

## Experiencing the Psalms: Participant Guide

If you're working with a class or small group, feel free to duplicate the handouts in this appendix at no additional charge. If you'd like to print 8-1/2" x 11" sheets, you can download the free Participant Guide handout sheets at:

[www.jesuswalk.com/psalms/psalms-lesson-handouts.pdf](http://www.jesuswalk.com/psalms/psalms-lesson-handouts.pdf)

You'll find 3 to 5 questions for each lesson. Each question may include several sub-questions. These are designed to get group members engaged in discussion of the key points of the passage. If you're running short of time, feel free to skip questions or portions of questions.

During the first lesson, hand out the "Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms" sheet. Then for each successive lesson, ask class members to come prepared to share how they chose to experience one of the psalms included in that lesson based on some of the suggestions given in the exercise sheet. This alone will engage members and make the class great fun – and bring great learning.

## Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms

In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, **complete one of the following exercises for each of the lessons in this study.** These aren't designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. When you finish, report back to the group how the exercise worked for you. Ideally, you'll vary the exercises from lesson to lesson to allow the Psalms to become part of you in new ways.

1. **Pray a Psalm.** Select one of the psalms along the theme of the lesson. Then, using the ideas and as many of the words as seem to fit your situation, pray that prayer to God, inserting your own struggles and needs within the prayer. Go through the entire psalm, paraphrasing it as you pray it sincerely to God. Many people have exercised this kind of prayer – they pray through every Scripture passage they read. Why don't you start this practice with one of the psalms?
2. **Meditate on a Psalm.** To meditate means to think deeply about something and mull it over in your mind over a period of time. You might read it several times in different translations. Say it over to yourself to feel the words on your lips. Write it out longhand. Consider the meaning of each important word. Memorization is another exercise, but memorizing is a good way to meditate on a verse or a passage.
3. **Read a Psalm to a Shut-in.** People who are home-bound or in hospitals, nursing homes, jails, etc. need encouragement. As your exercise, read a psalm from this week's theme to a shut-in. If you read more than one you'll be doubly blessed!
4. **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.
5. **Write Your Own Psalm.** Write your own psalm based on the theme of this lesson. You're entirely free in how you do this. Some approaches include:
  - Write in the style of Hebrew poetry using thought parallelism and imagery. This will be fun, though you may find it challenging. Consult my Introduction to Psalms in the section on Hebrew Poetry before beginning.
  - 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.

Write a psalm in any style you wish. The idea here is to learn to express yourself to God more freely.

6. **Sing a Psalm.** Find a song, hymn, or praise chorus that relates to the theme of this chapter – and that is based on a psalm. Then sing it or lead it for your group. If you like, write your own song, or find a melody that you can use to sing the words of the song from a translation you prefer. Be creative here.
7. **Prepare a Liturgy, Responsive Reading, or Choral Reading from a Psalm.** Psalms are at the core of the liturgy of Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican branches of the Church. Explore adapting a psalm for public worship. You might enjoy writing the script for a choral reading of a psalm or portion of a psalm creating parts for 3 or 4 readers. Then try it out during a worship service or in your small group or class.
8. **Teach or Preach a Psalm.** It's hard to prepare a message for people without really getting inside the text. Teach a psalm to a class of children, youth, or adults, or preach a psalm to your congregation.
9. **Memorize a Psalm.** "My mind is too old to memorize!" Hogwash! Try it, but perhaps start with a short psalm, or one you've already partially memorized. It's work, but you can do it and you'll find it very spiritually enriching. In ancient days many Hebrew boys memorized the entire Psalter. In his 90s, Billy Graham put it this way:

"Over the years I've memorized many passages from the Bible, and I'm especially thankful now that I did this. I wish we gave more attention to Bible memorization in our churches today."<sup>1</sup>

Memorize one psalm that relates to the theme of the lesson.

---

<sup>1</sup> Billy Graham in "Quotation Marks," *Christianity Today*, June 2007, p. 19.

## **Lesson 1. Marveling at God's Majesty in Creation (Psalms 8, 19, 139)**

### **Psalm 8 – How Majestic Is Your Name in All the Earth**

Q1. (Psalm 8). What does this psalm teach about God? What does it teach about human beings? What does it teach us about Christ? What does it teach about our responsibilities?

### **Psalm 19 – The Heavens Proclaim the Glory of God**

Q2. (Psalm 19) Verses 1 to 6 seem very different from verses 7 to 13, but there is a common thread that relates the first part to the second part. What is it? In what way does the psalmist seem to bask in God's Word? Have you ever felt that way? How does the psalmist's wonder in creation seem to affect him in this psalm? In the classic prayer of verse 14, what is David asking God to do?

### **Psalm 139 - The Creator and Searcher of My Inmost Being**

Q3. (Psalm 139). In what way does the wonder of creation in the psalm seem to affect the psalmist? In his concluding prayer in verses 23-24, what does he ask God to do?

### **Next Lesson**

Next week we'll be looking at **Lesson 2. Thirsting for God (Psalms 27, 42-43, 63)**. In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, complete one of the exercises suggested in "Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms" for *one* of the psalms we'll study next week. This isn't designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. Next week report to the group how the exercise worked for you.

## Lesson 2. Thirsting for God (Psalms 27, 42-43, 63)

### Psalm 27 - Your face, Lord, I Will Seek

Q1. (Psalm 24) What does it mean that David desires to “dwell in the house of the Lord”? What does it mean to “seek his face”? How does David provide hope at the end of this Psalm?

### Psalm 42-43 - Combating Depression with Faith

1. **Self-talk**, words addressed to himself, of hope, that he will eventually have cause to rejoice in God again. (42:5)
2. **Deliberate remembrance**, recalling God to mind, (42:6-7)
3. **Singing and praying** to God night and day (42:8)

Q2. (Psalms 42-43). What is the psalmist feeling during this spiritual struggle? How does he combat his spiritual depression? Have you ever felt this way? How did you reach out to God at this time?

### Psalm 63 - Earnestly I Seek You

Q3. (Psalm 63) Why is recognition that God loves you the basis of all faith? What does this realization bring about in your life?

### Next Lesson

Next week we'll be looking at **Lesson 3. Choosing the Right Path (Psalms 1, 15, and 133)**. In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, complete one of the exercises suggested in “Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms” for *one* of the psalms we'll study next week. This isn't designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. Next week report to the group how the exercise worked for you.

### **Lesson 3. Choosing the Right Path (Psalms 1, 15, and 133)**

#### **Psalm 1 - The Two Ways, Righteous and Unrighteousness**

Q1. (Psalm 1). This short psalm seems to reaffirm what we already know: the righteous will succeed and the wicked will perish. Why do we need to be reminded of this? From an emotional standpoint, what lines in this psalm stand out to you. Why do you think you like them?

#### **Psalm 15- Characteristics of a Righteous Person**

Q2. (Psalm 15) The Wisdom Psalms are meant to instruct us. How would you use this psalm in your family to instruct your children? What topics of right living does it cover?

#### **Psalm 133 – The Beauty of Unity**

Q3. (Psalm 133) What about this short psalm seems to attract you? Why is “dwelling together in unity” so difficult? What kinds of commitments does unity require of us? How do the principles of unity and purity seem to conflict with each other? Why are reconciliation and unity such high values in Jesus’ teaching, do you think?

#### **Next Lesson**

Next week we’ll be looking at **Lesson 4. Offering High Praises to God (Psalms 150, 95, and 98)**. In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, complete one of the exercises suggested in “Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms” for *one* of the psalms we’ll study next week. This isn’t designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. Next week report to the group how the exercise worked for you.

## Lesson 4. Offering High Praises to God (Psalms 150, 95, and 98)

Hallelujah mean? It is a command, an imperative, made up of three parts:

<i>hālal</i>	<i>lu</i>	<i>Yah</i>
Praise	you (plural)	short for Yahweh, “the LORD”

The verb *hālal* means “praise.” “This root connotes being sincerely and deeply thankful for and/or satisfied in lauding a superior quality(ies) or great, great act(s) of the object.” It can mean, “to brag,” and be used to praise a man or woman. But its primary use in the Old Testament is directed toward God.

### Psalm 150 – Let Everything that Has Breath Praise the Lord!

Q1. (Psalm 150) What does this psalm teach us about praise? Where should praise occur? With what should praise be conducted? Who should praise? What does this psalm make you feel like after reading it out loud?

### Psalm 95 - Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down

Q2. (Psalm 95) In Psalm 95 we are commanded to worship the Lord. What are the reasons *why* we should worship contained in this psalm? Why do you think the warning in verses 8-11 is included in this psalm? How does this fit with the earlier elements of the psalm?

### Psalm 98 - Sing to the Lord a New Song

Q3. (Psalm 98) What are the reasons given for praise in Psalm 98? Why do you think praise is so exuberant in this psalm? How exuberant is praise in your congregation, in your life? Why or why not is it exuberant?

### Next Lesson

Next week we'll be looking at **Lesson 5. Crying Out for Rescue (Psalms 69, 40, 80)**. In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, complete one of the exercises suggested in “Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms” for *one* of the psalms we'll study next week. This isn't designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. Next week report to the group how the exercise worked for you.

## Lesson 5. Crying Out for Rescue (Psalms 69, 40, 80)

### Psalm 69 – Deep Waters and Miry Depths

Q1. (Psalm 69:12-18) How could David dare to ask anything from God after the shameful things he had done with Bathsheba and Uriah? How does God's grace and mercy function in the face of our sins?

Q2. (Psalm 69:30-32) Why does this lament (and nearly all laments in the Psalms) end with an upswing of hope and praise? What does this teach us about our own laments and prayers? Why is praise, the language of faith, so important in our prayers, especially prayers of desperate pleas for help?

### Psalm 40 – O My God, Do Not Delay

Q3. (Psalm 40:5b) When you realize that God's thoughts and plans are focused on you in particular, how does that make you respond?

Q4. (Psalm 40:17) In this verse David combines both humility and faith in his prayer to God. Why are both humility and faith necessary? What happens when one of these qualities is missing?

### Psalm 80 – Restore Us, O God

Q5. (Psalm 80) If you were to formulate a personal prayer for revival for your own life or for your congregation, how would you word it? What elements should be present in a prayer for personal or congregational revival? What would this prayer have in common with 2 Chronicles 7:14? How does this kind of prayer pave the way for revival and restoration to take place?

### Next Lesson

Next week we'll be looking at **Lesson 6. Trusting in God's Protection (Psalms 61, 91, 121)**. In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, complete one of the exercises suggested in "Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms" for *one* of the psalms we'll study next week. This isn't designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. Next week report to the group how the exercise worked for you.

From Ralph F. Wilson, *Experiencing the Psalms* (JesusWalk, 2010). Copyright © 2010, Ralph F. Wilson <pastor@joyfulheart.com>. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to make copies of these participant handouts, one set for each member of a local group, at no charge, provided that this copyright information remains intact on each copy.



## **Lesson 6. Trusting in God's Protection (Psalms 61, 91, 121)**

### **Psalm 61 - Lead Me to the Rock that Is Higher than I**

Q1. (Psalm 61:1-4) What images does the psalmist evoke to communicate his trust in God's protection? How do the first four verses of this psalm make you feel?

### **Psalm 91 - Dwelling in the Shelter of the Most High**

Q2. (Psalm 91) What does this psalm teach us about God's protection when in danger? What does it teach about our authority to vanquish our enemies? What promises does Psalm 91 contain? How does this psalm make you feel?

### **Psalm 121 - I Will Lift Up My Eyes to the Hills**

Q3. (Psalm 121). What reassurance is it to you that God keeps you and watches over you? How does Psalm 121 make you feel?

Q4. Since Christians don't seem immune to accident, persecution, and death, how are we to understand these psalms of protection? Why don't some believers seem to be protected? Does God *really* protect us? How?

### **Next Lesson**

Next week we'll be looking at **Lesson 7. Resting in God's Care (Psalms 131, 23, 16, 3, 31, 46)**. In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, complete one of the exercises suggested in "Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms" for *one* of the psalms we'll study next week. This isn't designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. Next week report to the group how the exercise worked for you.

## **Lesson 7. Resting in God's Care (Psalms 131, 23, 16, 3, 31, 46)**

### **Psalm 131 - I Have Stilled and Quieted My Soul**

Q1. According to Psalm 131, just *how* does David quiet his inner person before the Lord? What are the elements mentioned in this psalm?

### **Psalm 23 - The Lord Is My Shepherd**

Q2. According to Psalm 23, how does the Lord our Shepherd quiet his sheep and give them confidence? How many ways can you find in this psalm?

### **Psalm 16 - You Will Not Abandon Me to the Grave**

### **Psalm 3 - I Lie Down and Sleep**

### **Psalm 31 - Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit**

Q3. (Psalm 31) What does it mean to say to the Lord, "Into your hands I commit my spirit" (31:5)? How does that statement bring peace to a person? How does the statement, "My times are in your hands" (31:15), bring peace to the troubled soul?

### **Psalm 46 - Our Ever-Present Help in Trouble**

Q4. (Psalm 46) How does the imagery of the river and streams in verse 4 function in Psalm 46 to speak peace to the harassed and harried person? Verse 10 tells us: "Be still and know that I am God." How does knowledge of who He is affect our peace? How should it affect our words? Why does He command us to "be still" as a result of this knowledge?

Q5. After you've studied the psalms in this chapter, what do you think it means to "rest" in God? How do you seek God's peace when you have a dozen things coming against you?

### **Next Lesson**

Next week we'll be looking at **Lesson 8. Exulting in God (Psalms 57, 96, 126, and 24)**. In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, complete one of the exercises suggested in "Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms" for *one* of the psalms we'll study next week. This isn't designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. Next week report to the group how the exercise worked for you.

## Lesson 8. Exulting in God (Psalms 57, 96, 126, and 24)

### Psalm 57 – I Will Awake the Dawn!

Q1. (Psalm 57) Why is praise difficult in the midst of trying circumstances? How does praise affect our faith? Our attitude? Our motivation?

### Psalm 96 - Ascribe to the Lord the Glory Due His Name

Q2. (Psalm 96) What does it mean to “ascribe” to God attributes of glory and strength? What happens when we fail to ascribe such qualities to him? In what sense is praise to God “fitting” or “worthy”?

### Psalm 126 – He Who Goes Out Weeping Will Return with Songs of Joy

Q3. (Psalm 126). In this psalm, the nation is going through some kind of crisis. How does the memory of God’s deliverance in verses 1-3 prepare them for the prayer of verse 4? How do you understand the two metaphors of deliverance: (1) a wadi or dry gully and (2) sowing and reaping? How do these metaphors help you in your situation?

### Psalm 24 – The King of Glory

Q4. (Psalm 24) How do verses 1-2 establish the Lord’s right as King? What do verses 3-6 tell us about the requirements of the King? What do verses 7-10 tell us about the glory of the King? How does this psalm speak to you in your situation?

### Next Lesson

Next week we’ll be looking at **Lesson 9. Rejoicing in God’s Character (Psalms 103, 145, and 117)**. In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, complete one of the exercises suggested in “Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms” for *one* of the psalms we’ll study next week. This isn’t designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. Next week report to the group how the exercise worked for you.

## **Lesson 9. Rejoicing in God's Character (Psalms 103, 145, and 117)**

### **Psalm 103 - Bless the Lord, O My Soul**

Q1. (Psalm 103) Which one or two aspects of God's character mentioned in this Psalm stand out to you? Why do you think the Exodus was so foundational in Israel's understanding of God? According to Psalm 103:10-12, what are the limits to God's forgiveness?

### **Psalm 145 - I Exalt You, My God the King**

Q2. (Psalm 145) Which aspects of God's character mentioned in Psalm 145 stand out to you in particular? Why is it important for "every creature," every human being, to praise him? What are you doing to help that happen?

### **Psalm 117 - The Faithfulness of the Lord Endures Forever**

Q3. (Psalm 117 and Lamentations 3:22-23). Why are love and trustworthiness so important as the bedrock of the Old Testament faith? What kinds of terms does the New Testament use to talk about these characteristics? Can you think of any New Testament verses that speak of these themes?

### **Next Lesson**

Next week we'll be looking at **Lesson 10. Looking Forward to the Messiah (Psalms 2, 110, and 22)**. In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, complete one of the exercises suggested in "Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms" for *one* of the psalms we'll study next week. This isn't designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. Next week report to the group how the exercise worked for you.

## Lesson 10. Looking Forward to the Messiah (Psalms 2, 110, and 22)

### Psalm 2 - You Are My Son, Today I Have Begotten You

Q1. (Psalm 2) What does Psalm 2 teach us about Yahweh's "anointed" king? Why do you think the apostles saw this passage as referring to Jesus the Messiah? What does the passage teach about the importance of submission to Jesus the Christ before it is too late?

### Psalm 110 - The Messiah as Priest and King

Q2. (Psalm 110) Why do you think that Jesus asked the Pharisees about verse 1, "If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" What point was Jesus making? How does Jesus combine the roles of Warrior-King and Priest in his ministry to us and to this world? How do you reconcile the violence suggested in verses 5-6 with Jesus as "Prince of Peace"?

### Psalm 22 - My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Q3. (Psalm 22:1) Why do you think Jesus spoke the words of Psalm 22:1? What was he seeking to express? What was he feeling? How did God answer his plea?

Q4. (Psalm 22) What similarities do you see between the words of Psalm 22 and the events of Jesus' crucifixion? Do you think Jesus understood Psalm 22 as referring to himself? Why do you think the Spirit inspired David to pen these words?

### Next Lesson

Next week we'll be looking at **Lesson 11. Finding Forgiveness and Restoration (Psalms 32 and 51)**. In order to encourage you to truly experience the psalms and make them your own, complete one of the exercises suggested in "Exercises to Help You Experience the Psalms" for *one* of the psalms we'll study next week. This isn't designed to create busywork, but to stretch you spiritually. Next week report to the group how the exercise worked for you.

## Lesson 11. Finding Forgiveness and Restoration (Psalms 32 and 51)

### Psalm 32 - Blessed Is the One Whose Sin Is Forgiven

Q1. (Psalm 32:2-5) How does self-deceit operate with sin to enslave us? How does confession enable us to get free from sin? Why do we sometimes resist the truth about ourselves? What does it take to get us to see truth sometimes?

### Psalm 51 - Create in Me a Clean Heart, O Lord

Q2. (Psalm 51:3-6) When David says, "Against you only I have sinned" (4a) is he minimizing his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah? What does he mean by this? When he mentions his sinfulness from before birth is he excusing himself or blaming Original Sin? What does he mean by this?

Q3. (Psalm 51:10-12) 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" (Psalm 51:10) and a "united" or "undivided heart" (Psalm 86:11)? Who purifies the heart? What is the process?

Q4. (Psalm 51:17) How does one achieve a "broken and contrite heart"? What are the earmarks of this condition? How does this differ from "being sorry" for a sin? How does humility relate to this condition?

## **12. Giving Thanks to Our Faithful God (Psalms 100, 107, 118, and 34)**

### **Psalm 100 - Enter His Gates with Thanksgiving**

Q1. (Psalm 100) What is the predominant emotion in Psalm 100? How does this psalm make you feel emotionally about God? What are the reasons for praise given in verses 3 and 5? What are the commands in this psalm?

### **Psalm 107 - Give Thanks to the Lord for His Unfailing Love**

### **Psalm 118 - His Love Endures Forever**

Q2. (Psalm 118) What does “the stone the builders rejected” (verses 22-23) have to do with the Messiah? What do verses 25-27 have to do with the Messiah?

### **Psalm 34 - Taste and See that the Lord Is Good**

Q3. (Psalm 34:1-3) Why should we praise God continually? What are barriers to continual praise? What does continual praise do to our spirit? How are you training yourself to praise continually?

Q4. (Psalm 34:18-22) What encouragement does David give to the brokenhearted? What does it mean that God “redeems” you? How can we avoid condemnation according to Psalm 34:22?