Leader Notes (in red throughout)

Goals:
1. This study will help youth see the people of the Old Testament as real people who offered real prayers in the midst of real struggles.
2. This study will help youth make the Psalms their own prayers.

Materials:
1. Bible Study Handout (Participant Version)
2. Bible Study Leader Notes
3. ESV Bible
4. Bookmark template
5. Art supplies: pens, markers, colored pencils, crayons

INTRODUCTION

Words. It can be hard to find the right words.

Picture a classroom in which you are a student. The teacher is reviewing a lesson that was taught yesterday. There will be a test tomorrow. As part of the review, your teacher asks the class a specific question. Everyone in the room should know the answer. But there is no response. The silence hangs in the air. Students shift uncomfortably in their chairs and avoid making eye contact with the teacher. She's waiting for you to speak.

Or …

You hear your parents coming home. You just finished cleaning up a mess—a broken window, or a broken dish, or a broken device. As you scramble to get rid of the evidence, your parents walk in the door and see your mistake. You lock eyes with your dad. He is clearly waiting for you to say something.

Or …

Imagine receiving an incredible gift. It was a gift you've wanted for a long time but never imagined you would get. You didn't even let yourself dream about it because there was no way it would happen. But then, on your birthday, the unimaginable happens. You open your last gift and there it is! The range of emotions—joy and surprise and gratitude and potential—leave you speechless.

Words. It can be difficult to find the right words at such times.

SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 43.

Ask for a volunteer to read the Psalm, or read it aloud yourself.

Tell participants: As the Psalm is being read, think about what the author might have been going through.

This is a real prayer from someone who lived in the days of the Old Testament. We don’t know who this person was. We don’t know what this person was going through, or what led to these words. But let’s try to imagine.

What types of feelings might have led someone to pray these particular words?

The psalmist may have had feelings hurt, been wronged or rejected. Something happened that was unfair.

Have you ever felt the way this psalmist seems to have felt? If not, there’s a good chance you will at some point. Maybe you’re feeling that way right now. In such times, you may not know what to say to God. It might be hard to find the right words.
Perhaps Psalm 43 could be helpful. You might think of it as God’s gift to help you pray. We pray these words in moments we feel wronged and rejected. We take comfort, knowing that someone has prayed these words before us. We are reminded that God promises to hear our prayers because he loves us.

In fact, the Psalms have been prayed this way for a very long time. For the people of the New Testament, the Psalms were real prayers they offered in all kinds of situations.

Did you know?

**When were the Psalms written?**

(Approximately 1030-500 BC)

**When was the New Testament written?**

(Approximately AD 40-95)

**How many years are separating the people of the Psalms and the New Testament?**

(At most 1125 years! At least 540.)

That’s a LONG time! There were hundreds—even a thousand—years separating the New Testament people from the writers of the Psalms, yet God’s people in the New Testament made the Psalms their own prayers. For example, let’s look at Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is young and unmarried, and yet the angel Gabriel appears to her and tells her that she’s pregnant. Think about how troubling this news would have been! At the same time, Mary believes the challenges she faces are part of a bigger plan in God’s story.

*Shortly after learning that she was pregnant, Mary puts all of her thoughts and feelings into a song and prayer. These are the words of Luke 1:46-55. Let’s read this song and see what Mary was feeling that day.*

Ask for a volunteer to read.

**What does her song reveal about Mary’s thoughts and feelings?**

The song suggests humility, confidence, joy, thanksgiving, etc.

You may not have noticed, but many words of Mary’s song are not her own. Much of what she sings comes directly from the Psalms. Look up the following Psalms and see if you can match the verses from Luke 1:46-55.

Assign each student, or pair of students, a Psalm or group of Psalms. Then challenge them to identify which verse from Luke most closely fits the message of that Psalm.

*All cross-references are taken from Concordia’s Lutheran Study Bible. This might be a good opportunity to show the youth how to use the cross-reference section of their Bible.

Psalm 138:6, 113:5-6, 72:17 Luke 1:48
Psalm 98:3 Luke 1:54

Mary was feeling scared and troubled—and at the same time—joyful and confident. That’s a wide range of feelings to put into words! But Mary isn’t stuck. As she sings this song to God, she finds helpful words from the Psalms. She knows that there have been others who have been troubled and, yet, were filled with joy. She has a whole book of prayers to draw from as she expresses her words to God.

God has given you these words, too. When you turn to the Psalms, you’ll find the prayers of people going through all kinds of situations—just like you. God has given you these words to pray when your own words are hard to find.

Even more, God has given you THE Word. He has given you Mary’s son, God’s Son—Jesus Christ. We look at what Jesus did for us—his life, death, resurrection, ascension—and we see his love for us. He has brought us into his family. He has joined us together with believers who have gone before us, including those who wrote the Psalms. With them, we pray to the **Real. Present. God.** who gives us his good words.
ACTIVITY

Psalm Bookmark

Using the attached bookmark template (make sure to have enough copies), instruct the students to find Psalms from the exercise with Luke 1 that could help them in their everyday lives. Give them 10-15 minutes to start filling out their bookmarks. Tell them this is something they can continue adding to as they read more Psalms in the upcoming months.

Examples:

Divide the bookmark into sections (or create several bookmarks) such as Praise, Request, Fear. Student can match a Psalm that can be said as a prayer in each situation. The bookmark can be kept in the Bible as a reference. Invite the students to decorate the bookmarks or add images inspired by the Psalms.

Use the hashtag #NYG2019 to share a picture of your bookmark with the rest of the Gathering participants on social media.

CALL TO ACTION

This week we will begin making the Psalms our own prayers. Here are some ideas:

- Try praying out loud one of the Psalms we read in this study.
- Try paraphrasing the Psalm in your own words.
- As you pray a Psalm, add your personal praises or requests. Think of it like adding a bow or a gift tag to a beautifully wrapped gift. (You aren’t changing the gift, just personalizing it.)
- Finally, take the time to memorize the Psalm.

PRAYER

Close the Bible Study with prayer. If possible, have a youth choose one of the Psalms on their bookmark, and use that Psalm as your closing prayer.
Leader Notes (in red throughout)

Goals:
1. This study will explore some of the distinct features of Old Testament poetry.
2. This study will unpack some of the key imagery in the Psalms, particularly Psalm 46 so that students have a foundation upon which the Morning Sessions at the Gathering will build.

Materials:
1. Bible Study Handout (Participant Version)
2. Bible Study Leader Notes
3. ESV Bible

Optional Materials:
Option 1: Computer, Projector & Artwork files (See below)
Option 2: Sheets of paper, drawing materials

INTRODUCTION

Poetry. It's everywhere.
It's the music on the radio. It's an assignment for your literature class. It's in the greeting card section at Target.

Can you think of any famous poems? Take a minute and list a few:
- “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost
- “The Raven” by Edgar Allen Poe
- “‘Twas the Night Before Christmas”
- Current song on radio
- A hymn from worship
- “Roses are red, violets are blue …”
- Etc.

What makes a poem … a poem?

Poems are creative uses of language. They are filled with imagery, similes, and metaphors. They bend the rules of grammar to convey thoughts and emotions. Sometimes, they follow rules of their own, such as haikus or rhyming patterns. Poems often have multiple possible meanings.

Poetry is everywhere. Even in the Scriptures. In fact, the Book of Psalms IS poetry. The Psalms are real prayers, real songs, composed by real people. But when you read them, you realize quickly that they are real poems, too.

Much like famous poems in our day, the Psalms are filled with rich imagery, colorful language, beautiful metaphors, and other literary devices. The poetic nature of the Psalms makes them both exciting—and challenging!—to study. Our hope is to help you see the value (and joy!) of grappling with the poetry of the Psalms.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Depending on time, you can do one of these opening activities or both.

Option 1: Electronic Art Gallery

Tell the students that you will be showing them some artwork. Using a computer and projector, display various pieces of art (3-5) on the screen, one by one. If you don't have these tech capabilities, you can print the artwork and pass it around. To find art, simply google “famous paintings.”

For each image, ask the students to look at the picture for a minute. Then ask them to give their own title for the art that captures what the picture means to them. Ask them why they said what they said. You'll probably find there are lots of different responses. That's okay.

After viewing all the images and discussing the youth's titles, ask the youth:

What is it like trying to put a picture into words?

Option 2: Picture of My Life

Give the students two pieces of paper and something to draw with. Ask them to draw a picture of their life on one of the pieces of paper and to leave the other piece of paper blank. They can use pictures, words, symbols, or anything else that comes to mind for their drawing. Give them 5-10 minutes to do this.
Then, have the students leave their drawings on a table or hanging on a wall. Tell them to put the blank piece of paper next to it. Have all the students go around and look at the other students’ drawings and ask them to write a title for each of the other students’ works. (If your group is large, you can divide your students into smaller groups to keep the activity moving.)

After everyone is finished, ask the youth:

Was it easy or difficult to put other people’s pictures into words? What made it easy? What made it difficult?

LESSON

Reading Psalms is a lot like looking at works of art. A good poet is a type of artist, using imagery to paint meaningful pictures in readers’ minds. The Psalms often do the same thing, creating vivid images for readers to ponder. In fact, the Psalms can communicate a variety of thoughts, ideas, emotions, scenes, and stories in just a few short words.

At the 2019 LCMS Youth Gathering, we will be spending time in Psalm 46. Let’s go ahead and start looking at this Psalm now. We will look at the pictures the psalmist paints. We will also look at some of the stories behind the images. Taking time to unpack these images now will be a huge help to you when you get to the Gathering.

Youth Leader: Read the Psalm aloud, slowly. Before you start, tell the youth:

“As I read this Psalm, try to pick striking words or phrases. What words paint powerful images in your mind? Circle those words as I read Psalm 46.”

Psalm 46

1. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
2. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
3. though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.
4. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.
5. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.
6. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.
7. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.
8. Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.
9. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.
10. “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”
11. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Afterward, have the youth share one or two of their most striking words or phrases.

There are all kinds of powerful words in this poem. Depending on your background or situation, some may strike you more directly than others.

In Psalm 46, there are certain images that would have been especially powerful for the people of the Old Testament. The psalmist who wrote these words evokes significant images from the history of God’s people.

Let’s look at a few of them.

Mountains and Sea (Psalm 46:1-3)

Look at Psalm 46:1-3, noting especially the images of the mountains and the sea. What do you think of when you picture mountains? Get creative!

Let the youth discuss. Afterward, say something like this:

“If you wanted to talk about a place of strength and security in the Old Testament, you would talk about the
Mountains. The mountains provided safety from attack. They towered above the rest of the landscape as a place of majesty. Cities were built near mountains. Holy activities take place on mountains. Mountains are often depicted as a place where God dwells."

Read Exodus 34:1-5 for an example of the history of mountains and God's people.

"God often met his people, like Moses, on the tops of mountains. This story is just one example."

Can you think of other stories about God’s people and mountains?

Examples include Mount Ararat (where the ark landed), Mount Moriah (where Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac), Mount Carmel (where Elijah beat the prophets of Baal), the Mount of Transfiguration, Mount Calvary, the Sermon on the Mount.

Now, what about the sea? What do you think of when you picture a sea?

Let the youth discuss. Afterward, say something like:

"In the Old Testament the sea is the opposite of the mountain. Mountains mean safety and security; seas mean chaos, calamity, destruction, and disorder. The sea is unstable. If you're looking for safety, this is the last place you want to be!"

Read Job 38:8-11 for an example of the history of seas and God's people. How does God himself describe the sea to Job?

It's like a prison. And a monster! It needs to be tamed with set boundaries.

River & City of God (Psalm 46:4-5)

Look at Psalm 46:4-5, noting especially the images of the river and city of God. How is a river similar to a sea? How is it different?

Let the youth discuss. Afterward, say something like:

"In the Bible, the river is an image of peace and tranquility. Rather than inducing fear, a river gladdens. It provides fresh water and promotes life. Rivers and streams of water are often used to depict vibrant scenes of life flourishing at its best."

Read Genesis 2:10-14 for an example of the history of rivers and God’s people.

"There were four rivers in the Garden of Eden. They were part of God’s perfect creation to gladden, sustain and promote life."

Now, what about the city of God? What do you picture when you hear those words?

Let the youth discuss. Afterward, say something like:

"We may think of heaven when we hear the words, ‘City of God.’ In the Old Testament, the City of God was a nickname for Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the home of the temple—the place where God promised to dwell. It was God’s home, God’s city."

Read 1 Kings 8:1-10 for an example of the history of the temple and presence of God.

Knowing that God dwelled in Jerusalem gave God’s people a sense of peace. They knew Jerusalem was a safe place because God was there. It was much better than being in the heart of the sea!

Lord of Hosts & God of Jacob (Psalm 46:7,10)

Look at Psalm 46:7 and/or 46:10, noting especially the phrases “Lord of Hosts” and “God of Jacob.” What do you think of when you hear the phrase “Lord of Hosts”?

Let the youth discuss. Afterward, say something like:

"In a way, ‘Lord of Hosts’ was a nickname for God. ‘Hosts’ could also be translated ‘armies.’ This was a powerful image of might and strength. The Lord of hosts is a name that emphasizes God’s lordship over the armies of Israel, both the human armies and the angelic armies. This name depicts God as a warrior who fights for his people and triumphs over their enemies.”

River & City of God (Psalm 46:4-5)

Look at Psalm 46:4-5, noting especially the images of the river and city of God. How is a river similar to a sea? How is it different?

Let the youth discuss. Afterward, say something like:
Psalms Are … Real Poems

Read 1 Samuel 17:45 for an example of the history of the phrase Lord of Hosts and God’s people.

This was a phrase evoked by David before his victorious defeat over Goliath. God was fighting on David’s side.

Now, what about phrase “God of Jacob”? To find out why this name is important, read Genesis 28:10-16.

God promises to be with Jacob and to give the land to Jacob’s offspring. The same God who kept his promises to Jacob will keep his promises to his people in the generations after Jacob. God’s people were even named after Jacob’s other name, Israel. And God’s nickname became, “The God of Jacob.” God was a personal God. He kept his promises to his people, and he was always with his people.

APPLICATION

Wow! That’s a lot of images. Which of these poetic images in Psalm 46 do you find the most impactful? Why?

When you read the Psalms, there are all kinds of images in these poems. Some of them you may understand. Others may be less familiar.

But that’s what makes the Psalms a vast ocean to explore. (Did you catch the metaphor?) Each Psalm evokes loads of images and ideas. There is so much depth and history packed in each one.

Just like poetry in our world today, the poetry of the Psalms takes time to navigate. When you read them, slow down. Close your eyes. Picture what psalmist pictured. Go on the journey with the psalmist. When you do, you discover more than just images. You will see beautiful things that God has done—and continues to do—in the lives of his people.

The Psalms may be full of images and metaphors, but these words point us to the same God working now as he always has worked. He fights for his people. He forgives sin. He encircles his people with love. He is a Real. Present. God. who has come to bring his people life.

CALL TO ACTION

1. Pick one of the key images we just discussed and look for it in other Psalms. You can use a study bible or an online search to find other passages where similar wording occurs.

2. Read one or more other image-rich Psalms. Some good suggestions are Psalm 8, 23, 42, 91, and 95. Meditate on the images they depict and their meaning for your life.

3. Add another Psalm to your bookmark from last time, or make another bookmark. Use the hashtag #NYG2019 to share a picture of your bookmark with the rest of the Gathering participants on social media.
Leader Notes (in red throughout)

Goals:
1. This study will highlight how the Psalms are rooted in real-life experiences, focusing on Psalm 51 and Psalm 32.
2. This study will help students begin using the Psalms in their own real-life experience.

Materials:
1. Bible Study Handout (Participant Version)
2. Bible Study Leader Notes
3. ESV Bible
4. Blank Paper, Pens

INTRODUCTION

Context matters.

Whether we are speaking, listening, reading, writing, or texting, we do everything at a specific time and place. That’s called context. It’s difficult to understand what people are trying to say without knowing the context. It’s a lot easier to understand what people mean when you know where, when, why, and how they’re speaking. When you know the context surrounding a phrase, the phrase becomes more meaningful.

The following activity can be done with partners, small groups, or as a whole group. If you’re splitting up the group, give each group a blank piece of paper and pen.

Let’s play a game called “Casey Likes You.”

With your group (or the whole group) see how many different ways you can say the phrase, “Casey likes you.” Put the phrase into as many different contexts as you can. On your paper, write down the different contexts you come up with so you can share them with the group.

For example, “Casey likes you!” (… I thought you’d want to know)

Give youth about 5 minutes to come up with their different contexts, and then have them share with the group.

Other examples they might come up with:

“Casey LIKES you” … but just as a friend. It’s not true love. Sorry.

“Casey likes YOU?” … I’m shocked. I had no idea.

“CASEY likes you” … not Kelsey. You should really get your hearing checked!

The phrase “Casey likes you” can mean lots of different things—and it all depends on the context. It could be great news, terrible news, or just helpful information. When you hear (or read) this phrase, you know there’s more to the story than just those three words.

CONTEXT & THE PSALMS

Context matters. It’s true for all communication, including our reading of the Scriptures.

When we read Bible passages, like the Psalms, it’s important to keep the context in mind. The Psalms come out of real-life situations that inspired people to put their experiences into prayers to God. In the Bible, you’ll find 150 different Psalms, each with its own context. Some seem to have been written on great days, others on terrible days, and still others somewhere in between.

To help understand the context of a Psalm, there are some questions we can ask. Who wrote this Psalm? What was the author going through? What events in the Bible are influencing what the author’s saying? These are all great questions to ask as we approach the Psalm. They help us make sense of the imagery, references, and emotions that could otherwise seem foreign or confusing.

“SUPERSCRIPTIONS”

If you’ve read the Psalms before, you might have noticed the words that come before the Psalm starts. For example, look at Psalm 3.

Instruct participants to open their Bibles or Bible apps.

Do you see the words that come before the Psalm starts? First, there’s usually a title. (In this case, “Save Me, O My God.”) Then, usually in small capital letters or italics, there is sometimes a description of the context. We call this a “superscription.” What does the superscription for Psalm 3 say?

“A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.”
Psalms Are … Rooted in Real Life

The superscriptions have been part of the Psalms for a very long time. They remind us that the Psalms come from real-life experiences. Paying attention to them helps us learn more about the stories behind their composition. In other words, they help us understand the context.

**FAST FACTS**

- Sometimes...Psalms come with “superscriptions.” Sometimes, they don’t.
- Sometimes...the superscription tells us just a little about the context, like the author’s name.
- Sometimes...we know a lot of context—even a whole backstory.
- Sometimes...we know almost nothing about the context of a Psalm.
- Even when we know very little about the original context of a Psalm, there is always more to the story than only the words on the page.

**SCRIPTURE**

_Instruct the youth to open their Bibles to Psalm 51. Begin by reading verses 1-12 together as a group. Then instruct the youth to read it again quietly while reflecting on the provided questions._

Read Psalm 51:1-12.

Now, take the time to read Psalm 51:1-12 again, but this time do it quietly, by yourself. As you read it this time, ask yourself these questions:

Give the youth about 3-5 minutes. It would be helpful to have these questions on a whiteboard or a PowerPoint slide. Afterward, have them share what they’ve discovered.

**What is the context?**

Give the youth a chance to answer. They may say something like this: “The author is going through a difficult time. They have done something horrible, and they feel guilty.”

Some youth might have noticed the superscription here. It says that the Psalm was written by David after committing adultery with Bathsheba.

**What is the author asking God? Why?**

Have youth share possible responses. They may say something like: “The author is asking for forgiveness, a clean heart, an opportunity to remain in God’s presence. The author is begging God for this, which indicates that the author cannot obtain a clean heart by himself. He is looking to God to give it to him.”

Part of the reason why these words are so powerful is because we know there is a real-life story that led to the writing of this Psalm. Notice the superscription. It tells us that this Psalm was written by David after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11-12.

Read 2 Samuel 11:1-5.

(Either read it aloud yourself or ask for a volunteer.)

If you have time, read the rest of 2 Samuel 11 to explore the whole context. If time doesn't allow you to read the rest of the chapter, you can summarize the rest of the story yourself or ask a student familiar with the story to share what happens next with David, Bathsheba, and Uriah.

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-7a.

**How do you imagine David feels when he hears Nathan say, “You are that man!”?**

It doesn't feel very good to be “found out.” David had been trying to keep his sin a secret, but it's not a secret anymore. At the time, it might have felt like keeping his sin secret was the “easy way out,” but now it’s time for David to do the more difficult thing: confess his sin to God. There’s nowhere else he can turn to fix this mess.

David committed adultery. He lied. He murdered. He covered it up. He was found out. And out of that mess was born Psalm 51. Go back and read Psalm 51:1-12 again. How does knowing the context change the way you view the Psalm?
These words from David sound very real. You can put a real story and voice to the Psalm. It’s coming from the heart of someone who desperately needs God’s help to forgive him and make him whole again.

**APPLICATION**

Your story isn’t the same as David’s story. Your context is very different from his. But even still, Psalm 51 can still be your Psalm. His words can be your words. In fact, Psalm 51 was born out of David’s real-life situation so that these words could be used in your real-life situations, too.

_Have you ever felt like you messed up and needed God’s forgiveness? What did that feel like?_

Youth may say: It’s doesn’t feel good. When we mess up, we’re not proud. We’re humble. We’re desperate for God’s love and words of forgiveness.

The truth is, people mess up all the time. Every day.

Breaking God’s commands is a very serious thing. Our sin separates us from God. Our sin makes us deserve eternal death. (It doesn’t get more real than that.) Our sin is the reason why God’s Son died on a cross. Our sin leaves us broken and helpless. Our sin is a very serious—and very real—problem. But when we are broken in sin, the Psalms give us words.

David gives us words. God gives us words to say back to him to confess our sin and our need for a Savior. God’s people have used Psalm 51 throughout the generations to confess their sins. Perhaps you recognized parts of Psalm 51 from our confession of sins that we say in worship.

The most beautiful part of David’s story is that God hears those words and forgave him. Likewise, God hears our confession, too. When we confess our sin to God, God provides real forgiveness and real life through our real Savior, Jesus.


How does this context about David’s life help you appreciate the words of Psalm 32?

The same God who showed mercy to David still shows his mercy to his people today. God continues to act in real time and space to bring his forgiveness to you, too. He is a Real. Present. God. who promises to hear our confession, forgive our sin, and create in us new life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**CALL TO ACTION**

1. Add Psalms 51 and 32 to your Psalm Bookmark (see the Pre-Gathering Bible Study, “Psalms … Are Real Prayers”). You could categorize them as Psalms of confession and forgiveness.

2. Choose another Psalm of confession and forgiveness to add to the bookmark, such as Psalm 6, 38, 102, 130, or 143. Which one of these speaks the most to your real-life situations right now?

3. Make one of these Psalms part of your daily devotional life.

4. Use the hashtag #NYG2019 to share what you’re doing with the rest of the LCMS Gathering participants on social media.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

Close the Bible Study with prayer. If possible, have a youth choose one of the Psalms on their bookmark, and use that Psalm as your closing prayer.
Leader Notes (in red throughout)

As you lead this study, review some of the concepts from “Real. Present. God. - An Introductory Study,” especially the “Finish that Lyric” activity in the introduction. Maybe it’s time to play the game again with your youth!

We recommend you do this Bible Study in one session. But if needed, it could be divided into two Bible Studies. A natural dividing spot would be after the section, “Finish that Psalm.”

Goals:
1. Remind youth that the Psalms were well-known songs and prayers for the people of the Old and New Testament.
2. This study will show youth that the Psalms are like hypertext links. In the New Testament, short verses of the Psalms are quoted to remind hearers of the fuller Psalm, as well as God’s plan to send a Messiah to be their Savior.
3. Youth recognize that Jesus is the Real. Present. God. of the Psalms.
4. Through Jesus, youth see the Psalms as their own songs, poems, and prayers.

Materials:
1. Bible Study Handout (Participant Version)
2. Bible Study Leader Notes
3. ESV Bible

Optional Materials:
For review: “Real. Present. God. - An Introductory Study”

INTRODUCTION

Psalms are real songs. Psalms are real poems. Psalms are real prayers.
For God’s people throughout history, the Psalms were the most well-known songs, poems and prayers. They knew these words by heart. But how does that affect us here and now? You might be thinking, “That’s great for the people back then. But these aren’t really my songs, or my poems, or my prayers. I have songs, poems, and prayers of my own. Why do I need these? Let’s face it, these Psalms are … OLD!”

Fair point. Let’s talk about your songs.
Do you remember the “Finish that Lyric” activity we played during our first Pre-Gathering Bible Study? The leader provided an opening lyric for a song, and then you finished it (hopefully in tune, and perhaps with a few dance steps mixed in!)

(Optional:) If you did not get a chance to do this activity in the introductory study, consider doing it here. If you did this activity in the introductory study, consider playing another round!

For the “Finish that Lyric” activity see “Real. Present. God. - An Introductory Study,” Page 1

Whether you do the activity or not, ask these questions next:
1. What is your absolute favorite song? Why?
2. Has this always been the favorite song?
3. What happens when you hear just one or two lines from your favorite songs?

Emphasize the positive effect of songs and musical experiences. Being able to complete the lyric of a favorite song is often more than an intellectual exercise. It is also emotional. Some students may share that the song brings enough emotion to affect the mood of their days. The idea is to re-set the table here for how just hearing one or two lines from a song can bring to life the whole song.

When you hear one or two lines from your favorite song, you’re often experiencing much more than those one or two lines. In those short moments, you can experience an entire chorus or even the whole song itself.

“FINISH THAT PSALM”

With the people of God throughout history—especially in times of worship—the Psalms would have been as familiar to God’s people as your favorite songs are to you now. They could have easily “finished that lyric” when it came to the Psalms.

Let’s see how we do with some relatively familiar Psalms. Can you complete the lyric?

Leader Notes: Using the following Psalms as cues, read the first part of each selection, and see if your youth can “Finish that Psalm.” Encourage them that this is not a test
and that the students should not feel bad if some of these are unfamiliar. The idea here is to have a little fun and to set the plausibility that worshipping people could very well have been familiar enough with the Psalms to finish the lyrics.

Psalm 23:1
The Lord is my shepherd ...

(I shall not want)

Psalm 118:24
This is the day that the LORD has made ...

(let us rejoice and be glad in it.)

Psalm 95:1
Oh come, let us sing to the LORD, let us make a joyful noise ...

(to the rock of our salvation)

Psalm 98:1
Oh sing to the Lord a new song ...

(for he has done marvelous things!)

Psalm 106:1
Oh give thanks to the LORD for he is good ...

(for his steadfast love endures forever!)

Psalm 107:1
Oh give thanks to the LORD for he is good ...

(for his steadfast love endures forever!)

Psalm 51:10
Create in me a clean heart, O God, ...

(and renew a right spirit within me.)

Psalm 19:14
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart ...

(be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.)

Psalm 103:1
Bless the LORD ...

(O my soul.)

Your students may also play the game with contemporary songs or traditional hymns. See if you can engage the students in a conversation about how any of these Psalms or hymns or songs make them feel, or what they bring to mind.

Sometimes, in the case of a well-known hymn or song or Psalm, one line can bring to mind the whole Psalm. Hearing a line from a Psalm could bring with it all the ideas, emotions, and images of the entire Psalm.

THE HYPERLINKED SCRIPTURES
Here’s another way to think about it.

You know what a hyperlink is, right?

It is text or a picture you can click, and it takes you to a page with more information.

Have you ever heard of the phrase “rabbit trail”? What is that?

Think of a Wikipedia entry. A rabbit-trail is what happens when you start clicking through, for example, Wikipedia articles on some topic. Each link brings you to a whole new page of information … and more hyperlinks. The next thing you know, you’re well off the original topic and an hour has passed!

In a way, the Bible is full of “hyperlinks.” They are all over the place. Certain Scripture passages quote other Scripture passages. They may be direct quotes, references, nods, or allusions. The people who wrote the books in the Bible knew the other Scriptures well. They frequently link their words to other passages in the Bible. (If you could click on every link, it wouldn’t take long to get caught up in a rabbit trail!)

Here are two examples:

Read John 1:1. What well-known verse from the Old Testament is being referenced?

Genesis 1:1. John is referencing the entire creation account simply by using the words “In the beginning.”
Read Acts 10:44-46. Then, read Joel 2:28-29. (Perhaps, ask for two youth volunteers.)

The example here is intentionally a little less clear. However, the phrase “poured out” is a connecting link between the two passages.

Many early Christian believers were able to make these linked connections almost effortlessly—even from memory. A person could hear a familiar line, their brains clicked the link, and they could “read the next page” without hardly thinking about it.

For us, some of these “hyperlinks” are clear (such as John 1). Some can be a little less obvious (such as Acts 10 and Joel 2). Thankfully, our English Bibles often make these hyperlinks much clearer with subscripts, superscripts, quotation marks, and even spacing. With a Bible app, these connections can be true hyperlinks!

Our goal in this study is to start using those hyperlinks. They’re here to help us make connections we otherwise wouldn’t be able to make. This is especially important for the New Testament and the Psalms. The New Testament frequently quotes and references specific Psalms. Because the Psalms were so well known, the New Testament writers were able to call to mind entire Psalms through just a few lines. It is possible that when a sentence or phrase from a Psalm is quoted in the New Testament, the writer was expecting readers to be thinking about the entire Psalm.

Even if we don’t know all the Psalms by heart today, we can still use the hyperlinks to make some of these connections. So, let’s take a look at a couple of links. When we see these kinds of links, let’s click on them and complete the lyric.

THE HYPERLINKED PSALMS

Option 1: Full Group

The next section can be completed either as a full group or in small groups. If you’re doing this as a full group, consider asking for volunteers to read the Scripture verses.

Option 2: Small Groups

Depending on the size of your group or time allotment, you may consider splitting your youth into small groups to read the following passages and answer the questions. Be sure to walk around and help groups with the “hyperlinks.”

Each group will need about 10-15 minutes. After working in small groups, have each group share their answers with the full group.

HYPERLINK #1: PAUL AND THE ROMANS

Read Romans 8:31-39.

After reading the passage, ask these questions:

What is Paul’s theme here?

God’s love is stronger than everything else

What particular message is he trying to get across?

Paul is trying to encourage the readers to not despair in their difficult trials.

What Psalm verse is linked here?

Psalm 44:22

How does this verse support what Paul is trying to say?

Reading just this verse, Psalm 44:22 points to the trials Paul is referring to in the immediately preceding verses. It’s another example of God’s people in need of help.

Now, follow the link—complete the lyric. Read the entire Psalm that Paul was referencing (Psalm 44:1-26). How does this entire Psalm shine light on the passage from Romans 8?

Paul is talking about the struggles of God’s people in Romans 8. He is giving them encouragement in the midst of those struggles. But Psalm 44 gives a fuller picture. The Psalm is a helpless, desperate cry for God to take real action and right the wrong. One would sing this song when they are on their knees, with nowhere to turn except God. Clearly, God’s people have been feeling “like sheep to be slaughtered” for quite some time. Now, in Romans 8, Paul reminds them that God has answered this cry for help with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the one who has come to redeem God’s people who have been waiting for a rescuer since the days of the Old Testament.
HYPERLINK #2: JESUS AND THE CROSS

Read Matthew 27:45-50.

After reading the passage, ask these questions:

What is going on in this passage?

This is the story of Jesus dying on the cross. He is giving his final words before giving up his spirit.

What Psalm verse is linked here?

Psalm 22:1

What does this verse say about what Jesus is going through?

As he’s dying on the cross, Jesus is feeling separated and forgotten by God.

Now, follow the link—complete the lyric. Read the entire Psalm that Jesus was referencing (Psalm 22:1-31). How does this entire Psalm shine light on what Jesus was experiencing?

This Psalm is another cry for God’s help. It’s a desperate plea for his rescue. However, the writer of the Psalm is putting his hope in God. The psalmist is certain that God will not only help but will give full victory for his people. When Jesus was quoting this Psalm, he was resonating with the cry for help. But at the same time, he was pointing to God’s final victory. Yes, he was dying on the cross on Good Friday, but Resurrection Sunday was coming. By quoting Psalm 22, Jesus is declaring that God has not forgotten the afflicted (22:24), he will right the wrongs (22:26), his victory is as good as done (22:30).

CALL TO ACTION

1. Add Psalms 22 and 44 to your Psalm Bookmark (see the Pre-Gathering Bible Study, “Psalms ... Are Real Prayers”). You could categorize them as Psalms of cries for help.

2. Use the hashtag #NYG2019 to share what you’re doing with the rest of the LCMS Gathering participants on social media.

PSALMS POINT TO A REAL SAVIOR

In Romans 8 and Matthew 27, Paul and Jesus are not merely quoting lines from famous songs. They are showing that Jesus is the answer to the questions and struggles of these Psalms. Even more, they are showing that the Psalms are more than songs and prayers—they point to a Savior who has overthrown the power of sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Imagine you are at the foot of the cross and you heard Jesus cry out the words of Psalm 22:1. You know this Psalm well. You can’t help but start singing or reciting the rest. Now ask yourself, “Why was Jesus saying those words? Was it to cry out in his suffering—his real experience of being forsaken by God at that moment? Or was it a message to you?”

The answer is ... both! Jesus was at the bottom. He had absolutely nothing left to give of himself. He had absolutely no earthly standing. He was in total despair. And he cries out. But, as you finish the lyric, as you follow the hyperlink, you realize that Jesus—at the weakest point of his earthly life—was actually declaring victory. For you! He gave his everything for you. He gave his everything so you can believe in Jesus as your redeemer, your rescuer, your Savior from sin, death, and power of the devil.

As we prepare for the 2019 LCMS Youth Gathering, we hope you become a little more familiar with the Psalms. You may not have all 150 of them memorized (but wouldn’t that be epic?). Hopefully, you are beginning to see that these real prayers, comprised of real poetry, which are rooted in real life, point you to your real Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, these Psalms are now yours. He has brought you into the history of God’s people who have been crying out for a Savior for years upon years. He has brought you into the family of believers who have been given a Savior through his death and resurrection. The Psalms point you to our Real. Present. God. who will always love you, always forgive you, always give you hope in the promises of Jesus Christ.
**CLOSING PRAYER**

In his book *Psalms/Now* (from Concordia Publishing House), Rev. Leslie Brandt considers each of the 150 Psalms. He uses language and concepts from each Psalm to form prayers for our use today. He tries to express the heart of each Psalm to help us think about our lives as both sinners and saints.

The following is his prayer based on Psalm 22. As we think about Jesus’ message from the cross, including his use of Psalm 22, we learn to bring our temptations to despair before our heavenly Father. With Jesus, we confidently cling to God’s promises, knowing that our Redeemer overcame death and the grave.

Oh God, why have you left me?
Why are You so far from me?
I can no longer feel you near.
I reach desperately for you,
But I cannot find you.

I know you are holy and all-righteous
And everywhere present.
The saints of the past years believed in You
And trusted you.
You responded to their cries.
They sought for You, and they found You.
It is no wonder that Your praises
Were constantly on their lips.

But I feel empty and insignificant...
I risk all in following
What I feel to be Your will for me;
Yet even my friends fail to support me,
And they actually turn against me.

I know that You have cared for me
Through these many years.
But, God, I need you now.
I am in trouble,
And I can’t find You or feel You to be near.

I feel in this moment as if I am falling apart.
Nothing seems to make sense anymore.
Everything I attempt to do ends in failure.

But, the fact is, You are not far off.
In fact, you are Real.
You know both my feelings and my failings.
Yet You love me and accept me.
You will save me -- You have saved me --
Even from myself.

Thus I will continue to sing your praises.
In spite of or in scorn of my feelings
I will celebrate Your loving presence.

As despicable as I may feel at times,
You do not despise me, nor will you leave me.
Your love is personal, and it is eternal.

I dedicate myself anew to You, O Lord.
I will serve You.
You are my God.
I will proclaim Your name and proclaim your love to those all about me...

For You have saved me.
For You are victorious.