

## 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 the Jew as well as the Christian 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 for example to discover that, 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

No particular preparation is needed, just some space and some energy!

## Go!

1. Introduce a Bible and the truth that it is one book but also full of loads of books to help us come close to God - in fact 66 books in total. Open the Bible up in the middle and discover the Psalms - all 150 of them. To reinforce this, exercise your hands by displaying all ten fingers and thumbs as fast as possible fifteen times - yes, there are 150 psalms.
2. There is a variety of poems, prayers and praises in the Psalms. Stand in a circle and all start walking on the spot and adding in actions in the following ways to express the range of Palms there are:
  - Marching Songs - pilgrim psalms - march on the spot
  - Stretching Songs - psalms of longing to know more of God- reach up high on tiptoes
  - Shrinking Songs - psalms of loneliness and despair -curl up small into a ball
  - Joining Songs - psalms to sing with others - all link hands on shoulders and walk on the spot
  - Whispering Songs - psalms of quiet prayer - all pretend to whisper with hands held as in prayer near the mouth
  - Shouting Songs - psalms of exuberant praise - all cup hands by mouths and shout out loud
  - Resting Songs - psalms of trust - all crouch down and rest heads on hands
3. Sit down in the circle. Explain that this collection of prayers, poems and praises is one Jesus would have used and Christians have said and sung them in worship for two thousand years.

All moods are there - a prayer for every occasion. Invite the children to make appropriate sounds and pull appropriate faces that go with the different types of emotions in the Psalms:

- shouts of praise
- cries for help
- sobs of sadness

- squeals of delight
  - sighs of despair
  - screams of anger
  - gasps of horror
  - groans of disappointment
  - whoops of glee
4. Now stand in the circle and play a 'fruit salad' type of game with the words, songs, poems, prayers; the all-move word being 'psalms'.
  5. Set the group off walking around the room but when you say 'freeze', everyone must stand completely still.

Explain that the writers of these psalms used lots of picture language to help us understand about God and how we can trust in God. As they are walking, share with them one of the following objects and ideas from the psalms and then, when you say 'freeze', they must become a statue of that object or picture. They could go into groups of twos or threes to do some of these. Here are the words and pictures:

- A tree by a river ( Psalm 1)
- a group of rocks (Psalm 18)
- an orchestra (Psalm 150)
- pieces of armour( Psalm 3)
- a strong city ( Psalm 48)
- a thirsty animal ( Psalm 42)
- a safe home( Psalm 90)
- a violent storm( Psalm 93)

6. In groups of five/six - mime the following scenes, which show David in different situations:

David as Shepherd - shepherd and sheep dog, organising the sheep into a fold

David as Soldier - a general with his soldiers, marching them and then deploying them for battle

David as Solitary - a group on the run, hiding from pursuers who are looking for them

David as Sovereign - a king being crowned and honoured by his subjects

7. It is an amazing book! And guess what? Ssh! The psalms hold some special secrets. David had a great, great, great, great, great, great..... grandson and his name was Jesus. This book of Psalms was the songbook that Jesus used; he would have heard it as a child and used it in worship as an adult. He sang from it and learnt it off by heart for festival times. He remembered the lines from it when he was in trouble and used some of the picture language in it in his stories.

Not only did Jesus use this book but this book also, though written years and years before Jesus,



gives us secret clues about God's special rescuer. David and the other authors wrote more than they knew. Introduce these 'secret clue' psalms in some fun ways: e.g.

*With laughter, because:*

There is the laughing Psalm! Psalm 2 (see verse 4) He wrote that God would give us an especially anointed one, who would be like a Son

*With shock, because:*

In Psalm 118 it speaks of God on earth being like a stone that everyone rejects but which then becomes the most important stone of all. Jesus said that this was about him and it is linked to the cross and resurrection (see Matthew 21:42)

*With puzzled expressions, because:*

In Psalm 110 he wrote that God would lift up someone else to whom everyone would bow and who would be a special priest - a mysterious one who would bring us to God.

*With tears, because:*

In Psalm 22 he wrote that one day someone would suffer and say some very sad words before God - words that are exactly the ones Jesus spoke as he experienced the cross

So the Psalms help us praise God and draw us closer to Jesus.