

Youth 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)

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

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

SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

Faith is not all about joy. Post to your social media things that are causing you to mourn this week.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip “Mourning Death and Celebrating Life” from the movie *The Best Man Holiday*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Who are they mourning?
- 2) Why is losing someone so hard?
- 3) How do you see people providing comfort in this scene?
- 4) When have you experienced a loss? (This doesn't have to center around death.)
- 5) How does your faith sustain you through a loss?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Psalm 80.1-19. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What are the three parts of this psalm? What does each part address?
- 2) How does the psalmist address God? Why is this an appropriate address for a lament?
- 3) Why does the psalmist only pray for three of the twelve tribes of Israel?
- 4) What view of God does this psalmist have of God?
- 5) How might God restore the people of Israel?
- 6) How might the psalmist persuade God to show favor on the desolate nation of Israel?
- 7) How is God's shining face used throughout this psalm?

Information *continued*

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the “Digging Deeper” portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) What was the trouble for the people of Israel?
- 2) What current music deals with lament? How do they parallel the psalms?
- 3) This is a communal lament. How does the repetition help the community join in?
- 4) How does one “shine forth”?
- 5) How does this psalm reflect the time the people of Israel spent in Egypt?

You may also want your group to discuss “The Hardest Question” if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as “The Hardest Question”: What’s wrong—or right—with this prayer?

Transformation

Conclude your time together by introducing the Social Media Challenge for the week:

Faith is not all about joy. Post your social media things that are causing you to mourn this week.

Once you have introduced the Social Media Challenge, allow students time to share those things that are causing them stress or are hard right now.

Close with a prayer celebrating a God who walks beside us when life is hard.

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^ebaôt*), and v. 19 calls out to “Yahweh God of Hosts” (usually translated LORD God of Hosts,” *Yahweh elohîm sebaôt*). 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

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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.