

JOURNEY  
THROUGH THE  
PSALMS

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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**Study for this Session:**

- Read Chapter 1 of *Journey Through the Psalms*.

**Study Overview:**

As a “school of prayer,” the psalms teach us that there are many different kinds of prayer and many different ways of praying to God. The Psalms express the entire range of human emotion - fear, praise, anger, joy, thanksgiving, and despair – experienced in the context of our relationship to God. Living with the psalms enables us to be honest as we faithfully bring our whole life before God.

The psalms remind us that faith includes struggle and doubt as well as gratitude and celebration. Doubt is not the opposite of faith, but rather part of the faith experience. A healthy faith embraces all the seasons of life and the entirety of our emotional lives.

The psalms begin with a call to obedience (Psalm 1) and conclude with joyful praise (Psalm 150). The psalms also express the very real experience of “living in the meantime,” a time when we wait to hear from God again in our lives. Praying the psalms connects us with our Hebraic and Christian roots and awakens us to an experience of God that embraces the totality of life.



## **Class Session 1: Praying the Psalms**

### **Opening Prayer**

*Read the prayer together as a class.*

**O Lord, you have searched us and known us;  
You know when we sit down and when we rise  
up. Be with us as we journey through the Psalms  
so that we may come to know you more fully and  
love you more deeply. Amen.**

*From Psalm 139*

### **Focusing**

*In small groups, introduce yourself with the following  
statement:*

“My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and my favorite  
Psalm is Psalm \_\_\_\_ because ...”

### **Video**

*As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following  
questions:*

1. In what ways do the Psalms give us back our dignity?
2. What is metaphor?
3. What are the two most common or central metaphors of the Psalter? Give examples.

4. Think about images that convey God as refuge for you. Then think about what our culture defines as refuge. How is God's refuge different?

### **Activity 1: Psalms as Metaphor**

*For this activity, you will work in small groups. Your leader will give you instructions. Be prepared to share your group's thoughts with the rest of the class at the end of the activity.*

Using old magazines, find and remove pictures that illustrate God as refuge and that illustrate modern cultural definitions of refuge. Using glue sticks, paste your pictures on a large piece of butcher block paper, which has been divided down the middle so that you can contrast these different ideas about refuge.

*What differences do you see between God as refuge and our culture's understanding of refuge?*

### **Activity 2: Range of Prayer**

*Read the following Psalm verses silently:*

Psalm 13:1  
Psalm 1:6  
Psalm 23:1  
Psalm 30:2  
Psalm 32:5  
Psalm 147:1

Which verse best expresses what you would pray right now?

*Open your Bible and read the whole psalm within which that verse is found.*

*Your instructor will provide you with further directions about this exercise.*

**Group Discussion**

1. Do you have moments of doubt in your walk with God? Are you able to tell God how you are feeling?
2. Are there parts of your life that you are choosing to hide from God? If so, why do you think that is?
3. Is it possible to feel both grateful toward and angry at God?
4. What do you feel when you think about God right now?

**Closing Prayer**

*Pray Psalm 121 together:*

**I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
Where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
The Maker of heaven and earth.**

**The LORD will not let your foot slip—  
The one who watches over you will not slumber;  
Indeed, the one who watches over Israel  
Will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**The LORD watches over you—  
The LORD is your shade at your right hand;  
The sun will not harm you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.**

**The LORD will keep you from all harm—  
The LORD will watch over your life;  
The LORD will watch over your coming and going  
Both now and forevermore.**

**Amen.**

# JOURNEY THROUGH THE PSALMS

## LEADER'S GUIDE

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**Page 4 of Participant's Guide****Study for this Session:**

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**Study Overview:**

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# Class Session 1: Praying the Psalms

## Participant's Guide:

## Leader's Notes:

### Opening Prayer

*Read the prayer together as a class.*

**O Lord, you have searched us and known us; You know when we sit down and when we rise up. Be with us as we journey through the Psalms so that we may come to know you more fully and love you more deeply. Amen.**

*From Psalm 139*

### Welcoming the Class

Introduce yourself and welcome participants as they arrive.

Give each student a Participant's Guide, if they do not already have one.

Ask participants to make name tents upon arrival and to place the name tent in front of them at their table or desk. Name tents can be made with single sheets of letter-size paper, folded into thirds to make a table tent.

Understandably, the length of class sessions varies from church to church. **Note that the times allotted for each class segment listed in this and subsequent lessons might need to be modified so that the entire session fits within the available class time.**

### Opening Prayer (2 Minutes)

When everyone has assembled, start the class with the Opening Prayer.



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### **Activity 1: Psalms as Metaphor**

*For this activity, you will work in small groups. Your leader will give you instructions. Be prepared to share your group's thoughts with the rest of the class at the end of the activity.*

Using old magazines, find and remove pictures that illustrate God as refuge and that illustrate modern cultural definitions of refuge. Using glue sticks, paste your pictures on a large piece of butcher block paper, which has been divided down the middle so that you can contrast these different ideas about refuge.

*What differences do you see between God as refuge and our culture's understanding of refuge?*

### **Activity 2: Range of Prayer**

*Read the following Psalm verses silently:*

Psalm 13:1 (lament)  
 Psalm 1:6 (wisdom psalm)  
 Psalm 23:1 (trust psalm)  
 Psalm 30:2 (thanksgiving)  
 Psalm 32:5 (penitential lament)  
 Psalm 147:1 (praise hymn)

Which verse best expresses what you would pray right now?

*Open your Bible and read the whole psalm within which that verse is found.*

*Your instructor will provide you with further directions about this exercise.*

### **Activity 1: Psalms as Metaphor (20 minutes)**

Materials: old magazines, glue sticks, butcher block paper

The purpose of this activity is to get the participants to think about and share with one another some of the relevant ideas and opinions they bring to this study.

Participants will work in small groups for this activity. Ask participants to break into small groups with no more than four members. Tell them they will have 10 minutes to complete the assignment.

Tell the participants:

*Using old magazines, rip out pictures that illustrate God as refuge and that illustrate cultural definitions of refuge. Using glue sticks, paste your pictures on a large piece of butcher block paper, which has been divided down the middle so that you can contrast these different ideas about refuge.*

Call the class back together and ask a representative from each small group to share a brief presentation of the group's activity.

Allow several minutes for all of the groups to share.

*If time permits, you might wish to include this activity:*

### **Activity 2: Range of Prayer (15 minutes)**

1. Have the participants silently read the Psalm verses listed at left.

2. Ask them to choose one verse that best expresses what they would pray if praying right now and read that verse several times prayerfully. Next they should open their Bibles and read the whole psalm within which that verse is found.

3. Finally, they should turn to a partner, read the Psalm aloud and share words or images in the Psalm that are particularly powerful and tell why. (Everyone will be talking at once, but no one will notice. Reading the Psalm aloud is one way to understand it better.)

4. When everyone is finished, say: "**Amen! And let the people say Amen!**" Afterwards, tally the number of people who chose each psalm verse. This will gauge the prayer mood of the class.

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**Group Discussion**

1. Do you have moments of doubt in your walk with God? Are you able to tell God how you are feeling?
2. Are there parts of your life that you are choosing to hide from God? If so, why do you think that is?
3. Is it possible to feel both grateful toward and angry at God?
4. What do you feel when you think about God right now?

*If you'd like to try something different, here are two possibilities:*

**Alternative Activity 1: The Hymnal**

Materials: hymnals

1. Have the participants look in the back of a church hymnal, in the index that deals with scripture passages related to the hymns, and count the number of psalms represented in the hymnal.
2. Then let each participant look up one or two of the psalms represented to see what kinds of emotions and thoughts about God are expressed.
3. Ask the participants: **Does the hymnal seem to draw upon the same kind of psalm or upon a wide range of psalms?** Share your findings with the whole class.

**Alternative Activity 2: Psalms in Worship**

1. Say, **“Think about how Psalms were used in your worship service last week. At what points in the liturgy (worship service) were the psalms used?”**
2. Next week, pay attention to the use of psalms in worship.

**Group Discussion (10 minutes)**

Allow up to 10 minutes for discussion to help connect this week's material to participants' lives.

Use the questions in the Participant's Guide to start the discussion. If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Silence is not failure. Remember, allow participants to think during the silence before you introduce a different question.

### **Conclusion and Closing Prayer** **(10 minutes)**

During this first week, you will need to provide guidance to participants on how to use the study guide to prepare for the next class session.

Ask participants to turn to “Preparation for Session 2: The Synagogue, the Church, and the Psalms” in their Participant’s Guide, and then make the following points:

- In the coming week, you will learn about the history of Psalms used in the church by reading Chapter 2 of *Journey Through the Psalms*. Your study guide is designed to help you work through the chapter and apply what you’ve read to your life as a Christian.
- Start by reading the **Learning Objectives**. This will help you target your study and set expectations for what you should learn by the end of the session. For example, by the end of Session 2, you should be able to arrive at a definition of prayer.
- Before you start reading in the text, complete the exercise in **Connecting with Scripture**. The biblical passages and the follow-up question are designed to provide a biblical and spiritual foundation for the week’s study.
- The questions in this section will encourage you to reflect on what the passages and study mean for YOUR life as a Christian. Feel free to write your answers in the space provided.
- The weekly reading from *Journey Through the Psalms* is listed under **Study for this Session**.
- Highlights of the reading and definitions of key terms are provided in the **Study Overview**.
- After you have completed the reading, answer the questions in the grey box, **Personal Reflection**. The purpose of these questions is to help you interpret and use what you have studied within the framework of your beliefs and experiences as a Christian.
- You will be receiving weekly email messages that supplement the Participant’s Guide.

### **Closing Prayer**

*Pray Psalm 121 together:*

**I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
Where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
The Maker of heaven and earth.**

**The LORD will not let your foot slip—  
The one who watches over you will not slumber;  
Indeed, the one who watches over Israel  
Will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**The LORD watches over you—  
The LORD is your shade at your right hand;  
The sun will not harm you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.**

**The LORD will keep you from all harm—  
The LORD will watch over your life;  
The LORD will watch over your coming and going  
Both now and forevermore.**

**Amen.**

Answer any questions, distribute materials, and make announcements, as necessary.

Make sure that all participants who want to are signed up to receive email.

Collect the name tents at the end of class and bring them next week.

After all class business has been conducted, tell participants that each class session will be concluded with prayer concerns. Invite participants to share prayer concerns and joys.

Encourage participants to write down the concerns/ joys in their guides and to remember them as they pray during the week.

Lead the closing prayer (at left).