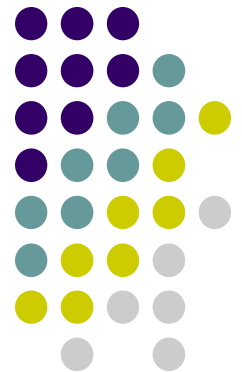


worship in the psalms

january 2012



life together
small group guide
first presbyterian church, spokane

table of contents



introduction	3
january 8 God's Majesty and Our Human Dignity	4
january 15 The Lord is My Shepherd . . .	6
january 22 A Prayer for Pardon and the Joy of Forgiving	8
january 29 Giving Thanks to God in Communal Worship	10
appendix	
Write Your Own Psalm	12
Share Your Favorite Psalm	13
Exploring Prayer as An Act of Worship	13

fpc calendar



common hour: 10am sundays	
january 8 all-together: communitas	
january 15 – february 5	
2012 session a (4 weeks)	
presbyterians: looking back, looking forward	
the bible in context	
the parent connection	
february 12 all-together: a congregational meeting like no other	
thursday night live	
january 12, 19, 26	google is a verb
january 19	seven secrets of successful couponing

introduction



Dear Small Groups,

We begin our life together in 2012 with Worship in the Psalms. The Psalms have been foundational in shaping the conversation between God and His people for centuries. This is for good reason . . .

The Book of Psalms represents a rich tapestry of prayer and praise. Some psalms reflect a texture of deep despair, other glow with a deep peace in the Lord's strength, still others bubble with an exuberant exaltation of the Most High God. They cover the range of human emotion and experience. What they all have in common is prayer, a reaching out to God from every imaginable experience.

- Dr. Ralph F. Wilson , [Experiencing the Psalms](#)

It is my hope that you will discover more of the richness in the Psalms and that they will become an integral part of your group as well.

This guide is designed to help you learn and discuss as much as it is to worship and pray more deeply and more honestly. Please think it terms of beginning to develop some new practices this month that you can continue throughout the life of your group. Let the psalms give your group a language and pattern that stretches you in your conversation with God.

Sincerely,
Brenda Norton, Director of Community Life

resources

The following websites were resources used to create this guide. You might want to explore these more on your own.

www.jesuswalk.com

www.smallgroupdiscussions.com

www.toolsformentoring.com/small-group

read more

[Reflections on the Psalms](#) by C.S. Lewis

[Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible](#) by Dietrich Boenhoeffer

[Where Your Treasure Is: Psalms That Summons You from Self to Community](#) by Eugene Peterson

need more copies?

You can download this guide at www.spokanefpc.org/Community Life/Small Groups or pick up more copies for your group from the Small Group mailbox in the main office at the church.



January 8

God's Majesty and Our Human Dignity psalm 8

Connecting Point

The Psalms cover the extremes of experience and emotions from highs to lows. So, this month have your group check in by having each person share one high and one low that they have experienced in the past week. You can do this as you share a meal or refreshment together.

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 119:64-68 as your prayer. (You might want to substitute "we" for "me.")

Read & Discuss the Word

Read Psalm 8

Discuss Option #1:

- What does this psalm teach about God? What does it teach about human beings? What does it teach us about Jesus? What does it teach us about our responsibilities?

Discuss Option #2 (Theme of God's Majesty):

- Discuss the word "majestic" - both meaning of the word and how using it to describe God helps us understand who God is.
- Share one aspect of God is mind blowing to you or one attribute of God that you admire.
- Verse 3 talks about the work of God's hands. Talk about a recent time when your observation of nature has caused you to be awed by God.
- What can you do to ensure that your everyday activities properly reflect the majesty of God?

Discuss Option #3 (Theme of our responsibilities):

- Reread verses 5-6. Why do you think God gave these responsibilities to humanity?
- Read Genesis 1:28. Give examples of how people can go about carrying out these responsibilities.
- God has chosen to work through humans to accomplish his will on earth. What are some things we can do to be better "employees" of God? What can you do to ensure that your everyday activities properly reflect the majesty of God? How can you see your work and efforts as part of creating beauty & redeeming/caring for God's creation?

Discuss Option #4 (Theme of our significance/insignificance):

- Reread Psalm 8:4. This verse declares our insignificance in the universe but yet our significance to God. I Read Corinthians 1:27-31. How does this verse help us understand the insignificance/significance paradox?
- Psalm 8:5-8: How does the fact that we're designed for significant work impact the way you see yourself, others, and the world?

Introduction to the Psalms

Dr. Ralph F. Wilson has posted a good overview of The Book of Psalms at www.jesuswalk.com/psalms/psalms-0-intro.htm. He has provided this in written and audio form.

Plan to read or listen to this introduction of the Psalms during your group time or assign it for group members to do as "homework."

These discussion questions are from jesuswalk.com, sermonplayer.com, and smallgroupdiscussion.com



Reflect and Respond

Read Romans 1:20 or Psalm 104. Then, spend time reflecting how nature reveals God's character, for example the mountains speak of His majesty. Either go outside for a walk or look out a window. Ask each person to reflect on one part of nature (a tree, the clouds, a blade of grass). Then come back and share.

Marveling at the Majesty of God in Creation

How does the psalmist's wonder in creation seem to affect him in Psalm 8?

In the following Psalms?

Psalm 19—The Heavens Proclaim the Glory of God

Psalm 139—The Creator and Searcher of My

Inmost Being

Group Prayer

Spend some time in prayer as a group. Specifically, give thanks to God for His majesty, and for the great privilege of partnering with Him in His work.

How can the group pray for you personally this week so that you can more fully worship God in His majesty and serve Him with humility?

(Write down answers to this questions to use as you pray for group members this week.)

Next

Suggestion: Plan to bring a psalm or portion of a psalm to go along with your high and low that you will share during Connecting Point at your next gathering.



January 15

The Lord is My Shepherd . . . psalm 23

Connecting Point

The Psalms cover the extremes of experience and emotions from highs to lows. So, this month have your group check in by having each person share one high and one low that they have experienced in the past week. You can do this as you share a meal or refreshment together.

Opening Prayer

Use Psalm 136 as a responsive reading. Have one person speak the descriptive verse and the group responds with the repeating verse. Read from the heart.

Read & Discuss the Word

Read Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is a familiar Psalm for some people. What struck you as you heard it read? Did anything new stick out to you?

Discussion Option #1:

The two images used of God in Psalm 23 are that of Shepherd (1-4) and Host (5-6). Describe the images of Shepherd and Host in Psalm 23. What are the similarities and differences? What specific ways does the Shepherd care for the sheep in Psalm 23?

How does the Lord our Shepherd quiet his sheep and give us confidence?
How can we tangibly be led to “quiet waters,” and have our souls restored by God?

Psalm 23 is not a naïve Psalm. It understands that our journey with God has seasons in “the valley of the shadow of death.” This is an image of a dangerous and fearful place. It does not only refer to times when we face literal death but any season of danger and fear.

Is this comforting or discouraging to you? What is the Psalmist’s confidence based on?

Has there been a time when God walked with you through “the valley of the shadow of death”? What did his comfort look like?

Why would the shepherd’s “rod and staff” in verse four be a source of comfort?

What is a practical way that you can be reminded of God’s faithfulness during a time of fear or anxiety? How does a proper view of God and self help us overcome fear, and feel more comfortable?

Discussion Option #2

In the sermon Jeremy explores this psalm in three sections with the following main theme for each section:

1. “the Lord is my shepherd, (therefore) I shall not want” - Considering what “I shall not want” means even though we DO experience wants/need/struggles
2. a description of the type of shepherding God does for us (leads us beside still waters, etc.)
3. future oriented—“surely goodness and mercy shall follow me . . .” Hope based on the shepherding we’ve already experienced from God.

God through these three sections discussing what you learned from the sermon. Talk about how you apply these lessons to your life. What is most helpful? What is most difficult?

Introduction to the Psalms

Dr. Ralph F. Wilson has posted a good overview of The Book of Psalms at www.jesuswalk.com/psalms/psalms-0-intro.htm. He has provided this in written and audio form.

Plan to read or listen to this introduction of the Psalms during your group time or assign it for group members to do as “homework.”



Reflect and Respond

Do one the three activities given in the Appendix on pages 12 & 13 of this guide:

- Write Your Own Psalm
- Share Your Favorite Psalm
- Exploring Prayer as An Act of Worship

There are times when I have a difficult time communicating with God. During these times, I often struggle to find the right words to express my joy or my pain in prayer. Thankfully, I have found that reading the Psalms helps me to focus on my experience, my emotions, and my expressions of suffering or gratitude to God. The Psalms beautifully express to God praise, anguish, repentance, faith, anger, and more. Within the Psalms lies every emotion known to humanity, and in them we can find comfort. The Psalms provide an example of how to honestly respond to God as he communicates with us.

- Sue Skalicky at www.smallgroups.com

Group Prayer

Pray for one another based on what was shared during the Discussion and/or the Reflect & Respond times today.

Also, pray specifically for situations in the group where people are facing “the valley of the shadow of death” in their lives. Pray for the comfort that our God, the Shepherd and Host, can bring.

(Make notes to use as you pray for group members this week.)

Next

Suggestion: Plan to bring a psalm or portion of a psalm to go along with your high and low that you will share during Connecting Point at your next gathering.

Questions and activities on these 2 pages are from toolsformentoring.com, media1.razorplanet.com, calvin.edu, jesuswalk.com, and smallgroupdiscussions.com.



January 22

A Prayer for Pardon and the Joy of Forgiveness psalms 51 & 32

Connecting Point

The Psalms cover the extremes of experience and emotions from highs to lows. So, this month have your group check in by having each person share one high and one low that they have experienced in the past week. You can do this as you share a meal or refreshment together.

Opening Prayer

Have a time of silence before the Lord to hear His voice and worship.

Introduction to the Psalms

If you haven't yet read or heard "Introduction to the Psalms", please plan to take time for it. See the similar box in the previous 2 lesson for more information.

Read & Discuss the Word

Read Psalms 51 & 32

What is your initial reaction to these psalms? How do they make you feel?

Choose which of the following themes your group would like to discuss.

God & David & You:

What character traits does David use to describe God in these verses? How does David speak of himself in these verses? Do your feelings about yourself ever seem similar to David's? What does David want God to do for him (Ps 51:7-12)? Describe all God is asked to do about sin in this prayer. What are all the images used? In what ways do you have similar requests of God?

Pardon & Forgiveness

What kinds of things cause our relationship with God to be broken?

Have you ever had a time when you felt that God "restored" your relationship with Him? How did you respond? Forgiveness in Psalm 51 leads to external actions. What are some of them (vv. 13-17)?

Psalm 51:13-19 talks about how we respond after God forgives us. Do you think most Christians spend enough time telling others what God has done for them? Why or why not?

When God forgives our sins, what should we tell others about that experience? In your own words, how would you describe God's forgiveness?

Pure Heart

How is it possible to have a "pure heart" after great sin? What does a "pure heart" consist of? What is the relationship between a "pure heart" (Ps 51:10) and a "united" or "undivided heart" (Ps 85:11)?

How does one achieve a "broken and contrite heart" (Ps 51:17)? What are the earmarks of this condition? How does this differ from "being sorry" for a sin? How does humility relate to this condition?

Honesty

Why do we sometimes resist the truth about ourselves? What does it take to get us to see the truth sometimes? How might Psalm 32 help you be more open and honest with God?

The Joy of Salvation

In Ps 51:12, David talks about the "joy of salvation".

Have you ever experienced the joy of salvation? How would you describe it?

Discuss how "joy" might be different than "happiness". Use Psalm 51:7-12 and Psalm 32 to guide this discussion.

How can you demonstrate joy in times of struggle?



Reflect and Respond

Do one the three activities given in the Appendix on pages 12 & 13 of this guide:

Write Your Own Psalm

Share Your Favorite Psalm

Exploring Prayer as An Act of Worship

There are times when I have a difficult time communicating with God. During these times, I often struggle to find the right words to express my joy or my pain in prayer. Thankfully, I have found that reading the Psalms helps me to focus on my experience, my emotions, and my expressions of suffering or gratitude to God. The Psalms beautifully express to God praise, anguish, repentance, faith, anger, and more. Within the Psalms lies every emotion known to humanity, and in them we can find comfort. The Psalms provide an example of how to honestly respond to God as he communicates with us.

- Sue Skalicky at www.smallgroups.com

Group Prayer

Pray for one another based on what was shared during the Discussion and/or the Reflect & Respond times today.

(Make notes to use as you pray for group members this week.)

Reread Psalm 32 at the closing of your prayer time.

Next

Suggestion: Plan to bring a psalm or portion of a psalm to go along with your high and low that you will share during Connecting Point at your next gathering.

If this is your last gathering for this month please do the "Next" on page 11 instead of this one.



January 29

Giving Thanks to God in Communal Worship

psalm 100

Connecting Point

The Psalms cover the extremes of experience and emotions from highs to lows. So, this month have your group check in by having each person share one high and one low that they have experienced in the past week. You can do this as you share a meal or refreshment together.

Opening Prayer

Ask God to give your group a spirit of thankfulness today.

Please allow extra time during your gathering for the discussion in section labeled "Next."

Read & Discuss the Word

Read Psalm 100

What is the predominant emotion in Psalm 100? How does this psalm make you feel emotionally about God?

What six reasons does the psalmist give to praise God?

Do these reasons apply to "all the earth" or just to "his people"?

What are the commands in this psalm?

What responsibilities are involved in knowing that the Lord is God (3)?

What attitude characterizes God's people (4-5)?

Why is thanksgiving a public, communal event?

Where in today's world do you see people displaying "thankfulness" in public?

What reasons may there be that people do not outwardly display an "attitude of gratitude"?

Which reason most motivates you to praise God?

Is your expression of joy too limited? Too private? Do you need the freedom to have a more joyful life?

Notice the link between thankfulness and joy in this Psalm. Do you think we would be more joyful if we were more thankful?

Make a list of all the words you can think of to say "Thank you."

Brainstorm ways to show thankfulness.

Plan something you can do together as a group to show your thankfulness.

Discussion to Dig in even More:

In verse 3 the Psalmist testifies that the Lord is God both for His creative powers ('it is He who made us') and His redemptive powers ('we are His people'). In our own faith, which came to us first (the belief that God created us and **then** the understanding that He redeemed us, or the belief that God redeemed us and **then** the understanding too that He is our Maker)?

Reread verse 4. It is not hypocritical to give thanks when we don't feel like it, because it is a decision of the will rather than the emotions. Paul wrote to 'give thanks in all circumstances' – crucially not 'give thanks **for** all circumstances' as some quote it. Given there is much suffering in life and much to contend with (Jesus tells us to take up our cross and follow Him), how is it possible to give thanks in all circumstances? Have there been hard times when you have tried to do this? How did it go?



Reflect and Respond

Do one the three activities given in the Appendix on pages 12 & 13 of this guide:

Write Your Own Psalm

Share Your Favorite Psalm

Exploring Prayer as An Act of Worship

Group Prayer

Allow a few minutes for everyone to pick out a portion of a Psalm that expresses thanksgiving.

Ask group members to read their chosen passage during your prayer time. Give space between each reading to thank God for all of the blessings that he pours over us. Praise Him for the things that we take for granted. Thank God for His faithful love.

Next

Talk about how this month in the Psalms has been.

Do you feel like your group has been more worshipful? more prayerful?

Have the Psalms helped you be more open and honest with one another? with God?

In what ways can you see your group continue to use psalm or similar practices of prayer and worship? Consider some of the activities in this guide that you may not have tried yet.

(Write down some practices you'd like to commit to as a group.)

Introduction to the Psalms

If you haven't yet read or heard "Introduction to the Psalms", please plan to take time for it. See the similar box in the first 2 lesson for more information.



appendix

Write Your Own Psalm

Remind your group that various different writers composed the Psalms. Both the common man and king penned the Psalms in the beautiful form of poetry. They were written with a range of emotions that we all feel from time to time. They were not composed by theologians but by individuals trying to figure out life and who God is. The Psalms are wonderful ways to express to God what we are feeling at times of worship. We may be angry. We may be questioning why something is happening. We may be thrilled by God's moving in our lives. Whatever emotion, whatever we are going through can be expressed through the Psalms.

posted by Tami Rudkin at www.smallgroups.com

In preparation, read several psalms and discuss how each is prayerful communication with God.

For example,

Psalm 19:7-11 focuses on exalting God and recognizing His attributes.

Psalm 37:3-6 recognizes our need for a Savior.

Forgiveness and grace are addressed in Psalm 51:1-2, written after David fell to sexual temptation.

In Psalm 103:1-5, the psalmist expresses his praise for God as his provider.

Psalm 136:1-9 speaks of God's faithfulness.

After sharing some examples with the group, provide each person with a piece of paper, a pen or pencil, and turn on some background worship music. Allow your group at least ten minutes to write their psalm, and then ask for volunteers to share what they wrote. Use the reading of these psalms as your closing prayer time. Encourage your group members to continue to use the writing of psalms in their personal times of prayer.

posted by Sue Skalicky at www.smaallgroups.com

Suggested Approaches

- Write in the style of Hebrew poetry using thought parallelism and imagery. This will be fun, though you may find it challenging. Consult Wilson's Introduction to Psalms in the section on [Hebrew Poetry](#) before beginning. (See website below.)
- Write a psalm with lines that rhyme like traditional Western poetry.
- Write a psalm in free verse, not bothering to make the lines rhyme. Just express yourself to God.
- Write a psalm in [Haiku style](#). (Go to the website below for a link to instructions about this style.)
- Write a psalm in any style you wish. The idea here is to learn to express yourself to God more freely.

posted by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson
at <http://www.jesuswalk.com/psalms/psalms-exercises.htm>

Option: Paraphrase a Psalm.

Write out a paraphrase of the psalm of your choosing in your own words. Try to find modern-day synonyms and thoughts that correspond to the thoughts in the psalm. Don't be afraid to be creative. If you need ideas, try reading a few psalms from [The Message](#) to see how Eugene Peterson creatively paraphrased the Psalms.

posted by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson
<http://www.jesuswalk.com/psalms/psalms-exercises.htm>



Share Your Favorite Psalm

Give your group about 5 minutes to choose one of their favorite Psalms to read for worship. Tell them they don't have to read the whole passage but perhaps just a few verses. They don't need to explain their choice, just take turns reading their selection. Assure them that even if they choose the same Psalm as someone else it is still appropriate to share theirs.

posted by Tami Rudkin at www.smallgroups.com

If your group will have a difficult time doing the above, assign one of the following passages to each group member. Have them take turns reading their Psalm.

Psalm 8:1-9	Psalm 63:1-4	Psalm 138:1-5	Psalm 9:1,2
Psalm 66:1-5	Psalm 145:1-21	Psalm 13	Psalm 89:5-8
Psalm 150	Psalm 18:1-3	Psalm 92:1-8	Psalm 23
Psalm 103:1-12	Psalm 30:1-5	Psalm 105:1-4	

Exploring Prayer as An Act of Worship

posted by David Rudd at www.smallgroupdiscussion.com

This is a group activity that uses psalms to explore prayer as an act of worship.

STEP ONE: Prepare Yourself.

Read Proverbs 15:8. Who does God love to hear prayer from? Does this usually describe you? Why or why not?

Read Psalm 68:18. When does God not hear our prayers? Why do you think this is?

Take some time as a group to pray silently. Have everyone think of sins they may be "keeping" in their heart. Encourage them to make those right with God and to commit to break the chains of those sins for good.

STEP TWO: Posture Yourself.

Read Psalm 95:6. What posture is suggested for worship?

You can tell a lot about someone by their posture. Someone who has their arms crossed, is probably not happy with you. Someone leaning forward to listen, probably wants to hear what you have to say.

What does the posture of bowing down communicate?

Even if you cannot bow down while praying, how can your attitude reflect an attitude of bowing down?

STEP THREE: Praise God.

Read Psalm 71:8 and Psalm 34:1. What might it look like to praise God all day?

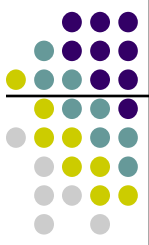
As a group, list 25 things you can praise God for.

STEP FOUR: Pursue God.

Read Psalm 46:10. What do you think it means to "be still"? How can being still help you in your relationship with God.

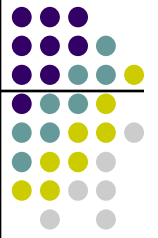
As a group, spend some time "being still" and pursuing God.

Close your time with group prayer. Have as many as want to pray a prayer of praise or thanksgiving.



notes

notes



Produced by Brenda Norton, Director of Community Life
at First Presbyterian Church, Spokane
318 S. Cedar, Spokane WA 99201