



CELL

PSALMS

These Cell Outlines are written by Youth and Children's Ministries. They are available every month from our website. For more information and other Cell resources, visit salvationarmy.org.uk/children-and-youth-resources

OVERVIEW

This month we continue our series exploring the Psalms. This theme will take us through to Christmas so there will be plenty of time to dig deep into the poetry of the Old Testament.

SESSION ONE: MIXED FEELINGS

THE PSALMS ARE FULL OF MIXED FEELINGS!

The authors of this ancient poetry express their joy, fear, anger, disgust and sadness throughout the 150 psalms. Today we'll explore the importance of bringing our mixed feelings to God and how our emotional maturity is directly linked to our spiritual maturity. We'll do all this with the help of the animated characters from the movie *Inside Out*.

SESSION TWO: HOW LONG?

LINKED TO INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL – TUESDAY 11 OCTOBER

To lament is to bring our complaints, pain and sorrow to God. The Psalms are full of faithful followers of God sharing their worries and concerns with their Creator and refusing to sugar-coat their frustration. As we consider the power of these psalms within our worship today, we will use Psalm 13 to help us recognise and reflect on the International Day of the Girl.

SESSION THREE: THAT MAKES ME SO ANGRY!

LINKED TO ANTI-SLAVERY DAY – TUESDAY 18 OCTOBER

As Christians it can be difficult to know what we should do with our feelings of anger. Surely we should be able to show some self-control and only think loving thoughts to those around us? In today's session we will explore psalms that consider feelings of anger and discuss their place in the book of Psalms. These expressions of anger will be linked to Anti-slavery Day where the young people will have an opportunity to discuss their anger and frustration related to the injustice faced by victims of modern-day slavery.

SESSION FOUR: COMMUNAL HOPE

In today's session we are focusing on Psalm 46. This psalm brings together believers in times of crisis, and reminds them of the hope found in God. Despite the challenging situations around us, Psalm 46 focuses on God as our refuge and strength. It is in the context of hope that we will explore the different ways The Salvation Army is supporting development projects across the globe.

SESSION FIVE: PRAISE YOU LIKE I SHOULD!

Today's session is all about praising God. Psalm 103 will accompany us on our journey of praise and remind us of the focus of that praise. In this session the group will get an opportunity to organise a praise event for a gloomy day and share in praise and worship together.

Any text in italics represents notes for the leader. It gives more context around the Scripture/activity. You may choose to share verbatim, summarise or not share at all.

MIXED FEELINGS

The Psalms are full of mixed feelings!

The authors of this ancient poetry express their joy, fear, anger, disgust and sadness throughout the 150 psalms. Today we'll explore the importance of bringing our mixed feelings to God and how our emotional maturity is directly linked to our spiritual maturity. We'll do all this with the help of the animated characters from the movie *Inside Out*.

WELCOME

The animated film *Inside Out* was released in 2015 and aimed to show the range of emotions we all carry within us. It gave us an insight into how the different emotions worked together to manage the everyday lives of each character.

Print out, or show, a picture of the main characters of 'Inside Out' (without the names included) and ask the group to identify the emotions they represent.

INSIDE OUT POSTER

https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Inside_Out?file=Inside-Out-60.png





The main characters are:

- Joy
- Sadness
- Disgust
- Fear
- Anger

At this time, which character do you identify with the most? Explain why.

Watch the clip showing what happened when two of the main emotions, Sadness and Joy, were missing in action.

 **Pixar *Inside Out* Family Dinner Scene (3 min 20 secs)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAL0nwCo0h8>

-  In what ways do you relate to this scene?
-  Have you ever been in a similar situation?
-  What leads to this kind of emotional miscommunication?
-  Is there another emotion-based character that you would add to *Inside Out*? What would it be and what would it look like?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

In this version of the scene the internal emotions of the characters have been removed.

 ***Inside Out* Dinner Scene, But Without Emotions (1 min 2 secs)**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ii_mmm0qUNOO

We can never truly know what emotions are whirring around in the minds of the people we encounter on a daily basis.

Having watched both versions, how does it impact your perception of the conversations you have with the people you see every day?



WORD

Today we're going to explore how emotions are conveyed through the Psalms. The psalmists had no issue sharing exactly how they felt and regularly brought their feelings of joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust to God. As we dive into the Psalms we're going to discover how these emotions, and many more, are communicated.

Give each member of the group the 'Mixed Feelings' handout. On the handout there are spaces to record words and phrases, or references for sections of the psalm where particular emotions are expressed. They can jot their findings next to the joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust headings. In the box at the bottom of the sheet there are a number of psalms to get them started. As with the genres we covered last month, there is not always a clear-cut answer to what the psalm is trying to express, so the group can discuss that as they read the Scripture.

Once the group have had sufficient time, spend time sharing the words, phrases and Scripture references they have noted for each emotion.

Throughout the Psalms we see a whole range of emotions communicated.

-  Which of the words and phrases stood out for you today?
-  What do the Psalms teach us about God's relationship with us?

God provides us with a safe place where we can bring our deepest fears and moments of joy.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY







- * Which, if any, of the verses you discovered today have brought you comfort? Explain why that is the case.
- * Which verses do you think would be useful to commit to memory or display on your phone?
- * Take a moment to find or create a version of your verse to refer back to later.

WITNESS

Watch the clip and then discuss the questions together.

 **How Christians Respond to Emotions – Dr Josh and Christi Straub**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LC23Q12EoE8>

DISCUSS

-  In what ways do you agree or disagree with Dr Straub when he says that we sometimes have difficulty dealing with emotions in Christian circles?
-  Where is the fine line between showing self-control and suppressing our emotions?
-  In what way do you manage your emotions differently depending on the situation you are in and the people you are around? Does this impact your mental health either positively or negatively?
-  In what ways do you agree/disagree with this quote from the clip: 'You can not be spiritually mature, while remaining emotionally immature'?
-  Taking our emotions to God is a vital part of our emotional and spiritual growth. How do you think our emotional maturity impacts the way others see our Christian faith? Do you think the two are linked at all?
-  Do we sometimes fall into the trap of presenting the best version of ourselves to God and to others? How do the Psalms help us to be authentic about the way we are feeling?

David (one of the writers of the Psalms) was a flawed human being who experienced a whole range of emotions, and yet the people knew that despite all his mistakes he was deeply loved by God. We don't have to have it all together when we are in God's presence or the presence of others. God wants us to live authentic lives, acknowledging our emotions and bringing our cares and concerns to him.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

What is your response to the following quote?

“ ‘What I think we as the church lack, though, is a place to talk about how things really are right now. In our desire to be an inspiration to one another we often veil what is true, because what is true is not always inspirational. It’s not easy to watch or personally experience a marriage on the verge of divorce, or a child battling cancer, or a betrayal of the worst kind, or dreams lost in the dust, or overwhelming feelings of despair or emptiness. But these things are real. And hurting believers whose lives are in tatters need real help. If we were able to put aside our need for approval long enough to be authentic, then, surely, we would be living as the church.’

— SHEILA WALSH, *LOVED BACK TO LIFE: HOW I FOUND THE COURAGE TO LIVE FREE*

As we meet together as a church, see friends for coffee or chat with complete strangers, we encounter a range of emotions hidden within each person. So often we are focused on our own emotional wellbeing. There’s nothing wrong with that, but we need to take a moment to recognise that each one of us carries feelings of joy, sadness, anger, fear and disgust amongst other emotions.

- * What would it look like if you, as a group, committed to bringing the authentic version of yourself to each conversation that you have together?
- * What boundaries and trust would need to be in place for that to happen?

WORSHIP

For our time of worship there will be an opportunity for you to express your emotions to God. Remember that God can handle your feelings of joy, sadness, fear, anger and disgust.

Give a copy of the ‘Expressing Mixed Feelings’ handout to each member of the group (this could be printed on the back of the ‘Mixed Feelings’ handout from earlier). Give the group time to share their feelings with God. This could take the form of a psalm, a drawing, or a letter. The important thing is that they are authentic as God wants to hear their mixed feelings.

When they have had time to express their feelings pray with the group.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Spend time reflecting on all you have discovered during this session.

What have you learned from the psalms about expressing your mixed feelings to God?

 **‘From the Inside Out’ - Lyrics Video, Hillsong Worship (5 min 50 secs)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ke37L7lpBs>

MIXED FEELINGS

Joy

Fear

Sadness

Disgust

Anger

4, 100, 37, 55, 42, 35, 126, 16, 55, 142, 27, 34, 91, 59, 56

HOW LONG?

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL – TUESDAY 11 OCTOBER

To lament is to bring our complaints, pain and sorrow to God. The Psalms are full of faithful followers of God sharing their worries and concerns with their Creator and refusing to sugar-coat their frustration. As we consider the power of these psalms within our worship today, we will use Psalm 13 to help us recognise and reflect on the International Day of the Girl.

WELCOME

HOW LONG – GURNING CHALLENGE

You are about to watch a clip of the World Record Holder for the ‘longest duration gurning with the lower lip over the nostrils!’ The current World Record Holder is Shuquan Tang from China.

Once you have seen the opening part of the clip, and grasped exactly what you are about to witness, your group leader will pause the clip and you can each predict how long Shuquan will hold on for!

 **Longest time gurning - Guinness World Records (2 mins)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tk2KwaMtDDY>

Once each group member has made their prediction, then play the rest of the clip and declare the winner. You may even want to give out a prize!

Today’s session addresses the complex issue of lament and how it should be part of Christian worship. The lighthearted starter should hopefully bring some laughter to the group before they tackle a challenging topic.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Challenge the group to a gurning competition. See who can hold their lower lip over their nostrils (or as close as they can) for the longest.

WORD

Our psalm for today was written during David’s challenging years in exile, as King Saul hunted him down in the wilderness. Years had passed since David was anointed to be the future king, and here he was running for his life and watching Saul get away with appalling behaviour. None of it seemed fair! David felt forgotten by God and was desperate for his situation to change.

Read Psalm 13 together or listen to David Suchet’s interpretation of the psalm.

 **David Suchet NIV Bible 0491 Psalm 13 (58 secs)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRoLLOLFEJ0>

Psalm 13 (NIV)

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

¹ How long, Lord? Will you forget me for ever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?
³ Look on me and answer, Lord my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,

⁴ and my enemy will say, ‘I have overcome
him,’
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
⁶ I will sing the Lord’s praise,
for he has been good to me.






What are the emotions David is trying to convey in this psalm? In what ways do you relate to the way he is feeling?

Psalm 13 is a psalm of lament. When we lament, we either complain, or express passionate grief or sorrow to God. Let's look at David's complaints in more detail, this time focusing on *The Message* paraphrase.

PSALM 13: THE MESSAGE PARAPHRASE

¹⁻² **Long enough, God –
you've ignored me long enough.
I've looked at the back of your head
long enough. Long enough
I've carried this ton of trouble,
lived with a stomach full of pain.
Long enough my arrogant enemies
have looked down their noses at me.
³⁻⁴ Take a good look at me, God, my God;**

**I want to look life in the eye,
So no enemy can get the best of me
or laugh when I fall on my face.
⁵⁻⁶ I've thrown myself headlong into your
arms –
I'm celebrating your rescue.
I'm singing at the top of my lungs,
I'm so full of answered prayers.**

-  What do you think David meant when he shared that he'd looked at the back of God's head for long enough? Can you relate to his feelings? If so, how?
-  What does it feel like to carry a 'ton of trouble'?
-  How is David's current emotional state impacting the way he views the world and other people?
-  Justifiably, David is paranoid about his enemies. How does he communicate that to God?
-  At what point in the psalm does David show a different side to his faith?

David isn't trying to tie everything up in a neat bow. He is acknowledging that despite his feelings of despair and abandonment, he knows the reality that God is with him. His prayer of lament turns to a prayer of praise.

How often, if ever, do you lament in your prayer times?

If you're OK to share, then what kinds of things do you lament about?

Watch the clip that addresses why psalms of lament are so important.

 **Justin Welby on prayers of lament:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UduqyYy2954>

Do you think we're good at lamenting in the modern-day Church? (Notice that the question says lamenting, which is directed to God, rather than complaining!)

How can we use the Psalms to teach us more about sharing our pain with God?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Watch the clip and discuss the difference between lament and grumbling.

How can we shift our grumbling to prayers of lament?

 **The Difference Between Lament and Grumbling (6 min 1 secs)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Glzyt6teHwI>

WITNESS

On Tuesday 11 October people across the world will be celebrating (will have celebrated) the International Day of the Girl. This day was established by the United Nations in 2012 and aims to highlight the challenges that girls face throughout the world. Today we will be using Psalm 13 as our inspiration to pray for the situation faced by many girls around the world and maybe even find a way to get involved and help out.

First we need to spend time exploring the issues faced by girls and discover ways to support them in prayer and in action.

This activity provides a rare opportunity for the young people to use their phones during the session! Give the group time to explore a range of resources and gather ideas about the types of issues girls are currently facing. Links are provided below, with the hope that additional resources will have been added since this session was written.

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/girl-child-day>

<https://www.actionaid.org.uk/get-involved/days-we-celebrate/international-day-of-the-girl>

<https://www.unicef.org/gender-equality/international-day-girl-2022>

Discuss what the group have discovered and then create your own version of Psalm 13 using the handout, either as a group or individually, linked to the themes discovered in your research.

When the psalm is completed, read it together as a group.

If there are any creative members of the group, they may want to take a copy of the words and turn it into a piece of artwork or, like the psalmist, commit the words to music.

On occasion we may feel that God has forgotten the cries of girls facing discrimination and inequality today, but this is not the case. He loves every person in his creation deeply – man, woman, boy or girl. As followers of Christ we have a part to play in advocating for girls across the world through our prayers **and** our actions. Hopefully today has prompted you to think about how you can make a difference to the girls in your life.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

- * We have explored the issues facing young girls across the world and spent time praying for them, but what practical steps can we take to support the girls in our own families, communities, churches and school?
- * What kind of issues do you think they face?
- * In what ways can you provide practical support and guidance to the girls in your life?

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:

If there is time, you may want to watch the following clip and discuss the role that men and boys play in supporting the women and girls in their lives.

 **'I Hope We Can Talk' | Gareth Southgate talks online sexist hate | EE Hope United (2 min 46 secs)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20pBKc7ptLs>



WORSHIP

The aim of the worship activity/meeting today is to prepare a short time of collective worship focusing on lament. The reasoning and ideas for lament are found in Matt Chandler's clip 'The Loss of Lament'. The clip explains why lament is so important for the Church as a whole and gives ideas about how we can lament together.

 **The Loss of Lament (2 min 41 secs)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZU10NdN4CA>

This activity may be challenging as, in my experience, not many churches have specific worship times dedicated to lament. It may be that the young people have never attended a worship service where the idea of lament has even been acknowledged. This is an opportunity to learn, so the intention is not necessarily for them to use this worship activity; it is more about them planning and discussing the various considerations that need to be made for this type of worship.

The group could consider the following:

-  What Scripture verses could you use?
-  What song choices would be appropriate?

- 🗨️ What may they need to consider when preparing the worship area?
- 🗨️ How will they respond to the varying emotions that will invariably surface during this activity/meeting?
- 🗨️ How will they respond to those who feel uncomfortable with the idea of an activity/meeting dedicated to lament?
- 🗨️ If they tried out this worship activity/meeting at their own church, how do they think people would respond?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Ask the group to spend time reflecting on all they have discovered about the importance of lamenting. When the song is finished, ask them to share one thing they have discovered in today's session.

- ▶️ **Be Amplified & Anaysha Figueroa-Cooper – 'Not Forgotten' | Lyric Video (4 min 44 secs)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Vmotx50K4A>

ADAPTATION OF PSALM 13 FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL

How long, Lord? Will you forget them for ever?

How long will...

How long will...

How long will...

Look on me and answer, Lord my God.

Listen to...

See the...

Respond to...

**But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.**

**I will sing the Lord's praise,
for he has been good to me.**

THAT MAKES ME SO ANGRY! – PSALMS OF IMPRECAATION

LINKED TO ANTI-SLAVERY DAY – TUESDAY 18 OCTOBER 2022






As Christians it can be difficult to know what we should do with our feelings of anger. Surely we should be able to show some self-control and only think loving thoughts to those around us? In today's session we will explore psalms that consider feelings of anger and discuss their place in the book of Psalms. These expressions of anger will be linked to Anti-slavery Day where the young people will have an opportunity to discuss their anger and frustration related to the injustice faced by victims of modern-day slavery.

WELCOME

In our first session this month we looked at the main characters from the Pixar film Inside Out and the emotions they represented. There are two characters in the film that would fully embrace today's psalms. Watch the clip to find out more.

 **'Disgust & Anger' Clip – Inside Out (59 secs)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1oXx4delIY>



-  What are you disgusted by? What makes you pull the face Riley did when presented with the broccoli?
-  How do you react when you are disgusted by something? Do you let everyone know or do you try to cover it up?
-  What makes you really angry, both for yourself and for the wider world?
-  How do you react when you are angry?
-  Does your anger prompt you to do something positive or negative?

Today we will be exploring psalms that express feelings of disgust and anger. As you read them, you may want to keep in mind your own reactions when you feel disgusted or angry.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Have a look at the following article about the 'Anger Van'.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-54250282>

-  Do you think this is a productive way to express anger? If not, why not?
-  Would you like to have a go in the 'Anger Van'? Explain why / why not.

WORD

Give the group a copy of Psalm 139 and read through the psalm together or take a few verses each.

Psalm 139 (NIV)

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

- ¹ You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.**
- ² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.**
- ³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.**

- ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
- ⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
- ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
- ¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,'
- ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.
- ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand –
when I awake, I am still with you.
- ¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
- ²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
- ²² I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

- * What is your favourite verse or section of this psalm? Why does it stand out for you?
- * Is there a particular verse that you recognise the most?
- * Imagine the scene. You have been asked to read this psalm at the dedication of a beautiful newborn baby. Before the meeting starts, the officer pulls you aside for a little chat and asks you to skip over a couple of verses from Psalm 139. Which verses do you think they are?

 Read Psalm 139:19-22.

- ¹⁹ **If only you, God, would slay the wicked!
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!**
- ²⁰ **They speak of you with evil intent;
your adversaries misuse your name.**
- ²¹ **Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?**
- ²² **I have nothing but hatred for them;
I count them my enemies.**

— PSALM 139: 19-21 (NIV)

There are many examples of these kinds of outbursts in the Psalms. Have a look at a few more examples and discuss your response to finding these kinds of words in the Bible.



Psalm 10:15; Psalm 18:40-42; Psalm 28:4; Psalm 137:8-9; Psalm 141:10.

The passages you have just read are examples of what are called 'psalms of imprecation'. An imprecation is a curse calling for the destruction of someone or something. Verses like 'I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made' (Psalm 139:14) make it on to T-shirts and mugs, but you may have never heard verses 19-21 found in the same psalm. It's also unlikely that you've heard many sermons about these kinds of psalms as they are often difficult to stomach.

If you are appalled by finding such wicked, vengeful words in the Bible, then you are not alone. CS Lewis, author of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, agreed with you. In his book *Reflections on the Psalms* he referred to the psalms of imprecation as 'devillish'. Despite this, CS Lewis was still unsure what to do with these sections of Scripture.

“At the outset I felt sure, and I feel sure still, that we must not try to explain them away or to yield one moment to the idea that, because it comes in the Bible, all this vindictive hatred must somehow be good and pious. We must face both facts squarely. The hatred is there – festering, gloating, undisguised – and also we should be wicked if we in any way condoned or approved it, or (worse still) used it to justify similar passions in ourselves.”

— CS LEWIS, *REFLECTIONS ON THE PSALMS*.

-  Do you agree with CS Lewis? Explain why / why not.
-  Do you think there is any occasion where it is OK for a modern-day Christian to pray the psalms of imprecation? Explain your answer and the impact praying these kinds of prayers could have.

Now let's consider a different perspective on the psalms of imprecation. In this clip theologian Walter Brueggemann compares the praying of imprecatory prayers, or vengeance psalms as they are referred to in the clip, to a situation you may have experienced with your family members. In the clip, Brueggemann focuses on Psalm 58:

 **Walter Brueggemann Psalms of Vengeance (5 min 7 secs)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDfzzJD8lpI>

Have Brueggemann's thoughts on the imprecatory psalms changed your perspective at all?

As Christians we often carry guilt when we feel anger towards someone or a situation. Brueggemann shared this sentiment when he said:

'Christians ought not to use these psalms as Christians ought not to feel this way.'

But what if you feel that way?

The clip outlined three main ways of dealing with our anger:

1. Act it out.
2. Deny it.
3. Give it over to God.

In what way do the psalms of imprecation give us a way to give our anger and frustration over to God?

Brueggemann compared this kind of psalm to two children angrily shouting at their parents about a fall out. Just like a responsible parent, God hears our cries of anger and asks us to leave it with him to deal with.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Listen to Psalm 139 and place the verses of imprecation in the context of the rest of the psalm.

▶ Psalm 139 (30 Days in the Psalms with Kristyn Getty) (3 min 47 secs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWDmOKbS44Y>

What does the inclusion of verses like this teach us about David's relationship with God?

WITNESS

There are many issues facing people in the world today that make us understandably angry. 18 October is Anti-slavery Day where efforts to extinguish human trafficking are highlighted and education is provided to help people identify and support modern-day slaves in their community.

The main purpose of this activity is to engage with Anti-slavery Day and consider practical ways that we can support the victims of human trafficking in our society. At the time of writing, the resources for Anti-slavery Day are currently not available, but each year there is a different focus. Choose and discuss clips and activities that are appropriate to your group to raise awareness of those facing modern-day slavery.

The link to the website and anti-slavery section of The Salvation Army's Youtube channel are provided below.

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/modern-slavery>

▶ Work with Modern Slavery – Salvation Army Youtube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7L42bBlnTlNFbar79DS9Vhx3lXsJBxLX>

As we see the evil in this world around us and the way that people are willing to exploit others for money, it often raises feelings of anger. You may still feel that the imprecatory psalms are outdated and full of vengeance, or, after considering the plight of those trapped in modern-day slavery, you may have changed your perspective. As you reflect on what you have discovered today, how would you now answer the question you were asked at the start of the session?

Do you think there is any occasion where it is OK for a modern-day Christian to pray the psalms of imprecation?

WORSHIP

We have addressed some challenging issues in today's session and faced the reality that there is much evil in the world. God can take our anger and frustration about the injustice we and others experience. He wants us to give it over to him rather than act it out, or deny our feelings.

Return to Psalm 139.

What reassurances do we find that remind us that God is with those who suffer the injustice of modern-day slavery?

What reassurances do we find that remind us that God is with us when we suffer injustice?

Share the verses together, and then pray together remembering that God can handle your frustration – in fact, he wants you to hand it over.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Spend time reflecting on Psalm 139 as you listen to the following song:

▶ 'Psalm 139 (Far too Wonderful)' – Shane and Shane (5 min 7 secs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIWMXiT8yrs>

COMMUNAL HOPE

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WEEK – 24–30 OCTOBER

In today's session we are focusing on Psalm 46. This psalm brings together believers in times of crisis, and reminds them of the hope found in God. Despite the challenging situations around us, Psalm 46 focuses on God as our refuge and strength. It is in the context of hope that we will explore the different ways The Salvation Army is supporting development projects across the globe.

WELCOME

This week we are focusing on International Development Week, so to get the session started we're going to test your geography knowledge.

Each member of the group will need a pen and paper. The quiz has three levels with different points awarded for each level. Follow the quiz on the clip and then add up the scores to see who is the geography genius of the group.

 **Guess The Country on The Map (Part 2) | Geography Quiz Challenge**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaVojzLVGu0>

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Which country would you most/least like to visit from those mentioned in the clip?

Are there any countries that are facing challenges at the moment? Which ones are they and how can we support them practically and in prayer?

WORD

At least one verse, or line, in Psalm 46 will be very familiar to you. Psalm 46 brings believers together to sing about the confidence and trust they have in God. It speaks of God's strength and the way he is a fortress when we feel afraid.

What kinds of songs do we use in communal worship that have a similar theme?

As we take part in International Development Week it's interesting to know that Psalm 46 was probably written during a time of emergency or crisis. The people gathered to share the truth of God's faithfulness, despite their circumstances.

Read Psalm 46 and ask the group to look out for the most familiar line.

Psalm 46 (NIV)

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to alamoth. A song.

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.**
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,**
- ³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.**
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.**
- ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.**
- ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.**

⁷**The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.**
⁸**Come and see what the Lord has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.**
⁹**He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.**
¹⁰**He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.'**
¹¹**The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.**

Which verse or line have you heard quoted the most?

Why do you think people are drawn to the line 'Be still, and know that I am God'? What reassurance does it bring?

As we read the rest of the psalm it is important to place these well-known words in the context of everything that has been said about God so far.

Read verses 1-9 and discuss what we discover about God in these verses.

God is:

- * ever-present
- * within the city
- * there to help
- * in control
- * Almighty
- * our fortress
- * all-powerful.

It is in this context that God says, 'Be still.'

There are many T-shirts and mugs also printed with the phrase 'God is within her, she will not fall'. As you look at the context of the psalm, what does the 'she' refer to? Is it a person or a place?

The 'she' is the city of God, Jerusalem, the earthly capital of God's kingdom. Again, these verses reassure us that God is with his people, no matter what we face.

Grab your Bible and skim-read through Psalms 42-44. What genre would you place them in?

Following these psalms of lament we have Psalm 45 focusing on God as sovereign over all the earth and then Psalm 46 which starts with the words:

**'God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.'**
 — PSALM 46:1 (NIV)

Why do you think the people followed a time of lament with a song of praise?

When we see the state of the world, from natural disasters to man's mistreatment of man, we can often feel overwhelmed by our surroundings. The authors of the Old Testament felt the same way and wrote beautiful poetry to express their fear and sorrow. They gathered together to share their anxiety with God and sang songs of praise to remind them of God's faithfulness.

We still face many challenges in our world today. What does this psalm teach us about gathering together to praise regardless of the circumstances we are facing?

Earlier we discussed potential songs that could be used to reflect the sentiments of Psalm 46. What song would you choose if you had gathered your church together for a time of praise during a time of crisis?

WITNESS

In today's session we are recognising International Development Week.

What do you think the term 'International Development' means?

Watch the clip to find out more.

 **What does International Development mean to you? (1 min 55 secs)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hR-wKAshqsg>

As with previous sessions linked to specific awareness weeks, the current material for this year is not available at the time of writing. The activity below provides links for The Salvation Army's International Development website. Encourage the group to explore a particular issue currently being addressed by the International Development Team and ask them to discuss the questions below.

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/international-development>

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/international-development-week>

<https://www.youtube.com/c/SAIDUK>

- * What issue are you exploring?
- * What kind of challenges are the people involved in this situation experiencing?
- * What is The Salvation Army doing to help?
- * Our faith leads us to action, so is there any practical way for you to get involved in this project? If not, how else could you help?
- * What reassurance would Psalm 46 give to the people involved in this situation? Which verses are most applicable to what they are facing?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

In answer to the question 'What does International Development mean to you?' one of the respondents replied with one word. What was it?

'Hope'.

The word hope is the central theme of Psalm 46. Even though we face challenges in our own communities and across the world, God is our hope, our refuge and our strength.

How could you share the themes of this psalm with others when they are feeling anxious about the state of the world?

WORSHIP

As our session draws to a close we are returning to the most popular line of Psalm 46,

'Be still and know that I am God.'

Watch the clip to find out more about this well-known verse.

 **What does it mean to be still and know that I am God? (5 min 7 secs)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dp05iPenMCM>

- 🗨️ How does the information in this clip change your understanding of Psalm 46:10?
- 🗨️ The clip mentions that this verse is not just about sitting quietly in God's presence; it is about stopping the 'frantic activity' of our lives.
- 🗨️ What does that look like for you?
- 🗨️ What frantic activity do you need to stop to be present with our ever-present God?
- 🗨️ What needs to change in your daily schedule to reduce the activity and increase the stillness so that you can rest in the presence of God?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Spend time reflecting on the words of Psalm 46 as you listen to the Scripture Lullaby.

- 📺 **'Be Still and Know' from Scripture Lullabies (4 min 19 secs)**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKWGSzxtcZA>


PRAISE YOU LIKE I SHOULD!

Today's session is all about praising God. Psalm 103 will accompany us on our journey of praise and remind us of the focus of that praise. In this session the group will get an opportunity to organise a praise event for a gloomy day and share in praise and worship together.

WELCOME

Back in the 1990s a music video went the 1990s equivalent of viral when it showed a fictional dance troupe surprising onlookers outside a Los Angeles theatre. The song was 'Praise You' by Fat Boy Slim. The video was filmed by handheld cameras and captured the genuine reactions of the crowd as they watched the Torrance Community Dance Group perform.

Watch the music video together and discuss how you would have felt as an onlooker that day.

 **Fatboy Slim – 'Praise You' (Official Video) (3 min 49 secs)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruAi4VBoBSM>

Which dance move from the clip are you most likely to incorporate into your repertoire?

The song and music video were used frequently at Christian youth events. Why do you think this song resonated with Christians so much?

Today our session is filled with praise, and hopefully you will feel compelled to burst into dance at some point during the session. If not, we'll just focus on Psalm 103 instead!

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Can you think of any other secular songs that are regularly used in a sacred setting? If so, what are they?

Are there Christian songs that have broken into the secular charts?

Examples:

'Shackles' – Mary Mary

'You Say' - Lauren Daigle

WORD

When it comes to your faith, are you more of a complainer or a praiser?

Within our churches we can sometimes focus a little too much on ourselves, when our praise is meant to be directed toward God.

Watch the clip 'Wrong Worship' together demonstrating some of the areas where we fall short in our praise of God.

 **Wrong Worship (3 min 20 secs)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJp98hoqy5I>

What kind of behaviours were highlighted in this clip? Do you recognise any of them in your own faith or within your church?

The aim of watching this clip is not to be judgemental, but to highlight that we often make praise and worship about us rather than about God. Many heated discussions have come about from disagreements about what our praise and worship should look and sound like in our denomination. The clip highlights that God is the one worthy of our praise and should be the only consideration when we spend time praising together.

Our psalm for today reiterates this idea and reminds us as followers of God to come to him with total focus and a heart full of praise.

 Read Psalm 103 together. Give each member of the group a copy.

Psalm 103 (NIV)

Of David.

- ¹ Praise the Lord, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- ² Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits –
- ³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
- ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
- ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- ⁶ The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.
- ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:
- ⁸ the Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
- ⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbour his anger for ever;
- ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
- ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
- ¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
- ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
- ¹⁵ The life of mortals is like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the field;
- ¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.
- ¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children –
- ¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.
- ¹⁹ The Lord has established his throne in heaven,
and his kingdom rules over all.
- ²⁰ Praise the Lord, you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
who obey his word.
- ²¹ Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts,
you his servants who do his will.
- ²² Praise the Lord, all his works
everywhere in his dominion.

Praise the Lord, my soul.

— PSALM 103 (NIV)

Give each member of the group a piece of paper and provide felt-tips for them to use. Using words and phrases from the psalm ask them to create a praise picture, spider diagram or mind map. It is up to them how they represent the psalm, but the aim is to draw out the characteristics of God and learn how to praise from the psalmist David. This activity should prompt discussions about the content of the psalm encouraging the group to discuss its meaning.

When the group have had enough time, ask them to share their creations. Their praise creations will be helpful for inspiration during the Witness section of the session.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

What is your response to the following quote?

“‘We would worry less if we praised more. Thanksgiving is the enemy of discontent and dissatisfaction.’

— HARRY IRONSIDE

WITNESS

Psalm 103 reminds us of the importance of praising God both individually and together as a church. Your challenge today is to plan a praise event for your church.

Research suggests that the third Monday of January is meant to be the saddest day of the year when people struggle the most to feel joyful. Blue Monday, as it's known, falls on Monday 16 January in 2023. You may decide to plan your praise event on this day at your church to give it a different focus. It is important to remember that praising God isn't about making us feel better on a gloomy day, but more about shifting the focus away from ourselves and praising the God we love. People may not feel like praising on a cold Monday night in January, but that's kind of the point. God deserves our praise no matter how we are feeling, and that praise can take a number of different forms. As you plan your praise event together, be creative, do something different and give God all the praise.

Spend time in prayer before you start planning together.

This event will be very specific to your congregation and community. You may want to guide the group to consider who they need to contact about the event, put a timeline in place, allocate tasks to different group members and keep reminding them of the focus of the event. The aim is to praise God even on a gloomy day when we might not feel like it.

WORSHIP

Share a time of praise and worship together as a group using Shane and Shane's version of Psalm 103. You may need to listen to the song more than once, but spend time learning the song and praising God together.

You may also want to use this song at your praise event.

▶ **'Sing Hallelujah (Psalm 103)' | Kingdom Kids feat. Shane & Shane (3 min 33 secs)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsZaa3_uGug

Today we have shared together in sung praise.

In what ways can you incorporate praise to God into your everyday life?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Read Psalm 103 from *The Message* paraphrase to bring your time of praise to a close.

¹⁻² O my soul, bless God.
From head to toe, I'll bless his holy name!
O my soul, bless God,
don't forget a single blessing!

³⁻⁵ He forgives your sins – every one.
He heals your diseases – every one.
He redeems you from hell – saves your life!
He crowns you with love and mercy – a paradise crown.
He wraps you in goodness – beauty eternal.
He renews your youth – you're always young in his presence.

⁶⁻¹⁸ God makes everything come out right;
he puts victims back on their feet.
He showed Moses how he went about his work,
opened up his plans to all Israel.
God is sheer mercy and grace;
not easily angered, he's rich in love.
He doesn't endlessly nag and scold,
nor hold grudges forever.
He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve,
nor pay us back in full for our wrongs.
As high as heaven is over the earth,
so strong is his love to those who fear him.
And as far as sunrise is from sunset,
he has separated us from our sins.
As parents feel for their children,
God feels for those who fear him.
He knows us inside and out,
keeps in mind that we're made of mud.
Men and women don't live very long;
like wildflowers they spring up and blossom,
But a storm snuffs them out just as quickly,
leaving nothing to show they were here.
God's love, though, is ever and always,
eternally present to all who fear him,
Making everything right for them and their children
as they follow his Covenant ways
and remember to do whatever he said.

¹⁹⁻²² God has set his throne in heaven;
he rules over us all. He's the King!
So bless God, you angels,
ready and able to fly at his bidding,
quick to hear and do what he says.
Bless God, all you armies of angels,
alert to respond to whatever he wills.
Bless God, all creatures, wherever you are –
everything and everyone made by God.
And you, O my soul, bless God!

— PSALM 103 (MSG)