

THE PSALMS

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Rectangular papers, and markers and/or pencil crayons
- Copies of the downloadable 622 service booklet
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader’s notes
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: FLAG OF ME

Provide teens with rectangular paper and markers and/or pencil crayons. Their gathering assignment is to design their own flag. Encourage them to illustrate a spectrum of interests, passions and associations that reflect who they are. It can include family, faith, even struggles in their life – whatever they feel is important enough to merit inclusion. If time permits, have the teens explain their flag briefly to the group.

Hang onto the flags! If you’re following these lessons in sequence, you can pull out the flags to use them for next week’s activity (lesson #20).

622: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the first part of the order of service for young people in the booklet, up to the middle of page 4.

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK’S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: FEELING DISCONNECTED

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- What does it mean to feel disconnected?
- What are some reasons why a person might feel that way when worshipping (for example, in church)?
- How about when praying? Are there time when you have felt like you’re “unfit” to pray?

A few things worth pointing out (if they don’t otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *Everyone feels disconnected sometimes. We go through times in our lives where we feel emotionally distant in our relationships or disengaged from projects that we were once interested in. That doesn’t mean we give up! Sometimes it means we need to commit ourselves to carrying on until the feeling of connection kicks in again. But it may also mean we need to try a different approach for a little while, or explore whether it’s time for a real change.*
- *There are lots of social reasons why people may feel disconnected from others in church. (Try to move the focus of discussion to the experience of worship). When it comes to worship, sometimes the words of the praises and*

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prayers may not resonate with us, especially if we have come with hearts that are filled with sadness or anxiety and the season is one of joy – or if the reverse is true. It may be worth mentioning that there is value in challenging ourselves to enter into the worship as best we can even if we’re not “feeling it”.

- *Sometimes people feel that they must be in a perfect emotional and moral state before they can approach God. But we know that God wants to hear from us, no matter where we’re at. Remember he is our loving Father, always watching for us to come home, whether we’ve messed up or whether we’re sad or anxious or angry. No matter what our emotional state or personal circumstances, we can bring it to God.*

THE LESSON: PSALM 42

The first part of the lesson begins with an introduction to the book of psalms in general and to Psalm 42 in particular - this can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

The book of psalms in the Old Testament is a collection of poems set to musical accompaniment. They were written by many poets at many different dates, and were in use by Israel for many centuries before the birth of Jesus. This ancient “prayer book” is quoted repeatedly in the New Testament, has been used in Christian liturgy since the earliest days of the Church, and continues to be used in Christian worship, crossing all denominational lines—and of course a large portion of the psalms are included in our Book of Common Prayer’s Psalter (beginning on page 331).

No matter what your state of heart and mind, you can find a psalm to help express it. Are you joyful, anxious, hungry for justice, guilt-ridden, or thankful? The writers of the psalms have been there too, and this ancient collection of prayers and hymns is a wonderful resource for us in our own prayer lives.

The psalm we’re looking at today (42) is a “maskil” or an instructive psalm. While expressing the intense emotional state of the writer, the psalm goes back and forth between giving voice to the writer’s experience and responding with his own faith-fuelled exhortations back to himself.

Refer to Psalm 42.

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS’ NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE OR THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, PAGE 383).

Read through the text. Then ask the teens to respond to what they’ve just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- How would you describe the psalmist’s mood?
- What clues can you find that the psalmist is not sugar-coating how he feels when he talks to God?
- What are some of the descriptions of God in this psalm that show us that even though the psalmist is feeling despair, his view of God is not a despairing one?
- In a sense, the psalmist is writing a sermon of encouragement to himself. What are the key messages he wants to get through to his soul?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *The psalmist is feeling estranged from God. He is sad (v3), feeling oppressed and mocked, and people have been saying things that make him feel even more abandoned by God (“Where is your God?”) (v9-10). He remembers a time when he was joyful, when his heart was filled with praise in worship, but now that’s just a memory.*

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- In particular, verse 9 is telling. The psalmist is speaking to God directly when he asks, “Why have you forgotten me? Why [is this happening]?”
- The psalmist’s view of God comes through when he describes him as “the living God” (v2), “my salvation” (v5, 11), powerful (v7), commander of steadfast love (v8), a “song” in the night (v8), “my rock” (v9).
- The psalmist knows he needs to place his hope in God and trust that he will again have cause to praise (v5, 11). He knows he needs to remember the history of God’s love in his life (v4, 6, 8). And he knows that God’s loving presence is with him even though it doesn’t feel that way (v8).

DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON’T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU’LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together. (*Note: the full psalm texts are not copied here but do appear on the Student Handout*)

THE WEEKLY “AT-HOME CHALLENGE” IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

EACH MORNING: Take ten minutes to be quiet with God. Open by reading Psalm 100. If your spirit is feeling heavy, then begin with Psalm 43 instead. (*You can use the Psalter in the BCP, a Bible, or the translation below*).

EACH EVENING: Take ten minutes to be quiet with God. Open by reading Psalm 67. If your spirit is feeling heavy, then begin with Psalm 121 instead. (*You can use the Psalter in the BCP, a Bible, or the translation below*).

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this prayer, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

O Most merciful Father, we humbly thank thee for all thy gifts so freely bestowed upon us. For life and health and safety, for power to work and leisure to rest, for all that is beautiful in creation and in the lives of men, we praise and magnify thy holy Name. But above all, we thank thee for our spiritual mercies in Christ Jesus our Lord, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. Fill our hearts with all joy and peace in believing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (THANKSGIVING PRAYER, BCP PAGE 736)

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Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE “PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS” SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-61, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU’RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the “Grace”, the final prayer in the booklet.

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PSALM 42: **SPEAKING TO MY SOUL**

¹As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. ²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? ³My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” ⁴These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation ⁶and my God.

My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. ⁷Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. ⁸By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. ⁹I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” ¹⁰As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?”

¹¹Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.