

Deut. 18:15–20

Ps. 111

1 Cor. 8:1–13

Mark 1:21–28

Praise the Lord!

**Goal for
the Session**

Tweens will shout praises with the psalmist as they celebrate the ways that God is at work in the world.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Psalm 111

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Christine Roy Yoder

The psalm is an alphabetic acrostic: each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This literary framework signals that the psalm is a comprehensive, or A-to-Z, celebration of God’s works. Indeed, following the invitation (v. 1) and reasons for praise (vv. 2–3), the psalmist recalls God’s work on behalf of Israel, from exodus and entry into the land to Sinai and the giving of the law. This prompts some interpreters to regard Psalm 111 as a condensed version of God’s salvation history. The rich range of the acrostic form therefore helps the psalmist affirm the rich variety of ways in which God relates to humankind and humankind to God.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Thomas D. Parker

Those who revere (“fear”) God live in a larger world, because they allow themselves to be open to something greater, something better, that lies deeply within even the most ordinary experiences. It is all too easy to be overfocused and miss the full range of reality in what we live through. It is so easy to let our lives be defined by the little world we have created through habits of mind and body that do not allow anything that may lie beyond to be registered in our awareness. It really is all about cultivating a sense of the presence of God. To live as if there were no God is to live in a space too small for our souls to grow and flourish.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Anne H. K. Apple

Perhaps, a prophetic word from this psalm will come in the form of a question. How are we trampling through the past, treading in the present, and looking for the future coming of our Lord? Are we gathering together and listening and discerning God at work through us? In the world, are we crafting and singing awe-filled hallelujah songs? As we receive God’s call to serve, we practice praise and live into God’s promise.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Elizabeth C. Knowlton

The experience of a God who is both immanent and transcendent evokes a deep sense of a dynamic and multifaceted relationship. Reflect on the nature of the faith community that is created by such a God. This community is inwardly focused to be sustainable, but it also goes beyond its wall to evidence signs of God’s character in the world. Psalm 111 provides a good lens through which to look in a new way for manifestations of God’s living presence both in the world and in individuals and communities.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Psalm 111

Focus on Your Teaching

Like most of us, tweens enjoy a good celebration—this session is an opportunity to rejoice in God’s goodness. This will not be a quiet session; it is an opportunity to encourage young people to have fun, shout praises, and give thanks for the ways that God is at work in the world. As you prepare for this session, think about the ways you have seen God at work. Be prepared to tell about your experiences as a way of helping learners deepen their understanding of the ways in which God moves in the world.

Awesome God, infuse this session with your joy as we celebrate the incredible ways in which you are at work in the world. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ Color Pack 10, 21, 22, 31
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1 from December 31, materials listed there
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ highlighters
- ☐ Internet-connected device (optional)
- ☐ newsprint, markers
- ☐ paper, pens
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens, paper, thesaurus
- ☐ option 2: Color Pack 30; *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player; rhythm instruments; snacks
- ☐ option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 3, Color Pack 23, drawing paper, rulers, colored pencils, fine-tipped black markers

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if learners’ Bibles are not all the same version, download Psalm 111 from a Web site such as www.biblegateway.com and bring a copy for each person.

Greet learners by name as they arrive, and ask about their week.

Gather the group and lead the opening ritual as described on Resource Sheet 1 from December 31. This week’s “Star Stuff” trivia question is:

- On a clear and moonless night, about how many stars can be seen by the naked eye?
- a. 2,000 (*correct answer*)
 - b. 4,000
 - c. 6,000

Display Color Pack 22, reading aloud the caption. Pray aloud:

Light-giving God, shine your light into our hearts today as we explore the Scriptures, so that we may see how to follow in your ways. Amen.

Introduce the session focus by having a brief conversation about signs:

- ✂ What kinds of signs do you see each day? What is their purpose?
- ✂ Some signs are in writing, but others are not. What signs would tell you that winter has ended? That your mom or dad was at home?

Comment that in this session you will look for signs of God at work.

If tweens do not have their own Bibles or if you prefer not to have them highlight in their Bibles, bring copies of Psalm 111. You can print the text from a Web site such as www.biblegateway.com. Or list the words to be highlighted on newsprint.

If you do not have Internet access in your learning area, go to the video on your mobile Internet device and play it through. Leave the page up. You will be able to replay it without needing an Internet connection.

EXPLORING

Ask tweens to tell you what they know about the book of Psalms. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (All about Psalms) and invite volunteers to read aloud the information there.

Distribute highlighters and ask tweens to turn to Psalm 111. Assign one verse to each learner. (If you have a small group, assign more than one verse to each learner and take one yourself.) First, ask tweens to highlight words in the assigned verse that describe God or tell about things God has done. Then have them highlight words that praise God. Be prepared to help as needed.

Explain that you will read Psalm 111 aloud in the following way: The group will read the psalm in unison. When the reading comes to a word that a person has highlighted, he or she should *shout* that word aloud. Give learners a minute to read over their verses in preparation. This will be a noisy exercise! If you are sharing space with other groups, consider moving somewhere else. Read the psalm through twice.

Invite comments and thoughts about Psalm 111, asking:

- ✠ In five words or less, for what is the psalmist giving thanks?
- ✠ What are some of God's works that the psalmist names?
- ✠ How and where is the psalmist expressing this praise? (v. 1)
- ✠ When have you felt like giving thanks to God with your whole heart?

Ask tweens to turn to Exodus 34:6 in their Bibles, a description of God in God's own words. Ensure that the learners understand all the words. Comment that whenever we see mercy, patience, love, and trustworthiness in action, we are seeing God at work. Ask:

- ✠ Where do you see God at work in the world today?

Option: Watch and discuss the video for the song "Indescribable" by Chris Tomlin at bit.ly/IndescribableTomlin.

- ✠ In what ways does this song remind you of Psalm 111?
- ✠ What works of God is this songwriter celebrating?
- ✠ When have you been aware of God at work through the beauty of creation?

Together, brainstorm words of praise that describe God, such as *amazing*, *wonderful*, *incredible*, *awesome*. List these on newsprint. Distribute paper and pens, and ask learners to finish this sentence: *I see God at work in the world when . . .*

Gather in a circle and read how you completed the sentence, then call on someone else. That person reads his or her sentence, then calls on another person to read. Continue in this way until all have read their sentences, and then place the papers in the center of the circle. Referring to the newsprint list and the papers in the center, have each tween choose one word or phrase of praise. Invite everyone to extend their hands and arms into the circle and shout out these words of praise. Finish by shouting, "Praise God!" in unison.

We Are Dancing in the Love of God

We are dancing in the love
of God,
We are dancing in the love
of God.

We are dancing
in the love
of God,
We are dancing
in the love
of God.

EASY
PREP

We are dancing, we are
dancing, ooh,
We are dancing in the love
of God.
We are dancing, we are
dancing, ooh,
We are dancing in the love
of God.

Siyahamba, ekukanyen'
kwenkos',
Siyahamba ekukanyen'
kwenkos'.
Siyahamba ekukanyen'
kwenkos',
Siyahamba ekukanyen'
kwenkos'.
Siyahamba, siyahamba, oh,
Siyahamba ekukanyen'
kwenkos'.
Siyahamba, siyahamba, oh,
Siyahamba ekukanyen'
kwenkos'.

The Whole World Is in God's Hands

The whole world is in God's
hands,
The whole wide world is in
God's hands,
The whole world is in God's
hands,
The world is in God's hands.

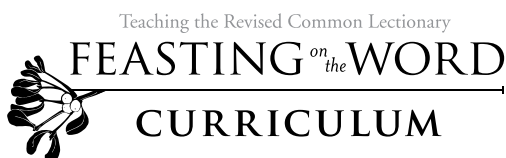
The wind and the wave are
in God's hands, . . .

The fish and the bird are in
God's hands, . . .

All of the animals are in
God's hands, . . .

All the world's people are in
God's hands, . . .

You and me are in God's
hands, . . .



Praise the Lord!

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Writing Psalms** Like the psalmist, we can praise God and celebrate God's work in the world. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Write Your Own Psalm), pens, and paper. Read the instructions and invite a time of quiet for tweens to work on their psalms. Be available to show learners how to use a thesaurus if your group is not familiar with this tool. Encourage learners to share ideas and help each other. Find a way for tweens to publish their psalms in the church bulletin, newsletter, or Web site.
- 2. Praise Party** Encourage learners to celebrate the ways that God is at work in the world by singing their praise to God. Play "We Are Dancing in the Love of God" (Color Pack 30; track 23 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*) or other contemporary worship music. Invite tweens to sing along and dance to the music, accompanying themselves with rhythm instruments. Write a couple of new verses by changing the word *dancing*. Continue the celebration by enjoying a snack together.
- 3. Illuminated Letters** Psalm 111 invites us to praise God. Recall that Psalm 111 is an acrostic psalm based on the Hebrew alphabet. Challenge tweens to think of a word or phrase that describes God for each letter of our alphabet. Examples might include *awesome, compassionate, quick to forgive, zealously loving us*. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 3 (Illuminated Letters). Show Color Pack 23 and read the information about illuminated letters on the resource sheet. Distribute paper and art supplies. Invite tweens to choose a word or phrase from your acrostic and print it on the paper, enlarging and illuminating the first letter. Follow the instructions on the resource sheet to create the illuminated letter. Use the black fine-tipped marker to print the rest of the word or phrase after the illuminated letter. Display the letters on a bulletin board with a title chosen by the group.

CLOSING

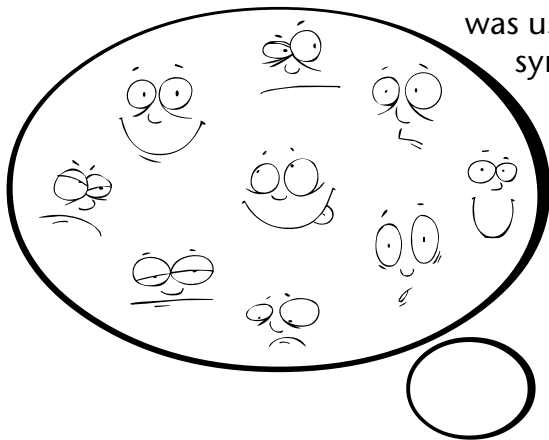
Gather the group around Color Pack 22. Recall that the beauty of creation is one of the ways we see God at work. Introduce this session's "Star of the Week": the Star of David. Cut the pattern for the six-pointed star from Color Pack 21 and have learners trace it to make their stars, as described on Resource Sheet 1 from December 31. As they work, explain that this star represents six characteristics of God: power, wisdom, majesty, love, mercy, and justice.

Lead the closing ritual as described on Resource Sheet 1 from December 31. Sing "The Whole World Is in God's Hands" (Color Pack 31; track 21 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*).

Tell learners that you will be praying for them this week, and ask them to pray for you as well.

All about Psalms

- 🌀 The book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible.
- 🌀 Psalms is a collection of 150 songs, prayers, and poems that were written over a period of about 1,000 years and then gathered together into one book.
- 🌀 Some of the psalms were written over 3,000 years ago.
- 🌀 The word *psalm* comes from the Greek word *psalmos*, which means a song sung while accompanied by a stringed instrument.
- 🌀 Many songwriters contributed to the collection, including King David.
- 🌀 The book of Psalms became the hymnbook or prayer book that was used by the people of God—first in the temple, then in synagogues, and later in Christian churches.



- 🌀 Jesus would have studied the psalms and learned many of them; he cried out some of the words from Psalm 22 when he was dying on the cross. (See Mark 15:34.)
- 🌀 Psalm 111 is an example of an alphabetic acrostic: each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This psalm is an A-to-Z celebration of God's works (from "Exegetical Perspective" by Christine Roy Yoder).



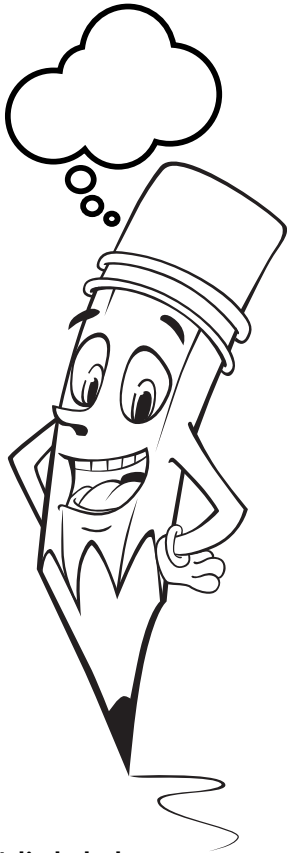
Have you ever noticed that a song can sometimes help you express your deepest feelings? It is the same with the book of Psalms. The different psalms express many different feelings, including joy, excitement, despair, hope, anger, sorrow, the desire for revenge, and pain. No matter what you are feeling, you can find a psalm to express your heart. The psalms remind us that we can talk to God about every part of our lives.

January 28, 2024
Praise the Lord!

Tweens
Resource Sheet 2

Write Your Own Psalm

Write a psalm by filling in the blanks below. Read your psalm aloud to see how it sounds. You may need to make some changes to make it read more smoothly. Read it again to see if it says everything you want. You may want to add some more descriptions of the way you see God at work. You might want to add a few more sentences describing how great God is. When you are happy with your rough draft, make a good copy of your psalm on some writing paper.



A little help:

The following words might help you describe God's works: *amazing, awesome, indescribable, wonderful, incredible, magnificent, astonishing, brilliant, fantastic, great.* Look up some of these words in a thesaurus to get more ideas.

A Psalm of _____
(your name)

Praise the Lord!
I will give thanks to God with my whole heart

in _____
(a place where you would like to praise God)

Great are the works of the Lord.

God _____
(one way you see God at work—use a verb)

and _____
(another way you see God at work)

The works of God's hands are _____
(a description of how amazing God's works are)

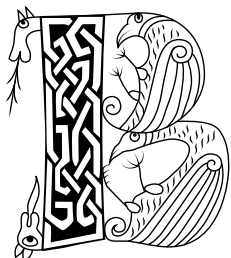
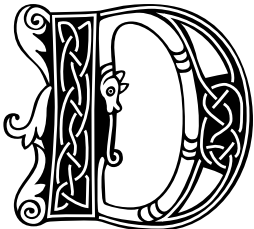
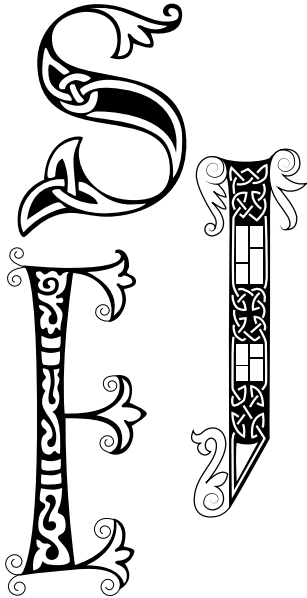
and _____
(another description of God's works)

Holy and _____ is God's name.
(description of God)

God's works endure forever. I will praise the Lord forever.

Amen.

Illuminated Letters



- An illumination is a decoration that is often found on the pages of manuscripts written before the invention of the printing press.
- The term *illumination* comes from the word *illuminate* and means “to fill with light.” This effect was usually achieved by the use of gold leaf, which reflected light and made the letters and illustrations appear to glow.
- An illuminated letter typically is the first letter of a page or paragraph. It is enlarged and decorated, while the rest of the text is in black. The decorations are made to fit into or around the letter, or sometimes take on the shape of the letter itself.

To create an illuminated letter:

1. Draw the outline of the letter lightly in pencil. A good working size is 2 or 3 inches tall to give plenty of room to decorate.
2. Measure out a boundary line around the letter. Squares and rectangles are most common, but circles can look good, too.
3. Use a pencil to fill the space with simple decorations. These can be flowers, animals, or simple geometric shapes.
4. Outline the letter and decorations with a fine-tipped black marker.
5. Color in the letter and decorations.