

Small Group Guide: The Praying Life - Week 1

Based on Psalm 23 and 1 Samuel 16-17

Overview

This week Pastor Milissa opened a new sermon series called *The Praying Life*, centered on the life and prayers of King David. Using Psalm 23 alongside the early chapters of David's story, she showed how God prepares us for what he calls us to do - through skills and experience, through open doors, and most importantly through a transformed heart. The goal of this series is to help us bring every season of life to God in prayer, trusting that when we encounter him, we are changed even when our circumstances are not.

Key Takeaways

- God prepares us for what he calls us to do long before we or anyone else can see what that is.
- God uses ordinary, even mundane seasons of life to build skills and character in us.
- While people look at outward appearance and achievement, God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).
- David's courage against Goliath was rooted in what he had already learned about God while tending sheep in obscurity.
- Prayer and worship are not just spiritual habits - they are the means by which God transforms our hearts.
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd who did what no human shepherd could do, laying down his life for his sheep (John 10:11).
- A transformed heart is not just for our own benefit - it is for the sake of others and the world.

Discussion Questions

Opening (Choose one to get the conversation started)

1. Have you ever walked a trail, taken a trip, or had an experience in nature that gave you an unexpected spiritual insight? What happened?
2. Is there a passage of Scripture, like Psalm 23, that you have heard so many times it has become familiar? What is one thing about it that still catches your attention?

Going Deeper

3. Pastor Milissa described how David spent years tending sheep in obscurity, building skills and character that God would later use in remarkable ways. Can you think of a season in your own life - a job, a role, a difficult experience - that you now recognize as preparation for something God called you to later?
4. In 1 Samuel 16:7, God tells Samuel that he does not look at outward appearance but at the heart. Where do you find yourself most tempted to measure your own value or readiness by outward things - accomplishments, appearance, reputation, or resume - rather than by what is happening in your heart?
5. David gave God the credit for his victories against the lion and the bear before he ever faced Goliath. He said, "The Lord who rescued me from the paw of a lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37). How does remembering what God has already done in your past build your faith for what you are facing right now?
6. Pastor Milissa made the observation that David's music was not just music - it was prayer and worship. His transformed heart was what set him apart from Saul, who had similar outward gifts and abilities. What does it look like in your own life to cultivate a heart after God's own heart, rather than simply developing skills and abilities?
7. Mary's reflection on the wandering sheep during the pilgrimage journey in Wales led her to think about people she knew who had stepped outside of relationship with Jesus, not fully realizing the danger they were in. Who comes to mind for you? How does thinking of those people as sheep without a shepherd change how you feel about them or pray for them?
8. Pastor Milissa said this about prayer: "When we bring things to God in prayer, the circumstances might not necessarily change, but we are different

because we've encountered the Lord. Nothing has changed, but everything is different." Have you experienced this? What did that look like?

Reflection Questions

9. Pastor Milissa described a "before and after" moment - a point in life where everything is divided into what came before and what came after. Has there been a moment like that in your relationship with God? What happened?
 10. At the end of the sermon, Pastor Milissa prayed: "Forgive me for taking credit and becoming the hero in my story instead of making you the hero." Where in your life right now are you most tempted to position yourself as the hero rather than giving God that place?
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Practical Applications

- This week, identify one ordinary thing in your life - your work, a skill, a relationship, a responsibility - and intentionally offer it to God in prayer. Ask him whether he is using it to prepare you for something you cannot yet see.
 - Spend time with Psalm 23 this week, but read it slowly and personally. Replace "me" and "my" with your own name. Let it become a prayer rather than a reading. Notice which line feels most true to your life right now and which line feels most like a stretch of faith.
 - Think of one person in your life who has wandered from God. Commit to praying for that person by name every day this week. Ask God to show you what, if anything, he is inviting you to do in response.
 - Journal or reflect on this question: Where do you see evidence that God has been preparing you for something, even in seasons that felt insignificant or hidden?
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Closing Prayer

Use the prayer from the end of the sermon as a guide for your group's closing prayer, or pray it together as written:

"God, you are our Good Shepherd. We confess to you the ways that we have wandered out of the sheepfold. As a Good Shepherd, would you take us by the hand? Would you lead us back? Everything in my life is because of you. Every good thing is because of you. You have given me skills, experiences, talents, gifts. Every success that I've had is because of your gracious hand. Holy Spirit, come. Would you fill every one of us? Would you magnify and empower all of the things that you have done in us? Show each and every one of us the right next step on your path of righteousness. In your name, Jesus. Amen."

Looking Ahead

Next week the series continues with David's story as his victory over Goliath propels him into rising fame, rising power, and great heartache - and the prayers that carried him through it all.