

the sanctuary

Creative prayer ideas

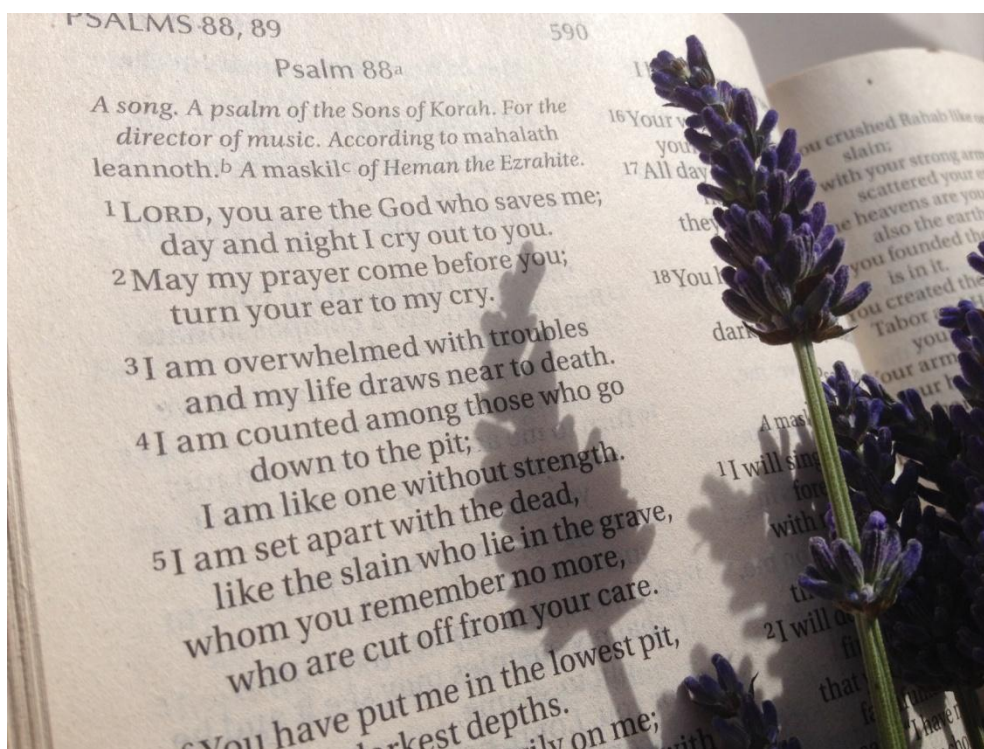
for interceding with the Psalms

One of the major stimuli for the Sanctuary's daily prayer rhythm is the Psalms. We cycle around them, taking a different one each day, and as a result – after several years of doing so repeatedly – are getting to know them better and better; and to receive them more fully as the rich gift to the church that they are.

They are not only helpful in leading us into worship and praise, but also often in inspiring or framing our intercessions. Sometimes it's the whole Psalm that resonates, sometimes just a part of it – but we've found that praying with the Psalms brings a depth and freshness to our intercessions that helps us press into God's truth for many of the key issues in our world that we're praying about.

In this resource, we've gathered together a number of examples and ideas from our daily prayer rhythm emails and previously published blogs or resources so you can dip into our growing collection of ideas inspired by the psalms in one place, and at any time. We're expecting it to expand in the future, and you will have additional ideas about how to use many of them as it's designed to model an approach rather than be an exhaustive commentary – but we hope you will find the ideas so far a really helpful start.

(If you find this resource helpful and/or would like to think more about the Psalm's place in our worship and prayer, you might also like to read this article: www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/article-psalms-as-our-worship-school.pdf)



Psalm 1 – praying for vision and close discipleship for individuals and the church:

Inspiration: Psalm 1 is a beautiful opening to the whole collection... presenting a clear vision of what God's people should look like. Instead of being drawn away from God's presence and counsel by sin or cynicism, they remain rooted in God's word and his company. Verse 3 pictures them as being rooted and remaining in exactly the right place to weather every season and bear their appointed fruit. They are like *"a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither"* (NIV).

Intercession: We've found this picture a really helpful one to bear in mind and pray over our own lives – that our ultimate vision would be our closeness and rootedness to both God's word and his Spirit. But we've also found it helpful in forming intercessions for particular ministries, churches and the Christ's body as a whole. It is a memorable mental picture, giving us different elements of the picture to pray blessing on... from rootedness through to fruit. But it's also incredibly helpful to use for more sustained, reflective prayer for these groups. Try drawing out the different areas of the picture for each 'tree' you want to pray for them and then labelling them – praying blessing on any specific areas of rootedness or fruitful ministry that you feel led to as you do.

Psalm 3 – praying for those who are grieving, suffering or feeling overwhelmed:

Inspiration: Psalm 3:3 says *"But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high."* (NIV) Imagine standing before the Creator – your Abba Father – and experiencing him gently placing his hand under your chin, to tilt it up towards his gaze. Imagine yourself not resisting and being met by a look of such astonishing love, delight and strengthening power that your perspective on everything else fades for just a moment... Shoulders back, head up, weight lifting, smile broadening, spirit lightening, heart flooding – accepted, seen, free. This isn't a fairy-tale. This is who our God says he is – how he says he loves us...

Intercession: Bring to mind a specific situation in which people are grieving, suffering or feeling overwhelmed – and pray for God's tender hand to lift their heads, as he nurtures them in their anxiety and pours his love, hope and comfort upon them. Give thanks that he is their shield and glory even in such difficult times, and pray that they would know his fathering touch on their broken hearts today.

Psalm 8 and Psalm 19 – praying about the environment and majesty of creation:

Inspiration: These two Psalms are often referred to as the "go-to Psalms" for powerful reminders of the glory of God's creation and of his might in both creating and sustaining the beauty and fullness of life. Psalm 8 also invites us to consider how amazing it is that God has chosen to involve man in his plans – whilst also starkly reminding us that it is him, not us, who's in control!

Use the verses of these Psalms to give thanks and praise for the beautiful world God has created and take time to build on the psalms' references to reflect on – and offer to God – some of your own favourite sights, sounds and smells from among the millions more landscapes and creatures he has made.

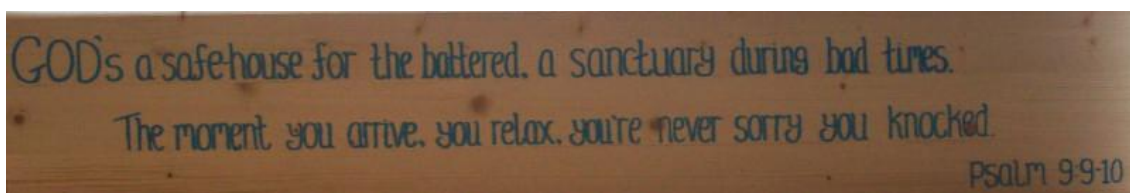
Intercession: Now pray for humankind to appreciate, protect and steward his creation better, whether in relation to wider issues such as climate change, pollution, or habitat loss or in response to specific headlines concerning

environmental degradation, endangered species, or the negative effects of nature deficit on peoples' health and wealth being.

Psalm 9 – God as a safe-house and sanctuary for the battered:

Inspiration: Psalm 9:9-10 says *“God’s a safe-house for the battered, a sanctuary during bad times. The moment you arrive, you relax; you’re never sorry you knocked.”* (NIV)

This Psalm – and these verses in particular – have long been celebrated by the Sanctuary as a powerful reminder of God’s welcome and protection, especially for those on the margins. So much so that we even painted the verses on a plank of wood to have up as a constant reminder to always run to God in the hard times.



Intercession: We’ve found these verses a very helpful way-in to praying about trafficking, slavery and domestic abuse victims – all of which are incredibly heavy, hard and dark issues to contemplate. But by fixing our attention on God’s promise to be a safe-house and sanctuary, we find we are able to cry out to him in faith and trust for his rescue for – and/or presence with – those in desperate need.

You might even find it helpful to simply pray out these verses with the person’s name or the people group in place of the word “battered” – e.g. something like *“Thank you God that you are a safe-house for the young women of Moldova who have been trafficked into prostitution; thank you that you can be their sanctuary even during these most desperate of times. May they run into you and find that they can relax and heal in your safety. Bring your mighty rescue for them – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually – today please Lord.”*

Psalm 12 – God as protector and rescuer of the poor and needy:

Inspiration: Psalm 12:5 says *“Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan, I will now arise,’ says the LORD. ‘I will protect them from those who malign them.”* (NIV)

On one day of our rhythm, this psalm came up alongside considering Jesus as the Lion of Judah – and we found it so helpful to imagine God as a protecting lion, roaring and bounding in to rescue the poor and trampled from those oppressing them.

Intercession: Use this verse – and the image of God as a lion – to inspire you to persevere in prayer for the poor and to grow your revelation of God’s strength. You might want to lift a specific situation to him – perhaps a headline you’ve seen in the news or a particular prayer request that’s come through from a Christian development charity – and allow this truth of who God is to give you the faith to pray for change.

Psalm 20 – praying blessing over others:

Inspiration: Psalm 20 is quite simply a beautiful psalm to use to pray blessing over others, whether known to you personally or not.

Intercession: You can either pray through the Psalm with someone or a group of people in mind, perhaps replacing the pronoun 'you' with the specific name/s you are thinking of) or if you find it easier, you can use our own version written out as a prayer in our collection of written prayers praying for protection for people facing dangerous situations. (See www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/written_prayers_interceding_for_protection_for_people_in_dangerous_situations.pdf) And if you can find somewhere to pray out loud using this scripture, you'll find it's incredibly powerful to do so! We love this Psalm so much, we've also set it as a song which you could listen to or learn to sing yourself in prayer. (See <http://www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-songs>) and – as an aside – find it's really helpful to pray over someone in person, particularly if they're in the midst of a significant time for whatever reason.

Psalm 22 – praying for people in anguish or struggling mentally:

Inspiration: This Psalm is the one Jesus quoted on the cross as he cried out in anguish – and more than anything, it reminds us that we mustn't be frightened to say whatever we need to in prayer. God is big enough, and loving enough, to receive it all. Verse 24 makes it very clear that he listens to our cries for help. Is there anything you've been holding back from him that you need to pour out in prayer? Perhaps today is the day to release that...

Intercession: We've found it really helpful to use this Psalm – or sections of it – to inspire you to pray for those who need help articulating their struggles and especially for those feeling isolated, or that nobody hears or cares. Pray that they would be able to pour out their hearts to God and know the comfort, hope and peace that he offers. Pray also for comfort to come through the people he brings around them, whether these are new people or existing contacts and relationships that he moves to offer a new level of insight or care. Finally, pray for them to be able to speak truthfully and confidently to the people around them – whether friends, family, teachers, or medical staff – and for this openness to be met by kindness, understanding and transformative help.

Psalm 23 – praying for individuals going through difficult seasons:

Inspiration: No wonder this psalm is the most well known of them all... it's so full of pictures that speak deeply of life's journey and challenges, and of God's abiding presence through it all. It's great to cling to for ourselves... take some time to go really slowly through it, asking God to show you deeper meaning as you think about it one idea or picture at a time...

Intercession: No wonder too that this psalm is then so helpful to pray over others – whether known to us or not – especially those who are walking through dark valleys. You can use the whole psalm powerfully, turning the pronouns round or replacing their names (e.g. *The Lord is his shepherd/ The Lord is Sarah's Shepherd*) in statements, and/or shaping the statements into prayers (e.g. *Lord, I know you are Sarah's shepherd, but please help her to really know you walking ahead of her and beside her*). When you come to the dark valley an individual or group are facing, you could imagine – or draw – it from above (from God's perspective) naming the things that overshadow and praying with faith not only for God's presence always accompanying the walker(s), but with a clearer sense of the end of the valley terrain always coming and opening out into freedom – whether in this life or eternity.

Psalm 27 – praying for the Lord's light and salvation over nations/situations:

Inspiration: This Psalm starts with the famous declaration *“The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?”* (NIV) And ends with a beautiful prayer of courage: *“Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.”*

And because of this, it’s a very powerful way to pray for nations in conflict or for tragic situations that seem particularly dark or entrenched – not least because it’s a reminder of God’s sovereignty even in the midst of seeming hopelessness or chaos, and of whom our battle is really against in all instances where evil seems so present as to tempt us to believe it has the upper hand.

Intercession: In this case, we’ve usually found it most powerful to pray with directly, adapting its words specifically for the nation/situation in focus as a challenging declaration and heart-cry of the truth of God’s light and salvation – e.g. *“The Lord is Syria's light and salvation, of whom should she fear?”* But it can also be helpful to combine this with praying with symbols such as candles, perhaps writing the nation’s name, or the issue or situation in focus, on a tea-light with marker pen and then lighting this as you pray.

Psalm 40 – praying for those in power:

Inspiration: Psalm 40 is attributed to David... a man who experienced great power himself and the great power of others (good and otherwise) directed towards him, but who always – whether shepherd boy, court minstrel or king – had a firm grip on the complete otherness and above-ness of God's power compared to his own. The Psalm reiterates again and again David’s understanding of man’s limitations versus the faithfulness and might of God.

Intercession: Use this Psalm and its perspective to lead you in prayer for powerful leaders (whether state, business, religious etc) and for them to not only humbly and courageously recognise their own limitations, but also not be misled by the world's offers of security and control. Instead, pray that – like David – they would lean on God's completely, rock-solid, incomparable power rather than their own. And as a result, use their position and power wisely and for the benefit of others.

Psalm 46 – praying for nations facing deeply unsettling times:

Inspiration: The whole of this Psalm is a beautiful and uplifting piece of Scripture to read when the world around us is shaking – but verse 10 stands out most powerfully: *“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”* (NIV)

When we know our good and mighty God really is the One true God over all – however fretting and distressing any circumstances we are in or aware of might be – there is always the very real and present invitation to stop, breathe deeply and lean back into him.

Intercession: The simple knowledge of who God is through this Psalm gives us more faith to pray about difficult and unsettling situations in the headlines – but it is also particularly powerful to speak verse 10 over the nation or people group or people group you are focusing on.

Psalm 63 – praying for joy and hope for the persecuted church:

Inspiration: Psalm 63 is a song of praise and joy expressing close fellowship with God (*"I will rise early to seek you ... I long for you ... I thirst for you ... because your love is better than life I will praise you ... my soul shall be satisfied"*). Yet this is traditionally held to have been written by David while in the wilderness, fleeing for his life from one of the most powerful people (in earthly terms) Israel had ever known – its first human king. So we've found it a powerful reminder that in the midst of any troubles, doubts, or anxieties we might experience, God is still there and ready for us to run into his ready embrace under the shadow of his wings (v7).

Intercession: This Psalm also feels like it could have been written today by many of our brothers and sisters around the world who are facing persecution for following Jesus. It's a reminder that although persecution is devastating (and please God, would it stop) it does also – in God's characteristically merciful and beautiful way of bringing beauty from ashes – often lead people into an even closer and more beautiful dependency on God... something very challenging to those of us who aren't persecuted for our faith and are often tempted to think that safe always equals better.

So use this Psalm and David's story to pray for the persecuted church to continue to seek and long for God; to know him answering by satisfying their souls (v5) with a deep awareness of his presence with them and upholding them through all circumstances (v8); and for them to continue to sing aloud his praises under the shadow of his wings (v7).

Psalm 69 – a lament for those in need of rescue or under attack:

Inspiration: Sometimes it's hard to find the right words to respond to a desperate situation without sounding trite or falsely hopeful. Sometimes we just need to say how it is – honestly and with hearts full of sorrow. And that's where Psalm 69 can help us. It's a lament and phrases beautifully the pain of suffering – whether the result of physical attack, illness, tragic circumstances, betrayal or public derision – without ever losing sight of God.

Intercession: Use the verses of this Psalm to help you articulate your prayers for the particular person on your heart, and don't feel you have to resolve your prayer either... a powerful, honest lament keeps God's perspective but doesn't hide how agonising a situation is either.

Psalm 72 – praying for leaders, especially those we find challenging:

Inspiration: We've written about this in much more detail in the following blog article:

<http://journey.thesanctuarycentre.org/2017/02/22/a-gift-to-2017-with-love-from-psalm-72/> but it can be really hard to pray for world leaders – especially when we consistently disagree with their decisions, and even more so when we're not sure we trust their character or root motivations either. To help guard ourselves from always falling into reactionary, or even highly judgemental, prayer, falling back on some solid, timeless words to pray with can be really helpful. Psalm 72 provides these...

Intercession: Use this psalm to step back from your own associations and emotions about a politician or leader of any kind, that might lead you to pray more *against* them than anything else... and instead to guide you step by step for praying for them to step up and embody the kind of leadership that is set out here. If you'd like to be guided through this step by step, the blog linked to above sets that out in its second half.

Psalm 75 – giving thanks for breakthrough and answered prayer:

Inspiration: It's so important to remember to give thanks for the breakthroughs and answers to prayer as well as to intercede. This gives glory to God and encourages our hearts! And it also raises our faith to persevere in prayer... especially when we look back and consciously recount and stack up our stories and testimonies of watching God at work in wonder! The opening verse of Psalm 75 says: *"We thank you, God, we thank you – your Name is our favourite word; your mighty works are all we talk about..."* (MSG)

Intercession: So when you see a situation in the headlines shift, or when breakthrough comes, pause and use this verse as a prompt to give thanks – for the prayers that have been answered, for God's hand on the situation, for his love and mercy revealed through his people, for his rescue... and keep going until you run out of "mighty works" to talk about! Or use it as a discipline – whether you've consciously witnessed a breakthrough or not – to call you to look back and actively remember your previous experiences... it's wonderful if you can write answered prayers down somewhere, perhaps keeping a list you can get out when you're struggling to remember... it makes the talking, thinking and praying about his mighty works much easier!

Psalm 88 – praying in the midst of bereavement, tragedy or devastating news:

Inspiration: We've come to be so thankful that this psalm is in our Bibles! Most laments have some sense of resolve in them... changing direction half way through as the pray-er reminds themselves of the bigger picture of God's love and sovereignty. But this one doesn't. It simply expresses pain. Sometimes it's important to know it's ok that we don't have to resolve our – or anyone else's pain. (You can read more reflections from us on why we think this is so helpful in both prayer and life at <http://journey.thesanctuarycentre.org/2015/08/25/celebrating-the-lingering-fragrance-of-psalm-88/>)

Intercession: Use this psalm to help set yourself and others free, giving yourselves permission to respond to extreme times of pain, trauma or grief with God, without feeling that you always have to resolve how you are feeling, or bring it back to a neat, theologically safe conclusion. Ask God how he is feeling about the situation too and share your mourning together. There will be other days for expressing even trust... remember how often Jesus wept, and feel free to do the same.

Psalm 96 – praying for, and with, the global church:

Inspiration: This Psalm reminds us that we are part of a global church – that all nations are called to praise the Lord, and to do so jubilantly. That together we all cry out "The Lord reigns" (v10). Can you imagine what it's really like for God to see all his children, of every nation, praising? Can you picture what it might be like if you could? What instruments can you see and hear? What styles of singing and types of dancing are going on around you? How many languages are used to proclaim him as Lord? These imaginings lead us to a foretaste of what we will experience in eternity, but it's wonderful to know that this is also happening today, even if it's just a small, and dispersed, reflection of how it will one day be.

Intercession: Give thanks that you are part of a global, worshipping church full of such diversity and dynamism. Pray that believers in every nation would be free to proclaim Jesus' name and to worship him without fear. Celebrate the different insights into who God is – and how he calls his followers to live – that the global church today (and through

history!) as a whole, and through each of its distinct streams and parts, brings. And as you worship, give thanks that many others around the world today are standing beside you proclaiming "The Lord reigns".

Psalm 100 – finding news to give thanks for, no matter how small:

Inspiration: Psalm 100 is one of the most famous psalms of thanksgiving and praise – so read it slowly, perhaps in a couple of versions, savouring each verse and gently meditating on its truth. Health professionals now say that gratitude and actively giving thanks has a positive effect on our well-being... something that God has known for a long time, given he designed us for praise! So us cultivating a "thanksgiving attitude" must give our caring God pleasure – especially when things are hard for us personally or when we find a way to give thanks despite the awfulness of the situation we're looking at.

Intercession: Approaching the headlines from a place of thanksgiving and praise is a challenge in the current climate – but holding firm to the truths of Psalm 100, look at some of today's main news stories. Pick one or a few and in each case, pause to hold the situation before God and pray for him to help you find what there is in it to give thanks for... there will be something, even if only very small. An act of kindness in light of a tragedy, a scandal revealing a way to make sure it never happens again, an individual standing up for righteousness in the face of injustice...

You might find it helpful to write these prayers of thanksgiving down to keep as a reminder to come back to another day when the headlines feel overwhelming again. And again and again, remember: *"the Lord is good and his love endures for ever"* (v5).

Psalm 119 – giving thanks for Scripture and praying for individuals/organisations working to increase access to it:

Inspiration: Psalm 119 is a hymn of praise and appreciation for God's word, and specifically for his instructions to his people, or as the Voice Bible puts it his "blueprint for living". Yes, it's long - 176 verses long! - but oh does it contain such beauty and truth as it celebrates God's faithful guiding of his people and calls us all to live in step with his teachings.

Take some time to read and meditate upon this Psalm, or perhaps listening to it being read to you by visiting the Bible Gateway audio site at www.biblegateway.com/audio/suchet/nivuk/Ps.119 . As you go through, consciously note the specific verses that you think God wants you to take hold of this time. This is a Psalm full of gems, some obvious, some buried beneath the surface, but all revealing the secrets to a truly full life... which ones does he want to reveal to you today? And how is he leading you to respond in worship, whether through words, song, life-changes or practical action?

Intercession: In the West, we tend to have numerous ways to access Scripture, whether by picking up a Bible off our shelves or online through digital, audio or visual channels – and most of the time, that's something we take for granted. But many people around the world don't have this luxury – either because they can't access or afford a printed Bible because of where they live, or because internet access is limited or controlled.

Use what you have celebrated about God's word through Psalm 119 to inspire you to pray for organisations or individuals helping to give people access to it. You may personally know of certain organisations working in this field who you can pray for – but if not, you could research more about organisations such as The Bible Society, Scripture

Union, Open Doors, Wycliffe Bible Translators and many more... and then pray God's blessing over all areas of their ministries.

(Psalm 119 is so rich there are lots of ways to pray with it, and if you've enjoyed scratching the surface, you might be interested in exploring our prayer stations based on it, which are available at www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/prayer_stations_inspired_by_journeying_with_Psalm_119.pdf)

Psalm 126 – praying for refugees:

Inspiration: This is a beautiful psalm, celebrating the past rescue and return God's people experienced, and using this as faith to stand on and pray for more breakthrough in the present situation. With its themes of exile and return, longing and hope, we've found it really helpful for finding words to pray with and for refugees and asylum seekers...

Intercession: Read the psalm and see how the key phrases resonate for you with those who have had to flee their homes in our own times... pray for those who sow in tears to reap in joy... for them to be able to go back home – or come to a new one – similarly rejoicing. We found doing this so helpful, we created a written prayer following this pattern to return to again and again, which you can find at

www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/written_prayer_for_refugees_based_on_psalms_126.pdf

Psalm 127 – praying for churches and ministries:

Inspiration: This psalm opens with a reminder we all need to hear again and again – *“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain”* (NIV).

What God's Spirit is saying; what he is doing; what he is building (in us and his church); and what he is guarding... these are the things that matter... the things that last... the things to invest in. So spend some time visualising your life as if it were a house... with different rooms or bricks representing different areas – perhaps you could even do some simple drawings of bricks piled up and labelled. Then consciously offer each area to God one by one, asking him to come and shape it in his way, and in his timing, through his Spirit's power – rather than through your plans or through you trying to make things happen in your own strength...

Intercession: Now do what you have done for yourself for your church, or the church as a whole... or for particular ministries, projects of Christian charities and organisations that you want to pray for. Pray that it is God's kingdom – not any of ours – that are built.

Psalm 133 – praying for true, good community:

Inspiration: Psalm 133 is not voicing a command, it's making an observation – expressing a delighted celebration – that we know deep in our spirits is the truth... that when brothers – or sisters, school children, colleagues, or churches... or communities, denominations, peoples or nations – dwell together in a way which celebrates, values and brings together their diversity into harmony, it really is beautiful! And when they don't? When they fight, or seek to suppress the value or distinctiveness of some in favour of the preference, power or control of others? Well... by contrast, this is the start of things getting ugly!

Intercession: Use the words of this Psalm to celebrate true community where you see it, and to pray for specific groups (of whatever kind) that need to grow in unity, appreciation of distinctiveness or reconciliation... and for God's blessings to flow when they are.

Psalm 139 – praying for individuals, or groups, being excluded or devalued:

Inspiration: This psalm is many people's favourite and it's not surprising... it contains so many beautiful passages that voice truth about how precious we are to God and how present he is to us wherever we go – every moment of our lives. It's a corker! Read it again and allow it to speak value into your deepest core.

Intercession: Turning this psalm round into a statement of blessing over, or a prayer for, people or groups who are not feeling valued – or are actively being marginalised, excluded or devalued – is really powerful. If you follow its pattern but personalise it to their circumstances, you'll find it really helps you focus in on the truth of God's heart for them, and what their true value is – and should be – to others. Here's an example of this we turned into a written prayer for people facing homelessness: <http://www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/written-prayers-meditative-prayer-for-people-who-are-homeless.pdf>