

Junior Soldiers

Unit 12 : Lesson 1



Psalms as Prayer

PURPOSE : For the children to explore different types of psalms and understand how they might be able to use them to express themselves to God.

“I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart, I will glorify your name forever?”

Psalm 86:12

Consider & Prepare

Read:

Psalm 142

Psalm 91

Psalm 145:1–7

Read each of the psalms above; then explore them using the following questions:

- What is best about this psalm?
- What challenges you?
- What resonates with you?
- What makes you question or wonder?
- What do you feel God is saying to you through the psalmist?

In this lesson, the children will be exploring the book of Psalms—a little like you just have and which is how we would like them to explore all scripture—and how they might be able to help us express ourselves to God. We will be looking at three particular types of psalms that are outlined below.

- **Prayers of lament:** These reflect the cries of our heart during those times of challenge, mourning and despair. These do not reflect a lack of trust but faith that God is big enough, strong enough and willing to share with us in our pain and confusion. These prayers are often raw and unguarded, allowing us to express and release our deepest and darkest emotions.
- **Confessions of trust:** These psalms articulate what we believe about God and why we believe it. They are important because they help us to clarify our theology, that is, our understanding of who God is and how he operates. Confessions of trust also provide us with something solid to hold onto during the times when our faith is weak or our theology might be challenged.
- **Songs of praise and thanksgiving:** In Philippians 4:4, Paul instructs us to ‘rejoice in the Lord always’. In some seasons of life it can be easy to rejoice and during these times praise and joy may flow from our tongues easily as we acknowledge who God is and what He has done and is doing for us. There are other times when rejoicing is not so easy and we must be more deliberate about this, choosing to rejoice even though our emotions might not be telling us to.

For some of the children, this may be their introduction to the psalms and so in the 'Connecting In' section we explain a little about the genre and purpose. Just as in church today we sing songs of celebration, reflection, testimony etc., followers of God have been singing songs to him for thousands of years. If you sing or listen to a song as part of your Junior Soldier lesson, you are perpetuating a church practice that even King David participated in. More so, Jesus himself would have sung these psalms as a boy and man when he attended synagogue.

We can learn a great deal from the book of Psalms and for many centuries it has been a great source of encouragement and comfort for Christians all around the world.



What you will need:

For 'Connecting In'

- A3 or butchers paper
- Textas

For 'The Main Thing'

- Coloured card or small paper plates
- Icy-pole sticks
- Sticky tape
- Textas
- Bibles

For 'Tying In'

- Write up sentence starters on a board or large sheet of paper
- A3 or butchers paper
- Pens, textas or crayons
- Bibles

For 'Home & Beyond'

- Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards for each child.



Connecting In

Finish the statement...

For this activity you need some large sheets of A3 paper or butchers paper and textas for the children/groups to write/draw their answers on. Divide your group up into at least two teams for this activity.

Read out the phrases below and, in response, each group will need to either write or draw the ending to the statement. You might like to alternate and for one sentence get them to write and then for the next sentence draw their responses.

There are no right or wrong answers but just some fun to help the children think about ways of describing how they think and feel about some people, objects, activities and especially God.

- ✓ The best place in the world to go is...
- ✓ Playing sport makes me feel like...
- ✓ Eating yummy food makes me feel like...
- ✓ My best friend reminds me of a....

- ✓ God, you are greater than a...
- ✓ When I think of you, God, I smile like a...
- ✓ Your love reminds me of a ...
- ✓ Jesus, you are more wonderful than a...
- ✓ God, when I think of your power I'm reminded of a...
- ✓ Your love is so mighty it reminds me of a...
- ✓ When I think of you I know I'm more loved than a...



Link: 'Well, I'm sure that you have had some fun with your group coming up with the ending to the statements we used in our game today. I wonder if you have read some books that use great words or statements to help the writer describe what they are thinking about a particular person, place or item. I love reading how some people describe somewhere where they have been and you can really picture what it would be like, or when someone describes a person and what they are like so well that you feel like you know them. I wonder if there are some songs that you have heard that might also do this and really describe a person, place or situation well.'

'There are heaps of words that can help us to describe our thoughts and feelings. Today we are going to explore a book in the Bible called Psalms—I am sure that most of you will have read or looked at this book before. A psalm is a song and so the book of Psalms is a song book in the middle of the Bible. Some are very long and some are very short, just like today where we have songs that have one verse and songs that have five verses. As you read them you might think that the words don't rhyme very well, but remember that they were written in another language, Hebrew, and when you translate them to English you have to use words that don't rhyme.'

'Originally, these psalms were written to be sung in worship, either in a church service or during a personal devotional time. All Jewish people would know these psalms well—there are only 150 psalms in all, so they would have been sung many, many times by a Jewish person as they grew up.'

'Psalms is a great book of the Bible that helps us to see how others have expressed their love, pain and passion as well as helping us at times to express how we might be feeling about God, about life or a particular situation.'

The Main Thing

How are you feeling?

For the next section of the lesson, as the children explore some psalms, we want them to think about feelings. This activity will give them opportunity to create their own emoticons while chatting about some of the things that make them feel a certain way. You will need some coloured card or small paper plates as well as some icy-pole sticks, sticky tape and textas. You can encourage the children to create their own emoticons by drawing some faces on a circle of cut out cardboard/paper plate or, if you like, you could print some emoticon images from the internet or purchase some stickers to be added to the card.

'We are going to look at some psalms today, passages of the Bible that express what the people of that time were feeling about specific situations, their lives and about God. We are going to make our own emoticons with a range of feelings expressed on them. Let's see if we can create some faces that show some of the following : happy, excited, sad, scared, frightened, angry, shocked, embarrassed, nervous etc.'

Exploring the psalms...

Explain to the children that you are going to read some psalms to them. As they listen, you want them to think about how the psalmist—the person writing the psalm—was feeling. They should be thinking about which of their emoticons might best describe the emotions that are being expressed. There are no right or wrong answers—this is about how the psalm is speaking to each person.

'Psalms can show a whole range of emotions such as sadness and grief, excitement, joy and happiness. I wonder if you might be able to pick some of these emotions in the psalms I am about to read.'

Read Psalm 142:

- Think about the psalmist, what does the passage tell us about them?
- How do you think the psalmist was feeling when writing this? Share the emoticon you have chosen.
- Now think about yourself.
- How did you feel when you heard this psalm? Hold up the emoticon that you think shows this.



'I wonder if you can remember a time when you have felt either sad, angry, hurt, upset or frustrated (*allow the children some time to share these experiences briefly*). Sometimes psalms that show us people expressing these types of feelings have been called 'prayers of lamentation'. A lament is something that shows what someone is really passionate about and expresses their grief or sorrow. When we lament the loss of a person or a pet or a friend, we feel sad and choose special words that express our sadness. God loves us and wants to know what the things are that upset us and make us sad—it is important to share this with him. I wonder if you have something sad to share with God today.'



Read Psalm 91:

- Think about the psalmist, what does the passage tell us about them?
- How do you think the psalmist was feeling when writing this? Share the emoticon you have chosen.
- Now think about yourself.
- How did you feel when you heard this psalm? Hold up the emoticon that you think shows this.

'I wonder what sorts of things that you trust God for and why (*allow the children some time to share*). I am sure that there are lots of things that you know about God, who he is and what he can do. It is important for us to tell God that we believe he is who he says he is—it is important for God to know it and for us to speak it out and for others to hear this is what we believe. Psalms that show this sort of emotion can be known as 'confessions of trust', they allow us to confess or say out loud that we trust and believe in God. I wonder if you have something that you would share with God today about how you trust and believe in him.'

Read Psalm 145:1–7:

- Think about the psalmist, what does the passage tell us about them?
- How do you think the psalmist was feeling when writing this? Share the emoticon you have chosen.
- Now think about yourself.
- How did you feel when you heard this psalm? Hold up the emoticon that you think shows this.

'I wonder what sorts of things make you happy or excited or just bursting to tell someone about (*allow the children some time to share*). I wonder if you have ever felt happy looking at the world God created, or if you ever want to thank God for the amazing things he has created, or for loving and creating you, or giving God praise or encouragement for being so amazing.'

'I am sure that there are people who praise and encourage you for who you are and some of the things that you do; it is important for us to tell God how he makes us feel. Psalms that acknowledge who God is, what he has done and is doing for us can be known as 'prayers of praise and thanksgiving'—giving thanks for how amazing our God is. I wonder if you have something that you would share with God today to praise him and give thanks for who he is.'

Exploring a little more...

For this activity the children will be exploring a few more of the psalms and thinking about how the person writing this psalm might be feeling. It would be good to divide the children into small groups or at least pairs for this activity. They will need a large sheet of paper, some textas, their emoticons and a Bible. Display the list of psalms below or print it off so that each group has a copy.



- Psalm 22:1–2
- Psalm 37:1–6
- Psalm 117
- Psalm 89:46–51
- Psalm 56:1–4
- Psalm 30
- Psalm 120
- Psalm 57:1–3
- Psalm 33:1–3
- Psalm 38:5–8
- Psalm 105:4–5
- Psalm 5:1–8

Depending on how much time you have available, you may like to give each group responsibility for looking up certain psalms and reporting back to the larger group.

- Using the list of psalms, find the passage and read it together in your group.
- I wonder how the person who wrote this might have been feeling.
- I wonder what stands out to you from this psalm.
- Write down the reference and then draw some faces that show the feelings that you can see shared in this psalm.



Tying In

Writing our own psalm...

You may like to take or allow some of the children to go outside (with supervision) to write their own psalm. Looking at God's creation can often help us to think about God and there are some children who will particularly benefit from this. Everyone will need a sheet of A3 or butchers paper, pens, textas or crayons and a Bible. Write up the sentence starters and statements on a board or some butchers paper. For this section you might like to have done yours before the session to also give the children an example of how this might look.

'The psalms we have looked at have shown us how those who have written them were feeling about God, their life or a particular situation. They have been able to express themselves freely just like we should be able to express ourselves freely when we have a relationship with someone. If God is our friend and we have a relationship with him it is important that we can tell God exactly how we are feeling—when we are happy, when we are sad, when we are angry, frustrated or scared etc. God is so amazing and loves us so much that he really wants to know all these things.

'Today you are going to have a go at either writing or drawing our own psalm; having a go at expressing ourselves to God in this way. You might like to use words or pictures or perhaps even both. There are some sentence starters and statements out the front that might be helpful to get you going. You might like to look up some other psalms to give you some ideas or do some brainstorming with a partner or leader.'

Allow the children to find a quiet space where they can think about what they want to express to God. You also might like to put some quiet music on in the background. Encourage the children to think about the following:

- ✓ Tell God how much you love him.
- ✓ Tell God why you love him.
- ✓ Tell God how you are feeling about something specific.
- ✓ Tell God what is making you happy, sad, angry, frustrated, or frightened.

Or use the following question starters:

- ✓ When I see...
- ✓ When I hear...
- ✓ When I look...
- ✓ When I feel...
- ✓ I know that...

When the children are finished, it would great to get them to come and sit in a circle and share their psalm as a prayer. Have a leader finish the section off with a prayer for everyone in the group as you celebrate loving God together.

Home & Beyond

Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards attached. The children might like to keep these in their journals or notebook where they could write or stick the challenges, reflect, answer questions or complete activities each week.

Psalms everywhere...

- Throughout your week, keep your eyes open for things, pictures, words or situations that remind you of God.
- Don't forget to tell him, and also add some pictures or words to your own journal.
- Share your psalms, thoughts and feelings with your family or your Big Bud. I wonder how they have seen God at work this week.



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