

October 11, 2020

Today we're going to pray with the prayer book in the middle of the Bible, called the Psalms. But we're going to do it Mad Libs style, so you'll want a screen you can type on or a pen and or pencil and a bit of paper, OK?

We'll start with a little explanation.

There are 150 psalms in the middle of the Bible. They are poems, songs, public prayers written in Hebrew 2300 to 3000 years ago, and for both Jews and Christians, they've taught us how to pray for millenia now.

When you pray the psalms, you read the words as your own prayers, helping you talk to God when you don't know what to say. When you pray with the psalms, you can be a little more creative, letting the tone or emotions and flavor or a psalm spark your own prayer. The psalms aren't meant to teach us all the truth about God and life. They say things about God and they say things about life we don't need to agree with. No, the psalms teach us how to pray to God, that we can be real and honest, and tell the truth to God, and remember what we think to be true of God as well, and that will give us hope, faith, and courage.

A teacher I had in a graduate school class 25 years ago put it this way. The psalms teach us to turn our face to God, not our back. It doesn't matter what is on our faces (or pouring out of our mouths) as we turn to God, just that we are. The worst thing that can happen to a loving parent isn't a sad child, an angry child, or a troubled child, but a child that walks away from you and shuts you out. The same is true with our God. God invites us to keep our faces, not our backs turned, however we are. The psalms hold an invitation to nearness and to freedom, to turn our whole selves to the God who is glad to know us, be with us, and love us - and in that context, to guide and shape and help us.

The person who prays like this over a long time learns to be at home with themselves and at home with God.

So we're going to practice praying with the psalms for a moment, Mad Libs style. Mad Libs is when you fill in the blanks of some lines, with words you chose out of context. It's a way to have a little fun and find yourself saying some things you might not have imagined saying.

So I'm going to provide three lines from real psalms, that we'll fill in with words you chose. And then I'll lead us in prayer with the original psalm, that brings a full set of emotions and experiences to God, asks God for help, and trusts that God will turn things around in time.

So, here are your fill-in words. We need:

_____ (an animal)

_____ (plural noun, a good thing)

_____ (plural noun, hard experience of yours)

_____ (hard emotion to deal with)

Psalm 42:1-3, 5 Mad Libs Style

As a _____ pants for _____,
So pants my soul for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?
My _____ have been my food day and night
While they sat to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"
Why are you _____, O my soul,
And why are you _____ within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

Read Psalm 42:1-3, 5 (real version)

As a deer pants for flowing streams,
So pants my soul for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?
My tears have been my food day and night
While they sat to me all the day long, "Where is your God?"
Why are you cast down, O my soul,
And why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

I invite you to try reading a few psalms and seeing if they give you any permission or ideas on how to pray, bringing your whole face to God each time you do so.