
SING!

Week Two | "Praying the Songs of God's People"

The Psalms as Prayerbook and Songbook

The Theology and Practice of Music in Worship · Participant Handout

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Welcome. Whether the Psalms are old friends or new territory for you, you are in the right place.

Come ready to listen, reflect, and pray — the songs of God's people have been waiting for you.

OPENING CALL TO WORSHIP · BASED ON PSALM 46

*The Leader reads the plain lines. **You read the bold lines marked "People."***

Leader: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

People: Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.

Leader: The Lord of hosts is with us.

People: The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Leader: "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

People: The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. We come to worship. Amen.

SCRIPTURE FOR TODAY

Psalm 22:1-5, 22-24 (ESV)

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? **2** O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. **3** Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. **4** In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. **5** To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

22 I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: **23** You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! **24** For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him, but has listened to his cry for help.

Psalm 46:1-3, 10-11 (ESV)

1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. **2** Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, **3** though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

10 "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" **11** The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Psalm 150 (ESV) — The Psalter's Final Doxology

1 Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! **2** Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! **3** Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! **4** Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! **5** Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! **6** Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Term	Definition	My Notes
THE PSALTER	The collection of 150 Psalms forming the poetic and prayerful heart of the Hebrew Bible. It served as Israel's official prayerbook and the church's first hymnal, used in temple worship and across two millennia of Christian liturgy.	
LAMENT	The biblical practice of crying out to God in honest grief, confusion, or suffering. Lament is not a lack of faith — it is faith in action, trusting that God hears our most painful prayers.	
ORIENTATION / DISORIENTATION / NEW ORIENTATION	Walter Brueggemann's framework describing the emotional journey of the Psalms: seasons of settled trust (Orientation), seasons of loss and upheaval (Disorientation), and seasons of surprised, transformed praise (New Orientation).	
SUPERSSCRIPTION	The headings that appear above many Psalms, often indicating authorship (e.g., "A Psalm of David"), the occasion of writing, the instruments to be used, or musical directions. These brief notes connect the poem to its living context.	
DOXOLOGY	An expression of glory and praise to God. Psalm 150 functions as the Psalter's grand closing doxology — the whole collection ends not with sorrow but with every breath lifted in praise.	

TEACHING NOTES OUTLINE

Movement 1 · The Psalms Are the Church's First Hymnal

Key idea: The Psalms were sung in the temple and have been sung by the church for over 2,000 years — they are the original common songbook of God's people.

What made the Psalms unique in the ancient world:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the Psalms:

(Hint: "the prayerbook of the Bible")

Notes:

Movement 2 · Honesty Before God — The Gift of Lament

Key idea: About one-third of the Psalms are. (Hint: laments)

The structure of a lament psalm:

Address → Complaint → → Trust → Praise

(Fill in the missing step. Hint: Petition)

Psalms 22 begins with and ends with.

Walter Brueggemann: *"The elimination of lament from the church's praise is a sign of."*

(Hint: dishonest praise / bad faith)

Notes:

Movement 3 · The Psalms and Our Singing Together

Ephesians 5:18–19 — "...singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart."

Colossians 3:16 — "...singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

Key idea: We sing not just *TO* God but *TO*. (Hint: one another)

What does it mean that congregational singing is a form of mutual encouragement and teaching?

Notes:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the space below each question to jot thoughts before or during group conversation.

1. Which Psalm has been most meaningful to you, and why?

2. Psalm 22 moves from anguish to praise without fully resolving the suffering. What does this teach us about honest worship?

3. Walter Brueggemann argues that eliminating lament from worship produces "dishonest praise." Do you agree? What is lost when a congregation never sings its grief?

4. How would you describe the emotional range of your congregation's typical worship? What is present? What might be missing?

5. If your congregation were to add one Psalm to its regular worship, which would you choose and why?

CLOSING PRACTICE · PRAYING A PSALM TOGETHER

We will close our session by praying Psalm 23 together antiphonally. The leader will read the lines marked **L**; you will read the lines marked **P**. There is no need to rush. Let the words be your own prayer, not just a recitation. Breathe. Mean it.

Psalm 23 (ESV) — Antiphonal Reading

L: 1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

P: 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

L: 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

P: 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

L: 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

P: 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

— A moment of silence is invited. —

Lord of the Psalms, give us voices honest enough to lament and bold enough to praise.

Teach us to pray all the emotions of our lives back to you,

and to sing together what we cannot always say alone.

Through Christ, who cried out from the cross and rose singing your praise.

Amen.

TAKE-HOME PRACTICE · THIS WEEK

Choose one, two, or all three. Even small steps count.

1. PSALM OF THE DAY

Read one Psalm each day this week. A suggested path: **Psalms 1, 22, 23, 46, 51, 100,** and **150**. Notice the range — from sorrow to trust to joy. Pay attention to the one that catches you most. You might write down a single verse that stays with you.

2. LAMENT PRACTICE

Write your own lament psalm using the five-part structure we studied. Even a rough draft counts — God is not looking for polished prose.

- **Address God** — begin by speaking directly to God ("O God...", "Lord...")
- **Name the trouble** — say honestly what is wrong or hard right now
- **Ask for help** — make your specific petition
- **Express trust** — recall who God has been; anchor yourself in that
- **End with praise** — even if fragile, turn toward God in gratitude

3. SING A PSALM

Find a hymn or song in your church's hymnal or worship collection that is a Psalm paraphrase — examples include *A Mighty Fortress* (Psalm 46), *The Lord's My Shepherd* (Psalm 23), or *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* (Psalms 103 & 150). Sing it or listen to it this week. Notice how the music shapes the prayer in a way that words alone cannot.

REFLECTION QUESTION FOR THE WEEK

"What emotion have you been afraid to bring to God in prayer or worship? What might a Psalm of lament give you permission to say?"

Space for journaling — a few lines, a few sentences, whatever comes.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

SING! The Theology and Practice of Music in Worship is a six-week worship formation journey for adult disciples who want to go deeper into why the church sings — not just how. Over six sessions, we explore the biblical roots of sung prayer, the history of Christian hymnody, the theology of congregational voice, and the practices that shape worshipping communities. Each week connects scripture, theology, and lived experience, inviting participants to bring their whole selves — mind, heart, and voice — into the presence of God. This series is designed for anyone who loves music and worship, whether you are a lifelong singer or someone who has never quite felt at home raising your voice in church.

Participant Handout · SING! Week Two · For personal and congregational use

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