

Adult Teaching Resources

September 15, 2024



Some Things Never Change

September 1, 2024—Psalm 15—Who Gets Close to God?

September 8, 2024—Psalm 125—Presuppositions and Prayer

September 15, 2024—Psalm 116 (RCL 16:1-9)—When the Answer Is Yes

September 22, 2024—Psalm 54—Same Old Same Old?

September 29, 2024—Esther 7:1-10, 9:20-22—Celebrating Vengeance?

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When the Answer Is Yes

Psalm 116

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.

Key Verse

*What shall I return to the LORD
for all his bounty to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD. (Ps. 116:12-13)*

Opening

After everyone arrives, ask each person to find a partner. When each couple is settled, ask everyone to think of a time when they were sick or injured and thought there was no healing in sight.

What illness or injury did you have?
How old were you when it happened?
How did you feel while you were incapacitated?
What did you do to try to relieve your symptoms and pain?
How long after you got sick/injured did you begin to feel better?
How long until you were totally healed?

Give each couple time to share with each other, then open the floor for volunteers to share their story before moving to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

Why does the psalmist love the Lord? (Because he has heard his voice and his supplications)

Why will the psalmist call on him as long as he lives? (Because he inclined his ear to him)

What encompassed the psalmist? (Snares of death)

What laid hold on him? (The pangs of Sheol)

What happened to the psalmist? (He suffered distress and anguish)

What did the psalmist call out? (“O Lord, I pray, save my life!”)

Who does the Lord protect? (The simple)

Why is his soul at rest? (Because the Lord has dealt bountifully with him)

What did the Lord do? (He delivered his soul from death, his eyes from tears, and his feet from stumbling.

What will the psalmist do? (He will walk before the Lord in the land of the living)

Making Connections

Our Lesson Writer tells us, “Psalm 116 has no superscription. We have no idea who wrote it, nor do we know the specific illness or issue that threatened the writer’s life.” What do you think our psalmist might have been dealing with to write such a powerful psalm? Is there anything in modern-day life that would compare to writing a psalm like this?

When you are in the middle of a health crisis, what is your relationship with God like? What is your prayer life like? Why is it that way? When the health crisis is over, what is your relationship with God like? What is your prayer life like? Why is it that way?

Have you ever promised God something if God would help you through a difficult time or season? What was happening to you? What did you promise God? What ultimately happened?

Share a time when you feel that God heard your voice. What is it about that moment that you felt God heard you? How did you feel, knowing that God heard you?

Our Lesson Writer reminds us, “The people were challenged to love God with all of their being, period. As with humans, however, love grows best in the context of a mutual and reciprocal relationship.” What do we expect from God in our relationship? Do you think God comes through on that? Why do you say that? What do you think God expects from us in our relationship? Do you think we come through on that? Why do you say that?

What is your prayer when you find yourself at the end of your rope—either from illness, injury, grief, or some other catastrophe that you can’t control. How often do you pray that prayer? Do you feel that prayer helps? Why do you say that?

What good things can you say about God from what God has done so far in your life? Have you shared these words of praise with anyone else? Say more about that experience.

When have you found deliverance with God? How did you respond to God’s actions?

So What?

Ask everyone to gather back together with their partner from the beginning of the lesson. Have everyone think back the health/injury situation they shared with their partner at the beginning of the lesson and ask them to share with their partner the answer to these questions

When you went through that experience and you felt things were so bad,

How did you reach out to God?

How did God respond to you?

What kept you faithful to God during the situation?

How did other people respond to your faithfulness?

Was there anyone who could not understand your faithfulness and questioned why you still leaned so much on God? What did that person say to you? How did you respond to that person?

What did you learn about yourself during that season?

What did you learn about God during that season?

Give each couple time to share with each other. Then, open the floor for large group conversation and discussion.

Ask your group to think of words or phrases they would use if they were writing a psalm, like the psalm from today's lesson, to explain the goodness of God.

The Challenge

This week as a part of your prayers, intentionally claim the goodness of God, even if you aren't in a crisis. What words or phrases come to mind that you can use to praise God?

Prayer

Loving God, you are so good and faithful. Thank you for hearing our prayers when we have no where else to turn. Thank you for hearing our prayers when life gets hard. Thank you for being with us and walking with us no matter what we face. Help us to never take you for granted, but instead proclaim your goodness everyday. 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.

What text?—The Revised Common Lectionary’s psalm reading for the day is Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19. The choppy selection makes the length more manageable for public reading, and avoids repetitive themes in vv. 5-11. But, those verses contain some real gems. For our study, we will consider the entire psalm.

Save my life—The Hebrews believed that God was the author of life, and therefore able to save life. Having the breath of God was symbolic of life. The creation story of Genesis 2 says that after God formed man from the dust of the ground, God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7).

In the familiar story of the “dry bones,” God instructed the prophet Ezekiel to prophesy to a valley filled with disarticulated skeletons, whereupon the bones rattled and came together and then were covered with flesh, so that they appeared as people, but not alive. God then told the prophet to call to the four winds to bring breath to corpses, and “I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude” (Ezek. 37:10).

Christians celebrate a similar belief when we sing the old hymn by Edward Hatch and Robert Jackson, “Breathe on Me, Breath of God.” The fourth verse affirms a belief that God can grant, not just physical, but eternal life:

*“Breathe on me, Breath of God, so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life of thine eternity.”*

Vows in the Old Testament—Vows to God were a serious matter: if one made a votive promise and the request was fulfilled, the petitioner was obligated to fulfill the vow. A desperate woman named Hannah vowed that if God would give her a son, she would give the child back to God (1 Sam. 1:11). As hard as it was, after Samuel was weaned, she took him to Shiloh to serve in the temple (1 Sam. 1:24-28).

A warrior named Jephthah, seeking to become Israel’s leader, vowed that if God would grant him victory in war over the Ammonites, he would sacrifice whatever came out the door of his house upon his return. He may have been hoping it would be an animal, as two-story houses in which animals were kept on the ground floor were common in those days. Unfortunately, it was Jephthah’s only daughter who came out to greet him, singing and dancing for joy at his victory. Jephthah immediately regretted his rash vow, but felt compelled to fulfill it, even at the cost of his daughter’s life (Judg. 11:30-40).

While making their way through the wilderness, the people of Israel vowed that if God would give them victory over the Canaanite king of Arad, they would destroy all the plunder as a way of giving it to God rather than keeping it for themselves (Num. 21:1-3).

Digging Deeper *continued*

Votive promises did not have to be so severe. Jacob vowed that if God would protect and provide for him, he would worship and pay tithes to Yahweh (Gen. 28:10-22). Absalom claimed to have vowed that if God would allow him to return to Jerusalem from his exile in Geshur, he would go to Hebron and worship (2 Sam. 15:1-8). Later, some people made vows to become Nazirites for a specified period (Numbers 6).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Why did the psalmists vow praise more often than sacrifice?

As noted in the lesson, psalmists who offered vows were more likely to promise public praise to God rather than specific deeds, gifts, or sacrifices. For example, in Ps. 22:21-22 (my translation) we read:

*Save my life from the sword,
My only one from the claws of the dog;
Save me from the mouth of the lion,
and from the horns of the wild ox, answer me!
(Then) I will tell of your name to my brethren,
in the midst of the assembly I will praise you.”*

Psalm 69:29-30 has a similar theme to that of Psalm 116:

*But I am afflicted and in great pain,
Let your salvation, O God, set me on high!
(then) I will praise the name of God with song,
and I will magnify him with thanksgiving. (my translation)*

Similar examples can be found in Ps. 61:7-8, 69:29-30, 109:29-30, and others. Sacrifices are sometimes still associated with the payment of vows, as in Psalms 66 and 116, but increasingly, the psalmists come to believe that God valued praise over sacrifice or other deeds. Why?

The answer may well lie in context. During the exile, the Hebrews had no temple or ability to offer sacrifices, but they could still offer praise to God. The psalmists were convinced that public praise was pleasing to God. In a practical sense, if God did not deliver petitioners from life-threatening situations, they would not be alive and available to fulfill the promise, for “the dead do not praise Yahweh” (Ps. 115:17a). If human praise is truly valued, then it would be to God’s advantage to save those stricken ones who promise to praise God if they live.

For more, see my book, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 147 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 150-161; or an earlier article, “Conditional Vows in the Psalms of Lament: A New Approach to an Old Problem,” in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Psalms and Wisdom in Honor of Roland E. Murphy*, O. Carm., ed. Ken Hoglund, et. al. (Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1987), 77-94.