

PRAYER

Session 5

Praying the Psalms

This is the fifth of six sessions on prayer. In this session we will look at the Psalms, the Bible's book of prayer and song. The Psalms cover a period of more than six hundred years in the history of the people of Israel. These 150 songs praise the God of creation and depict the struggles of God's people through the period of the patriarchs to the time after the Babylonian exile ended. The oldest psalms were prayed by the communities in which they originated and they were later adapted and used in different situations the people faced. The psalms were set to the accompaniment of musical instruments, usually stringed instruments such as the lyre or zither. The original collection of the Psalms in Hebrew was completed by the third century BCE, though the individual psalms are much older. The greek translation from third century is the version Jesus and the early church would have been familiar with and utilizing. Jesus frequently quoted the Psalms, and prayed them even on the cross as he was dying.

Opening Activities



Centering Moment

Light a candle and observe 30 seconds of silence as a reminder of God's presence among us.



Psalm 133 (read it together as a group or have each member read a verse or line. If you want, have every member read the entire Psalm out loud individually)

*How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the Lord ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.*



Where are the places in your life you feel a sense of unity? Disunity?



Opening Prayer:

God of the universe, the whole of creation sings of your glory. Help us to reflect and immerse ourselves in these ancient words that transcend space and time. Amen.



Music (optional)

Sing or listen to “On Eagle’s Wings” (Based on Psalm 91)



Share

Share with one another any thoughts from last weeks’ exercises or session.



Watch: Praying the Psalms



Discuss

- What Psalms or portions of psalms best reflect where you are in your lives of faith? Take a few minutes to think about this or skim through the Psalms.



Group Exercise - Writing a Reverse Psalm

Write a “reverse paraphrase” of Psalm 23. A reverse paraphrase is writing lines that represent the opposite of what each verse or stanza means to you. (Example: “The Lord is my shepherd” would become “There is no one to guide me.”) The point is to discover the power of familiar words in fresh ways.

- Read your reverse paraphrases to one another. Now, re-read the Psalm as it was written and let the words guide you in a period of prayer.



Closing Prayer

Pick a psalm and offer it up as your closing prayer.



Exercises To Do At Home

1. **Find a Psalm** that gives voice to how you feel at this time about your life and your relationship with God. Write a paraphrase of the psalm that captures the prayer of your heart. What do you imagine was happening to the psalmist when he wrote the original words?
2. **Write your own Psalm** - whether it be a Psalm of Thanksgiving, Praise, or Lament. If you’re willing, share with the group at your next meeting during your reflection time of the previous week.