

Psalm 10

On your marks:

The Psalms are an amazing collection of poems, prayers and songs of praise and have been the staple diet of worship both for Jews as well as Christians for centuries. They give us words for all sorts of occasions and moods as we work out our faith in God in the rough and tumble of everyday life. Many children will never have come across this book and may be surprised to discover that, for example, as well as expressing thanks and delight in God, it is also OK to argue with God, express despair and depression, shout angrily about things that are wrong and even have doubts about God's love. All this is in the Psalms and a lot more. It is an important resource to help our children grow into a mature faith.

Get set:

Read through the psalm first before you work with your group. Look at different translations. The verses quoted in the outline below are from the CEV (Contemporary English Version). Any specific materials needed to step into this particular psalm are included in the instructions below. The outline includes: a key verse; a brief introduction; an idea for acting out the psalm; prompts to talk about the psalm; a craft idea; some new ways to retell the psalm; a suggestion for reflection on the psalm; and finally a focus for praying for others with this psalm.

Go!

Key verse: *'But you see the trouble and the distress, and you will do something'* (v. 14).

One of the surprising but refreshing aspects of the Psalms for many readers is the freedom with which the writers feel they can address God. If we have been brought up to believe that praying is just about saying thank you and rehearsing a shopping list of needs, then we might well be shocked by the way David and the other writers doubt, question and rage against the Almighty. But this *is* prayer and a very important part of how we grow in our faith.

Psalm 10 is full of agonising questions: why does God seem so absent when things are tough? Why do 'the wrong people' succeed in this life? Why do those who don't believe live more comfortable lives than those who do? Why do the innocent suffer? Why doesn't God do something? This psalm may well be over 2000 years old but the sentiments are familiar and contemporary. It is an encouragement to us to bring all our true feelings to God when we pray and not to lapse into being hypocritical or pious. Only when we are

real can we find a way through to the beginnings of answers and thereby deepen our faith, as is clear from the last part of this psalm.

Act out the Psalm

This psalm gives us the opportunity to ask uncomfortable questions and connect our faith to the harsh realities of the world in which we live.

Collect a set of recent newspapers, both tabloid and broadsheet. If the group is made up only of children, then you will want to check carefully the contents of these first but not so much so that you remove all the sad and painful stories.

In groups of two or three ask them to select some of the key story headlines that address issues similar to those found in this psalm, such as:

Poor and innocent people suffering

Powerful and well-off people getting away with it

Global inequality and injustice

Individual pride and arrogance

Indifference to the needs of others and apathy towards those in trouble

(In some articles you may even find parallels to the sort of mocking questions about belief in God that this psalm quotes, in particular in verses 11 and 13.)

They should next decide which headlines they are going to use to present a contemporary version of this psalm - in some cases groups may need to write their own headlines to sum up what they have found.

Now divide the group in two: those who will call out the gloomy comments from the headlines and those who will speak out the questions and comments to God, using verses from the psalm. Finally, put the whole thing together, interspersing the psalm's verses with the headlines up to and including verse 13.

At this point pause for a moment and then one voice only should read the final section of the psalm in a calmer manner to indicate that faith in God is slowly and painfully being restored. Emphasise words such as, 'you see' (verse 14); 'you will do something' (v. 14); 'you will always rule' (v. 16); 'you listen' (v. 17); 'you offer hope' (v. 17); and 'you defend' (v. 18).

Talk about the Psalm

In this psalm the writer is struggling to make sense of the unfairness of the world and he also wonders whether having faith makes any difference. Evil triumphs everywhere and God seems to be doing nothing about it. He can hear the scoffing voices of those laughing at him with his so-called belief in God. Read those verses again (vv. 6, 11 and 13).

Do we hear similar things today? (Maybe not from the lips of others but in our own

heads?)

How do deal with these voices?

The fact that innocent people suffer is for many a strong argument against the existence of a God who cares.

Read again the verses which address this clearly (vv. 8-10).

What is your answer to this? What would you say to someone who says they can't believe in God because these sorts of things happen?

Read verse 1 of the psalm again. God sometimes feels so very close but at other times he seems very distant and absent. At times it is almost as if God is playing hide-and-seek with us.

Is this your experience? How do you cope?

Finally, read again the last verses of the psalm (vv. 14-18). After all the trauma of the words of the prayer so far, the writer is beginning to come to a place of faith again.

How does this happen? It is anything to do with the rest of the prayer up to this point?

What sort of faith is being expressed in these final verses?

How do you hold on to faith, when there is much in this life that makes it hard to believe?

Craft the Psalm

If you have collected headlines from the first exercise (see **Act out the Psalm**), use these now to build up a collage version of the whole psalm. Arrange the headlines and also some of the key questions and defiant statements found in the psalm around the edge of your picture.

Now at the centre, create a peaceful place - the eye of the storm - in which words are being said that express confidence in God again. Pick out key words from verses 14-18 such as: you see; you rule; you listen; you offer hope; you defend.

Choose colours carefully for these words so they contrast with the other statements and questions that surround them.

Retell the Psalm

1. Here is a version of the psalm for a younger group to use, picking up on the fact that children aren't afraid to ask the question 'why', with which this psalm begins.

Why can't I see God?
Why don't I hear him?
Why doesn't God appear when I want him most?

Why do bad things happen?
Why do bossy people get away with it?
Why does God put up with all the bad things people do?

Why do people lie?
Why are people so cruel?
Why do some people think that God just isn't there?

Why are some people poor?
Why are some in trouble?
Why do some people think that God just doesn't care?

Why is God so silent?
Why is God so far away?
Why hasn't rescue come my way?

(pause... take a deep breath and then, as a growing act of faith, say)

But God does see,
And God will do something,
And God will not abandon people in need.

But God is on his throne,
And God listens to their cry for help,
And God will keep defend everyone who calls.

2. And here's a version for an older or mixed-age group to use

Is it far to God? I really need to know.
Things have got real bad and God's answers seems so slow.
The world is quite content, not bothering with God;
And those of us who do believe are simply seen as odd!

Unfair trade, unpaid debt, unwanted wars and crime;
The poor are always losing out... time after time.
Things must change; God must act; so what will our God do?
God calls us all to count on him, just as he'll count on you.

God sees through us; God rules through us, and through us he listens too.
To bring God's hope and hear their cry, it's up to me and you.

Reflect on the Psalm

As for all the psalms, use a base cloth in the shape of a musical instrument, perhaps a harp, on to which you can place the following four printed questions, while you read selected verses from the psalm:

Where are you God? Read out verse 1 of the psalm, pausing to touch the question word.

Why do people behave like this? Read out verses 2a, 3b, 4, 7, 9b and 10, pausing between each verse and touching the question word.

When does God show his love? Read out verses 14, 17 and 18, pausing between each verse and touching the question word.

Who are those in need? Pause for a moment and then read out verse 12 slowly.

Pray for others with this psalm

Pray for those who work for trade and economic justice in this very unfair world.

(N.B. an up-to-date prayer focus from one of the mission or aid agencies will be helpful here.)

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