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Psalm 4

Phase 1: ORAL



Step 1: Listen

Listening to a guide translation and versions of the psalm

Listen well to the poem (notice content, emotions and interesting use of language). There are two guide translations in Appendix A:

1. **Hebrew-mirror** - copied from the Exegetical Layout and adjusted for minimal readability,
2. **Guide translation** - the literal, type 1 corresponding (but more readable) translation, exegetically the same as Hebrew-mirror.

Pre-Activity (Optional): Read Phil 4:4-7 as a group. Take a few minutes to talk about these verses. Some guiding questions: What does it mean to rejoice always? To not be anxious about anything? To let your requests be made known to God by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving? What is the peace of God?

Activity: Read the two prepared guide translations. One reader per translation or one reader for all translations (as skills permit). Others to listen with closed books. Consider 'how to listen' – posture? With responses? In silence?



Step 2: Familiarise

Explaining and discussing the meaning and beauty of the psalm

Get an overview of the poem (the big picture) - what's the main message? Who is involved? A poem must be understood as 'a whole' (unlike a story).

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE PSALM

After listening to the guide translations, please respond to any of the following questions:

- What do you like about the psalm?
- What do you find difficult?



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- **How does the psalm make you feel?**
- Which verse do you find particularly important in this psalm?
- What does this psalm teach you about the LORD? What is the LORD like?
- Are there any noticeable repetitions in this psalm?

ENGAGING WITH THE WHOLE PSALM

Facilitator: address the following topics:

- *The participants in the psalm, the different “speakers” and “audiences”*
- *The historical background and the context of the psalm, the story behind the psalm, if relevant*
- *The theme of the psalm*
- *The flow of the psalm*
- *The potential big picture obstacles*
- *Emotion map*
- *The peak or peaks of the psalm*
- *The genre and purpose of the psalm*
- *Highly important poetic device(s) related to understanding the big picture*
- *How does the psalm point to Christ?*

Participants

Activity: Identify the participants in the psalm. Who is speaking in Psalm 4? Is there more than one speaker? To whom is he speaking?

- Participants
 - First person psalmist
 - LORD, God
 - “sons of men”
- Who is addressed when?

The psalm starts with the psalmist addressing the God of his righteousness in v1. In v2-6, he addresses the sons of men. In v6-8 he addresses God, the LORD, again.
- Discuss the first and last verses together

Activity: Listen to the first verse and the concluding verse again. How do these verses relate to one another? What do they say about the message of the psalm?

The psalm opens with a sense of burden and oppression, but closes with a sense of confidence and peace.

- What do you think is the theme of the psalm, and how is the theme developed, how does it flow?

Theme and flow of the psalm

The structure of the psalm looks like this:

Stanza 1: Confidence



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Stanza 2: Rebuke

Stanza 3: Confidence

Stanza 4: Rebuke

Stanza 5: Confidence

The psalm begins with the psalmist calling out to God in his distress. He asks God to answer him, to show favour on him and to hear his prayer. As the psalm progresses, we see that he is in distress because the people around him have turned to worthless lies.

In the second stanza the psalmist tells us what it is that the people are doing, both to himself and to God. They are turning his glory into shame, and they are rejecting God by going after emptiness and lies. He asks them how long they want to go on this way.

In the third stanza the psalmist is reiterating that, by God's grace, he remains loyal to the LORD and that the LORD will hear when he calls to him, just like he asked in stanza 1. And because he is loyal to the LORD, the LORD will also hear his prayers on behalf of the people.

In stanza 4, the psalmist instructs the people in how they should respond. Though they are anxious, they should not sin (by turning away from God and speaking worthless lies). Rather, they should ponder on the word and works of the LORD (speak in your hearts) and remain silent. They should also offer sacrifices of righteousness to the LORD and trust in him.

In the last stanza the psalmist is again declaring his confidence in the LORD. He asks the LORD to shine the light of his face (his presence) upon them. The psalm ends with three blessings: harvest-surpassing joy, great peace in sleeping, and divinely-assured security.

The peak of the psalm

- Discuss the peak and other high points of the psalm.

Activity: Is there a climactic point in this psalm? Discuss it in the full group or in pairs.

Verse 6 is the heart of the Psalm and verses 7-8 are the climactic conclusion, forming the high point of the psalmist's confidence in YHWH. The "goodness" and the "light of his face" is what happens when God brings someone "righteousness", when He put things right. It means that YHWH reveals his presence to the ones loyal to him. The psalmist testifies about the blessings of God's goodness and the "light of his presence", namely great joy, peace, rest and security.

Emotions in Psalm 4

It is important to try to map the different emotions in this psalm: despair, sorrow, complaining, confidence, anger, joy.

Activity: Discuss in small groups the different emotions in this short psalm. Make a list of them.

Genre of the psalm



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Activity: Discuss what type of song or poem is this psalm? Do you have something similar in your language?

Psalm 4 is traditionally classified as an individual lament, but it is clear that it is also a psalm of confidence. The psalmist, who is an innocent worshiper, rises above the grounds of lamentation with sure trust in God.

The psalm might be an evening prayer, based on v8. It follows the morning prayer (Psalm 3) and was probably used within the regular service of evening worship. The prayer is petitioning God's help in distress, but also expresses confidence in the LORD's abundant goodness.

Background of the Psalm

The psalm gives no explicit information about the background setting that inspired its writing and its content is of such a general nature that we have no certainty as to its specific life setting. What we do know is that the psalmist is in distress because those around him are turning to worthless, false gods. "Don't you know that God will listen to me?" He tells them. "Remember how good God has been to us?"

A hypothetical situation could be that there has been some kind of national calamity, like a drought, which has caused a failure of crops and a lack of contentment among the people. In response, the people have rejected YHWH and his king and have sought recourse to other gods – emptiness and falsehood (v. 2). King David calls the people to repentance (vv. 3-6), and he prays to YHWH on their behalf (v. 7b). Having trusted in YHWH and performed his duty, David can sleep in peace (see v. 9). The psalm envisions a future in which the people repent, YHWH hears David's prayer, and the land is restored.

The king played an important role in the people's relationship with the LORD. He represented the people to the LORD and the LORD to the people. Like a prophet, the king was responsible for encouraging and admonishing the people to follow the LORD and like a priest, he was responsible for interceding with the LORD on the people's behalf. Israelite agriculture was dependent upon rain and drought was a frequent and serious problem for Israel. In the ancient Near East the king was held responsible for the rain (cf. Pss. 72; 132:15; 144:11-14). In times of crisis, especially drought, the people often turned to other gods (cf. 1Kgs. 17-18; Jer. 5:24; Hos. 2:8-9; Zech. 10:1-2).

We can see how Psalm 4 fits very well into a society that works like this. However, this situation is only hypothetical. The lack of certainty makes the psalm applicable in a great variety of situations.

Significance of the psalm

Activity: As a group, discuss what did the poet want to achieve for himself or for his audience?



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Psalm 4 offers no theoretical solutions to the problems of false accusations, oppression, and injustice. It offers, rather, a kind of therapy: prayer. For however strong the accuser or oppressor may be, ultimately it is only God who matters. And however deep the anguish and uncertainty may be, God can provide that inner peace which makes sleep possible. There is no suggestion in this psalm that the accusers go away or cease in their accusations. What changes as a consequence of prayer is not the external circumstance, but the inner spirit of the worshipper?

What does this psalm teach us about Christ?

Jesus also prayed this psalm for himself while on earth, being pressed in and challenged.

Jesus Christ is the God of our righteousness. The New Testament revealed that very clear to us. He is the One who put everything right and aligns us again with God and God's will.

He is also the speaker of verses 2-5, exhorting his followers to be faithful.

The shining of the LORD's face with covenant favour (verse 6) has been fulfilled in Him. He is the radiance of God and the covenant favour shining over his people (2 Cor 4:4 and 6).

The blessings of abundant joy, peace, and security are available in Him, now, more than ever.

UNLOCKING SOME OF THE BIG PICTURE OBSTACLES TO THE PSALM

In v.1 we find "God of my righteousness" and in v.5 "sacrifices of righteousness". The question is, what exactly is described as righteous? In v.1, is God righteous, or does He make me righteous? The literal translation is "God of my righteousness". This might be hard to understand, but it says He is the one who works out righteousness for me, He put things right for me, He upholds justice. God is intrinsically righteous irrespective of me, and He is the source of my righteousness – i.e., "the God of my righteousness". In v.5, it is not the sacrifices, like the lamb or the dove, that are righteous, but rather the sacrifices are offered in a righteous manner. The person making the offering is doing in the right way, with a pure heart and with good motives. To be righteous means to be right with God and right with people, to do what is right and just. We can think of a measuring weight that is the right weight, not too heavy or too light.

SEGMENTATION OF THE PSALM

Title & superscription

Stanza 1 Verse 1: Confidence: Calling out to YHWH in distress

Stanza 2 Verse 2: Rebuke: turning glory to shame and rejecting God by going after worthless lies

Stanza 3 Verse 3: Confidence in YHWH





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Stanza 4 Verses 4-5: Rebuke and instruction: five things to do: though they are anxious, do not sin; ponder on the word and works of YHWH; be silent; bring right sacrifices; and trust YHWH

Stanza 5 verses 6-8: Confidence in YHWH's blessing of joy, peace, rest and security

FINAL SUMMING UP

To summarise the Psalm, discuss the following questions:

- What is the main point/message of the psalm?
Though others turn away from God and I suffer innocently, the LORD hears my prayers. He is the one who gives me what is good: joy, peace, rest and security.
- What does this Psalm teach you about the LORD?
The LORD listens and hears the prayers of his faithful ones. The LORD makes us righteous. When the LORD shines the light of his face on us, He gives us what is truly good: joy in our hearts, complete peace, rest, and security.
- How could your church (or you) use this psalm?
The lack of precise identification of either adversaries or accusations is a part of the genius of the psalm, and that which makes it so appropriate for use by any man or woman. There are days in the lives of all human beings that require a psalm like this at their end. It reflects the anguish of the innocent and oppressed, or of the righteous sufferer. And thus, it is a particularly important kind of psalm, for it addresses a fundamental human experience, the experience of injustice, suffering, and oppression.
- What heading or title would the group suggest for this psalm?
 - *An evening prayer of confidence*
 - *Facing another night*



Step 3: Internalise

Absorbing the big picture of the psalm

'Get the poem inside yourself' (feel the emotions and be able to recall the main ideas).

Look at the whole psalm so that you can experience it and retell the message. This is not an attempt to memorize the psalm, but to be able to understand the whole message and to express it in the target language. Aim to do at least the first two activities.

CREATIVE RESPONSES

First, do Internalisation Activities 1-5 as a whole group





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Internalisation Activity: Listen to Psalm 133 being read again. Note all the words you hear which speak of God's power, or which are very intense/extreme language.

Internalisation Activity: Say each line of the psalm in the right order, as a group. Use your own words; there's no need to have it precisely right. Then let one or two persons say each line of the psalm, again in the right order

Internalisation Activity: Then, as a group, make gestures for each line and again say all the lines in order, but this time with gestures. Use mime/gestures to show the emotion and action.

Internalisation Activity: Lastly, as a whole group, use the popcorn method. Each line, in the right order, is said by a different person. Do this a second time to further reinforce.

Internalisation Activity (optional): The storyboard method: draw pictures of each event in the psalm as they unfold.

Then divide the group into two or three groups

Internalisation Activity: Skits—act out what's happening in each of the lines. Make a little drama. Encourage them to use facial expressions, body language, motions, and movement to try to experience the emotions and the sequence of events. This psalm lends itself well to a skit.

Internalisation Activity: Memory song or memory aid. Consider making a short poem of the song in the Language of Wider Communication to help you remember the different actions in order.



Step 4: Explore and compose

Explore the Hebrew and local poetry and compose a song

For the facilitator: in this step, address the following topics:

- 1) Repetition of words, images, and sounds
- 2) Handling the Hebrew parallelisms
- 3) Figures of speech, like metaphors, personification
- 4) Rhythm, verse length, beat
- 5) Word order, clause order
- 6) Poetic devices that emphasizes and mark something as important

Once the artist-translators have sufficiently internalised and drafted the psalm in the workshop setting, compose a song, poem, rap, chant, or prayer to capture as much of the psalm as possible.

Discuss the repetitions and contrasts of the poem





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Activity: Listen to the psalm again and in groups, list all the words and concepts that are being repeated, and all the concepts that form opposites or contrasts.

INSIGHT: Repetitions

- “I”, “me”, “my” in v.1, 2, 3, 7 and 8
- “God” in v.1 and “LORD” in v.3, 5, 6 and 8
- “call” in v.1 and 3
- “righteousness” in v.1 and 5
- “hear my prayer” in v.1 and “the LORD hears when I call to him” in v.3
- “heart” in v.4 and 7
- “on your beds” in v.4 and “let me lie down and let me sleep” in v.8
- “trust” in v.5 and “securely” in v.8 have the same root in Hebrew
- “many” in v.6 and “abounded” in v.7 have the same root in Hebrew

INSIGHT: Contrasts

- “in distress” vs “open space” in v.1 and “in peace” in v.8
- “honour” vs “shame” in v.2
- Calling out, praying, speaking vs “be silent” in v.4
- “tremble” (being anxious) in v.4 vs “in peace” and “securely” in v.8
- “emptiness” in v.2 vs “abounded” in v.7
- “light” in v.6 vs the darkness of night in v.4 and 8

Activity: Can you identify any images, similes or metaphors?

Main Images or Metaphors of the Psalm

“In distress, you have made an open space for me”

“In distress” literally means “in a tight space”. The image is of being hard-pressed, pressed into a corner with the enemies closing in, and then being set free, given space to move. “You have made an open space for me.” You opened up before me; you brought me out of my pressing distress. I can breathe again. Could also be a place of abundance (the root is also used to describe the Promised Land).

“You love emptiness, you seek what is false”

“Love emptiness” means loving things that are useless or worthless, things with no substance. This can be idols or anything else that doesn’t help in times of need. The word here is closely linked to “false gods”. It could refer to the empty, worthless fertility rituals of Canaanite and Amorite religion, which have generally been accompanied by orgies and sexual immorality at the high places. “Falsehood” means “deceit, lies”. It could refer to “false gods, deceiving deities”. Falsehood is often compared to idols in the Old Testament. Pagan idols and the empty fertility rituals go together. But note that if the people are tempted to turn to Baal, or Dagan, or whoever, then he isn’t named.

“Lift up upon us the light of your face, O LORD”





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“Lift upon us”, means God acting in exalting himself to make his presence, his word and his will clear to us. The words adapt the priestly blessing (Numbers 6:25) into a prayer, of YHWH lifting his face (countenance) over the people. This shining of his presence is linked to the *menorah* in the sanctuary, which casts its light on the Table of the Presence, with the 12 loaves of bread representing Israel.

“Light of your face” is an idiom referring to the goodness one experiences in the presence of the LORD. “Light” represents all the good there is, especially the good from God. It links with v1, which expounds on what this goodness might look like (God hearing the plea, bringing freedom in distress, showing favor, and hearing prayers).

Being aware of the Aaronic Blessing of Numbers 6:24-26 is crucial to understand this psalm. Shine on us is a direct echo from the priestly blessing of the face of the LORD shining over the people and bringing his covenant blessings like rain, food, water, offspring, and security.

COMPOSING A SONG

For the facilitator: several considerations, like the big question when to start doing the song

- 1) *When to start composing a song? The guide writer and facilitator have some freedom when. Either at the end of step 4, or after step 5. There are pro’s and con’s to each option. One advantage of doing it in Step 4 (before the detailed exegesis) is that the team starts to think about poetry. They only start to think about poetry once they start composing a song. The risk is that when they compose something early, before step 5, that they settle on a melody they like, but need to change it or even abandon it after getting the more detailed exegetical insights. The advantage*
- 2) *Some other considerations: what about memory aid, the poem or song made at the end of Step 3?*
- 3) *Another option is to only compose a nice tune and song on one stanza with not any serious exegetical issues. That tune can then be used for the rest of the psalm at the end of Step 5. Experience with shorter sections, like one or two stanzas at a time, to compose.*
- 4) *The team needs to learn some song-writing skills.*
- 5) *It is not necessary to use the same tune for every stanza. Sometimes 3-4 tunes can be used for long psalms.*

Note the poetic devices used in the Hebrew mirror or in the Flower Garden (Appendix C). What is the psalmist trying to achieve? Consider what poetic devices are used in the local language to achieve the same functions.

Activity: NOW, COMPOSE A SONG! Participants are to choose a style or genre that is relevant for the psalm, and to set the whole psalm or sections to a rhythm or music. The song needs to cover all the main stanzas, but doesn’t need to be correct in every detail (that comes later in Step 5)

Activity: Make a recording of the composition(s).



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Step 5: Draft

Translating stanza-by-stanza

Listen to the poem again. Orally create stanza-by-stanza a first draft of the psalm in the target language, trying to capture the poetic elements and essential details of the meaning. To take full advantage of the oral form, avoid reverting to written Biblical text at this point.

Activity: Divide into smaller groups and let one in each group read through guide translation #2: Hebrew-tight (or play a recording) while others translate. The oral draft can at that point be recorded and/or immediately written down (Step 6 merged with Step 5).

STANZA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Often it speeds the work to have different groups do different stanzas. If you do this, make sure you all hear the psalm from top to bottom and to make suggestions to other groups when you come together...

Stanza 1: Verse 1 - Confidence: Calling out to YHWH in distress

To the choirmaster with stringed instruments.
A psalm of David.

1 When I call, answer me, ELOHIM of my TSEDEQ!

In distress you have made open space for me, show favour to me and hear my prayer!

To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.
A psalm of David.

1 When I call, answer me, O God of my righteousness!

In distress, you have made an open space for me.

Show favour to me and hear my prayer.

Discuss:

- V1 contains three petitions (answer me, show favour to me, hear my prayer). Think how you would express petitions to a deity in your language and culture. For instance, the above translation even feels as if David is commanding the LORD to do something. Could you do that in your language? Also discuss the feelings these petitions evoke in you.
- Also see how the petitions bracket the reassuring line, “O God of my righteousness.”
- To “call” means to call aloud in prayer. It is an emotional prayer. Translate it with a word that brings out this anguish, almost desperation.
- “God of my righteousness” means “God who makes me righteous” or “God who gives me righteousness” – God is the source of my righteousness. (See “Unlocking some of the obstacles to the psalm” under Step 2.) Translate “righteousness” with a term that expresses the good order and wellness that God brings with his divine rule.





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- Why is the psalmist in distress? In the rest of the psalm, we find out: his honour is turned into shame, the people around him love emptiness and run after lies, they are not sacrificing in the right way, and they are looking for “good” things at the wrong places.
- Repetition of 1st person in v1: “I... me... my... me... me... my...”
- Look at the metaphor “in distress, you have made an open space for me”. See if you can translate it with an idiom of freedom.

Activity: Retell the three requests in your own words. Then try singing, or chanting, these three petitions in your language.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 2: Verse 2 - Rebuke: turning glory to shame and rejecting God by going after worthless lies

2 O sons of man,
until-when (shall) my honour (be) to shame?
You love emptiness
You seek falsehood.

Selah

2 O people,
how long shall my honour be turned into
shame?
You love what is nothing,
you seek what is false.

Selah

Discuss:

- There is a change in the addressee here. In verse 1, God is addressed. In verses 2-5, it seems to be that the psalmist is rebuking the “sons of man”.
- “Sons of man” do not only refer to men. It is a Hebrew way of referring to “humans”, i.e., women and men. Make sure your translation assumes both.
- The rhetorical question in verse 2 is interesting. How are rhetorical questions used in poetry in your language? Can they be used to challenge people to change their behaviour?
- Draw on the internalisation activity for the translation of honour and shame. If you have a honour-shame culture, this can be an important topic to discuss. Although the people might cause shame, or unjustly accuse the psalmist of something, the LORD has set the psalmist apart for himself, the LORD will give him goodness, joy, peace, rest and security. The LORD will restore his honour.
- How will you translate “until when?” or “how long?” in verse 2 in such a way to bring out emphasis? In Bantu languages, question words like this often come at the end of a sentence. These words are very common in psalms of lament.
- Discuss the words “emptiness” and “false” and how you would translate them. Don’t get stuck with the word “idols”. These could be idols, but “emptiness” and things that are “false” take us further than what the idea of a physical idol can. In its simplest form, these are things that can’t help.



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Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 3: Verse 3 - Confidence in YHWH

3 But know that he has set apart YHWH
a loyal one for himself;
YHWH will hear when I call to him.

3 But know that the LORD has devoted me, a
loyal one, for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.

Discuss:

- The name of God, YHWH, is prominent in Psalm 4. It appears 5 times and ELOHIM once.
- “Set apart” is to make something or someone separate by treating it differently.
- “Loyal one” comes from the root CHESED (covenant love). It is the faithful one, the one who remains in covenant with the LORD. Some versions have “godly one”. He is the one who has experienced God’s faithful love and remains true to that love by showing it to others.
- Could you position the second occurrence of YHWH in verse 3 in your draft as to make it prominent? Maybe try putting a pause? How would you do that in your own poetry?
- “the LORD hears when I call to him” forms an inclusio with “when I call” and “hear my prayer” in v1. What began as a prayer in v1 (“when I call... hear my prayer”) is now a statement of confidence (“the LORD hears when I call to him”).

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 4: Verses 4-5 - Rebuke and instruction: five things to do

4 Tremble and do not sin;
speak in your hearts upon your beds
and be silent.
Selah
5 Sacrifice sacrifices of TSEDEQ,
And trust in YHWH.

4 Tremble and do not sin;
speak to yourselves on your beds,
and be silent.
Selah
5 Offer sacrifices of righteousness,
and trust in the LORD.

Activity. Have a group discussion: In some cultures, leaders like chiefs or church leaders, may call the group to repentance in some area of wrongdoing. How is that normally done?

Discuss:

- In verses 4-5 there is a stacking of imperatives: tremble, do not sin, speak, be silent, sacrifice, trust. What effect does this have? How will you handle this stacking of imperatives in your own poetry?
- “Tremble” can also be translated with toss and turn. It denotes agitated motion, like shiver or shake. It’s something the waves can do. It’s something the nations do in Psalm 1. It’s not necessarily violent action, but could be. Although the verb is an imperative, it seems to mean, when you get agitated, here is what to do and not do. You can tremble with anger and rage, but



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don't sin by doing anything. You can speak your evil words within your hearts, but don't speak them out loud. Lie still and silent upon your beds, where you can do no harm. The psalmist advises his adversaries to keep their rage within themselves, to maintain control of their actions and their evil words.

- "Speak in your hearts" is a common Hebrew expression for "to think", "to ponder". Do you have a metaphor or expression that says the same?
- Between vv4 and 7 the good and the wicked are contrasted. In v4 the wicked "speak in their hearts and their beds". In v7 the righteous is "given joy in his heart" and he lies down "in peace" and "sleeps" securely.
- "Sacrifices of righteousness" means to offer according to God's will. It's not the sacrifice that is righteous, but the one who brings the sacrifice.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 5: Verses 6-8 - Confidence in YHWH's blessing of joy, peace, rest and security

6 Many are saying, "Who will show us good?"
Lift up upon us the light of your face, o YHWH!
7 You have given joy in my heart,
From the time of (when) their grain and their
new wine abound.
8 **In peace** altogether let me lie down
and let me sleep;
For **you**, o YHWH, alone
Securely you make me dwell.

6 Many are saying, "Who will show us
(anything) good?"
Lift up upon us the light of your presence, O
LORD!
7 You have given more joy in my heart
than when their grain and new wine abounded.
8 **In peace** altogether let me lie down and let
me sleep;
for it is **you**, O LORD, alone,
who makes me dwell **securely**.

Discuss:

- V6 is the heart of the psalm and v7-8 are the climactic conclusion, forming the high point of the psalmist's confidence in YHWH.
- V6b is the psalmist's response to the question of the sons of man in v6a. They ask "who will show us anything good?" and he responds by prayer that God will "lift upon us the light of your face" because he knows that the LORD's presence is true goodness.
- In verses 7-8 we see a clustering of fronted words, i.e., words that are emphasised by unusual word order. "In peace", "you" and "securely" are all fronted. How would you emphasise this in your language?
- "Many" and "abound" have the same root in Hebrew and form an inclusio. "Trust" and "securely" also have the same root and serve as emphasis.
- The psalmist hints at what the "good" in v6 is. It may look like it is the "abounding grain and new wine" which the people see as "good". This harkens back to all the blessings of the covenant, like fruitful work, happy marriage, children, safety, prosperity, good health. And indeed, these things are good, but the psalmist has "good" that goes much deeper and is less circumstantial than that – the joy, peace, rest and safety the psalmist finds when the LORD lifts up upon him the light of



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his face, the goodness of his presence. The “goodness” and the “light of his face” is what happens when God brings someone “righteousness”, when He puts things right. It means that YHWH reveals his presence to the ones loyal to him. The “good” can also hint back at the freedom from distress and the desired open space mentioned in v1.

- “Lift the light of your face” is an important phrase. “Face” in Hebrew implies presence. How can you express the thought “the light of your face” poetically in your language? How can light “be lifted” over us? Which word or words would express this divine blessing best in your language?
- “Joy in my heart” means a deep, overwhelming joy, very great joy in my innermost being. This verse gives a classic contrast between inward and outward joy, the first welling up steadily from God through every discouragement, the second the rare product of a pleasant set of circumstances.
- “Peace” has to be understood as “human flourishing” rather than the cessation of warfare. In this verse, it is not only “peace”, but “peace altogether”, “complete peace”. The Hebrew word is SHALOM, which means not only peace as no violence or warfare, but completeness, soundness, welfare, tranquillity, and contentment. “In peace” contrasts directly with “in distress” in v1.
- “Securely”: The essence of the term seems to be security, a security in God that gives safety and confidence, that makes the psalmist unafraid. Being unafraid is deeper, more comprehensive, wider, like the wide-open spaces of freedom David asked the God of his righteousness to give him. Once again (like the joy) it is not dependent on circumstances of real safety, but on trust in the LORD. The same root is used in v5 (“trust”).
- There are certainly several words in your language for joy, peace, and security/safety. Explore all of them, not only one, as you think about this verse. (Draw back on the internalisation activity where the group explored these concepts.)

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Activities:

- 1) Listen again to the recordings of each verse or section.
- 2) Think about how to include relevant parts from previous steps and to use ideas from the previous creative activities.
- 3) Put everything together to make a poetic oral representation of the complete psalm, and then record it.



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Phase 2: TEXT



Step 6: Transcribe

Make a written draft

Activity: Transcribe the recording/s of the oral draft onto paper or a computer.

Before moving on to the checking steps, check the transcribed draft for the following. This should be done as a whole group, looking at the psalm projected onto a screen or wall. Doing this now will help the exegetical and poetical checks that follow to stay focused on essential matters.

1. **Versification:** put the verse numbers into the psalm.
2. Check that the number of the psalm, and any **superscription**, are in place at the top. (Superscriptions are often left out completely according to team policy, but they are recommended to be put in the written text but not the song.)
3. Put in the **stanza breaks** (blank lines usually).
4. Correct the **punctuation**, in particular finding out where the sentences should end. Different groups use different approaches. Our recommendation is to use capital letters only for the beginning of sentences, not for the beginning of each poetic line.
5. Correct the **spelling**. You may find that there is a lot of discussion over this. The group needs to have consistency but also needs to abide by any government guidelines.
6. Raise any questions you have about the **back translation** at this point. The back translation just needs to be comprehensible; it does not need spell checks etc. You, the facilitator, are the only person who needs it. However, without a good back translation you cannot understand what is going on. As a bonus, at least a couple of exegetical questions you've prepared usually turn out to be unnecessary after this step.
7. Check the **line divisions** (this refers to how the power is broken up into lines and where to make those breaks).



Step 7: Contents Check

Checking exegetical faithfulness

Check the exegesis of the oral translation. Consider whether the correct meaning has been translated and if the wording used can be improved. The purpose of this step is to check the content of your draft for faithfulness and trustworthiness.

Activity: Review the draft translation in detail, using the oral recording of Step 5 or the transcription of Step 6. Do an exegetical check by comparing the draft with the guide translations given in Appendix A and the exegetical layout in Appendix B and adjust the text as necessary.



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EXEGETICAL CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- Verse 1 “God of my righteousness” and the placing of the vocative.
- Verse 2: sons of man
- Verse 2: the honour-shame pair
- Verse 2: loving emptiness
- Verse 3a: the loyal one
- Verse 3b: Position YHWH in your draft as to make it prominent. Maybe try putting a pause and comma after it.
- Verse 4: tremble versus anger
- Verse 5: “sacrifices of righteousness”
- Verse 6c “shine your face on us” is the high point, the peak of the poem
- Look at the notes in step 5
- Look at the notes in Appendix B



Step 8: Poetry Check

Compare and weigh the poetic features

Check if the Hebrew poetry is all accounted for in the translation through equivalent poetic features in the target language. Consider if the poetry of the translation can be improved, for example, look at the length of lines and the use of rhythm and ideophones.

Activity: Consider the poetic features of your translation. Do they reflect the purpose of the Hebrew poetic features, drawing attention to the correct parts? Experiment a bit with different word-orders and see what sounds the most beautiful, the most poetic.

POETIC CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- Verse 1 The metaphor for being in a tight space and set free
- Verse 2 and 6 The rhetorical questions
- Verse 4 The stacking of imperatives
- Verse 7-8 The clustering of fronted words
- Does this translation incorporate the poetic features of the lament and exhortation genre of your language?
- Are there sufficient figures of speech in your translation? Poetry requires an abundance of figures.
- Are the verse lines of equal length, more or less?
- Are you satisfied with the rhythm? Is there a poetic rhythm and balance in your translation? Be sure to do syllable and accent counts.



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- Consider the poetic device of tail-head constructions or chiasms.
- Consider exclamations and ideophones.
- Evaluate appropriate word order changes for marked word-order constructions in the original.
- Feel free to use defamiliar language, like ellipsis (leaving out implied words), strange (but still acceptable) word-order, stand-alone words, etc., which are all very appropriate for poetry.
- Any other typical poetic devices for your language that you can work in?



Step 9: Finalise

Preparing the final version of an authenticated translation

Prepare the final version which will serve as an authorized translation, that in turn will serve as the basis for performing the psalm in the community (audio, visual and written).

Activity: Re-check the spelling of your transcription, the punctuation, in-setting, and the layout of paragraphs to represent stanza segmentation.

Activity: Re-check the essential accuracy of the back translation (not worrying about spelling).

Activity: In AVTT, ensure that the final text of your psalm is uploaded with a back translation, check that the recordings from different steps are in the correct place, and do a final audio recording.

Activity: If possible, copy the final written text into Paratext.

Phase 3: PERFORMANCE



Step 10: Perform

Performing the psalm in your community

Convert text into performance (dramatic reading/song/chant) to both perform and share this psalm, ensuring the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible).

You now want to convert your written translation into a performance (song or chant) so that you can share it with your community. You need to make sure that the main message comes through in





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content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible). The genre - lament or praise or thanksgiving or other - should be similar to songs of the same genre in your culture.

Psalm-specific ideas:

- Record a dramatic reading of the whole psalm. Maybe use another voice for v6.
- Make a song using the text of your final translation. You can change word order, but try to include all the words. Record.
- Record a short chorus of one or two verses. Something catchy and highly memorable. Record audio and video. If possible, invite a group of children to learn and perform the chorus as well.

Activity: Identify any relevant genres or styles or performance and put the psalm to music. You can put the whole psalm to music, word-for-word, or you can use creative licence to adapt the psalm for the performance.

Activity: Complete a transcript and back translation for the lyrics of any song created by the team to be checked before recording.

FINAL CHECKLIST

In the end of each psalm, there should ideally be four products:

1. Transcription: An authorized, authenticated, or officially written draft in AVTT and Paratext.
2. Dramatic Reading: A recording of a dramatic reading or recitation of the whole psalm, using the authenticated version word-for-word, recorded in AVTT.
3. Whole Psalm Performance: A recording of a performance of the whole psalm, using the entire authenticated version but with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance, including poetic and dramatic features beyond the authenticated version, recorded in AVTT.
4. Song or Hymn: A recording of a performance of part of the psalm including the main idea of the psalm, in the form of a song, hymn or chorus, with or without drama, with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance and to make it easy to sing and remember, recorded in AVTT. An improved version of the Step 4 composition could be used here.



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Appendix A: Guide Translations

| Hebrew-mirror | Guide Translation |
|--|---|
| <p>To the choirmaster with stringed instruments. A psalm of David.</p> <p>1 When I call, answer me, ELOHIM of my TSEDEQ! In distress you have made open space for me, Show favour to me and hear my prayer!</p> <p>2 O sons of man, until-when (shall) my honour (be) to shame? You love emptiness You seek falsehood.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Selah</p> <p>3 But know that he has set apart YHWH a loyal one for himself; YHWH hears when I call to him.</p> <p>4 Tremble and do not sin; speak in your hearts upon your beds and be silent.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Selah</p> <p>5 Sacrifice sacrifices of TSEDEQ, And trust in YHWH.</p> <p>6 Many are saying, “Who will show us good?” Lift up upon us the light of your face, o YHWH!</p> <p>7 You have given joy in my heart, from the time of (when) their grain and their new wine abound.</p> <p>8 In peace altogether let me lie down and let me sleep; For you, o YHWH, alone Securely you make me dwell.</p> | <p>To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A psalm of David.</p> <p>1 When I call, answer me, O God of my righteousness! In distress, you have made an open space for me. Show favour to me and hear my prayer.</p> <p>2 O people, how long shall my honour be turned into shame? You love what is nothing, you seek what is false!</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Selah</p> <p>3 But know that the LORD has devoted me, a loyal one, for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.</p> <p>4 Tremble and do not sin; speak quietly to yourselves on your beds, and be silent.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Selah</p> <p>5 Offer sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD.</p> <p>6 Many are saying, “Who will show us (anything) good?” Lift up upon us the light of your presence, O LORD!</p> <p>7 You have given joy in my heart more than when their grain and new wine abounded.</p> <p>8 In peace altogether let me lie down and sleep; for it is you, O LORD, alone, who makes me dwell securely.</p> |





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Appendix B: Exegetical Layout

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SUGGESTED HEADING

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Coding for TAM Verbs and Hebrew features:

- Qatal perfective = blue
- Yiqtol imperfective = red
- Infinitive construct = purple
- Wayyiqtol waw+imperfective = pink
- Jussive/cohortative = light brown
- Imperative = brown
- Participle = green
- Weqatal = navy

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| לְמַנְצֵחַ בְּנְגִינֹת | ¹ To.the.choirmaster ² with.stringed.instruments ³ . |
| מְזֻמֹּר לְדָוִד: | Psalm of.David |
| בְּקִרְאֵי עַנְנֵי אֱלֹהֵי צְדִקְי | 1 When.I.call answer(S).me ELOHIM of.my.TSEDEQ ⁴ ! |
| בְּצַר הִרְתַּבְּתָּ לִי | In.distress you(2S).have.made.open.space for.me, |
| חַנּוּנִי וּשְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי | Show.favour(S).to.me ⁵ and.hear(S) my.prayer! |

¹ Traditionally Psalm 4 is seen as an evening prayer, based on verse 8a.

² "to the choirmaster" is added to 55 psalms. It could be that there was a collection of psalms compiled for the choirmaster from different sources or choirs which was used at special occasions. Or it could mean that the composition had to be handed over to the conductor of the temple choir to be used in the temple. "To the worship-leader."

³ "Stringed instruments" appear in 7 psalms (Pss 4, 6, 54, 55, 61, 67, 76). The word "psalm" also originally meant plucking the string of a bow, hence the playing of a stringed instrument.

⁴ Translations differ. NIV has "my righteous God", ESV, NKJV and NASB have "God of my righteousness" (NASB has a footnote "who maintains my right"), CSB and NET have "God, who vindicates me".

⁵ "Show favour to me", be gracious to me, show kindness without me deserving it. (This is a different word than mercy.)



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|--|--|
| בְּנֵי אָדָם | 2 ⁶ O.sons of.man ⁷ , |
| עַד-מָה כְּבוֹדִי לְקַלְמָה | How.long my.honour ⁸ to.shame? |
| תִּאְהָבוּ רֵיק | You(2P).love emptiness |
| תִּבְקְשׁוּ כִזְבַּ סֵּלָה: | You(2P).seek ⁹ falsehood. Selah ¹⁰ |
| וַדַּעוּ כִּי-הִפְלִיחַ יְהוָה חֶסֶד לָו | 3 And.know ¹¹ (P) that-he.has.set.apart ¹² YHWH a.loyal.one for.himself; |
| יְהוָה יִשְׁמַע בְּקִרְאֵי אֱלֹו: | YHWH will.hear when.I.call to.him. |
| רָגְזוּ וְאַל-תִּחַטְּאוּ | 4 Tremble(P) ¹³ and.do.not-sin(P) ¹⁴ ; |
| אִמְרוּ בְּלִבְבְּכֶם עַל-מִשְׁכְּבֵיכֶם | Speak(P) in.your.hearts upon-your.beds ¹⁵ |
| וְדַמּוּ סֵּלָה | and.be.silent(P). Selah |

⁶ The first line of this verse focuses on the king, whom the “sons of man” are against. The second line puts the spotlight on the love of their hearts and what they seek, i.e., the things they are for. The rebuke reaches to the core of their affections (which is ultimately emptiness and lies).

⁷ The “sons of man” were not necessarily his mortal enemies, but people around him and the people of Israel in general that don’t have a heart for God in this time of testing. It could be the high-born, influential people. People who try to discourage him, who display a lack of faith that the LORD will keep his covenant promises of sustenance. He challenges them to repent from their “emptiness” and trust the LORD.” The identities of those people are not really known, helping us to identify deeper with the Psalm.

⁸ “my honour” means my glory or splendour, that is my reputation, my good name. In the mouth of King David, the respect due to me as the God-appointed and anointed king.

⁹ “seek” means devote your life and energies.

¹⁰ The meaning of Selah is not clear, but it may mean “go slowly, think about this before proceeding!” or “sing louder!”

¹¹ “And know” is an abrupt plural imperative – “here is what we all need to know!”. “And” could be better translated “but”. This is the first of a list of 6 imperatives directed to the psalmist’s audience; “know”, “tremble”, “do not sin”, “say”, “sacrifice” and “trust”. (There are 4 more imperatives in the psalm, directed towards God; “answer”, “show favour”, “listen” and “lift up”.)

¹² “Set apart” is sometimes used to describe what “holy” means, but this is not the Hebrew word “holy” (QODESH).

¹³ “tremble”: English versions assume not only physical, but emotional agitation here, e.g., “in your anger”. The LXX sees anger here. Eph 4:26 quotes the LXX verbatim, “Be angry and do not sin”.

¹⁴ “do not sin” means don’t do wrong against the God of righteousness; don’t miss what God has for you. Rather have respect for him, serve him and trust him.

¹⁵ The addressed lie down on their beds, but there is heart work to be done before they sleep – they need to ponder their anger and sin. Paul builds on this idea by adding “don’t let the sun set on your anger” (Eph 4:26). This contrasts with the righteous one of God who lies down and sleeps in perfect peace (v8).



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| | |
|--|---|
| זָבַחוּ זִבְחֵי-עֶדְקָה | 5 Sacrifice(P) sacrifices-of.TSEDEQ, |
| וּבִטְחוּ אֶל-יְהוָה: | and.trust(P) in-YHWH. |
| רַבִּים אֹמְרִים | 6 Many are.saying, |
| מִי-יִרְאֵנוּ טוֹב | “Who-will.show.us good?” |
| נִסָּה-עָלֵינוּ אֹר פְּנֵיךָ יְהוָה: | Lift.up(S)-upon.us (the).light of.your.face, YHWH! |
| נָתַתָּה שִׂמְחָה בְּלִבִּי | 7 You(S).have.given joy in.my.heart, |
| מֵעַתַּת דְּגָנָם וְתִירוֹשָׁם רַבּוּ: | from.the.time.of their.grain and.their.new.wine abounded. |
| בְּשָׁלוֹם יַחְדָּו אֲשַׁכְּבָה וְאִישׁוֹן | 8 In.peace altogether ¹⁶ let.me.lie.down and.let.me.sleep; |
| כִּי-אַתָּה יְהוָה לְבַדְּךָ | for-you(S) , YHWH, (to.)alone ¹⁷ |
| לְבַטָּח תּוֹשִׁיבֵנִי: | to.securely you(S).make.me.dwell. |

¹⁶ “altogether” is left untranslated in most English versions. It probably says something about the peace — “in an altogether peaceful state”, “in complete peace”.

¹⁷ The “to alone” means “you, YHWH, you alone”, adding emphasis to the source of the psalmist’s complete peace.



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Appendix C: Flower Garden

The repetitions and patterns below are placed upon guide translation #2 (Hebrew-tight). Read the commentary at the end of this Appendix which explains insights into these patterns.

Colour Code:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated words/concepts • Repeated words/concepts • Repeated words/concepts • Repeated words/concepts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated words/concepts • Repeated words/concepts • Repeated words/concepts • Repeated words/concepts • Repeated words/concepts |
|--|---|

See the commentary below concerning the themes, colours, and patterns in this section.

*To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.
A psalm of David.*

1 When I call, answer me, O God of my righteousness!
In distress, you have made an open space for me.
Show favour to me and hear my prayer.

2 O sons of men,
how long shall my honour be turned into shame?
You love emptiness,
you seek what is false. Selah

3 But know that the LORD has set apart a loyal one for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.

4 Tremble and do not sin;
speak in your hearts on your beds,
and be silent. Selah

5 Offer sacrifices of righteousness,
and trust in the LORD.

6 Many are saying, "Who will show us (anything) good?"
Lift up upon us the light of your face, O LORD!

7 You have given joy in my heart
when their grain and new wine abounded.

8 In peace altogether, let me lie down and let me sleep;
For it is you, O LORD, alone
securely you make me dwell.

