

13 THE JOURNEY INWARD

Magnificat of Reconciliation

My soul rejoices in you, Yahweh,
and my spirit dances within your presence, my God,
because you who love mightily look upon me,
one who stands with arms stretched out toward you.
From this day and forever all who come to life,
one after one, shall remember me and shall pray,
"Blessed are we when we open our hearts and
receive in joy the seed of the Everlasting One."
Holy is your name.

You are the gentle one who reaches out in tenderness
from age to age
to caress with your hand the heads of those
who bend their necks.

With powerful arms you embrace each of us.
The proud hearts that we hold out to you,
you break and shatter.

You pull down the structures and fantasies with which
we fortify ourselves,
and you teach us the simple things.

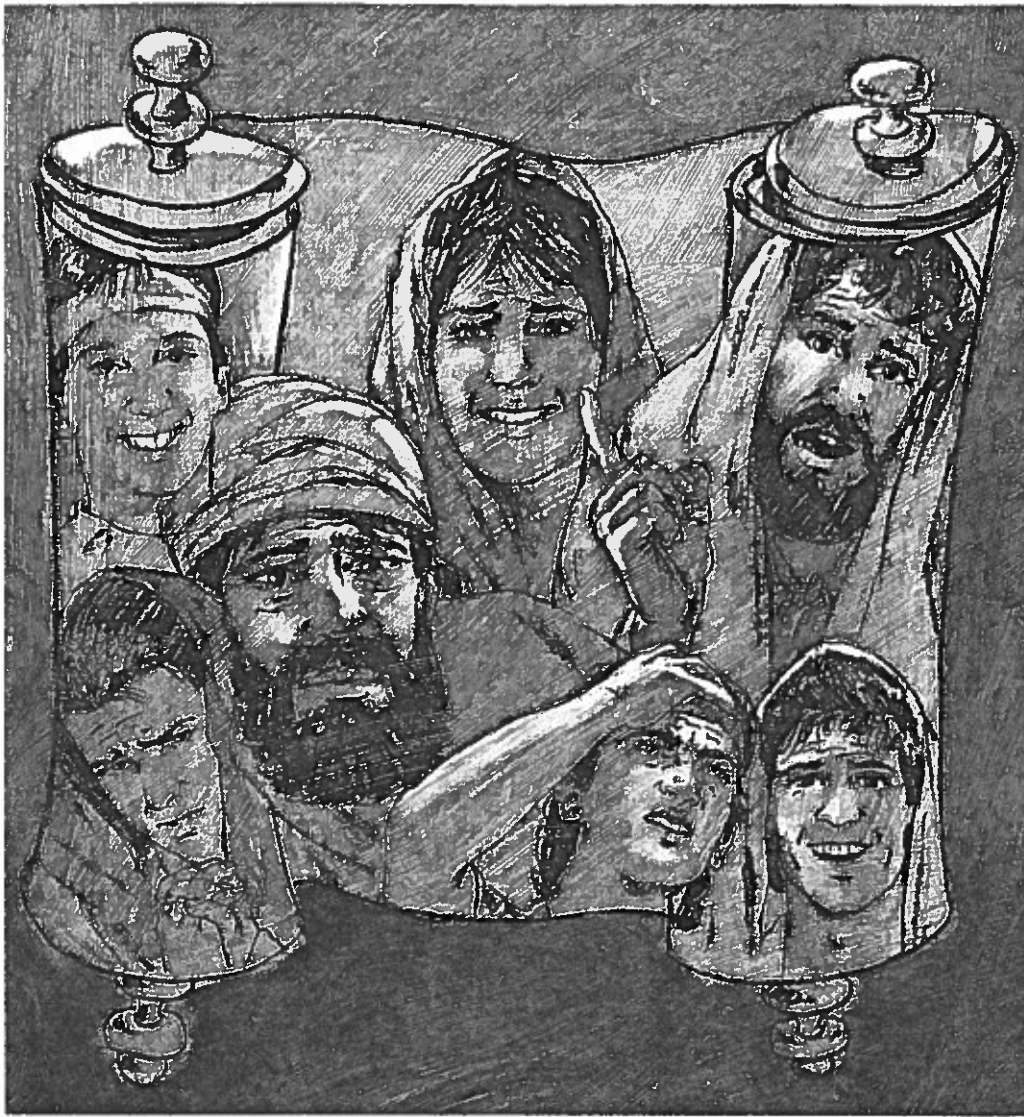
When we are hungry you fill us with good things.
When we are gluttonous you teach us patience
that we may come hungry again to your table.

This day and forever you stand with your people,
those who remember you tenderness,
. . . having given us your word, your promise . . .
we remember your tenderness as we walk in safety.
For you are Yahweh
in whom we trust.

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3 STATEMENTS

- Music, art, dance, and poetry are important ways people express feelings, thoughts, and faith.
- The psalms journey with us through every human experience—from sorrow and grief to joy and thanksgiving.
- Faith in God does not mean we have to stop thinking, asking questions, and studying.



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the *Source*

PSALMS: TOUCHING OUR INNER FEELINGS

Music, art, dance, and poetry are important ways people express feelings, thoughts, and faith. They sometimes express what we cannot speak in ordinary words. These forms of expression touch our inner self in special and unique ways. The worship of God's people includes all of these elements. This variety of expression of the inner self is reflected in the Old Testament's songbook, the book of Psalms.

The psalms were sung to music. Psalm 92:3 invites the people to sing God's praises "to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre."

The psalms are full of artistic language and images. They describe scenes ranging from peaceful and quiet pastures to loud raging storms. Trees and mountains and stars join the chorus of praise. Pictures of a mighty God sitting on a royal throne are mixed with other pictures of God as a parent gently lifting an injured child or a shepherd caring for the sheep.

Dance and movement were part of Israel's worship as well. Psalm 150:4 urges the people to praise God "with timbrel and dance." In Exodus 15:20, Miriam led the people of Israel in worship with timbrels and dancing as they sang praise to God in celebration of the crossing of the Red Sea. In 2 Samuel 6:14, King David danced as part of the worship celebration of the Ark of the LORD being brought to Jerusalem.

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The psalms are also poetry. The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language. Hebrew poetry looks in some ways like more modern poetry. It paints rich and exciting word pictures. It expresses deep internal thoughts and feelings. The poems divide into verses and lines. What is somewhat unique about Hebrew poetry is its way of expressing a thought in one line and then repeating the same thought using different words in the next line. The second line typically adds something new. An example is Psalm 51:1. The verse contains two lines that are somewhat parallel.

1. Draw a line between where the first parallel line ends and the second parallel line begins.

“Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.”

2. In your own words, what one similar thought do the two lines or halves of Psalm 51:1 express?

3. What further thought or meaning does the second line add to the meaning of the first line?

The psalms put it all together. They include music, art, dance, and poetry as important ways of expressing God’s love for us and our response to God.

Select one of the following ways of expression and a psalm whose message you would want to convey through such an expression. The psalms given are only suggestions. If you have another psalm you would rather do, feel free to do so.

● **Dance.** Read the psalm and devise some simple movements and gestures that express the movement and meaning of the psalm. You may include appropriate music to accompany your dance. Suggestions: Psalms 1; 22:1-11; 130.

● **Art.** Read the psalm and pay particular attention to the images and pictures that the words express. Draw the images and pictures. You may want to trace the movement or structure of the psalm with a series of images. Suggestions: Psalms 23; 46; 95:1-7.

● **Poetry.** Read the psalm over several times. Interpret its message and any movement of thought from beginning to end to a partner. Take all or part of the psalm and totally rework it into your own words and thoughts in the form of a poem. You do not need to cover everything that is said in the psalm, but try to express in your own poetic form its main themes. You may or may not want to use rhyme. You may want to use a contemporary “rap” form of poetry. Be creative.



Jean Desjardis

THE PSALMS OF PRAISE AND JOY

The book of Psalms grew out of a long history of worship among God’s people. The 150 psalms reflect different times, feelings, experiences, and authors. There is something here for everyone. *The psalms journey with us through every human experience—from sorrow and grief to joy and thanksgiving.*

Above all, the psalms teach us to sing God’s praises and to celebrate all that God has done for us. The last psalm, Psalm 150, sums up the message of the entire book of Psalms. It calls

all of creation to praise God. This psalm is a model not only for our prayers and songs, but for our whole life. Everything we do finally leads to the praise and glory of God alone.

1. Read Psalm 150:1-6. When in your life would you feel most like praising God with such joy and energy?

2. When in your life would you feel least like praising God in this way?

THE PSALMS OF LAMENT AND SADNESS

If we read only psalms like Psalm 150, we might get the idea that these prayers are only about the good things or happy times of life. But if we read through the psalms, we soon discover that they also express the bitterness of life. They talk about the good times and the bad. In fact, the most frequent type of psalm is the psalm of lament. Laments are psalms that complain to God. They express negative feelings to God. By expressing these feelings to God, somehow a transformation begins to occur. The psalmist is led eventually to new trust and praise of God.

1. Read Psalm 13:1-2. What are the complaints and feelings the speaker has?

2. Read Psalm 13:3-4. The psalmist asks God to answer his or her prayer. Why should God do it?

3. Read Psalm 13:5-6. There is a sudden change in mood in these verses. What do you think might have happened to cause this change?

PROVERBS: SHAPING OUR INNER THOUGHTS

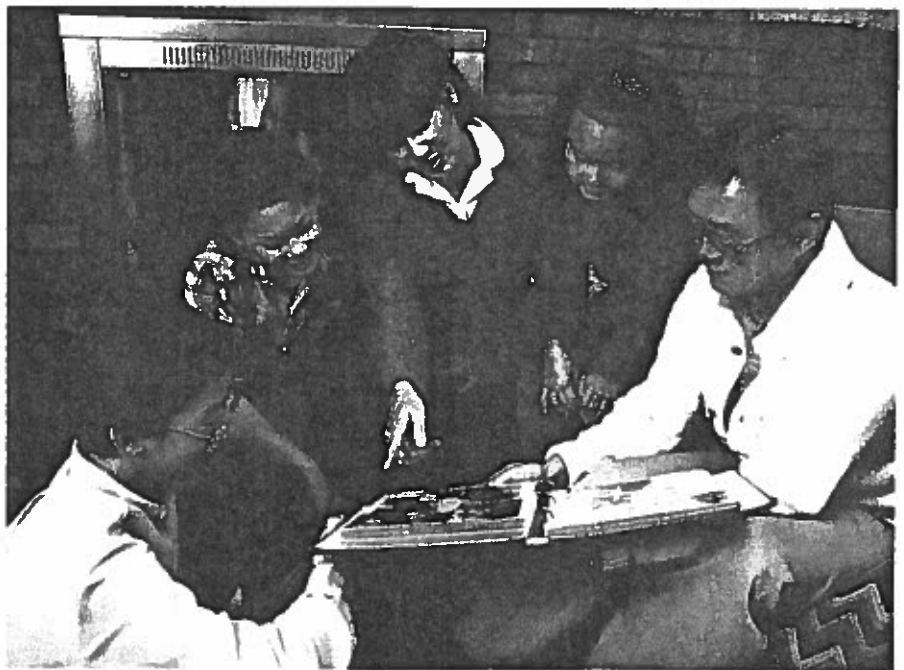
The psalms give us direction for voicing our thoughts of thanksgiving, joy, sorrow, fear, and even anger. They are ways God has given us to sort out our feelings and faith. The book of Proverbs, which comes just after the book of Psalms, also helps us to shape and voice our understanding of faith.

The book of Proverbs indicates God's interest in developing our minds as one of God's good gifts. God wants us to use our minds fully. *Faith in God does not mean we have to stop thinking, asking questions, and studying.*

The book of Proverbs contains, of course, proverbs. Proverbs are statements that are short on words, but long on experience. The proverbs in the book of Proverbs were collected to help educate young people in the ways of the world. These proverbs were gathered together over many centuries.

Some of these sayings began in families as parents passed wisdom on to their children by word of mouth. Other sayings of wisdom came out of schools for young children. Still others came out of the king's palace where young men were trained to become government officials. Some proverbs were borrowed from the cultures around Israel and adapted to Israel's faith.

Faith in God does not mean we have to stop thinking, asking questions, and studying.



Jim Whitmer

Many proverbs contrast the ways of wisdom and foolishness, hard work and laziness, humility and pride, justice and wickedness, right and wrong, and truth and lies. The material varies as life itself varies. But all the proverbs teach us how to get along with the world, with other people, and with God. A sample of proverbs is listed below. Write the letter of the question on the blank line next to the proverb that best answers the question.

- _____ 1. Proverbs 3:5-8
- _____ 2. Proverbs 9:10
- _____ 3. Proverbs 19:15
- _____ 4. Proverbs 23:19-21, 29-35
- _____ 5. Proverbs 24:29; 25:21-22
- _____ 6. Proverbs 28:27
- _____ 7. Proverbs 30:7-9

- a. What are the dangers of being too poor or too rich?
- b. What are the effects of abusing alcohol or other drugs?
- c. What is the result of laziness?
- d. How should we treat the poor?
- e. How should we treat our enemies who have hurt us?
- f. What is the beginning of wisdom?
- g. In whom should we trust?

Shaping life

HOW DOES IT SOUND?

Like painting, dancing, or riding a bike, praying does not come naturally. Praying a prayer of lament seems even more unnatural. We might think we should not talk to God in that way.

Learning to pray takes practice, and using the prayers of another frees us from the worry of saying the right thing, in the right way.

Select a partner. To begin, one of you will represent the writer of Psalm 13 and the other will represent God. The one who represents the writer

should read Psalm 13 aloud. The one who represents God should listen carefully to both the central idea of the psalm and the emotion from the writer.

After the psalm has been read the first time, be still for a moment or two and think about what it felt like to speak those words. What did it feel like to hear those words?

Change roles and repeat the reading and listening. Again, think about those questions. Then discuss them together.

PROVERBS FOR DAILY LIVING

The purpose of the proverbs was not to provide a whole new set of laws to follow. They are to serve as teachers or guides as we journey through life.

FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading

Select one or more passages from the list below. After reading it, summarize its main point. Tell how it relates to the session. List one or two thoughts you had as you read the passage.

- Psalm 22:1-22
- Psalm 42:1-11
- Psalm 98:1-9
- Proverbs 3:1-12
- Proverbs 10:1-32

Memory

Memorize Psalm 23:1-6. This is one of the best-known and most loved of all the psalms. Psalm 23 often is used as a comfort in times of crisis and death. As an added challenge, memorize Psalm 13.

Activity 1

Use the book of Psalms as a guide for a daily routine of prayer and meditation. Read one psalm a day. Reflect on its mood and meaning and images. How do they fit with concerns and feelings you have?

The proverbs contained in the Bible are not the only wise sayings that give us guidance. There are many proverbs that you probably live by every day. Some of them are directly from the Bible, while some are from other writers.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), an American statesman and writer, produced hundreds of wise sayings and collected them in a series of booklets called *Poor Richard's Almanac*. The proverb "A stitch in time saves nine" is credited to Franklin.

Think of five or six proverbs that you know. For each one, ask what it means. Then discuss how you use that proverb as a guide for your own life. You may wish to write one or two. Collect the proverbs written by your class into a small book.

A good practice would be to have a notebook handy in which to write down any thoughts or reflections you have as you read. Record the date, the number of the psalm, and your reflections for the day. This psalm diary will help you keep in touch with your inner feelings and thoughts. It will also help your life to be shaped and guided by the prayers and experiences that have shaped God's people over thousands of years.

Activity 2

The book of Psalms is the hymnbook of the Bible. Look at the hymnbook your congregation uses. In what ways is it similar to the book of Psalms? Are any of the psalms included as hymns? If so, which ones? Skim through the hymn section. What moods and thoughts are expressed in these songs? What is your favorite hymn? Memorize its words.

Activity 3

Write a psalm reflecting a strong feeling. Share your innermost thoughts with God about something important to you.

FOCUS

ON THE TIME BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS: PART 1

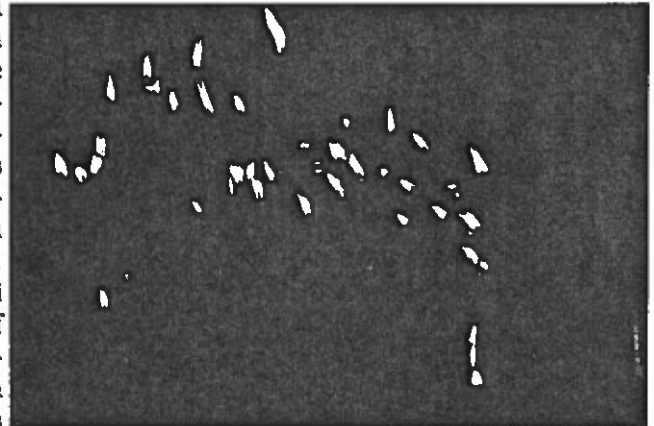
The book of Daniel was the last book that was written in what we call the Old Testament. But history and writing did not stop in 164 B.C. and then suddenly start again in the time of Jesus.

In the time between the Old and New Testaments, various Jewish groups and writers tried to deal with the hardships and persecution of that time in different ways. These other writings are contained in a collection of books called the Apocrypha (a-POK-ra-fa). They help us understand the time just before the coming of Jesus and the writing of the New Testament.

One way that a group of Jewish people reacted to the time of Greek persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes (an-TI-a-kus e-PIF-a-nees) was through hit and run warfare. This group was led by a family of priests. The most famous of them was a man named Judas

Maccabaeus (mac-a-BE-as), which means Judas "The Hammer" because he was so good at hammering the enemy. In spite of being greatly outnumbered, the Maccabees fought against the army of Antiochus Epiphanes and eventually won.

In 165 B.C. Judas and his followers again purified the temple in Jerusalem and restored the service of Jewish worship there. They restored the light at the temple as part of the rededication. (See 1 Maccabees 4:34-43.) This began the modern Jewish festival of Hanukkah, the Jewish Feast of Lights. It is celebrated by Jews near the middle to the end of December.



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