

REDISCOVERING OUR PLACE IN GOD'S STORY



PROLOGUE BIBLE STUDY

OPENING QUESTIONS

- 1) Human beings are story-writing creatures. We use stories to make meaning, inspire hope, and captivate our imaginations. What is one of your favorite stories? Share about a favorite book, short story, or movie. What is it about this particular story that grips your heart?
- 2) The Bible is not just a collection of short stories, moral lessons, and religious laws. It is a story. It has an overarching narrative about why God created the world and how he is working to rescue and redeem it. How familiar are you with the meta narrative of Scripture? How would you describe the larger storyline of Scripture to a friend?
- 3) Which parts of the Bible/biblical narrative do you find most difficult to understand or make sense of? Which parts are you most drawn to and excited by?

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 1

Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.
Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

"A transplanted tree provides the image that locates us in the way of prayer. Letting the Psalm words carry their most natural meaning, "a tree planted by streams of water" is "a tree transplanted alongside irrigation canals." Israel, during the time that the Psalms were collected and made into this prayer book, was in Babylonian exile. Babylon was flat and featureless. A single river flowed through the country. The Babylonians had cut a network of irrigation canals across the land, multiplying the square miles of fertility. Transplanted to the banks of these irrigation ditches the Israelites - refugees under a merciless sun - thought they were in the worst possible place for prayer. Solomon's splendid temple was a pile of ruins back in Jerusalem. They didn't think they could pray. But they did. How did they do it? By letting God's word enter their lives again, there in exile, and letting his address pull answers out of them. They immersed themselves in Scripture meditation. Before they knew it, they were praying. They were trees. Transplanted to Babylon they put down roots, put out leaves, and produced fruit. We all suppose that we could pray, or pray better, if we were in the right place. We put off praying until we are where we think we should be, or want to be... Scripture meditation is the action that moves us away from distracting words that push us this way and that; these words pull us into attentiveness. The transplanted tree is the image that focuses our distracted will, the will that is ever restlessly looking for satisfaction somewhere else. The tree claims our attention and says, 'Put your roots down here.'"

Eugene Peterson, *Answering God*

**OBSERVATION
QUESTIONS**

- 1) Share one thing that stands out to you in Psalm 1 - something that challenges you, encourages you, or confuses you.
- 2) Why do you think the Psalmist chooses a tree and chaff as the primary metaphors to describe two paths for a person's spiritual life? What does each metaphor communicate about the quality of life each path brings?
- 3) What does it mean to "step," "stand," or "sit" with the wicked or with sinners?
- 4) What does it mean to meditate on God's law day and night? How does one do this practically?
- 5) What kinds of questions, fears, and concerns might the Israelites have had while in exile in Babylon? What kinds of "fruit" would meditating on the biblical story produce in their lives during this difficult season?

**APPLICATION
QUESTIONS**

- 1) How can being a college student at UVM make it hard to pray and spend time reading the Bible? Do you ever feel like the Israelites may have felt in Babylon? Why?
- 2) What distracts, hinders, or makes it hard for you to pray and spend time with God while on campus?
- 3) What would it mean for you to be "spiritually rooted" like a well-watered tree while a student at UVM?
- 4) What kind of "fruit" would you want to yield more of by spending more time praying and meditating on the biblical story?

**SPIRITUAL
EXERCISE**

Find a nice large tree somewhere on campus. Spend a few minutes reflecting on its size, strength, and rootedness. Write a prayer asking God to make your spiritual life like that tree.