

Looking At Life

Lesson 1

Unit One

Hello, God? I Have a Few Questions...

Here I Am, Lord

- Group 1: Lord listen to my words.
Group 2: Pay attention to my sigh.
Group 1: My king and my God, listen to me when I cry for help.
Group 2: I pray to you.
Group 1: Lord, in the morning you hear my voice.
Group 2: In the morning I pray to you.
All: I wait for you in hope.



Psalm 5: 1-3

God, I've Heard About You All My Life... But I Need to Know More!

We naturally have questions about our world, our lives, and our future. And even though the world around us seems more complicated than ever, it's really no different than in Jesus' time. Jesus truly was not like anyone the apostles had ever met. Imagine the questions they must have had! This man had control even over the forces of nature as we will see in the Gospel reading today. He could even walk on water. He seemed to have the answer for everything, but sometimes the answer he gave or the way he reacted just led to more questions.

Truly, the world has never been the same since Jesus walked the earth. The apostles were certainly never the same. In fact, *all* people who live with Christ are always

dramatically changed at the very core of who they are and what they do.

How could God change you?

But, before God can truly work in your life you have to learn to TRUST him.

Undoubtedly, just like the apostles, saints, and all who have lived before us, we have doubts and questions—and that's great! Don't ever be afraid to ask questions. God is happy with our questions and completely understands our doubts and fears. We know that now our knowledge is incomplete but someday we will know and understand.



God Asdvadz Աստուծոյ

I Corinthians 13: 12

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

As you get older you will have more and more decisions to make and, from time to time, you will struggle with who you are and how you fit into this world. We can learn from the examples of the apostles and the saints of our Holy Church who struggled with the same questions and had difficult decisions to make just as we do today. They all had something in common that supported them and helped them make the right decisions, even when it did not seem right to the rest of the world—they gathered in a community as a family of faith. Within that family of faith it is much easier for us to make good decisions because we have the support and wisdom of others and we have the strength and power that the Holy Spirit offers to his Body of believers. Just as they did, you will experience time after time the faithfulness of our God—that faithfulness will lead to trust. Our response to God's faithfulness is to keep the lines of communication open through a prayerful life. Our God not only hears your voice...he listens...he responds!



Scriptural Reflection

*A Journey to Meet Christ
Close your eyes...concentrate
on the rhythm of your
breathing until you feel
yourself calming down...
relax and...prepare yourself
for a journey to meet the
Lord...be alert...a storm is
quickly approaching and you
don't want to make the same
mistake the apostles did!
Listen to the story of Jesus
calming the storm in
Matthew 8:23-27.*



Jesus, Can I Trust You Will Send Me a Lifeboat?



Sometimes life is like a giant storm...yet the teachings of our Church and the practice of faith encourage us to believe and trust in our God who is all-knowing, all-loving and ever-present. He loves us so much that he sent his only Son to help us understand the mysteries of life. He sent his Son to prove how much he loves us and also to make us worthy. Living within the community of faith we witness the faith of others and learn from their example to turn to God in trust for all things but especially when we are caught in a "storm." But, we will still have questions we would like to discuss with Jesus. Let's consider a couple of the most commonly asked questions. There is even room for a question that really bugs *you!*

1. If God is all-loving why do people suffer from disease?
2. What good comes from natural disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes?
3. It's just so sad...I don't understand why people have to die!
4. *Now ask God to help you understand a question that's been on your mind.*

The Sea of Life (Dzov Gensaguys)

The sea of life daily storms upon me
The raging waves of my enemy hit me
Good captain, to me a protector be.

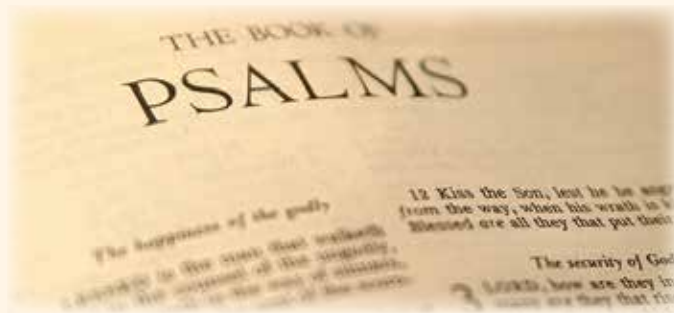
Mesrob Mashdotz



Psalms

Questions → Trust → Praise

Did you know that there was a book of the Bible *all* about people talking to God? Agonizing over their doubts and fears? Asking for God's help? And, ultimately, expressing their trust and praise? While there are many prayers and hymns in the Bible, the one biblical book dedicated to these *entirely* is the book of **Psalms**.



Most of the psalms were originally composed for liturgical worship. Why? Because while they express an individual's feelings, they also expressed what *everyone* often feels. And the community of believers wanted to sing and chant them together, at worship.

There is no sure way of dating the psalms with total accuracy, but we know that some date back before 587 BC—hundreds of years before Christ. Imagine that... we are still praying them!

To this day, the psalms are an important foundation for the Divine Liturgy and all the worship services of the Armenian Church. As a matter of fact, at our Badarak, at the conclusion of his personal confession and when he is going up to the altar, the priest and the deacon take turns reciting Psalm 43.

Open your Bible to the Book of Psalms and read Psalm

43. Why do you think this is such an appropriate psalm to be recited at this moment in our Liturgy?

Identify:

1. 2 verses that ask God for something
2. 2 verses that offer praise to God
3. 2 verses that ask God 'Why'

Saghmos

Uuḡfḡnu

Write Your Own Psalm

Use the letters provided to begin each sentence.

T _____

R _____

U _____

S _____

T _____

Our Armenian Way

St. Gregory of Narek

(c. 945-1003) was the greatest prayer writer/poet of the Armenian Church and a beloved teacher and churchman in his time. He was born in Narek and entered the monastery of the same name (south of Lake Van). He wrote Bible commentaries, history and poetry. Like many of the psalm writers, **St. Gregory** felt himself completely unworthy. Yet he never lost sight of God's endless mercy and great compassion. He trusted God and, indeed, God found him

so worthy that he inspired this humble man to write *Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart*, a book of 95 amazing confessional prayers. For centuries this little book of prayers was the most respected and most read book among Armenians. A miraculous healing power was attributed to it and it was often kept under the bed pillows of the sick.

Here's an example of one of his prayers:

*Dear Lord, I pray
that I might be honored with clothing of light
from which I have been stripped
that I might touch the hand of Him
from whom I am separated
that I might receive my daily bread
for which I have not worked
that I might be showered with rewards
which I have not earned
remember all my blessings
which I always forget.*

Prayer 24



What are some of the blessings I need to remember right now in my life?

Unit One: Looking At Life

Session 1 Hello God? I Have a Few Questions...

Key Concepts

1. Through trust we learn to accept that while our faith answers many of life's questions, some answers will only be revealed in the "fullness of time."
2. We first learn to trust through our experiences within the family and faith community.
3. God lovingly encourages us to express our questions and concerns.
4. The Psalmists expressed these very feelings through their prayer songs.

Objectives

During the session students will

1. Identify someone they trust.
2. Explore how faith grows with trust.
3. Participate in a spiritual reflection using the story of Jesus' calming the storm (Matthew 8:23-27).
4. Discuss some of life's challenging questions.
5. Read and analyze Psalm 43 and review its use in the Armenian Divine Liturgy.
6. Write their own psalm.
7. Read about St Gregory of Narek and examine Prayer 24.
8. Identify some of their blessings.

Materials Needed

Index cards

Procedure

1. Welcome students. For the opening prayer, divide the class in two and have them pray as a responsorial prayer together.
2. Distribute the index cards and ask students to write the name of one person they trust more than anyone else in the world. Next to that person's name have them add one adjective that describes the characteristic that he or she possesses that makes them feel this way about them. Write the word "Trust" on the board and invite students one by one to come up to the board and write their word under it. Discuss results. Note repetitions and unusual words.
3. Read **But I Need to Know More!** together and discuss the question. (Discussion guidelines: God could change us by filling us with stronger faith, more love, more patience, kindness, understanding, joy, etc.) 15 min.
4. In preparation for the guided journey to meet Christ, ask the students the following questions. Be prepared to prompt the students by relating a personal experience you've had.
 1. Has trusting someone ever put you in an awkward situation?
 2. What happened? (Allow 1 or 2 students to relay an incident.)
 3. Were you ever able to trust that person again?
 4. Why or why not?Conclude by acknowledging that it is not always easy to reach out in absolute trust. Set the stage for the journey to meet Christ by saying "*Let's join the disciples on the stormy sea to see how they handled a similar situation.*"
5. If room permits, have the students move to their "Sacred Space." If space is limited have the children remain in their seats as you guide them. (You will find explicit instructions on 'Sacred Space' and 'Guided Scriptural Reflections' outlined in the **Introduction** of this manual.) Have students close their eyes as directed in **Scriptural Reflection**. Read Matthew 8: 23-27 Then lead them in the meditation as follows: "You are one of the disciples with Jesus in a boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. All of a sudden the sun is covered by the clouds. The

wind is getting stronger and the waves bigger. Now the puffy white clouds turn dark and the boat is being tossed from side to side. You are finding it hard to stay in your seat and are holding tightly to the side of the boat. You know that Jesus is there in the boat and are puzzled that he is asleep instead of doing something to save the crew. Finally, the storm is so great that you go in fear and wake Jesus up asking him to do something. He responds by asking ‘why are you afraid – don’t you trust in me?’ He shakes his head in disappointment that you do not have faith in him...nonetheless he calms the sea. You look at one another in amazement – never have you seen anything like this before – the storm stops – everything is calm. You look over at Jesus...a bit ashamed that you did not have faith that being with him was all the protection you needed. You have learned a good lesson ...now you know that this is someone that you can trust. You look at Jesus, hug him and say sorry...I love you. Come out of your heart room...gently close the door! Take a deep breath and turn around and move your mind back to your sacred space. Open your eyes – move back to your desks.” 15 min.

6. Read and discuss **Jesus, Can I Trust You Will Send Me a Lifeboat?** Guidelines for discussion:
 1. We don’t know why God created a perfect world and then allowed it, through sin, to deteriorate to a place where there is disease and death. But we know that *someday*, in what is Biblically called “the fullness of time” (refer back to 1 Corinthians 13 in their text), when we see God, we will have answers to questions we struggle with now. Until then we remember: God loved his Son, but asked that he suffer greatly for all of us – we must always remember that God is with us especially in our suffering – when we suffer, he suffers.
 2. Again, someday we will understand why we live in a world where natural disasters occur. But for now, natural disasters can provide opportunities for people to care for one another and to act as God’s representatives here on earth. They can prompt people to find ways of preventing or lessening their effects. Use examples of heroic and generous actions that often occur after natural disasters.
 3. Death is the end of this life...but the beginning of eternal life. In God’s design, often the end of one thing is the beginning of something new. Reiterate that our God is a God of new beginnings.
 4. The 4th question is of a personal nature; discuss students’ questions together. A good response is always “we don’t always find definitive answers to the questions of life exactly when we want them...God sometimes responds to us in stages as we are ready for the truth. Our part is to always keep our hearts and minds open to hear his voice...and the best way to do this is through prayer.” 10 min.

7. Read or teach **Psalms: Questions → Questions → Trust → Praise.** (Answer guideline: the Psalm is appropriate – and is immediately preceded by the praise-filled psalm 100 – in that it reflects the priest and the congregation’s human frailty while expressing joy that they are going up to the holy altar – to truth, and light, to the place where God dwells, the “holy mountain.” Help them to dissect the psalm using the questions provided. Answers: 1. 1,3; 2. 4,5; 3. 2,5)

8. Continue with **Write Your Own Psalm.** Have students work alone, in groups, or together as a class. If there are groups elect a leader from each group to read the psalm. 10 min.

9. As a segue into **Our Armenian Way**, tell them that the Armenians have their own master psalmist. Read the text and prayer together. Discuss the question (be prepared with some blessings of your own to mention).

10. Conclude with a closing prayer – either St. Gregory’s Prayer 24 or one of the students’ psalms. 10 min.

Extending the Lesson

Have students explore the Divine Liturgy books to see if they can identify other Psalms incorporated in the Liturgy.

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Great Barekendan

(Genesis, Chapter 2)

Although this Sunday is not a day of Lent (as the five Sundays following it are), the Armenian Church opens the series of Sundays of Lent with Barekendan. To distinguish this Sunday from the other ten Barekendan Sundays, it is called “great” or “Real Barekendan”. The word “Barekendan” means joyful, happy and vital living. For this reason, the first Barekendan Sunday is marked especially by general festivities.

No other Sunday among the Church Sundays is observed so carefully as this one, though corrupted from its original meaning. It may be assumed that these festivities are due, perhaps, to the re-alization of the onset of the forty to fiftydays of Lent. Consequently, people would be making the most out of the occasion thus presented to enjoy food and have a good time. This opinion, however, is only partly correct.

In fact, Great Barekendan commemorates the happy, careless and innocent life of the ancestors of Mankind – Adam and Eve – in Paradise.

This Sunday, besides reminding us that man is created happy and put in a happy environment, suggests also the idea that man is destined to everlasting happiness. The Holy Bible, as well as man’s experience, testifies to the truthfulness of this idea. A child under normal conditions (not perfect or ideal conditions) is the happiest creature in the universe. His happiness is seldom dependent upon outsiders but springs from within his little self. A heap of sand is enough to make him happy for hours. The mere appearance of a butterfly suffices to set his heart a-tremble with boundless enjoyment. It is as if everything in nature exists to make him happy.

A child truly comprises in himself/herself and symbolizes the infancy of the human race. And, to be sure, the days in Paradise of Adam and Eve – our ancestors – remind us all the attractions of our own childhood and the beauty of such projections, all found to be recorded in the first pages of the Bible. The day when the child starts to distinguish between “good and evil”, the moment “his eyes are opened” ... he begins to lose his innocence of childhood and his happiness as well. The next Sunday will explain this idea more.