

Toolkit

praying honestly with Psalms

AIM

To explore being honest with God in prayer using the Psalms as a guide.

INTRODUCTION

The best relationships flourish in an atmosphere of mutual trust, love and honesty. This is true also of our relationship with God who is our Creator, Saviour and loving Father. In fact, due to God's unconditional and unending love for us, it's entirely safe to be honest in this relationship – more so than in any human relationship.

You can use this material in a small group or individually or as the basis for a service of worship on the Psalms. If this study is used in a group setting, you may like to split a large group into smaller groups of 4 or 5. The suggested Psalms could either be read from the front, or each group could decide how to read them – aloud or individually in their group. Either way, each person will need a Bible to refer back to the Psalms as they discuss the suggested questions. It would also be helpful if each group could have a copy of these notes. The groups will need to be a little distance apart to enable clarity of conversation in each. Ask if anyone wishes to give feedback after a suitable time for discussion of each topic.

PRAYER – CAN WE BE HONEST WITH GOD?

1. The psalms show us that it's OK to be honest with God:

- The Psalms express all manner of emotions, situations and ideas. They contain both positive and negative thoughts; praise, confession and lament; doubt, fear and trust.
- Have a look at **Ps 11, 13, 29 and 51** to see some initial contrasts. Some of these include some rather unpleasant thoughts – how do you feel about talking to God this honestly?

2. Psalms also show us how to be honest with God:

- A) Use of refrains: As we read the Psalms, we realise that no matter how elated or dejected the psalmists become, they do not allow ego, cynicism or self-absorption to take over.
- Take a look at **Ps 42 and 57** to find some of these refrains. How does the writer use the refrain to refocus on God during these laments? Is this something you could employ in your own prayers - if so, how would you go about it?
- B) Remembering who God is: Another device the psalmists use is to remember who God is. Often, in the middle of enthusiasms about success in battle or the misery of illness or persecution, the psalmist will refocus on God's character and attributes. This serves as a reminder that God is God - the Creator of the Universe - not some kind of Father Christmas character who is always supposed to make life comfortable for us.
- This can be seen in **Ps 5**. How do you relate to this concept? Can you think of some occasions when this would not be helpful – or at least not immediately?
- C) Retelling history: Another way to be honest about difficulties but avoid falling into dejection is to refer back to the help God has given in the past. Psalmists will retell the history of their relationship with God, both personally and culturally to build their faith.

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- Check **Ps 71 and 74** to see this idea at work. What events might you retell – either personally or in a wider context?
3. Psalms also contain questions and philosophical thoughts.
- These kinds of psalms are exploring thoughts and asking questions in God's presence. Addressing our thoughts and questions to God can help us stay open to God's responses to us, thus avoiding having a closed mind... or getting tied up in knots!
 - Take a look at **Ps 49 and 85** for examples of these. What questions or thought processes do you have that you could open up to God in this way?
4. Discuss the following questions
- What effect has looking at the Psalms as a way of being honest with God had on you?
 - What, if anything, will change the way in which you pray or what you pray about?

You may like to use this prayer to get you started:

Prayer

Lord God, thank you that we can be honest with you. Thank you that your love is unconditional and never ending. Thank you that you know and understand every thought, emotion and reaction within us – and still love us. Thank you for always being available when we need to express our feelings and ideas. Help us to be honest with you, opening ourselves up more to you so we can receive more of you. Amen.

More Ideas

This is just a taster of the Psalms and the idea of being honest with God.

Here are some more ideas that may help you explore honesty in your relationship with God. *(Remember, this is between God and you alone)*

1. Words (your own or those of others) – write or pray silently or aloud – remembering the Psalmists' methods mentioned above.
2. Colour – get a HUGE piece of paper (eg left over wallpaper) some BIG felt tips or crayons and let rip! Certain colours and shapes could represent certain emotions or experiences - you choose. (This isn't drawing, it's expressing yourself with colour – don't try explaining it to anyone, it's a word-free prayer from your heart to God's.)
3. Music – yours or others' - with or without words
4. Dance/movement – for God's eyes only!
5. Tear pictures/headlines out of old magazines and arrange them to form your ideas for prayer

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Suggested further resources

'Praying in Color' by Sybil MacBeth. Pub: Paraclete Press. ISBN 9781557255129

Website: <http://prayingincolor.com>

'Spirituality of the Psalms' (2002 - Augsburg) or 'Praying the Psalms' (second edition 2007) by Walter Brueggemann

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more toolkit items please revisit the website.

Acknowledgements

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HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group about general or website V4L issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

If you have comments and particularly contributions to the prayer year, you can email the V4L prayer year coordinator via prayer@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk