

Adult Teaching Resources

January 27, 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 Goodness

Psalm 19

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

*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.” Psalm 19:14*

We all have that one place where we feel safe; where we feel at peace; where we feel the presence of God. We know that place so well we can describe everything about it. We know the colors, the smells, and the moments that make that place special. Today, we explore the words of the psalmist describing the time where he experienced God.

Opening

After everyone arrives, focus the large group on the question of our Lesson Writer, “where in creation have you sensed God’s presence most closely?”

Ask your group to think of their special places and then share with the larger group.

Where is that place?

What makes it special?

How often do you get there?

How did you sense God’s presence in that place?

Reading the Bible

What do the heavens and the firmament do? (tell the glory of God, proclaim his handiwork)

When does speech come? (day to day) When is knowledge declared? (night to night)

Where is their voice and words heard? (through all the earth, to the end of the world)

What is the law of the Lord? (perfect)

What are the decrees of the Lord? (sure)

What are the precepts of the Lord? (right)

What is the commandment of the Lord? (clear)

What is the fear of the Lord? (pure)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What are the ordinances of the Lord? (true)

How important are all of those? (desired more than gold)

What happens when those are kept? (there is great reward)

What shall I be when those are followed? (blameless and innocent)

What is the hope for our words? (that the words of mouth and the meditation of my heart will be acceptable to God)

Making Connections

What words or phrases of praise come to mind when you think of God's glory?

Where or how do you experience God in nature? Is there a specific part of nature that speaks to you?

What does creation or nature say to you about God? If nature could speak, what words would you hear?

Our Lesson Writer asks, "If you felt inspired to write a poem or devotional thought about how God has spoken to you through the wonder of creation, what would you write about?" What would you write?

What is the first think that comes to mind when you hear the words:

Law?

Decree?

Precept?

Commandment?

When do those words have positive connotations? When do those words have negative connotations?

When you think of God's law, how do you describe it to someone else?

What is your prayer to stay on the path of faithfulness?

So What?

Share with your group the key verse in this lesson, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”

Ask the large group to share their thoughts and ideas on this verse.

What are the words of your mouth and meditations of your heart that you want acceptable by God?

How do you know when your words and meditations aren't worthy of God?

How do you let your words and meditation be known to God?

What needs to change within you for your words and meditations to be acceptable to God?

What needs to happen to make sure your church's “words” are acceptable to God?

The Challenge

This week, challenge yourself to speak only those words that you think will please God.

Prayer

Loving God, this morning we pray the words from our text, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. 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 first time—Can you remember the first time you flew on a jet plane that flew above the clouds? I will never forget the first time I flew. It was 1971, and I was en route to BSU summer missions orientation at what was then the Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va. As the Braniff jet and burst through a thick layer of cumulous clouds and flew among the giant columns of fluffy white vapor, I imagined angel children hopping from one cloud to the next. When one has a heart for sensing God’s presence, few places speak louder than the sky.

A numbering conundrum—It is not unusual for psalms to be combined or split apart over time. For example, in the predominant Hebrew text of the Old Testament (called the Masoretic Text, or MT), Psalms 9 and 10 appear as two psalms, but in the early Greek translation known as the Septuagint (LXX), they appear as one. Likewise, Psalms 114 and 115 in Hebrew appear as Psalm 113 in the Greek. But, Psalm 116 in Hebrew is divided into two psalms (114 and 115) in the LXX, and Psalm 147 appears as Psalms 146 and 147. The LXX also contains a psalm not found in the Hebrew Bible, numbered as Psalm 151.

A second numbering oddity is that the verse numbers are different in Hebrew and English. The Hebrew text counts the superscription as a verse, so that v. 1 of the English text is actually v. 2 in the Hebrew version, which has 15 verses instead of 14. In the commentary, we’ll use the English verses.

Repeating ones’ self—The basic characteristic of Hebrew poetry is repetition between two or three lines of a verse. Scholars refer to this as “parallelism,” though it does not always indicate the repetition of the same thought: we find cases in which the second line repeats the first line in different words (synonymous parallelism), the second line states something opposite of the first (antithetic parallelism), or in which the second line expands upon the first or expresses a related thought (synthetic or formal parallelism).

Examine the parallelism of Psalm 19. Which type is most common?

Gushing speech—The verb behind “pours forth” usually means something like “gushes forth,” like a powerful spring of water emerging from the earth.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Starlight—I can remember, as a boy, going into the backyard of our country home and looking into a sky filled with stars, with the Milky Way being a distinct and very visible band. Most of us live in urban settings now, or have outdoor lights even in rural areas, and such sights are harder to see.

I recall an amazing, cold night in Armenia when some companions and I made our way through a mountainous region. At 2:00 a.m., we stopped for a break at about 10,000 feet. With no light pollution from below and less atmosphere above, the sky seemed to explode with more stars than I had ever seen. It's no wonder the ancients – who had no TV or other electronic devices – spent much of their time stargazing.

Great transgression—The expression at the end of v. 13 could be translated as “great transgression” (NRSV) or as something like “blatant rebellion” (NET). The word translated as “great” could also mean “many,” but the noun is singular, indicating a characteristic state of transgression or rebellion, rather than a single horrid act.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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How many ways can you say “law”?

In vv. 7-9, the psalmist uses five different words to describe God’s revelation of rules to live by for those who want to have a right relationship with God.

The first is *torah*, the same word Jews use to describe the first five books of the Bible, also known as “the law.” It is a general word, while the synonyms that follow have more specific attributes.

The word for “decrees” (*’edut*) can be translated as “testimony,” “law,” or “decree.” It carries the sense of a rule being given by God.

“Precepts” (*piqqudim*) comes from a word describing a person who has been appointed as an overseer. In this sense, precepts are guide to proper behavior, appointed by God.

“Commandment” (*mitzwah*) means what it says. The psalmist uses the singular form, giving it a collective sense. “The commandment of the LORD” comprises all of God’s commandments, and not just the 10 spelled out in Exodus 20.

The word “ordinances” in v. 9 translates the plural form of the word *mishpat*, which typically means “justice.” It is the judgment of a judge (*shaphat*). As court rulings can become the basis on which laws are interpreted, the judgments of God determine proper behavior: to follow them is to “do justice,” as Micah 6:8 encourages us to do.

Some writers read *marot* in place of *yir’at* in v. 9, assuming an error in the copying of the text. Coming as it does in the midst of a sequence of synonyms for the law, one would expect to see another synonym, rather than “fear of.” The proposed *marot* means “utterances.” The statement that it is pure and endures forever fits better with an expression like “utterances of the LORD” than “fear of the LORD.” (for the alternate reading, see John Durham, “Psalms,” in the *Broadman Bible Commentary* Vol. 4 [Broadman Press, 1971], 208).

The English language has even more words to describe the law, or laws. In addition to the words above, we may speak of acts, edicts, rules, regulations, dictums, orders, pronouncements, injunctions, directives, principles, and more. The words are different, but the idea is the same. Though a free people, we are not free to do as we please: there are laws to guide our behavior in ways that are beneficial for individuals and for society as a whole.

We may shake our heads at the some of the strange legalisms that may affect (or afflict) life in our city, state, or nation. And, we may look askance at some of the peculiar rules that the rabbis concocted in an effort to “build a hedge about the law” to try and keep people from breaking the bigger laws.

The Hardest Question *continued*

When we think about the laws, precepts, or principles that God has revealed in nature and in our hearts, however, the proper response is not a shaking of the head, but obedience from the heart.