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. We’ve all experienced situations like this before. Sometimes we’ve spoken the wrong words. Sometimes we’ve been unable to come up with any words at all.

But imagine this. What if the teacher handed you a notecard with the perfect answers written on it? What if moments before they walked in the door, your parents texted you the perfect apology to deliver? What if, on the spot, you were able to express your gratitude and joy with the perfect response?

God our Father knows the power of words. In Genesis 1, he used words to create the universe. God our Father also knows the importance of words. In John 1, his Son is called the Word. God our Father knew we would need help finding the right words. That’s one of the reasons he gives us the Psalms.

The Book of Psalms is a collection of prayers and praises. It was written by real people (like you) who experienced real needs, real fears, and real joys. The individual Psalms were written over several centuries by a variety of authors, but they are also inspired by God. As such, the Psalms are God’s gift to us. They’re even better than a notecard with test answers on it. They give us words to use when we speak to God.

SCRIPTURE

Read Psalm 43.
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?

When was the New Testament written?

How many years are separating the people of the Psalms and the New Testament?
Psalms Are ... Real Prayers

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.

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

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.

| Psalm 34:2-3, 69:30 | Luke 1:  
| Psalm 89:10, 98:1, 118:16 | Luke 1:  
| Psalm 132:11 | Luke 1:  
| Psalm 138:6, 113:5-6, 72:17 | Luke 1:  
| Psalm 34:10, 107:9 | Luke 1:  
| Psalm 25:6, 89:1-2, 103:17, 100:5 | Luke 1:  
| Psalm 89:8, 71:19, 126:2-3, 99:3, 111:9 | Luke 1:  
| Psalm 98:3 | Luke 1:  
| Psalm 35:9, 106:21 | Luke 1:  

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

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

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.
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:*

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**What makes a poem ... a poem?**

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**

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

**Option 2: Picture of My Life**

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

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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.

**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,
Psalms Are ... Real Poems

I will be exalted in the earth!"
11. The Lord of hosts is with us;
    the God of Jacob is our fortress.

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!

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

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

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?

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

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?

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

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

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

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”?

Read 1 Samuel 17:45 for an example of the history of the
phrase Lord of Hosts and God’s people.
Now, what about phrase “God of Jacob”? To find out why this name is important, read Genesis 28:10-16.

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.
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.

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!)

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.

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?

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.
Psalms Are … Rooted in Real Life

**SCRIPTURE**

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:

*What is the context?*

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?_

**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?*

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.

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-7a.

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

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**
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!)

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?

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?

Psalm 23:1
The Lord is my shepherd …

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Psalm 103:1
Bless the LORD …

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.
Here’s another way to think about it. You know what a hyperlink is, right?

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

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?

Read Acts 10:44-46. Then, read Joel 2:28-29. (Perhaps, ask for two youth volunteers.)

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

HYPERLINK #1: PAUL AND THE ROMANS

Read Romans 8:31-39. What is Paul’s theme here?

What particular message is he trying to get across?

What Psalm verse is linked here?

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

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?
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.

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.
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.