



THE PSALMS: A Youth Activity

The Psalms have often been referred to as both the hymn book and the prayer book of the Church. One of the characteristics of the Psalms that I feel is important is that the Psalms express feelings—deep, personal, individual (as well as corporate) feelings. At times when we feel as if no one understands how we feel, or when we can't find the words—joyful or otherwise—to express our thoughts and emotions, we can probably find them expressed somewhere in the Psalms. This program will attempt to begin to look at the Psalms and how to use them as our personal prayer book.

Begin the program by reading two Psalms. Read first Psalm 117. This is a corporate Psalm of praise. Read it in the following manner:

Leader: Praise the Lord, all nations!

People: Praise the Lord, all nations!

Leader: Praise Him, all peoples!

People: Praise Him, all peoples!

Leader: His constant love for us is strong and His faithfulness is eternal. Praise the Lord!

People: Praise the Lord!

(Psalms 117, TEV)

Next read Psalm 139. Read it as a prayer. Have everyone bow their heads and close their eyes and listen carefully to the words. Read it slowly and with expression.

After this opening, talk about the feelings expressed in these two Psalms. How did the young people feel as they participated in these two Psalms? List these feelings on a chalkboard or newsprint. Compare the two Psalms. How were they alike? How were they different?

At this point you may want to share some background material on the Psalms. This can be found in many study Bibles and also in commentaries. You don't need to go into great detail in this part—just enough to give some basics and foundation for understanding the Psalms.

There are many types of Psalms and each type deals with a different subject and set of feelings. For this program we are going to look at four types: Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving, Psalms of Lament, Psalms of Trust and Wisdom (or Torah) Psalms. Pass out the worksheets. Have the young people look at the chart in question #1. Give a brief introduction to the three types. What does it mean to praise, to lament, to trust? Have them then complete the chart. This can be done individually, as a large group or by dividing into three groups and each filling in a different type. Have the young people read the examples listed for each type and then answer the three questions. When they have completed their charts, then

have them share their findings with the large group. Record the group's responses on a large chart on a chalkboard, newsprint or an overhead projector. Stress how the Psalms express our feelings and can be used as our prayers when we can't find the words. Point out also how the things we are feeling are not "new." The Psalmist also felt this way and brought those feelings before God in these songs and prayers. With this in mind, have the young people complete question #2. Assure them that this is personal—they will not be asked to share it with the group. This is their prayer with the Lord.

Move on to question #3. Do this as a total group. Turn to Psalm 119. Assign different individuals or small groups sections of the Psalm to read. What does it teach us in relation to God's Word? Record these answers on the chalkboard or newsprint.

Move on to question #4. Let the young people complete this question on their own. When they have finished, go over the verses as a group. Read each verse (or verses) and decide what type each is. Why was that type chosen? What is it about the verse that makes it "fit" that type?

Look back over the list of feelings and subjects dealt with in these types of Psalms. There are many other types as well. Think of a subject or situation that exists today that needs to be brought before God. It can be personal, community, or global such as hunger, poverty, homelessness, AIDS, child abuse, etc. List these on the chalkboard or newsprint. As individuals or in small groups, let the young people choose one of the subjects or situations and write their own Psalm about it as instructed in question #5. Save these to be shared during the closing worship.

Move now to question #6. This is the preparation for the closing worship. Divide into 3 groups and assign each group a task. When they have completed their work, see if there are any remaining questions, comments or concerns. If there is further interest, plan an additional program to continue a study of the Psalms. Some good resources for this would be commentaries on the Psalms, or the book **Praying and Teaching the Psalms** by Donald Griggs (Abingdon Press). When you feel you have tied up the loose ends, close with the following worship:

CLOSING WORSHIP

Call to Worship: Play the song "Come Worship the Lord" (Psalm 95), found on the album *Come to the Quiet* by John Michael Talbot (Sparrow Records).

Praise and Adoration: Let group A read the psalm (or verses) they choose.

Silent Prayer: Let each young person pray and meditate on the verses they choose in question #2.

God's Word: Let group B read the verses they selected.

Psalms of Today: Let as many young people (or groups) who would like to share the Psalm they wrote in question #5 do so.

Hymn: Let group C close the worship by leading the group in the song they choose.

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