

**Prayer Stations Guide
Westside King's Church
2009 Days of Prayer**

Theme: Praying in Context

A Prayer Guide for Experiencing the Psalms

January 4-6, 2009

READ THIS BEFORE YOU BEGIN

The Westside community has made it an annual tradition to begin each new year with days set aside for prayer. This is a sacred time we share together, a time to break from the busyness of life in order to seek quietness and space to be with God. During these days, we desire to listen to what God says, and answer back from our truest selves. We do this because we believe that prayer is both basic and necessary to the life of faith.

Every year we construct a prayer walk to help focus our prayers and thoughts. This year we have themed our prayer walk to follow the psalms as our “school of prayer”.

There are seven stations in this year’s prayer journey. Each station has been designed to focus on a particular context of life that we inevitably encounter, and each connects that context to words in the psalms and in the life and prayers of Jesus. This guide has been prepared to assist and enrich your journey through this exercise.

We invite you to begin with a reading from Psalm 116:1-9:

*I love the LORD because he hears my voice
and my prayer for mercy.
Because he bends down to listen,
I will pray as long as I have breath!
Death wrapped its ropes around me;
the terrors of the grave overtook me.
I saw only trouble and sorrow.
Then I called on the name of the LORD:
“Please, LORD, save me!”
How kind the LORD is! How good he is!
So merciful, this God of ours!
The LORD protects those of childlike faith;
I was facing death, and he saved me.
Let my soul be at rest again,
for the LORD has been good to me.
He has saved me from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling.
And so I walk in the LORD’s presence
as I live here on earth!*

STATION 1: PRAYING IN THE PLACE OF THANKSGIVING

We start by giving thanks to God, a rare practice these days. Maybe you too have been infected by “the culture of complaint” we live in. Or maybe you just forget to slow down enough to take stock of the aspects of your life that are God-blessed. But giving thanks to God is a necessary and liberating context in which to pray, and the Psalms teach us this.

*The LORD is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and I am helped.*

My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song. [Psalm 28:7]

Other Psalms which help us to express thankfulness are Psalms 100 and 136.

The symbolic metaphor for this station is the door. Expressing our thankfulness to God is an entrance to more intimacy and understanding of God such as Psalm 100 suggests.

Giving thanks doesn't mean that everything is going perfectly for you. Consider how Jesus chose to give thanks to God in his most difficult moments: when his friend Lazarus had died, at his tomb he shed bitter tears and said: "*Father, I thank you that you have heard me.*" [John 11: 41]. Of special note is the last evening of his life, the evening he first celebrated the Eucharist (thanksgiving meal) with his disciples: "*... The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it...*" [1 Cor. 11:23-24]. Obviously, for Jesus, being thankful was a powerful way to connect present difficulties with future hope, especially in the most trying of circumstances.

Now try it. If the psalms teach us how to pray, consider the words of thanks you might offer to God:

STATION 2: PRAYING IN THE PLACE OF ANXIETY OR FEAR

The most common command in the Scriptures is this: “do not be afraid”. While none of us escapes from periodic bouts of anxiety and fear, perhaps the bigger issue is the constant low-grade anxiety which hangs on like a resistant cold. The anxious life is a habit of being that robs us of the joys and loves we should be seeing and celebrating. The psalms teach us another way to live, the way of trust:

*But when I am afraid,
I will put my trust in you.
I praise God for what he has promised.
I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?
What can mere mortals do to me? [Psalm 56:3-4]*

Some Psalms which help us here are Psalm 27, 55 and 112.

The image for this station is a lamp. We took the cue from Psalm 27: 1 which says: *“The LORD is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid?”* Often it is the sense of the unknown that powers our fears and anxieties, the sense that we are not in control and cannot determine outcomes (though we try). So darkness is fear, while the light of understanding is the banishment of that fear. The Lord is our light, says the psalmist.

The way of Jesus is a way to live free from anxiety and fear, especially when it comes to the practical issues we tend to think about over much: *“do not worry about your life... who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?... seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these [practical and necessary] things will be given to you as well.”* [Matthew 6:25,27,33] If you are worried about finances (a real issue now days), this is a good place to speak to God about it.

Write a prayer of trust to God in the light of who he is:

STATION 3: PRAYING IN THE PLACE OF LONELINESS OR LOSS

Loneliness or loss might be described as a place of absence or abandonment. It can be a very despairing place to be. There is a large category of “lament” (tears or sadness) in the psalms, and you will not have to search far to find words to express the sorrow, alienation, or simple grief that you may be experiencing.

*Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.* [Psalm 25:16]

A few recommended Psalms for praying in loneliness and loss are Psalms 22, 42 and 142.

Jesus expressed a moment of loneliness when he hung on the cross: “... *at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* [Mark 15:34] This is a direct quote from Psalm 22, a gripping depiction of sadness, loneliness, and abandonment. But if you follow it far enough you see how such words expressed to God have a way of working themselves back to hope.

The metaphor for you to consider is a set of jail bars, and the cue is taken from Psalm 142:7a, “*rescue me from this prison*”. While loneliness and loss can feel like a permanent place, there is a life of reconnection ahead: “*and when your people notice your wonderful kindness to me, they will rush to my side.*” (142:7b).

Do not be afraid to express your loneliness or loss to God. But as you express yourself to him, also listen to what hope he might whisper back to you. Write your thoughts here:

STATION 4: PRAYING IN THE PLACE OF CONFUSION OR DISORIENTATION

As human beings, we carry an innate sense of how life should be. When things do not go according to plan we get angry or depressed, or we simply live in paralyzed confusion. Whatever the case, if we remain silent before God during our times of disorientation, we can very much stall and remain in this condition for longer than God intends.

The image for this space is a bed. Psalm 6:6 pictures our bed as the place where we inevitably feel the disorientation of our lives; at the time we should be resting in peace, we realize instead the anger and confusion that have captivated our emotions:

*I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping. [Psalm 6:6]*

Two Psalms which speak about confusion and disorientation are Psalm 73 and 143.

One point of wisdom: while our anger, confusion and frustration can safely be expressed to God, venting such emotions to others can sometimes lead to less than good outcomes. We should be wise about who we share life's struggles with. One thing for sure, God is safe and he really is there – really! For this reason, *“Jesus would often go to some place where he could be alone and pray”* [Luke 5:16], a space to get away from others and talk to his Father about what was really in him. This is wise practice for those who can do it.

What anger, confusion or frustration do you need to express to God? What could you say to him that you could say to no one else?

STATION 5: PRAYING IN THE PLACE OF OTHERS

We do not simply live for ourselves. Prayer is one of the most important ways we learn the secret of connection, and how it is we live with and for others. In prayer we remember that only God can “fix” the human condition (including ourselves); but in prayer we also remember that part of the fixing is the realization that we are connected.

The Psalms remind us that the world we live in is filled with injustice and abuse, violence and poverty. We see the incompleteness of things everywhere, but along with the incompleteness there is the hope in a messiah, a king who will put everything right:

*The king rescues the homeless when they cry out,
and he helps everyone who is poor and in need.
The king has pity on the weak and the helpless
and protects those in need.
He cares when they hurt,
and he saves them from cruel and violent deaths.* [Psalm 72:12-14]

This king was ultimately Jesus, the one who came to “work justice and righteousness”. So while we work for a better world, we must also pray for a better world. In the life of Jesus, I can think of no more powerful phrase than the one he taught us to begin our prayer to God: “*Our Father*”. In this way he taught that when we come to God, we immediately realize that he is not only for us, but for others, and that we should remember the needs of others as well as our own.

The image here is the carpet and the kneeling bench, two low places where we humble ourselves to identify with the needs of others.

Who might you bring into the “our Father” as you pray the prayer he taught us? What would you ask God to do for them?

STATION 6: PRAYING IN THE PLACE OF WAITING

We are near the end of our prayer journey but not quite. It is at this stage we are reminded that waiting is the normal human and spiritual life. We are not given everything we want, nor at the time we want, but our souls must learn to wait for God:

*I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning. [Psalm 130:5-6]*

Other Psalms that speak to the issue of waiting are Psalms 13, 40, and 62.

Jesus practiced waiting and encouraged us to do the same. In fact, the substance of his model prayer, what we call the Lord's Prayer, has an in-built anticipation of the future while it patiently waits in the present.

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one. [Matthew 6:9-13]*

What is it that you are waiting for? And how will you wait? Jesus suggests that our basic wait (though we might not know it or express it this way) is for the kingdom of God. Our wait is for the resolution God himself will bring. And in the meantime, we pray for a way to live that is connected to that eventual good outcome:

STATION 7: PRAYING IN THE PLACE OF NEW BEGINNINGS

And so we come to the end of our prayer journey. This last station is the place where we pray for this new year. With new beginnings comes new hope, but a hope that is based in the character of God, the one who has helped us before:

It seemed like a dream, too good to be true, when God returned Zion's exiles.

*We laughed, we sang,
we couldn't believe our good fortune.*

*We were the talk of the nations—
"God was wonderful to them!"*

*God was wonderful to us;
we are one happy people.*

And now, God, do it again—

*bring rains to our drought-stricken lives
So those who planted their crops in despair
will shout hurrahs at the harvest,
So those who went off with heavy hearts
will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing. [Psalm 127]*

Consider Psalms 40, 84, and 145 as you meditate on the new beginning that is 2009.

What thoughts or impressions do you want to remember or preserve from this prayer walk experience? What hopes do you carry for this new year?

We hope that this prayer exercise has been meaningful and helpful to you. Our hope is that you would learn to prayerfully connect to all of the places you find yourself in the weeks and months to come. The real life of faith can handle all of the possible contexts of life. The Psalms teach us how to do this, giving us words and emotions, connecting us to the largest community of prayer there is.

As you leave, please sign our COMMUNITY PRAYER JOURNAL so we have a record of your visit. You can also include a few statements that capture what your prayer experience was like.

We are glad that you have taken the time to journey through the prayer walk and we sincerely pray for a full awareness of God's grace and peace in this new year.

God bless you,

Bob Osborne
Director of Spiritual Formation
Westside King's Church