

# Adult Teaching Resources

October 4, 2020



## A Prayer List for Today

**Psalm 80:1-19 (RCL 80:7-15)—“Restore Us, Lord”**

Psalm 23—“Lead Us, Lord”

Psalm 96:1-13—“Be Honored, Lord”

## The Right Stuff

Matthew 22:34-46—“The Right Questions”

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# “Restore Us, Lord”

*Psalm 80:1-19 (RCL 80:7-15)*

## FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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

Our prayers are a reflection of what we experience and what we are dealing with. When life is good, our prayers are usually upbeat, happy, and sometimes even giddy. When we're faced with challenges or loss, our prayers take on a darker, more somber tone.

Today we explore a psalm of lament, when Israel was concerned about who she was and what her future would be.

### Opening

After everyone arrives, keep the large group together. Ask the group to think back to their time during the coronavirus pandemic. Ask these questions for group sharing and conversation.

When the shut-downs and restrictions were first put in place, what did you think would happen?

When things started to re-open, what was your hope?

When restrictions and mask ordinances came back because the numbers started rising, what was going through your mind then?

Give the group time to talk and share. Then, ask each person to answer this question. As they answer, write their responses on the board.

What was your biggest challenge during the coronavirus?

If folks have more than one challenge, record those on the board, too. Keep this list visible as you will come back to it at the end of the lesson.

### Reading the Bible

How does the psalmist say God leads Joseph? (like a flock)

What does the psalmist want God to do? (save us and restore us)

What does the psalmist ask? (how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?)

## Reading the Bible *continued*

What has God done? (fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure)

What do their neighbors think of them? (they scorn them and laugh at them)

What did God do in Egypt? (brought a vine out of Egypt and planted it)

What did the vine do? (it grew from the mountains to the sea to the river)

What does the psalmist ask God? (Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?)

What has happened to the vine? (The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it, they have burned it with fire, they have cut it down)

What does the psalmist want for those who have harmed the vine? (may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance)

What does the psalmist want God to do? (But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself) What will they do for God? (Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name)

## Making Connections

Our Lesson Writer says this is a “a prime example of a communal lament in which a leader either sang in behalf of the community or led the congregation in a plaintive prayer to God.” What other examples of a communal lament can you name? What examples can you think of outside the church walls?

As you think about what’s happening in your life right now, what appeal do you have for God? What complaint do you have for God? What expression of trust do you have for God?

How do you want God to “shine forth” in your life right now?

Have you ever felt God was angry with you? When was it? What do you think caused God’s anger? How did everything get resolved?

What do you believe about this statement: God blesses and curses people based on their actions?

Our Lesson Writer says, “we still have a tendency to blame our troubles on God rather than accepting responsibility for our own actions. As a result, we sometimes think of God more as a cosmic repairman we call on to fix things rather than a loving shepherd we follow every day.” What do you think of God? Is God a repairman? Is God something else?

## Making Connections *continued*

When, in your past, did God bless you? How did you know it was God's blessing? How do you want God to bless you now?

When have you made a conditional promise to God—God, if you promise to do \_\_\_\_\_, I promise I will do \_\_\_\_\_? Did God follow through? Did you? What did you learn about that experience?

## So What?

Give everyone a sheet of paper and a pen. Ask everyone to look at the board and the list from the beginning of class. Ask each person to pick one topic from the list and write a short psalm of lament based on that topic. Encourage them to use today's psalm as a guide.

What is the complaint?

What is the plea for help?

What is the reassurance of trust?

Give everyone time to think and write. Then, ask everyone to find a partner to share their psalm with. Have each person read their psalm to each other. As time allows, open the floor for volunteers to share their psalms. Spend some time in conversation about the psalm from the lesson and the psalms written in class.

What do the psalms say about us?

What do the psalms say about God?

What do the psalms say about our relationships with God?

What do the psalms reveal that we need in our relationships with God?

## The Challenge

This week, pray your prayer of lament from class each day as a part of your prayer time.

## Prayer

*Loving God, we all go through good times and bad times. Thank you for those who have gone before us and led the way about to handle rough days and difficult times. We are still dealing with the affects from the coronavirus and probably will continue to deal with them for a long time. We ask that you continue to hear our prayers—both the happy ones and the ones we start with “How long.” Amen.*

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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 for the day is Psalm 80:7-15, but to understand these verses, we need to examine the wider context of the full psalm. So, for our lesson we are considering all 19 verses.

**What was the trouble?**—Scholars have put forward many ideas about the situation in history that led to this plaintive psalm. Some suggest it was written in the northern kingdom of Israel, around 722 B.C., when the Assyrians were ravaging the land. The “Joseph” tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are mentioned, along with Benjamin – and they were all northern tribes. In support of this view, the Septuagint (an early Greek translation) adds “concerning the Assyrians” to the superscription.

Even so, others think the psalm may have come from a troublesome time in the southern kingdom, from the years in exile, or even from the early post-exilic period. Though the author in those settings would have been from Judah, references to tribes from the defunct northern kingdom could have expressed a wish for the remaining Hebrews to be reunited.

**A sad country song**—If you look at Psalm 80, you will notice that it has a chorus that’s repeated several times, like most country songs. You’ll find the chorus in verses 3, 7, and 19. The first verse of the song is vv. 1-2 of the text. The second verse is vv. 4-6. The third verse is longer: vv. 8-18. Let’s imagine what it might sound like in slightly more contemporary language, with an old-style country beat (see the online video for a suggested tune).

Chorus (vv. 3, 7, 19)  
*Bring back the light, show us your face,  
Break through our night, so we’ll all be saved,  
Oh shine your love into this dark place,  
Bring back the light of your amazing grace.*

Verse 1 (vv. 1-2)  
*Give ear O shepherd of Israel,  
Look down from heaven, you know us well.  
Stir up your power and save us, please —  
we come before you on bended knees.*

(Chorus)

Verse 2 (vv. 4-6)  
*You seem too angry to hear our prayers,  
You feed us bread that’s soaked with tears.  
Our neighbors scorn us, our enemies smirk,  
You’ve run us down with your judgment  
truck.*

(Chorus)

Verse 3 & 4 (vv. 8-13, 14-18)  
*You made us like a growing vine,  
Planted us down deep on a mountainside,  
We spread like kudzu, clear to the sea,  
But now we’re pig food, won’t you hear our  
plea?*

*Look down upon us and see this vine,  
We have been bush-hogged and burned with  
fire,  
Restore our future, so hope remains,  
Then we’ll be faithful, and call your name.*

(Chorus, sing last line twice)

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Name that tune**—Psalm 80’s complex superscription appears to instruct the leader to use a tune that includes the word “Lilies,” though some have speculated that the term *shoshannîm* could also refer to an otherwise unknown stringed instrument.

The psalm is also identified as an “*eduth*,” and belonging to a collection attributed to Asaph. *Eduth* can be translated as “covenant” (NRSV) or “testimony” (HCSB), but many interpreters believe it should be read in conjunction with *shoshannîm*. Thus, the NIV has “According to [the tune of] ‘The Lilies of the Covenant.’” The uncertainty of translation leads some versions to simply transliterate the Hebrew words either singly (NAS95) or in combination (KJV, NET).

**All together now**—The thrice-repeated chorus (vv. 3, 7, 19) is identical except for the divine names used in the address. Verse three addresses “God” (*elohîm*), v. 7 appeals to “God of Hosts” (*elohîm s’baōt*), and v. 19 calls out to “Yahweh God of Hosts” (usually translated LORD God of Hosts,” *Yahweh elohîm sebaōt*). In deference to English style, most translations begin the address with the exclamation “O,” but there is no equivalent in the Hebrew.

Scholars have suggested many explanations for the differing titles. The most appealing to me is that the poet or a later editor sought to add emphasis to each repetition of the chorus by using progressively more complex variations in appealing to God.

“Restore us” translates the *hiphil* stem of the verb *shub*, which means “to turn,” “to return,” or by extension, “to repent.” While the psalmist may simply be asking God to return Israel to an earlier situation of peace and security, the prayer has overtones of asking God to “turn us around” or “cause us to repent,” which the poet believed would lead to the same result, that “we shall be saved.”

**Follow the leader**—Verse one mentions Joseph, while v. 2 names Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh. Joseph was remembered as the full brother of Benjamin (their parents were Jacob and Rachel), and the father of Ephraim and Manasseh, who became the largest of the tribes. When Jacob blessed his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh, he claimed that God had been his shepherd for his entire life (Gen. 48:15).

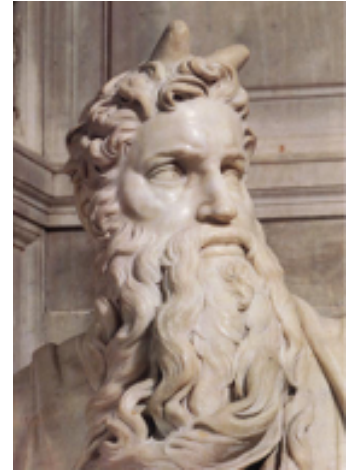
The familiar notion of God as a guiding shepherd was also present in the Exodus account (Exod. 15:13), in the prophets (Ezek. 34:11-16, 31), and in other psalms (Psalm 23, 100:3).

The image of God as being enthroned between or above the cherubim is drawn from the description of the sacred Ark of the Covenant, topped by two golden cherubim, as a locus for God’s special presence (Exod. 25:19-22, Num. 7:89, 1 Sam. 4:4, 2 Sam. 6:2).

In the Exodus narratives, the Ark of the Covenant was carried at the head of the procession as the Israelites traveled from Sinai to the land of promise, following God’s symbolic presence in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exod. 13:21-22, Num. 14:14, Neh. 9:12). And, according to Num. 2:17-24, the first three tribes in line were Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Did Moses have horns?**—Exodus 34:29, 30, and 35 speak of Moses' face after he had talked with God. The text is subject to different translations. The text is clear that the “skin of his face” did something. The verb is used only here in the Hebrew Bible in this sense, and it has the same consonants (qrn) as the noun that means “horn.” The verb should be understood to mean something like “send out rays,” in the sense of shining. Thus, most translations say “the skin of his face shone.” A more literal translation might be “the skin of his face sent out horns.” Because of this, Aquila's translation into Greek, followed by the Latin Vulgate, said that Moses' face had become “horned.” As a result of this tradition, it was common for medieval and Renaissance artists to portray Moses with horns, as we see in Michelangelo's famous statue of Moses found in the Vatican. The sense of the text, however, is that Moses' face shone, reflecting the belief that God's face also shone with glory.



The expression may also reflect the ancient Near Eastern cultural background in which various texts indicate that when gods battled each other, the winner would “shine forth” in victory. Similar images of the “divine shine” are found in Ps. 50:2 and 94:1.

**Shine, Jesus, Shine**—The psalmist's prayer for God to “make your face shine upon us” is echoed in a popular praise song by Graham Kendrick. “Shine, Jesus, shine” prays for Christ to “fill this land with the Father's glory,” bringing a Christian slant to the ancient prayer.

**Recalling the Exodus**—Marvin Tate, writing in the Word Bible Commentary, notes that four imperative verbs are used in the psalmist's petitions of vv. 2-3: *Give ear, shine forth, rouse, and come*. Tate notes: “The parallel with the deliverance from Egypt is striking. In the call of Moses, Yahweh says, “I have seen, I have heard, I am concerned, so I have come to lead” (Exod. 3:7-8).”

Cited from *Psalms 51-100*, vol. 20 of Word Biblical (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 313.

**Torrents of tears**—The term “bowlful” (NRSV) as a measure of tears to be drunk translates the word *shalish*, which means “a third.” Here it refers to a third of a larger measure, just as we think of a “quart” as a fourth of a gallon. Unfortunately, the text doesn't say which larger measure the psalmist has in mind, but the clear implication is that Israel drank tears in quantity. Whether we think of kegs, steins, jugs, or buckets, the image is clear.

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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.

### What's wrong—or right—with this prayer?

Psalms 80 is clearly a part of scripture. Does that mean it provides a perfect pattern for prayer? Keep in mind that it reflects Israel's approach to God in a particular setting, and Israel did not always get it right. We can learn from both negative and positive examples.

What's wrong with the prayer? First, the prayer approaches God as one whose primary business is bailing us out. We all are created in the image of God, who gives us both the right and the responsibility to make personal decisions for good or evil. There are times when trouble comes calling with no invitation, but often the trouble we experience is of our own making.

I have known people who didn't learn to take responsibility because their parents were always coming behind them and cleaning up their messes and taking up for them even when they were clearly at fault. When that happens, we have difficulty learning to accept responsibility for our own actions. It's all too easy to blame someone else and expect others to bail us out of trouble.

The Old Testament narratives repeatedly recount (read the Book of Judges!) how Israel was prone to rebellion against God, falling into idolatry, and generally turning their backs on the way God had taught them to live. When they got in trouble, however, they had a tendency to start acting religious. There was something wrong with that then, and there's something wrong with that now.

A second thing wrong with the prayer is that it tries to swing a deal with God. The prayer concludes with a promise that, if God will only save Israel, *then* they will be faithful and worship God as they should. Many of us have prayed that same sort of prayer. Because humans are prone to making deals, we assume that God is, too. But God loves us for who we are, not just for what we do. God wants to forgive us and cleanse us and help us start anew because we come in repentance desiring a better life—not because God needs or wants or needs whatever payoff we might promise.

There is at least one thing right about this prayer: it acknowledges that in some matters, only God can help. When it comes to a redemptive and eternal relationship with God, only God can help us with that.

We may also face other times when trouble comes, whether self-inflicted or not, and we know that only God can help, and it is appropriate to seek God's aid. It is important, however, to understand that there are no guarantees. God promises to love us and care for us and be present with us. God does not, however, promise to make life easy for us, or to always say "yes" when we ask for something.

## The Hardest Question *continued*

It is true that sometimes, when we pray, it seems that God is silent. God may seem silent because we don't know how to listen, or don't take the time. God may seem silent because the answer to our prayer is not "yes," and that's the only answer we are listening for. Sometimes, however, the heavens seem quiet because God *is* silent (compare 1 Kings 19:11-12). Sometimes silence is the most powerful way of speaking. Sometimes God's apparent absence may be what it takes to make us hungrier for God's presence.

And sometimes, the answer we need is "no." I suspect most of us can think of things we once asked for with all our hearts, but looking back, we realize that we are better off now because that prayer was not answered with a "yes."

There may be other areas that we *don't* understand and maybe in this life we never will. Why God didn't stop the cancer. Why God didn't keep loved ones safe from all physical harm. Some things we won't understand until we get a chance to stand face to face and ask God ourselves. When that time comes, some of us may have quite a list! In the meantime, though, we live by trust and faith that God does hear our prayer, and that God's presence is sure even when divine intervention is not.