

Psalms of Hope



Psalms workshop KS2

THE CHURCH
SCHOOLS OF
CAMBRIDGE

Introduction

Today we are going to be thinking about psalms.
Can anyone tell me what they think a psalm is?
Can you tell me where you might find a psalm?
Has anyone ever read or heard a psalm?

Story

You will need: praying hands, trumpet, harp and King David figure, musical instrument, crown, globe, thanking God figure, question mark, walking people figures, compass, chain, praying figure, sand timer, pen, wooden heart, labels on sticks (invocation, complaint, petition, motivation, imprecation, praise), person and cave, lion and person, 2 flames, shield and glittery heart, person, dove and musical instrument, key, 2 pieces of ribbon, tree, seeds, wheat, shepherd, sheep, sword, bowl, wave, eagle, rock.

Place the praying hands and trumpet in the back centre

The Book of Psalms in the Bible is the prayer book of God's People. In it we find 150 poems and songs which have been prayed by the Jewish people for over three thousand years; and then about two thousand years ago Christians joined in.

Place harp and King figure on either side of the praying hands

Some of the oldest psalms are said to be written by King David; songs that he played on his harp.

There are lots of types of psalms in the Bible – each one takes you on a different kind of journey.

Place musical instrument, crown, globe, thanking God figure; question mark; walking people figures to the right of the praying hands

There are psalms praising God - as King, or as the Lord of Creation; psalms thanking God for God's blessings; wisdom psalms – finding out how God wants people to live; psalms for pilgrims to sing on their way to Jerusalem.

Place compass beside the praise symbols

These are the psalms of orientation – like using a map and compass when you go orienteering, to find the route – of people following the way God wants them to go.

Rattle and place chain then place praying figure beside it to the left of the praying hands

Then there are the psalms of lament – of people crying out to God when everything seems to be going wrong and hoping for better times.

Place sand timer beside the symbols of lament

These are the psalms of re-orientation – of people being lost and turning their lives right round to come back to God.

Pretend to write with a pen, then place the pen in front of the praying hands

A psalm is a bit like a letter to God – saying different things in different parts.

Draw wiggly line in sand, and place heart at the end, in front of the sand timer

Once you know the different parts, they can take you on a journey – helping people get closer to God, and deeper into the heart of what God wants for the world.

Draw 5 lines in the sand

In a lament psalm, there are often six different sections:

Place labels on sticks in a row across the centre; one in each section, as you say:

The psalm opens with the **Invocation** – calling out to God to listen – the ‘Dear God’ bit at the beginning.

Then there is the **Complaint** – the bit telling God what the problem is – telling God what has happened since you last wrote – catching God up with your news, but this is a lament, so the news isn’t good, and you are having a grumble.

Next comes the **Petition** – asking God for help with that problem – the ‘please do something for me’ section. It’s like when you sign a petition, hoping it will help to make something change.

Then comes the **Motivation** – telling God why you know God will help – God is so powerful God can fix any problem. You are motivating or encouraging God.

Then comes the fun part - the **Imprecation** – cursing the cause of the problem. It is your chance to be a bit rude! You want the tricks to backfire and happen to the thing causing the problem, instead of to you.

Finally, there is the **Praise** part – where you tell God that you know God has heard you, and you promise to praise God, because you trust God to help you and sort things out.

Let’s look at a psalm to see how it works.

Psalm 7 is a psalm of King David, about a time when he was being attacked by his enemies. At one time he even had to hide in a cave to escape the soldiers who were looking for him.

Place the objects behind the relevant labels:

Place person, then place wooden cave over it

It opens with an **invocation**, calling out to God:

**I have come to you for protection, O Lord my God.
Shelter me from those who are chasing me!**

Place lion and person, then ‘carry’ person away

Then comes the **complaint**, David is telling God what the problem is:

**If you don’t, they will maul me like a lion,
carrying me away where there is no one to rescue me.**

Place large flame, then smaller flame

Then comes the **petition**, David is asking God for help:

Rise up, O Lord, in anger!
Rise up against the rage of my enemies!

Place shield then heart

Then comes the **motivation**, David is saying why God he knows God will help:

God is my shield; he will defend me.
God saves those whose hearts are true and right.

Dig a hole in the sand then topple people figures in

Then comes the **imprecation**, David wants the bad things to happen to his enemies instead of himself:

Let the wicked dig a deep pit to trap others,
Then fall into it themselves!

The trick has backfired!

Place dove then shake and place musical instrument

And finally, the part where David promises to **praise** God:

I will thank the Lord who puts things right;
I will sing praises to the Lord Most High.

Repeat the whole psalm without breaks – letting it flow.

Place key towards the front

A psalm is a bit like a beautiful doorway – you can appreciate it from the outside, but if you have the key to unlock the door, you can see even more once you get inside.

If you understand how the poetry in a psalm works, then you can really understand. It helps people of faith get closer to God.

Place 2 pieces of ribbon beside it

Psalms use a special kind of poetry called **parallelism**.

Think of two parallel lines – beside each other.

The lines of poetry are written in pairs – in parallels. It's a bit like looking through a pair of binoculars. Both eyes see slightly different things, but your brain puts the two images together so you see one thing in 3D.

So, in a psalm, the first line will say something, then the second line may say the same kind of thing in a different way:

I have come to you for protection, O Lord my God.
Shelter me from those who are chasing me!

David is asking for protection and shelter – two ways of saying the same thing.

Or:

Rise up, O Lord, in anger!
Rise up against the rage of my enemies!

God's anger and rage of David's enemies are both rising up, but one is rising against the other.

Or sometimes the second line says completely the opposite thing:

Let the wicked dig a deep pit to trap others,
Then fall into it themselves.

The attackers start out setting a trap for others and end up getting trapped themselves.

Point to the different sections

Each section of the psalm has pairs of ideas – these are the verses.

Psalms also use a kind of **picture language**. It isn't easy to talk to God just using words, so they use imagery or symbols to dig deep into the meaning.

Psalms 7 uses images of shelter, a lion, raging anger rising, a shield, a heart, and a pit.

Place shepherd, sheep, seeds, tree, sword, bowl, (trickle sand between your fingers) wave, eagle, rock – along the front

The psalms paint pictures of things from everyday life that people in Bible times would have known and seen around them:

shepherds and sheep, seeds and trees and fruit, weapons, cooking pots, the desert, water, eagles, rocky places and so many more!

Move your hand in the air across the story bag

Psalms take us on a journey – they help us to look at our lives and get them on the right path.

You are going to be writing a lament psalm:
telling God about a problem and hoping it will be sorted out.

Wondering

***I wonder what sort of problem you might like to write about?
What is going on in the world today that needs fixing?***

I wonder how you will start your psalm? Does God seem quite close, or do you really need to shout to get God's attention?

***I wonder which words you will choose to make pictures in your psalm?
What sort of things are special in your life? What can you see in the world around you?***

I wonder what your curse will be like? How will you make the tricks backfire?

I wonder how you could praise God?

When you have written your psalm, you are going to copy out a neat version, and then decorate it.

I am going to show some pictures of some of the ways monks in the Middle Ages chose to decorate the books of psalms that they were copying out.

PowerPoint

Slide 1 - titles

Slide 2

But first, this is the Great Psalms Scroll - the oldest surviving copy of the psalms. It is written in Hebrew on animal skins; and stored rolled up as a scroll.

The Jewish people didn't paint pictures of God, or even anything God has created. The beautiful handwriting, the calligraphy, is enough to show it is holy scripture.

Slide 3

Christians liked to add decorations. By the Middle Ages, they were getting more and more elaborate. Some of the monasteries in our area made amazingly decorated, or 'illuminated' copies of the Book of Psalms – the psalter. They wrote in Latin on animal skins and bound the pages together to make books, and some of them have survived until today.

This is page from the Ormesby Psalter, which was made in Norfolk at the end of the thirteenth century. The writing has been framed by decorations and pictures. Can you see the man riding the goat and the people with the dog at the bottom?

Slide 4

This is a close-up of the page we have just seen. Can you see the angels flying down left the side?

Slide 5

Here is another page from the Ormesby Psalter- with a knight in shining armour, and a man creeping up on him. It shows how King David felt when he was being attacked by his enemies.

Slide 6

This is a page from the Macclesfield Psalter, which was made in East Anglia at the beginning of the fourteenth century. It is now kept in the Fitzwilliam Museum, in Cambridge and sometimes they have it on show so you can go to see it.

Slide 7

This is a close-up of the page you have just seen. The middle of the capital letter 'O' at the beginning of the psalm has got a picture inside.

Slide 8

Here is another page which has a bit of a joke on – a man is being chased by a huge fish. Can you see the gold leaf?

Slide 9

This is a page from the Luttrell Psalter, which was made in in the middle of the fourteenth century. It is part of Psalm 26. King David talks about going to God's altar in God's house – can you see the priest standing behind the altar in church at the bottom of the page?

Slide 10

Here is a detail of the page you have just seen. Can you see all the little birds down the side?

Slide 11

This is another page from the Luttrell Psalter. The psalms talk a lot about sowing and harvesting, and artist shows what harvesting was like seven hundred years ago – here they are threshing the corn. We use machines nowadays!

Slide 12

Here are two people playing with a hammock. It's something we might do in our gardens.

Slide 13

This is the whole page. Can you see the fantastic beast down the side?

Slide 14

The cat has just caught a mouse.

Slide 15

Here are two people playing a board game.

Slide 16

Can you see the watermill at the bottom of this page? It is Psalm 103, which talks about God's love overflowing, just like the water is flowing over the mill wheel.

Slide 17

The Luttrell Psalter was made for Sir Geoffrey Luttrell. Sometimes artists added in portraits of the people they were making the book for - can you see Sir Geoffrey in the middle of the table?

I wonder how you will choose to decorate your psalm?

When you are writing your psalm remember:

- Start by thinking of the problem you want to be solved.
- Think of your psalm as a journey. Where are you starting, and where will you end up? How will you move from sadness to hope?
- Write something for each of the sections.
- Try writing in parallels – in pairs of lines which say the same thing in different ways or say the opposite thing.
- Choose some picture words and symbols from your life to help you explain what you mean.
- Then use some of the images from the words you have chosen to decorate your psalm.

Follow-up Activity – Listening to the Psalms

The psalms were designed to be chanted or sung. They have been a source of musical creativity for thousands of years.

Here are some psalms for you to listen to:

Traditional Hebrew psalms using ancient tunes – Psalm 127:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Filrbg101jk>

Modern Jewish psalms in English – Debbie Friedman, Psalm 126:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7L44yZkbGjc&list=PL2a89NGcTeeqaZaMKW34rjaO0DxinnLG_&index=6

Cathedral choir singing in plainsong in Latin, in a tradition that continues from days of the early Christian church – Westminster Cathedral choir - Psalm 116:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2v3aurq29ys>

Renaissance polyphony – William Byrd ‘Sing joyfully’ - Psalm 81:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=va55VwsSX8U>

Victorian anthems – Mendelssohn ‘Lift thine eyes’ – Psalm 121:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xc-BFtqkMQY>

Taize chants – ‘Bless the Lord my Soul’ – Psalm 103:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4Svh-9ohg4>

Modern worship song – Jason Silver, ‘Praise the name of the Lord’ – Psalm 113:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3AYH8Yqk1w>

Celtic-style folk psalm – Kiran Young Wimberley, ‘You have turned my sorrow to dancing and joy’ - Psalm 30: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5mjrZXd-w0

I wonder which you like best?