



## 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:** *'Each morning you listen to my prayer, as I bring my requests to you'* (v. 3).

'Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me.' So runs the proverb but the truth is often quite the opposite. Although words are obviously just words and don't do any physical damage, everyone knows how hurtful insults can be to us, crushing our self-esteem and leaving their poisonous stain on our character. Today's psalm seems to be prompted by just this sort of experience. David is surrounded by lies, boasts and destructive talk that have brought him low. He has had enough of negative attitudes and deceitful advice and so he brings it to the Lord in this prayer.

We can easily understand his situation - most of us have experienced the destructive power of words like this. What this psalm gives us is a pattern for bringing such troubles of life to God. He begins with his customary words to God, which form part of his regular morning 'quiet time', although already the hurt and anger is there in the words he chooses. Next he focuses on God and his character, particularly in the way it relates to the circumstances about which he is praying. Then he remembers the wonder of being able to come close to God, in whose help he now trusts; only then comes the complaint about the sort of things he has been subject to. His words are angry and there is also frustration here but God can take it and it is better that we pour this out to God in prayer rather than let it become violent language of retaliation on our lips. Finally he ends by reminding himself that God is his safe place, his shield, shelter and protection. David ends, not on a negative



note of anger and revenge, but by recalling God's blessing and kindness.

Here is a pattern for all of us as we face the unavoidable hurts and frustrations of day-to-day life: call on God, remember who God is, be aware of God's majesty, speak out our hurt and trust in God's protection.

Whatever these 'enemies' may be saying, it is what God thinks that counts and it is to this understanding that this psalm brings David and us too, if we follow its pattern.

### **Act out the Psalm**

This morning prayer from David is his way of dealing with the many voices that are determined to pull him down. We can recognise these voices and they might sound something like this:

*You can't cope.  
Others can do the job better.  
You'll never amount to much.  
Why bother - you'll only fail.  
If only you'd tried harder.  
You're only young.  
No one cares what you think.  
You're hopeless.*

Use these 'voices' as one-liners and give them to members of your group, who should then repeat them menacingly and with mounting volume as they stand alongside someone who is kneeling in prayer. These voices should then begin to die down to a whisper, while another group speaking other voices begins to take their place, once the pray-er in the middle has said verses 1 and 2 of this psalm. Here are the new voices - again one-liners - but words of comfort and encouragement to David and getting louder and louder:

*Don't listen to the lies.  
Don't fear the boasts.  
Only God says what is true.  
God will help you stand.  
God is greater.  
God loves you.  
God welcomes you.  
God will show the way to go.  
God's kindness makes you strong.*

Finally the negative voices should be completely silenced and the encouraging voices should reach a crescendo and then stop, ending with David reading quietly and confidently the last two verses of the psalm.

### **Talk about the Psalm**



As Christians we are encouraged to take everything to the Lord in prayer. In this psalm David is doing just that within the context of his early morning time of worship and also as he reminds himself of God's character and God's intimate love for him.

*Do we have a regular time of prayer in our lives, within which this sort of praying can take place - a place where we can express our real fears and feelings?*

*Do we spend time in prayer reminding ourselves just who God is and how much God loves us? How can we do this?*

Sometimes a 'set form of words' for our praying can help us when we are struggling to know what to say and how to express what is on our hearts. There are hints of this set prayer in the opening verses.

*Do you have some 'set words' for praying that have helped you tune in to God?*

Remembering good times of worship is one way to put our complaints in perspective. David does this in verse 7.

*Are there times in your life to which you can think back when God was especially close? Do you remind yourself of these when your mind is full of the hurts of the moment? Can this help?*

Finally David pulls no punches when he tells it like it is for him in verses 9 and 10. He is angry and wants God to punish those who are against him with their lies and boasts. He sounds quite vindictive but at least he's being honest. God wants us to be real with him in our praying. Only then can God help us into a better place.

*Are we really honest in our prayers to God?*

The better place for David is where he ends this prayer, reassured because he has been reminded that God alone keeps him safe, whatever is being said about him.

*Do we give space in our praying for God to answer our prayers? And is the answer the sort of answer that spills out as testimony to others, as it does here for David?*

### **Craft the Psalm**

Each stanza of this psalm has a different mood to it and could be explored using some modelling clay or Play-Doh. If the latter, then have a range of colours to hand, so people can choose which would best suit the mood of the shape they decide to mould.

Spend a moment reading through each stanza as a group and then ask them for some adjectives and adverbs that come to mind that for them capture the tone of the words. Let these words be the inspiration for the shape they decide to make for those verses. For example:



Verses 1-3: urgent, prayerful, patient, confident, anxious and hopeful  
Maybe a praying hand or listening ear might be the shape?

Verses 4-6: holy, pure, different, sinless, true, upright  
Maybe a cross, an all-seeing eye, a hand 'saying no', or a face with a frown might be the shape?

Verses 7-8: adoring, mysterious, majestic, guiding, teaching  
Maybe a bended knee, a temple, an arrow or a sunrise might be the shape?

Verses 9-10: furious, revengeful, angry, hurting  
May be an exclamation mark, an angry face, a forked tongue or a pit might be the shape?

Verses 11-12: peaceful, safe, sheltered, blessed, smiling and singing  
Maybe a smile, a sheltered place, a musical note or a blessing might be the shape?

### **Retell the psalm**

1. Here is a version for younger children to use:

**Chorus** (repeated after each short verse):

#### ***I pray to God who is my King I'll talk to him of everything***

1. God is good; he hates what's bad.  
Lies and boasts just make God sad.
2. God is close; he loves me so.  
He teaches me the way to go.
3. It makes me mad - they're just not fair.  
Please, God, sort it; make them care!
4. God keeps us safe and helps us sing.  
He loves us all - He is our King.
5. And here is a version for an older or mixed age group to use, involving two voices or two groups of voices:
6. A - I'm angry B - I'm praying  
A - I'm groaning B - I'm asking  
A - You're God B - I'm crying  
A - You're King B - I'm waiting
7. A - You're holy B - not sinful  
A - You're great B - not boastful  
A - You're true B - not deceitful  
A - You're peace B - not fist-full
8. A - I'm amazed B - You're gracious  
A - I'm filled B - You're wonderful  
A - I'm awed B - You're righteous



- A - I'm needy B - You're guidance
9. A - They're wrong B - They're destructive  
A - They're lying B - They're deceitful  
A - They're evil B - They're damned  
A - They're worthless B - They're against you
10. A - We're running B - You're waiting  
A - We're singing B - You're saving  
A - We're loving B - You're protecting  
A - We're trusting B - You're blessing

### **Reflect on the Psalm**

Lay down the following objects or pictures of the objects alongside chosen verses from the psalm, using a base cloth, as for all the psalms, that is in the shape of a musical instrument such as a harp. Pause between each verse and the placing of each object.

As you read verse 3, put down some praying hands.

As you read verse 4, put down a night-light on a dark stand and light it.

As you read verse 7, put down a cross.

As you read verse 9, put down some speech bubbles (Post-it note size), on which are written the words 'lies', 'deceit', 'boasts'; after a pause cover them with your hand as if to blot them out.

As you read verse 12, put down a rainbow arc, tracing the colours and its shape with your fingers.

Spend time wondering which part of this psalm is special for each of you today. Which parts of this psalm are helpful and which parts are uncomfortable? Can this psalm help you deal with your anger about what others are saying?

### **Pray for others with this psalm**

Pray for those who are being bullied and intimidated by lies and unkind.