

Adult Teaching Resources

January 20, 2019



Epiphany (January 6-March 3)

What Are We Praying For?

Psalm 72 (RCL 1-7, 10-14) – “A Prayer for Justice”

Psalm 29 – “A Prayer for Peace”

Psalm 36 (RCL 5-10) – “A Prayer for Love”

Psalm 19 – “A Prayer for Goodness”

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A Prayer for Love

Psalm 36 (RCL 5-10)

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

*“O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your salvation to the upright of heart!” Psalm 36:10*

The Beatles sang, “All You Need is Love.” That is true. We all want to find love and to be love. We all want love. We all need love.

We believe in God and we believe God loves us. Our psalm today explores the idea of God who knows us and loves us.

Opening

After everyone arrives, ask folks to find a partner for some opening questions.

Without naming specific names, who have you experienced who you would consider to be “evil?”

What qualities, actions, and attitudes do you connect with that person?

What did that person do that you would consider “evil?”

Without naming specific names, who have you experienced who you would consider to be “loving?”

What qualities, actions, and attitudes do you connect with that person?

What did that person do that you would consider “loving?”

Give each couple time to share with each other. As time allows, ask for volunteers to share with the larger group.

Reading the Bible

What speaks to the wicked? (transgression)

How do the wicked view themselves? (no fear of God)

What are their words? (mischief and deceit)

What is their action? (mischief and a way that is not good)

How far does God's love extend? (to the heavens)

What is God's righteousness like? (the mighty mountains)

Where do God's people take refuge? (in the shadow of your wings)

What does God give? (drink from the river of your delights, light)

What is the psalmist's prayer for dealing with the wicked? (don't let the arrogant tread on me, or the hand of the wicked drive me away)

Making Connections

How do you define "wicked?" How do you think they relate to God? How do you think they related to others?

Why do you think there is wicked and evil in the world? How do you think God deals with the wicked and evil?

When have you suffered "at the hands of mean, lying, and selfish people?" How did you get through it? Where was God for you?

Do you experience God's presence more when life is challenging or when life is easy? Why do you think that is?

How do you describe God's love for you? To what can you point and say – because of this, I know God loves me?

How has God protected you on your faith journey? How has God provided for you on your faith journey?

Our Lesson Writer says, "The Hebrew word for "know" means "to know by experience," so the psalmist's reference to "those who know you" is intended to describe faithful followers who listen to God and follow God's way." How do you experience God? How do you know what to do and how to follow God?

So What?

Ask your group to get back with their partner. Share this quote from our Lesson Writer with the group:

“Do you ever wish harm upon those who have threatened or hurt you? It’s a common desire, and appears often as an acceptable response in the Old Testament. Jesus, however, turned that human proclivity upside down, urging his disciples to make a more loving choice by loving their enemies and doing good even to those who abuse them. “Do to others as you would have them do to you,” Jesus said (Luke 6:27-32).

Jesus’ command finds few adherents in these days of divisiveness and recriminations, but they remain a helpful corrective to the idea that one’s best defense is to bring or wish harm to those who are perceived as a threat.

Ask each partnership to spend time talking about how we are to live out Christ’s words in a divisive time in our world.

How do we trust God in divisiveness?

How do we face evil as God’s people?

How do we live with love and grace?

After time for each couple to talk. Then, gather everyone together and ask them to share their thoughts and ideas about living as faithful people with evil in the world.

The Challenge

This week, choose someone who is a challenge for you, and commit to pray for that person every day.

Prayer

Loving God, we strive to be good people who live in a challenging world. We face evil people and situations and trust that you will be with us and guide us to do what is right. May your love overcome all obstacles. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The Text—The Revised Common Lectionary text excerpts vv. 5-10 from the psalm, which is fine for public reading alone, but not as appropriate for Bible study. Verses 1-4 and 11-12 strike what appears to be a different theme, but their appearance both before and after the central section of praise makes it clear that the author (or the final editor) wanted to include both messages in the psalm.

Was David the author? The superscription of Psalm 36, added at some point in the scribal tradition, says “To the leader. Of David, the servant of the LORD.”

The tradition that David wrote many of the psalms is quite old, but the Bible makes no claim that he wrote them all. Texts such as 1 Chronicles 16, 2 Chronicles 29:25-30, and Ezra 3:10 all associate David with the establishment of music as an integral part of Israel’s worship, but he is properly seen as a patron and encourager of Israel’s music and liturgy, not its sole author.

No less than 116 of the psalms have superscriptions in the Hebrew text, including 87 of the first 100. These are old traditions but not as old as the psalms themselves: they were added by later scribes and should not be considered a part of the original text. In some cases, what appears to be a superscription for one psalm may originally have been a postscript for the previous one. In the Septuagint (an early translation into Greek), other superscriptions were added to all but the first two psalms. The superscriptions appear to give instructions to the musicians or song leaders regarding which instruments or tune is to be played.

Among the superscriptions, 101 include attributive names, and *l’david* appears 73 times. This doesn’t necessarily mean “by David,” however. The Hebrew prefix *l* more typically means “to” or “for,” rather than “by.” It could mean “of” in reference to a collection. Psalms are also attributed to (or for) Asaph (12), the sons of Korah (11), and Solomon (2), plus Heman, Ethan and Moses (1 each).

More on translating verse 1—Here’s a more detailed description of the difficulty in translating v. 1.

The Hebrew text numbers the superscription as v. 1, and begins v. 2 with the word for “oracle” (*ne’um*), connected to the word meaning “transgression” by a hyphen known as a *maqgef*. If we read it that way, we get something like “An oracle of transgression to/for the wicked is in the midst of my heart,” which may suggest that the psalmist is inspired to utter an oracle against the wicked. The NIV 11 follows this reading: “I have a message from God in my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked . . .”

Digging Deeper *continued*

This seems a bit forced. Keeping in mind that verse numbers and punctuation were added long after the text was first written, others judge that the word for “oracle” should be read as the last word of the superscription, beginning the psalm with “An oracle.” A similar occurrence is found in 2 Samuel 23:1.

Some spell out the word “oracle” (as NET), while others don’t translate it at all (NRSV). With support from the Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate (all early translations) and several Medieval Hebrew manuscripts, some readers also emend “my heart” to “his heart,” a change of one letter.

The NRSV version reads the pronouns as an inclusive plural (so as not to imply that only men are wicked) and presents transgression as a personified force that “speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; there is no fear of God before their eyes” (v. 1).

The NET puts it in more modern language while keeping the singular and gender-specific pronouns: “An evil man is rebellious to the core. He does not fear God.”

Either way we read it, it’s clear that the writer has a low opinion of evil people.

Another option—A less-likely scenario to explain the presence of v. 12 is that the psalmist’s oppressors did indeed meet with judgment of some sort, and the verse was added as a later note of triumph.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

How would Jesus have us respond to people who harm us?

Jesus famously took current attitudes based on old traditions – even Old Testament traditions – and turned them topsy-turvy. In the midst of his “Sermon on the Mount,” Matthew’s gospel records him as speaking very firm words about how his followers should respond to those who were callous or hurtful toward them:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. 42 Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
(Matt. 5:38-48)

Luke’s version occurs in his “Sermon on the Plain,” similar to the “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew. An abbreviated version of both Beatitudes and Woes appears in Luke 6:20-26, followed by these words of instruction, which appear a bit more gentle than Matthew’s account, but remain incredibly challenging.

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them” (Luke 6:27-32).

The Hardest Question *continued*

There is no question that Jesus' commands to love and do good even to the meanest people are hard to follow. And, they do not mean we are to become masochists or go out of our way to let others hurt us. Nor does it mean that weaker people in real danger of harm cannot defend themselves or seek help: Jesus would certainly not advise children or spouses subject to domestic abuse to just "put up with it," despite the claims of some fundamentalist leaders that women should willingly suffer abuse and simply pray for their husbands to be convicted.

Jesus' teaching should be understood as a general principle: believers should always stand up for what is right and work for what is good, but do it with love.