

# “O Lord, Why am I Here? Who am I?”



Session 1



*Psalm 8; 150*

## Session Objective

Participants will explore questions contemplated by the psalmists as they offered their prayers and sang their songs. In response to the questions, “Why are we here? Who are we?” the Psalms affirm that God knows and loves humans and wants us to (1) worship and glorify God and (2) take care of the world God has created.

## Faith Statement

**“Q. 1. What is the chief end of [humanity]?”**

A. [Humanity]’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

**Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?”**

A. The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.”

—The Westminster Confession of Faith, The Shorter Catechism (7.001–7.002)

## Session Overview

 Enter	Option A: Psalm Questions
	Option B: Play “My name is . . . and I have never”
 Engage	Option A: Resting with the Question
	Option B: A Quick Look at the Psalms
 Explore	Option A: Glorify and Enjoy!
	Option B: Praying the Psalms
	Option C: The Glory of God
 Express	Option A: Design Psalm 150 Worship
	Option B: Create a Video
 Exit	Questions for God



Enhancements

Family Connections  
Ponder the Psalm  
Wonder at the Heavens  
God’s Love



For instructions to download Web Resources and the coffeehouse version, see page 1.

## Spiritual Reflection for Leaders

What do you remember about the big questions that puzzled you as a youth? What were your concerns about God, the meaning of life, your vocation, and the future? What are the questions about faith that concern you today? In what ways have your questions changed? Have your questions been answered or have they led to other questions?

Psalm 8 celebrates God's glory, in particular as it is revealed in creation. Scanning the vast sweep of the night sky, the psalmist is awed and humbled by the Creator's magnificent handiwork. Staring into the majesty of God, the psalmist utters an enduring question: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?"

Psalm 150 praises God in both earth and heaven (sanctuary and firmament) for what happens on earth and heaven (God's mighty deeds and surpassing greatness). The final verse calls on all living things on the earth to praise the Lord! This same psalm has been read and sung throughout the ages as an act of worship. What does this psalm say to you at this very moment?



## Understanding the Scripture

At the center of the Bible is the Book of Psalms, an expansive collection of prayers to be recited and chanted, whispered and shouted, while alone and also with others gathered in the worshipping community. At the center of the Book of Psalms is a steadfast witness to God's revelation as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of life. At the center of each psalm is a deep yearning to be surrounded by God's presence, to know God's power, and to understand God's purposes. Our focus in each of the sessions is to compare the yearning of the psalmist with our own desire to experience God.

Psalm 8 proclaims the awesome wonder of God's creation, which leads the psalmist to contemplate, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:4). In forming the answer, the psalmist recalls the creation story: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" (Genesis 1:28)

Psalm 150 serves as a doxology to the entire collection of psalms. Over the course of the book, the Psalms plumb the depths of human emotion as God's people express rage, despair, doubt, sorrow, exaltation, joy, faith, and hope. At the heart of the Psalms is the desire to praise God for being God. In fact, the Hebrew title for the Book of Psalms, *Tehillim*, means "songs of praise."



## Understanding the Faith Statement

The Shorter Catechism, along with the Larger Catechism, the Confession of Faith, the Directory of Public Worship, and the Form of Presbyterian Church Government, were the work of the Westminster Assembly. Called together in response to an ordinance from the House of Commons seeking a common ground for the government and liturgy of the Church of England, the 151 individuals selected by Parliament accomplished their work in 1,163 sessions over a period of seven years (1643–1649).

For the generations whose confirmation into Christian discipleship involved learning and memorizing the Shorter Catechism, the most memorable part of their work is the opening question: “What is the chief end of [humanity]?” Even though other parts of the catechism may have been forgotten, many will be able to complete the answer to that question: “[Humanity]’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” The Shorter Catechism, the work of the Reverend John Wallis, was intended for the Christian education of children.



## Teaching Today’s Question

Simply due to its size, entering into the Psalms presents a formidable challenge. Which psalms should we select to study? For this short study in the *Faith Questions* series, the title itself provides our approach. What were the questions of faith expressed by the psalmists? In what ways do we pursue similar questions? What can we hear in these ancient voices’ answers that speak to the questions we ask?

Of course, the easiest way to find the psalmist’s questions is to read through the psalms and look for question marks. Perhaps not so surprisingly, questions are found in some very familiar psalms. Many are rhetorical questions, postulated not because the psalmist seeks an answer as much as a way to testify to their faith. Today’s question is centered in Psalm 8, which first ponders the question, “Who are we?” and then goes on to praise the glory of God’s creation in humanity. Psalm 150 provides an exultation of praise in the name of our God who is worthy of all praise.



## Enter

### Option A: Psalm Questions

- Psalm verses strips cut from "Questions" (Web Resource 1a)

As youth arrive, give out psalm strips bearing questions from the psalmists. The text of the psalm strips is from The Common English Bible.

Direct the youth to read their psalm question aloud and to think about the reason for asking it: What may have happened? What is the primary emotion? Why is the psalmist asking this question?

### Option B: Play "My name is . . . and I have never"

Gather in chairs in a circle, except for one person who stands in the middle. The middle person is to begin a sentence with, "My name is . . . and I have never asked a question about . . .," naming one thing she or he has never questioned; for example, why the sky is blue, what is at the center of a Tootsie Roll Pop, and so on. Anyone who has asked the question must get up and find the seat that is vacant. The person in the middle will also go for the empty seat, and once again one person will be left standing in the middle to begin the game again.



## Engage

### Option A: Resting with the Question

- Newsprint, marker

Write on newsprint and post: "O Lord, why am I here? Who am I?" Encourage participants to ask and discuss their own questions that relate to these questions. Read and discuss:



- Do you always feel like you know who you are?
- Are you different in different places?
- Do you ever feel like you aren't who you should be?
- Do you ever feel concerned that you might "miss" who you are supposed to be?
- In what ways does your relationship with God help you understand your identity?
- In what ways can your church help you discover your true self?

Pray the opening prayer.

## Option B: A Quick Look at the Psalms

Bibles, copies of “150 Psalms: A Quick Look” (Web Resource 1b)

Even though this course is not an introduction to the Psalms, it is helpful to engage in a brief overview. Discovering what to look for in the Psalms will guide our exploration in future sessions. Distribute copies of “150 Psalms: A Quick Look” (Web Resource 1b).

Introduce today’s session by stating that our questions about identity and purpose have been asked for centuries. The writers of the Psalms asked the same and similar questions. We can look to the Psalms to not only find our questions, but also answers.

Pray the opening prayer.

### Opening Prayer

*Creating God, we praise you for your breathtaking gift of life with all of its wonders and mysteries, its questions and discoveries. We pray that your Spirit, which breathed life into humanity and breathed power into the Scriptures, will breathe within us. Inspire our hearts and minds as we gather in Jesus Christ, giver of new life. Amen.*



## Explore

### Option A: Glorify and Enjoy!

Bibles, copies of a Peanuts comic strip

First, engage the group in enacting Psalm 150. Assign the following parts and instruct the youth to respond with enthusiasm—by playing “air tambourine,” for instance—when their part is mentioned in the psalm.

- Trumpet
- Lute
- Harp
- Tambourine
- Dance
- Strings
- Pipe
- Cymbals

Read Psalm 150. Underscore the fact that the word “praise” is mentioned 13 times!

Second, discuss the first question and answer of the Faith Statement:

**“Q. 1. What is the chief end of [humanity]?”**

A. [Humanity]’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

Ask one or more of:



- How does Psalm 150 answer the question, “O Lord, why am I here? Who am I?”
- What is one way to glorify God?
- What does it mean to enjoy God forever?

Third, show or describe a *Peanuts* cartoon strip. It can be found on the Internet at <https://goo.gl/AbaEDN>.

In the strip Snoopy is dancing wildly and thinking, “To live is to dance.” Lucy grabs Snoopy and joins in the dance. Next, Snoopy and Lucy dance side by side. Finally, Snoopy dances alone, paws outstretched, thinking, “To dance is to live.”

Ask the youth to consider:



- How does the comic strip answer the question, “O Lord, why am I here? Who am I?”
- What connections do you see between Snoopy’s dancing and the catechism’s statement that “[Humanity’s] chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever”?

**Option B: Praying the Psalms**

Bibles, copies of “Praying the Psalms” (Web Resource 1c)

Our questions in this session—“O Lord, why am I here? Who am I?”—arise from a question of the psalmist in Psalm 8. Distribute copies of “Praying the Psalms” (Web Resource 1c) and read either one or both translations of Psalm 8 antiphonally. Enter into the psalm by asking:



- Picture the psalmist. What may have moved the psalmist to ask the question, “What are human beings that you think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them?” What emotion does the psalmist express?
- Picture the setting. Where is the psalmist? What is he/she doing? Is the time of day important?

- Picture yourself. How do you feel praying the psalm? In what circumstance could you see yourself praying this psalm?

### Option C: The Glory of God

Bibles; a collection of natural objects such as shells, rocks, or leaves

Invite participants to turn to Psalm 8 and read the psalm silently. Then read it aloud together as a group, but in a quiet whisper. Finally, ask the group to read the psalm aloud one more time, starting with one voice and adding more voices with each verse, building into crescendo by the end.

Observe that the Psalm ends and finishes with a declaration of God’s majesty. Ask:



- What does the word “majesty” mean to you?
- Where did the psalmist see God’s majesty?

Invite participants to choose and examine an object from the collection you brought. Have them feel the texture of the object and observe its subtle shades of color. Discuss:



- How does your object reveal the majesty of God?
- Where else in creation do you see God’s majesty?

On a sheet of newsprint, lead the group in rewriting verse 6 in their own words. Explain to the group that the Hebrew word for dominion or rule is *radah*, which means “to exercise oversight.” Basically, it means that God has entrusted humanity with the care of creation. Ask:



- How does it feel to be entrusted with the oversight of God’s creation?
- What things make it difficult to care for God’s creation?
- How do you feel about the responsibility human beings have for creation? If you were God, would you have given humans this much responsibility? Why or why not?

Explore the following questions:



- Was there anything similar in the actions shared? If so, why do you think that is?
- What do you think caused the people to sin?
- Do you think the people started out intending to sin? What happened?
- What do these stories tell us about the way sin works in our lives?
- Do you think sin can ever be avoided? Why or why not?



## Express

### Option A: Design Psalm 150 Worship

Bibles, bulletins from recent worship services, hymnals, paper, pens

Give everyone a bulletin. Invite them to review the worship service and note any activities in the service that seem to be acts of praise. Ask: "Are you satisfied with the way praise happens in our worship? What would you add or change?"

Form teams of no more than three or four people. Give each team hymnals, pens, paper, and a copy of a recent order of worship. Ask each group to design a worship service with Psalm 150 as its theme, using the recent worship service as a guide. They should choose hymns or songs, decide how many prayers to include, design a creative way for worshipers to hear or experience the psalm (drama, song, dance, etc.), and suggest a way to share with the worshipers how Psalm 150 answers the questions, "Who am I? Why am I here?"

Allow as much time as you can for groups to design their service. Gather back to have groups share what they have planned or created. Arrange with the worship leadership to use some or all of the service plan in a future worship service.

### Option B: Create a Video

Video camera

Participants will create a video that explains what Christians can do to care for God's creation. Lead the group in creating a short video that challenges other Christians to care for God's creation. Have the group choose a concept for the video, assign roles, and then record the video. Encourage the group to include why it's important for Christians to care for God's creation as an answer to the question, "Why am I here?" Include specific things Christians can do to practice this care. If possible, upload the video to your congregation's website.



## Questions for God

- Index cards, pencils

Distribute index cards and pencils. On one side of the card, invite group members to write one important question they would like to ask God about their future. Their questions may deal with career choices, educational plans, issues of faith, or whatever they choose.

When everyone has written a question for God, invite group members to use the other side of the card to list ways they can be more able to hear God's response to their question. If they want to know about career plans, does it help to develop gifts God has given them? Can the things they want to know about school be addressed in prayer? When everyone has completed both sides of the card, have them talk in groups of two or three about the questions and plans. Then ask:



- What insights do you have about God's active and abiding presence in your lives?

### **Closing Prayer**

*Tell the youth that sometimes we get so overwhelmed with noise and doing things that it is good just to sit quietly and listen for God. Invite the youth to get comfortable, close their eyes, and sit in silence. Tell them that in the silence, they should let their minds go wherever they will. But if anything "pops up" that seems to be pointing to God, they should pay attention and follow that thought as far as it will take them.*

*Allow three to five minutes for the silence. Close by simply saying, "Amen."*



## Enhancements

Other Ways to Connect with the Session

### Family Connections

"Family Connections" (Web Resource) has a set of discussion questions for each of the six sessions in this course that families can use after each session. Provide each family with a copy of this Web Resource.

### Ponder the Psalm

Distribute crayons and paper. Invite the youth to write or draw as you read aloud Psalm 8. Slowly read Psalm 8, pausing for at least 5 to 10 seconds after each line or phrase. Pause for a moment of silence (a minute or even two, if the group seems focused on writing or drawing) at the end of the psalm. Ask:



- What words stood out for you as you heard the psalm?
- What pictures formed in your mind (or on paper)?

Read the psalm again. Ask:



- What do you think is the main point the psalm writer conveys in this psalm? Encourage diverse thinking.
- What is your opinion of what the psalm writer is saying?

### Wonder at the Heavens

Go to [www.apod.nasa.gov/apod](http://www.apod.nasa.gov/apod) and look at some of the images in the archives. Have the group choose an image they like and have them look at the image together while a volunteer reads Psalm 8. Ask:



- How might the psalmist have felt when looking at the heavens?
- What do you think about when you look at the heavens?
- What do the heavens tell us about God?

### God's Love

God's steadfast love can move us to prayers of thanksgiving. Read Psalm 18:1–2, Psalm 36:5 and 7, or Psalm 139:5 to provide images that describe God's love. Invite the youth to complete this sentence: "God's love is like . . ." Print their ideas on newsprint. Distribute paper and pens for the youth to use these images in writing prayers of thanksgiving for God's love. Consider using one of the prayers each week in the closing ritual, or print them in the church newsletter or on the church website.