

Praying the Psalms

Ash Wednesday

Before we begin

We tend to think that prayer is what good people do when they are doing their best. It is not. We suppose that there must be an "insider" language that must be acquired before God takes us seriously in our prayer. There is not. Prayer is elemental, not advanced, language. The Psalms in Hebrew are earthy and rough. They are not genteel. They are not prayers of nice people, couched in cultured language.

—Eugene Peterson

Eugene Peterson wrestled the earthy and rough language of the Hebrew Psalms into everyday English in a translation called *The Message*. During this Lenten season, let's learn to pray the Psalms as Christians have been doing for centuries. Eugene Peterson died last October. Let's use his legacy to enrich our prayer life. "Only as we develop raw honesty and detailed thoroughness in our praying do we become whole, truly human in Jesus Christ, who also prayed the Psalms."

Invocation

God, we know you are with us. We really want to be able to communicate with you. Awaken our curiosity and open our minds so we can learn an ancient, yet amazingly fresh, way of talking with you. Bless this time and our learning.

Confession

Good and gracious God, today we start on a time of prayer and learning we call Lent. What you wish most from us is total honesty. And honesty is the hardest thing we can give. You give us plenty of do-overs, second chances and grace to get used to the idea of being totally honest with you. Be patient with us as we learn this way of praying – this way of using ancient texts to zero in on our most honest feelings. Amen.

Psalm 51: 1-17 (MSG)

Generous in love—God, give grace!

Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record.
Scrub away my guilt,

soak out my sins in your laundry.

I know how bad I've been;

my sins are staring me down.

You're the One I've violated, and you've seen

it all, seen the full extent of my evil.

You have all the facts before you;

whatever you decide about me is fair.

I've been out of step with you for a long time,

in the wrong since before I was born.

What you're after is truth from the inside out.

Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.

Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean,

scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life.

Tune me in to foot-tapping songs,

set these once-broken bones to dancing.

Don't look too close for blemishes,

give me a clean bill of health.

God, make a fresh start in me,

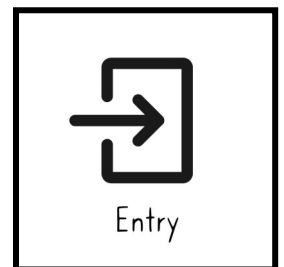
shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.

Don't throw me out with the trash,

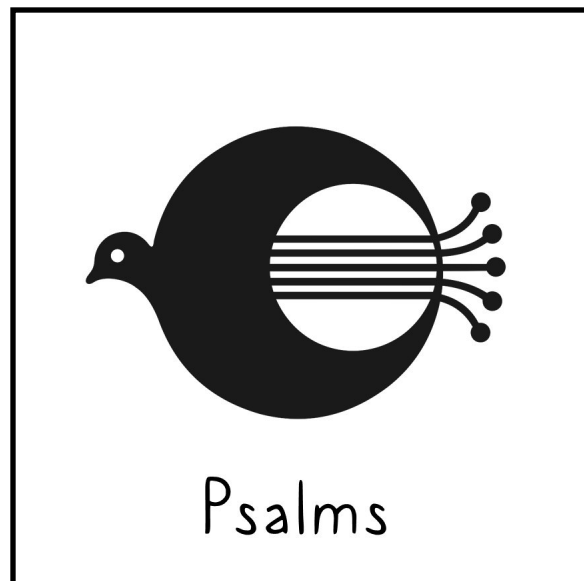
or fail to breathe holiness in me.

Bring me back from gray exile,

put a fresh wind in my sails!



Give me a job teaching rebels your ways
so the lost can find their way home.
Commute my death sentence, God, my
salvation God,
and I'll sing anthems to your life-giving ways.
Unbutton my lips, dear God;
I'll let loose with your praise.
Going through the motions doesn't please you,
a flawless performance is nothing to you.
I learned God-worship
when my pride was shattered.
Heart-shattered lives ready for love
don't for a moment escape God's notice.



Prayer

Leader: Creator God, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of our lives.

All: God, make a fresh start in us.

Leader: Christ, what you want is truth from the inside out. Stay with us, and create a new, true life.

All: God, make a fresh start in us.

Leader: Spirit, tune us in to foot-tapping songs; set these once-broken bones to dancing!

All: God, make a fresh start in us. Amen.

You are invited into a time of silence

Take a few deep breaths.

Relax your shoulders, your jaw, your hands and your feet.

Re-read the Psalm several times.

Each week we will share an idea that might help with praying the Psalms.

1. Think of the Psalm as a Christmas tree and decorate it with "ornaments" from your own life, things that matter to you. Now try reading and embellishing the Psalm as a prayer.

Use this space to record your prayer ideas and prayer drawings.

Blessing

May God always listen to our prayers.

May we always listen for God's still small voice.

May we live our lives in communion with God.

Daily Intentions for Lent are available at: waytolead.org/lent-intentions-2019