

Creation Psalms

Intention

Use the writing of verse as a means of engaging joy, gratitude, worry, fear or loss. Doing so offers clarity, cultivates open spiritual reflection and nurtures hope.

Instruction

Settle into a natural area that is relatively quiet and undisturbed. Start with a short prayer or a brief, grounding practice of centering to create a sense of presence and openness. This could be a body scan, guided meditation or short reading that invites mindful attention and intention.

Afterward, engage with the natural world around you in quiet observation or by experiencing the landscape on a gentle walk. Set aside 5-15 minutes for this study.

Following this time of attention and reflection, settle into a space where you can sit and write comfortably. Consider what you saw during your time of observation. What thoughts came to mind? What did you feel stirring in you emotionally? Did the Holy Spirit move during this time?

Psalms take many forms; they can be full of joy and thanksgiving or be a deep expression of lament.

If your observation of the natural world moved you to delight or gratitude, you might try writing some verses in the style of Psalm 104:

- 14 You make grass grow for flocks and herds
 and plants to serve mankind;
- 15 That they may bring forth food from the earth,
 and wine to gladden our hearts,
- 16 Oil to make a cheerful countenance,
 and bread to strengthen the heart.
- 17 The trees of the LORD are full of sap,
 the cedars of Lebanon which he planted.
- 18 In which the birds build their nests,
 and in whose tops the stork makes his dwelling.
- 19 The high hills are a refuge for the mountain goats,
 and the stony cliffs for the rock badgers.
- 20 You appointed the moon to mark the seasons,
 and the sun knows the time of its setting.

- 21 You make darkness that it may be night,
 in which all the beasts of the forest prowl.
- 22 The lions roar after their prey and seek
 their food from God.
- 23 The sun rises, and they slip away
 and lay themselves down in their dens.
- 24 Man goes forth to his work
 and to his labor until the evening.

How does the natural world around you demonstrate God's abundant love, care and creativity? How does your feeling of joy, thanksgiving and delight direct your attention to God?

If you were moved in sorrow or pain, remember that psalms of lament represent a third of the psalter. They are a powerful means of honestly expressing hurt while moving toward hope.

Lament psalms often use a specific structure:

- Address: short, often emotional query. Why, God? How long must we suffer?
- Complaint proper: a longer explanation of the grievance
- Petition: what the psalmist wants God to do
- Motivation: the argument, why God should help
- Confession of trust and vow of praise: usually starts with "But," expression of faith in, and praise for, God.

If you're engaging in this practice as a group, you might identify a theme of lament and divide into smaller groups. Have each team work together on writing one or two parts of this traditional structure. After 10-20 minutes of writing, come together and combine the verses as a full five-part lament psalm.

Consider writing some verses in the style of Psalm 42. Just as the original psalm writers were, be as raw and honest as possible:

- 1 As the deer longs for the water-brooks,
 so longs my soul for you, O God.
- 2 My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God;
 when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?
- 3 My tears have been my food day and night,
 while all day long they say to me,
 "Where now is your God?"

- 4 I pour out my soul when I think on these things;
how I went with the multitude and led them into the
house of God,
- 5 With the voice of praise and thanksgiving,
among those who keep holy-day.
- 6 Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul?
and why are you so disquieted within me?
- 7 Put your trust in God;
for I will yet give thanks to him,
who is the help of my countenance, and my God.
- 8 My soul is heavy within me;
therefore I will remember you from the land of Jordan,
and from the peak of Mizar among the heights of Hermon.
- 9 One deep calls to another in the noise of your cataracts;
all your rapids and floods have gone over me.
- 10 The LORD grants his loving-kindness in the daytime;
in the night season his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

When you have finished writing your psalm(s), read them aloud.

Close with a prayer of gratitude and words of intention to demonstrate love and care for the place in nature that has offered you a space to write and inspiration for your writing.

These outdoor meditations were contributed by Payton Hoegh, M.Div, Spiritual Communities Director of the Center for Spirituality in Nature and postulant for ordained ministry in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles. For more resources and information about spiritual practices and guided meditations and to learn about joining other Episcopal congregations in starting a local "Spirituality in Nature Group" community, visit www.centerforspiritualityinnature.org.