



# Experiencing God through the Psalms

February 9 - March 2

**Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

## Week 1: Worship and the Psalms

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything that made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. Share some of the experiences you have had with worship—perhaps in different church traditions or in personal and private ways. What has been most helpful for you in experiencing God?
3. Read Psalm 24. How is God portrayed in this passage? How does it make you feel if you interpret this literally? How does it make you feel if you interpret this metaphorically? How does it draw you into worship or not?
4. How has your image or paradigm of God evolved over time, and how has this impacted how you worship? Read Matthew 11:25-30. What does this passage show us about how Jesus views God? Why do you think this evokes joy and worship in Jesus? What response does this evoke in you?
5. In the message on Sunday, we explored several different characteristics of worship in our own cultural context. For each one read and reflect on the scriptures and discuss how it could inspire, challenge, and draw you into worship and a deeper experience of God.
  - Worship is celebrating our oneness with God: John 17:20-23; 1 John 4:7-9
  - Worship is a whole life expression: Romans 12:1-2
  - Worship is authentic: Psalm 13:1-2; Psalm 34:18
  - Worship is transcendent: John 4:19-24; Psalm 121:1-2
  - Worship is grounded in reality: Amos 5:21-24
  - Worship is relational: Matthew 5:23-24; Revelation 7:9-10

What are some other characteristics of worship that are important to you? For these and the ones above, share what you feel you need to do to engage more in worship both privately and when we are together as a community

### Practice for the week: Look for the small things and give thanks

This week, take a moment to read Matthew 11:25-30 again each morning. Throughout the day, adopt Jesus' attitude of curiosity and delight. Look for the small moments of love and light that break through into your day. Take notice of people it might be easy to overlook. Assume the posture of a person who is light and small but caught up with others in God's love which is big and beautiful. In each of these moments give thanks and express delight.

## Week 2: Lament and Hope

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What was difficult for you?
2. The speaker on Sunday suggested that lament is a neglected element of worship today. Why do you think this is? What is your own experience of lament?
3. Read Psalm 10 and Psalm 13. What do these psalms teach us about how to pray from a place of pain or suffering? How do these psalms hold multiple viewpoints and emotions in tension?
4. The psalmists sometimes use bold, even accusatory language toward God (e.g., "Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?"). What does this tell us about the nature of our relationship with God? Do you feel comfortable expressing raw emotions in your prayers? Why or why not?
5. Lament is not passive. In what way can it be an act of faith and a means of resistance? How does lament help challenge injustice, and envision and call for change?
6. In what ways can communal lament draw us closer to God and to one another?
7. Are there particular injustices or personal struggles that you would like to bring before God in lament? If you are reading these questions in a group setting, spend some time sharing and praying for one another. If you are reading these questions on your own, speak out your lament to God, choosing to believe that God hears and cares (possibly in defiance of appearances to the contrary).

### Practice for the week: Practicing lament

Take some time this week to practice lament. (You may find it helpful to use a journal for this exercise.)

1. It is easy to feel overwhelmed with all that is happening right now. Think of just one example of injustice in our society, or of personal pain.
2. What emotions arise in you as you think about this issue? Express these emotions to God.
3. What desires arise in you as you think about this issue? Talk to God about what you long for.
4. How do you experience God in this moment? Anger? Trust? Disappointment? Hope? Doubt? Be honest and bold in expressing this to God.

5. How would you like God to help you in this moment? Try to articulate your requests.
6. As hard as it may be to consider right now: How have you seen God be trustworthy towards you in the past? Does that give you any hope for the situation you are lamenting?
7. As hard as it may be to consider right now: What is something you can praise God for?

## Week 3: Repentance and Forgiveness

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. Share a little about your own journey with forgiveness. How has it impacted your experience of God? How has it affected your own sense of self-worth? Have you struggled with forgiving others?
3. Read 1 John 4:7-8 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. The first passage offers a definition of God as love. The second offers a description of love. What do these concepts suggest about the nature of God and how God relates to our imperfections?
4. Read Psalm 32 then go through it a verse at a time and discuss its meaning and relevance. How do you identify with Psalm? What do you find encouraging? What do you find challenging?
5. In Psalm 32:4 what do you think the writer means by "your hand was heavy upon me"? Have you ever experienced this? How could it be helpful and healing? How could it be destructive and toxic?
6. In Psalm 32:5 we see a rhythm of confession and forgiveness. What is the importance of confession in this dynamic exchange? What might be the outcome of too much emphasis on confession? What is important about forgiveness in this dynamic exchange? What might the outcome of too much emphasis on forgiveness? Which of these would you say you struggle with most?
7. Read Matthew 6:9-15. In a relatively short prayer Jesus places high value on forgiveness. Why do you think Jesus put such a big emphasis on an experience of forgiveness in our relationship with God? Why do you think he put such a big emphasis on forgiving others in our relationship with God? How do these two dynamics resonate together and how could this produce deeper life and greater health in us and others?
8. Break into smaller groups of 2 or 3 (or stay together as a larger group if that feels appropriate) to share about ways in which you have struggled with forgiveness. This could be wrestling with a sense of guilt or shame; it could also be the challenge of forgiving others. Listen to one another with empathy rather than trying to fix anything and then spend some time praying with one another.

## **Practice for the week: Confession and Forgiveness**

Here are two practices for the week. Choose the one that seems most appropriate for you.

### ***Practice 1: Confession***

*While I kept silent, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Psalm 32: 4-5 (NRSVUE)*

*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. James 5:16 (NLT)*

Read the scriptures above and reflect on any sense of guilt or shame from the past that has remained like a heavy burden on you. Then think of a faithful and trusted friend, counselor, spiritual leader, or therapist with whom you could share this burden. This should be someone you know will listen with empathy, respond with compassion, and maintain absolute confidence. Take the courageous step to meet in a safe space and share with them. If it feels appropriate, ask them to pray with you. As you let the light into this dark and intimidating area receive God's love, mercy, and forgiveness. Let go of this burden now shared.

### ***Practice 2: Forgiveness***

*Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For the judgment you give will be the judgment you get, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. Matthew 7:1-5 (NRSVUE)*

Read this scripture each morning and make an intention throughout the day not to judge. When a situation arises where you instinctively want to judge or criticize someone, instead reflect on your own frailty and weakness. Take a moment to briefly pray for the other person and give thanks for the mercy that you (and they) both receive.

## Week 4: Praise and Gratitude

1. What stood out to you from the message this past Sunday? Was there anything that seemed timely or relevant to you? Was there anything which made you uncomfortable, or with which you disagreed?
2. What does it mean to “notice”? What actions/mindset are involved? How is “wondering” the same as noticing? How is it different?
3. What are you good at noticing or wondering about? What could you improve at noticing or wondering?
4. The speaker on Sunday said that noticing and wondering are essential elements to gratitude and praise. Do you agree? How have you seen that lived out?
5. Read Psalm 111:2-4. What does it mean to delight in God? Have you ever experienced that? Take some time to share your own examples.
6. Read Psalm 92:1-5. What impact does music have on you when you worship compared to just thinking or speaking gratitude and praise to God? What impact does corporate worship have on you versus worshiping on your own?
7. This is a difficult time for many of us. Why might it be particularly important to practice praise and gratitude right now? How could you make worship a more regular part of your spiritual practice? Take some time now to offer up prayers of praise and worship to God together as a group. If you are reading these questions alone, express your heart to God.

### **Practice for the week: Gratitude and wonder**

Set aside a few minutes every day this week in which you will challenge “your soul” to “praise the Lord” (Psalm 104:1). Work this into a setting that works best for you. This might be while you are outside in nature or could be while alone and in complete silence. You might use a time while traveling to work, but make sure you set aside time when you will be free from distractions.

Spend time giving thanks for all the positive things in your life: friends, family, job, home, etc. Then move on to reflect on the characteristics of God you feel most drawn to and which most easily evoke worship from you. Invite these aspects of God to overwhelm you and allow yourself to get caught up in the wonder of it all.