



# The Psalms & Holy Curiosity

Psalms for Living | Small Group Session 1

**Opening Questions . . .** (Go around your table and share the following:)

- Your name
- Vikings? Packers? Both? Neither? If neither, which team(s) do you like to root for?
- What comes to mind when you think of the Psalms?

## A Practice for Quieting Your Heart and Mind

Before reading the Psalm, take a few minutes for quiet and to breathe deeply. In the silence, imagine you are inhaling God's Spirit and exhaling whatever distractions or worries you bring with you into this time and space. Or try Father Richard Rohr's prayer "Be Still: A Contemplative Prayer for Presence" based on Psalm 46:10 found in the Online Resources (see back page for link).

(silence | breathe deeply, exhale slowly)

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

Amen.

## What Does the Bible Say?

Read the Psalm aloud. Then take a few minutes for each person to write their initial responses below before discussing as a group.

### Psalm 23

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;

<sup>3</sup> he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;

for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
my whole life long.

### A Moment for Individual Reflection . . . (Write your initial reactions in the space below.)

- What words, phrases, or details stood out to you as we read?
- What made you curious or wonder?
- What caused resistance for you?
- What emotions did you notice within yourself as we read?

### Think About . . . (choose one or two to talk about together)

- What did you notice as Psalm 23 was read? Use the reflection questions above as prompts, sharing only what you are comfortable sharing.
- Does this Psalm bring up any memories for you? Is there anything you'd be open to sharing with the group?

### A Few Notes about Psalm 23 . . . (to share or to read on your own, as time permits)

- Notice the change in voice. Verses 1 – 3 speak about the Lord. At verse 4, there is a shift as the psalmist begins to speak to the Lord expressing comfort and trust in the Lord's presence and protection.
- Old Testament scholars Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr. write, "It is important to recognize that 'shepherd' is a term used in the ancient world to refer to a king whose task it is to protect and provide for the subjects of the realm. It is likely that the psalm is not as idyllic and romantic as is often interpreted; rather, the psalmist speaks out of a context of deep danger and articulates every confidence in YHWH as the one who will keep the flock safe and protected in the face of every danger."<sup>1</sup>
- In verse 6, goodness and mercy do not just "follow." They pursue. According to the New Interpreter's Bible, the Hebrew verb...has the more active sense of "pursue." God is coming after the psalmist. The bad news is, we have enemies. The good news is, God has our back. Ordinarily in the psalms, it is precisely the enemies who "pursue" the psalmist...Here the enemies are present but have been rendered harmless, while God is in active pursuit."<sup>2</sup>

## What Do Others Say?

I love to drive, and I don't mind a longer commute. The drive to and from Incarnation gives me time to think, or listen to podcasts and audiobooks, or simply enjoy the quiet of being alone in the car. Even though I love to drive, I'll admit that when we first moved to Hudson and I would drive home, there was a section of road on I-94 between Woodbury Drive and the St. Croix River that seemed to go on forever. Over time though, the route became so familiar that time would pass quickly. Sometimes I would barely notice the details and I would be surprised to discover that I was already at the river, crossing the bridge into Wisconsin.

When we adopted our daughter from China, we decided that it made more sense for her to go to daycare near Incarnation than near our home. When I returned to work after family leave, four-year-old Tillie also began commuting from Hudson to Shoreview. The early days were interesting because she was just beginning to learn English, so I had to figure out ways to help her pass the time.

One morning as we crossed the bridge over the St. Croix River, the sun was shining brightly and dancing off the water. It was so beautiful, so I said "Hello, water!" Tillie copied me in her sweet four-year-old voice, "Hello, water!" It was almost a prayer of gratitude. With those two words, an adventure began. We began the adventure of noticing and naming certain markers on our journey. We'd say hello to our neighbors' house: "Hello, Chris and Kristin's house!" "Hello, school bus!" "Hello, hospital!" "Hello, big boats!" "Hello, fire

station!" As Tillie's capacity for the English language grew, we noticed and named more things. When we'd say hello to the two horses and a pony by the red barn, Tillie would declare, "They're a family like us!" Yes, honey, they're a family like us.

This adventure of noticing and naming became a holy curiosity for what was happening in the world around us. It was a delight to see things through Tillie's eyes. I gained fresh perspective on what had formerly been a routine drive, often on auto pilot.

Psalm 23 is likely the most well known and probably most beloved of all the psalms. It is often read at funerals, and for good reason. The phrase "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (23:4, Revised Standard Version)" was familiar to me, even as a young person. Sometimes, though, like on a well-traveled road, familiarity can blind us to the riches of a Bible passage. Either we think it only belongs to a particular occasion or we think we know it and so we stop paying attention to the details. What if we approach scripture with holy curiosity, with hearts and minds ready to notice and to wonder, or imagining ourselves in the story?

Personally, I love Psalm 23. It is one of my favorites because it is so rich. Yes, it is wonderful and powerful to read at a funeral; but frankly it speaks to me in everyday life too. Hello, green pastures and still waters. Hello, restored soul. Hello, darkest valley. Lord, I fear no evil for you are with me. Hello, table and overflowing cup. Hello, goodness and mercy that pursues me all the days of my life. Lord, I shall dwell in your house with gratitude!

--Reflection written by Jeanne Hartfield

**Think About . . .** (choose one or two to talk about together)

- What phrase from this Psalm is your favorite? What does it bring to mind for you?
- Is there a portion of this Psalm that you're likely to skip by or say too quickly?
- What is something you often pass by without noticing, but is of great value to God?
- This Psalm is filled with beautiful images from the past. What images from your life today could replace: green pastures; your rod and your staff; you anoint my head with oil... or other images?
- What are some of the ways God restores your soul? How could this time in this small group be restorative for you?
- In your life today, what does it mean to you to dwell in the house of the LORD?

**Optional for In Person Groups:** [Watch the Psalms Overview Video from The Bible Project](#)

Some have described this video as "drinking from a firehouse" because there is so much information that comes so fast. It's worth watching together and/or on your own. The video is available online at [incarnationmn.org/psalms](http://incarnationmn.org/psalms) (password: **HolyCuriosity**). After watching discuss:

- What stood out to you from the video? What in the video sparked holy curiosity?

## Prayer

Leader: You, Lord, are the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. Thank you, that you know me and call me by name. Thank you that you would search and search just for one missing sheep out of a hundred—even if it were me—and not rest until it was back in the fold. And thank you, too, for the great words of the psalms, which comfort, challenge and inspire us. We shall not want, Lord, for we are yours, and you have given us what we need. You have given us all we need.

All: **Thank you for green pastures.**

**Thank you for quiet waters.**

**Thank you for refreshing my soul.**

Leader: Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear.

All: **You, Lord, are my shepherd.**

**You have called me by name.**

**And you have searched, until you have found me.**

**Enfold us in your love. Amen.**

Based on Psalm 23, Luke 15:3-7, Matthew 18:12-14. Written by Brian Draper, and posted on the Monthly Prayers page of the Christian Aid website.<sup>3</sup> Adapted to a responsive prayer for this purpose.

## Connecting Faith with Daily Life

Additional resources can be found on the Psalms for Living resource page at [incarnationmn.org/psalms](https://incarnationmn.org/psalms) (password: **HolyCuriosity**). Between now and the next small group session, try one or more of the following:

- Watch the overview video from The Bible Project available on the Psalms for Living Resource page.
- Practice quieting your heart and mind by using Father Richard Rohr's meditation "Be Still: A Contemplative Prayer for Presence" based on Psalm 46:10. Visit the Psalms for Living resource page for a video version with images and music or link to the written instructions for doing this prayer on your own.
- Try the practice of lectio divina or holy reading using the psalm (or a portion of a psalm) of your choice. You'll find a link to instructions for lectio divina on the Psalms for Living Resource page. If you're looking for ideas, try doing this with Psalms 24, 27, 29, 34, 65, 121 or 136.
- Consider what it would look like to interact with people, the Bible, or your daily routines with a spirit of holy curiosity. What do you discover when you practice wonder and noticing?
- Select a phrase from Psalm 23 that could be a continuous prayer for you this week. Repeat the phrase to yourself as often as you can as you go through your normal day (at a stoplight, waiting at the grocery store, as you walk to a meeting or appointment...).

### Check out these additional resources on the Psalms for Living online resource page:

When Psalms for Living launched in September 2019, there was a large group kickoff event to introduce the series and provide some large group teaching. There are two excerpts from that event on the Psalms for Living online resource page:

- **Video One:** Pastor Jeanne Hartfield talks about our mindset for approaching the Psalms through this small group experience and discusses the idea of "Living Word."
- **Video Two:** Pastor Jeanne Hartfield provides an overview of the Psalms for Living sessions. Please note: What was call the kickoff is now Session 1, what was session 1 is now Session 2, etc. See the updated *Psalms for Living Overview* document for specifics.

## Psalms for Living: Online Resources

There are additional resources on the Incarnation website to enhance your Psalms for Living experience. Visit:

[incarnationmn.org/psalms](https://incarnationmn.org/psalms)

password: **HolyCuriosity**

<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann and W. H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 122-123.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2175](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2175) and *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. IV (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 768-769.

<sup>3</sup> <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/04/prayer-psalm-23.html> and <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/>