

## Exploring the Story in: Psalm 119:73-80

### *The Discipline of Psalms*

When I was learning how to play the cello, I was often frustrated by the amount of time spent on scales and etudes. In an hour of practice time, I spent at least thirty minutes working meticulously on technique. In an hour of lesson time, I was lucky to get ten minutes to play what I considered the actual 'music' I was working on at the time. Of course, my teacher knew what I was reluctant to admit: in order to make music, you first need to develop discipline.

Lent is a time in our Christian calendar set aside for discipline. For me, the Psalms offer an opportunity for practice and technique-building in my prayer life. During this week and throughout Lent, I invite you to join me in praying our Psalms much the way a musician might practice scales. Try praying them at different tempos. Try praying them at different volumes. Try praying them at different times of day. Pray them backwards, pray them forwards. Skip verses, repeat one verse multiple times. Pray them whether you're feeling it or not. Pray them even when they seem repetitive or boring. Pray them first, and pray them last.

- *The Rev. Louisa Watkins Umphres*

## Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 119:73-80, 145
- Evening Ps. 121, 6
- Gen. 41:46-57
- 1 Cor. 4:8-20 (21)
- Mark 3:7-19a

## Prayer

Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word. Amen.

\*From *Psalm 119*

## Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 34, 146
- Evening Ps. 25, 91
- Gen. 42:1-17
- 1 Cor. 5:1-8
- Mark 3:19b-35

## Prayer

Make me to know your ways,  
O LORD; teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth, and  
teach me, for you are the God  
of my salvation; for you I wait  
all day long. Amen.

\*From *Psalm 25*

## Exploring the Story in: Psalm 25

### *Needing a Teacher: A Psalm for Guidance and for Deliverance*

As an adult at the cello, I determine my own practice schedule. I get to skip straight to the ‘good stuff’ – the Bach, the Bréval, the Brahams. But as my discipline has deteriorated, so have my cello skills. I can no longer play what I had mastered at fourteen. Having lost the humility a student-teacher relationship affords, I have also lost much of my musical way. So it is with our prayer life: no matter our age or experience, we need not only discipline. We need help.

Psalm 25 directly opposes much of what our culture espouses: self-sufficiency, self-actualization, instant gratification... self-salvation. Here, our Psalmist calls out to God as a teacher, a guide, and a savior. In praying Psalm 25, we, like our Psalmist, may strive to have our eyes “ever toward the Lord”. Trusting in God instead of ourselves takes patience, sometimes waiting “all the day long.” Indeed, praying Psalm 25 means orienting ourselves toward God and away from the tempting ideology of self. With such an orientation, we may yet find our musical way. them last.

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## Exploring the Story in: Psalm 51

### *Fudging the Fast Parts: A Psalm for Cleansing and Pardon*

My teacher used to wonder at one of my bad cello habits. He would ask: “Louisa, I wonder if you can tell me – why is it when passages are hardest for you, that’s when you pick up the tempo the most? Why is it in your most difficult fingerings, you can’t seem to play fast enough?” So often in life, when things become difficult, we run. We rush through conflict or speed past guilt. We try to out-run the realities of our life, the realities of our weakness.

The habit of confession in worship allows us to stop for a moment before moving to the Word or Sacrament. Lent, too, allows us to slow down, let our guilt catch up to us, and face the reality of our sin. In Psalm 51, a traditional Psalm for Ash Wednesday, our Psalmist stops to take stock of his transgressions. In verse after verse, he admits wrongdoing.

But also note the overarching theme of the Psalm: God’s pardon. When we slow down enough to admit our guilt and brokenness, we may also experience God’s grace catching up to us... overtaking us. If we stop to pray and listen, we may “hear joy and gladness;” we may experience our crushed bones rejoicing.

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## Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 5, 147:1-11
- Evening Ps. 27, 51
- Gen. 42:18-28
- 1 Cor. 5:9-6:11
- Mark 4:1-20

## Prayer

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast  
love; according to your  
abundant mercy blot out  
my transgressions. Wash me  
thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.

\*From *Psalm 51*

## Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 27, 147:12-20
- Evening Ps. 126, 102
- Gen 42:29-38
- 1 Cor. 6:12-20
- Mark 4:21-34

## Prayer

Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me on the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily on the day when I call. Amen.

\*From *Psalm 102*

## Exploring the Story in: Psalm 102

### *When You Can't Hear the Music: A Psalm of Lament*

As we approach Good Friday, we approach the day Jesus will shout from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” These words from Psalm 22 are echoed here, in Psalm 102. We can relate to our Psalmist’s pains: to lying awake like a lonely bird; to harboring a stricken heart like withered grass; to crying tears that mingle salt with our drink. We, too, sometimes wonder if God has ‘lifted [us] up and thrown [us] aside’.

Often, we are taught to come to God with gladness and thanksgiving. We want to enter prayer in places of peace and calm; we find God in moments of joy or rest. But we do ourselves and God a disservice if we relegate our relationship with God to certain times or places; if we only practice scales in the major key. Our Psalms open the door to prayers in the minor key, prayers that are sad and lost. Our psalmist never hesitates to pray in sharps and flats – shouting words that are honest and raw. We, too, are invited to cry out to God, even when we are unsure where God might be in our lives. In so doing, we may find ourselves ending our prayers differently than they began, as happens in Psalm 102: once again sure that “the children of [God’s] servants shall live secure”.

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## Exploring the Story in: Mark 4:35-41



Nena Bryans, *Even the Wind and Wave Obey Him!* 1989 Sculpture in Hydrocal Plaster

### Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 22, 148
- Evening Ps. 105, 130
- Gen. 43:1-15
- 1 Cor. 7:1-9
- Mark 4:35-41

### Prayer

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rise up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path we may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

\* From *The Book of Common Prayer*

## Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 43, 149
- Evening Ps. 31, 143
- Gen. 43:16-34
- 1 Cor. 7:10-24
- Mark 5:1-20

## Prayer

Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful. Let Israel be glad in its Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King. Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre. Amen.

\*From *Psalms 149*

## Exploring the Story in: Psalm 149

### *Hitting the High Notes: A Psalm of Praise*

Certainly my cello teacher was right: playing Bréval without first practicing scales is futile. But another thing my cello teacher knew? Playing scales well can be as beautiful as the greatest concerto. Our Psalms offer timeless words of prayer. They can be great tools for discipline, and they can be great concertos in their own right. Psalms, after all, are songs; they are music inspired by and for our God.

In Psalm 146, our singer affirms God as ‘Maker’ and calls upon everyone to sing and dance and make melody to God. Our Psalmist reminds us that our lives are not our own; they belong to God. As theologian J. Clinton McCann, Jr. puts it, for our psalmist “to live is to praise God, and to praise God is to live.”

I will never be a perfect musician; we will never be perfect prayers. We can and should practice the discipline of Psalm, striving to improve our prayer-life and relationship with God. But it is good to know – sometimes a simple scale can make the most heart-stopping melody. And sometimes a simple Psalm to God can bring you to life.

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