

REORIENT

Psalms for the Wilderness



Devotional & Workbook

Weeks 4-7 - Reorientation

INTRODUCTION

“Two movements in human life are important: (a) deep reluctance to let loose of a world that has passed away, and (b) capacity to embrace a new world being given.”

Walter Brueggemann, The Psalms & the Life of Faith, p. 8

Most of us have used GPS or navigation apps at some point. They're a convenient way to find our way, especially somewhere unfamiliar. I remember riding in the car with my parents on a trip to Santa Cruz, driving in circles because they couldn't find the street they wanted. They weren't even using a paper map — just a feeling that the street had to be around the next corner.

A GPS all but eliminates the risk of getting lost. Even if you miss a turn, it chimes in with those magical words: “recalculating.” It finds new directions to get you back on track. Follow them, and you're reoriented toward your destination.

Now imagine if, instead of recalculating, the GPS just told you to go back to where you started. Imagine if it couldn't adjust to where you actually were, and could only follow the originally charted path. That would be frustrating and slow — you might give up and try to chart the way yourself, like my parents did, with mixed results.

We sometimes work the same way. When life is disrupted and we feel lost or grieving, we want to go back — to what was familiar, to what felt safe. That instinct can lead us to abandon the path we're on in search of security: an old job, an old relationship, a comfortable place. We may find what's familiar there, but rarely a way forward.

This is what I believe the next few psalms are trying to do for us — what a GPS does. Rather than sending us back to the familiar to start over, or leaving us to give up, psalms of

reorientation “recalculate” our path forward. Like the psalms of disorientation, they acknowledge real difficulty. Psalm 77 wrestles with feeling abandoned by God,

“Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?”

Psalm 77:7

But these psalms don’t stay there. Often they turn on a word like “remember” — a recollection of how God has worked before, paired with hope that he’ll work that way again. Psalm 77 reaches this turn when the psalmist writes,

“Then I thought, ‘To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand. I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.’”

Psalm 77:10–11

Remembering how God has worked in the past reorients the psalmist toward hope for the future.

These are psalms that recall the past but look forward with hope. They don’t dwell there, and they don’t seek the safety of what once was. Instead, they call to mind God’s faithfulness and promises, “recalculating” the path and reorienting us to look up and see how God might be at work now.

My hope and prayer is that as we look at these psalms together, we’ll let them do the same for us — reorient us, and recalculate our path forward.

With you on the journey,
Pastor Greg Flagg

REORIENTATION

Week 4 - Remember

In the book *Rare Leadership*, Marcus Warner and Jim Wilder describe traits that are important, but surprisingly uncommon, in effective leaders. RARE is an acronym for four habits: Remain Relational, Act Like Yourself, Return to Joy, and Endure Hardship Well.

In the chapter on Return to Joy, they outline a process for walking ourselves and others back toward joy: Validate, Comfort, Repattern (also an acronym - VCR). This process closely mirrors what I believe the psalms of reorientation are doing. They validate the situation and what the psalmist is feeling. They offer comfort by remembering truths about God and recalling how God has acted in the past. Only after validating and comforting are we able to repattern to then see a new path ahead.

Describing how comfort works in this process, Warner and Wilder write:

“Comfort lets us know that however large the problem, our group identity is larger. There are still relationships and resources for us even when the problem cannot be changed.” (p. 170)

This is exactly what the psalms of reorientation attempt when they call us to “remember” and rehearse what is true: God is faithful, we have a community of friends, and these feelings are not unique to us.

When we remember those things, no matter how overwhelming the situation feels, reorienting toward joy becomes a little easier.

Psalm 77

I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted.

I remembered you, God, and I groaned; I meditated, and my spirit grew faint. You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart meditated and my spirit asked: “Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”

Then I thought, “To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand. I will remember the deeds of the Lord ; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds.”

(Verses 1-12)



Pittman, Lauren Wright. *For Those in Darkness [Light is Dawning]*, 2018.

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Psalm 22 (v. 2-4) - "My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises. In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them."

Practice

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina (Latin for “Divine Reading”) is a traditional practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God’s word. It does not treat Scripture as texts to be studied, but as the living word.

Through the practice of Lectio Divina a scripture is read through four times with a different purpose for each reading. Each time we read the text, we allow it to permeate our mind and souls at a different level. We are not looking to find information, we are desiring for God to shape and change us through His word.

The four steps of Lectio Divina are:

1. Read (Lectio)

Read the passage once. Silently and slowly. If you are comfortable, read the text out loud.

2. Reflect (Meditatio)

Read the verse a second time. Then ask yourself, “What does this mean? What is the invitation here? Where is Christ in these verses?”

3. Respond (Oratio)

Read the verse a third time. Then talk to God about it. What do you need to say to God? What is God saying to you?

4. Rest (Contemplatio)

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REORIENTATION

Week 5 - Confession

One of the most famous lines in American film history comes from the 1970 film *Love Story*: “Love means never having to say you’re sorry.” Oliver and Jenny, from very different backgrounds, fall in love, marry, and weather families who doubt them. Jenny says the line to Oliver after a fight; later, Oliver says it to his father as they reconcile.

The sentiment has been debated ever since. Most say the line is nonsense — anyone in a real relationship eventually has to apologize. Others insist true love makes space for faults and offers forgiveness before it’s even asked for.

Our faith invites a similar debate. The psalms remind us that God loves us with an “unfailing love” — hesed, a steadfast, covenant loyalty. So why would we ever need to say “we’re sorry,” if God’s love never fails?

Yet the psalms also call God a righteous and regularly model confession. Proverbs 28:13 says, “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” James 5:16 adds, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other.”

Both can be true. God is love, watching the road for those returning to him, ready to run and embrace them. But when we’ve walked away from God’s unfailing love, confession is what opens us back up to experiencing its fullness. Without acknowledging the break, we risk believing the lie that we’re beyond forgiveness.

Confession reminds us that love means never having to say you’re sorry — because God loves us before we say it. But once we do confess, we get to reorient our experience around inexhaustible depths of his mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

(Verses 1-12)



Christ, Forgive a Penitent!, stained glass in Saint Mary of the Presentation Catholic Church, Geneva, IN.

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Psalm 38 (v. 17-18) - "For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me. I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin."

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REORIENTATION

Week 6 - Trust

Anyone who's spent time in church youth groups knows the "Trust Fall." Someone stands with their back to the group, arms crossed, and falls backward. They are unable to see whether the group behind them is ready to catch them. Trust is what closes that gap between falling and being caught.

For some, this is easy. Life has taught them people can be relied on. For others, it's terrifying. Experience has taught them the opposite. Some have felt the real thing this exercise only simulates: betrayal.

Brené Brown in her book *Atlas of the Heart* writes that betrayal can feel "as if the ground beneath us has given way" (p. 194); like the hands behind us never caught us at all.

We hear that same struggle in the Psalms: "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?" The psalmist wonders if God is even listening. They are still falling, not yet caught, maybe never will be. It's the language of betrayal, aimed at God's silence.

But the psalmist doesn't stay there. They are met with the truth: God has not betrayed them. God has been trustworthy before and will be again. Their lament is reoriented around God's "unfailing love" and "salvation," which leads to the acknowledgment, "he has been good to me."

Sometimes we can feel like the psalmist, falling backward in a "Trust Fall" exercise with God wondering if God is really back there. We can begin to feel like God has betrayed us and has drawn back his arms in some cruel trick.

The psalmist leans back, maybe screams a bit, but trusts they will not be betrayed even as they wait for the arms to come.

Psalm 13

How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.



Cyrus Cuneo, World War I: The Red Cross in the trenches ca. 1914-1920.

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Psalm 102 (v. 11-13) - "My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass. But you, Lord, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations. You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come."

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REORIENTATION

Week 7 - Deliverance

There isn't much we have to wait for anymore. We stream shows on demand instead of waiting for them to air. Two-day delivery and tracking numbers mean we rarely wonder when a package will arrive. Late-night cravings can be solved in under an hour with DoorDash.

So when we're walking through a hard season, waiting for God to intervene can feel unbearable. Like other psalms have shown us, we wonder if God will ever show up, or if anything will change. Things drag on longer than we hoped, and we keep crying out.

Then, surprisingly, out of nowhere it changes.

Maybe we witness a miracle, and God works in wondrous ways. Our grief is transformed into joy. Maybe instead we're given grace to see the world differently. Our struggle becomes integrated into our life as God reorients our perspective.

Through either path, we discover deliverance — the peace the psalmist describes: “I will listen to what God the LORD says; he promises peace to his people.” That deliverance gives us a hard-won peace, a deeper trust in God, and a new vision to avoid what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls “cheap grace” in *The Cost of Discipleship*. Costly grace, by contrast, is “the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.”

Experiencing God's deliverance means we've come to see who God is in a new way. Our view is reframed because we've kept seeking him and knocking at the door. God reorients our perspective around his will for the world around us and our life. That leads to deeper trust, more honest praise, and a life shaped by costly grace rather than cheap.

Psalm 85

You, Lord , showed favor to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger.

Restore us again, God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, Lord , and grant us your salvation.

I will listen to what God the Lord says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants— but let them not turn to folly. Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.



Jean François Millet, Spring, ca. 1868-1873.

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Psalm 86 (v. 11-13) - “Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead.”

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