

Clay-Making Activity

(This activity is suitable for older and younger children.)

Step 1: Homemade Clay Recipe

- 3 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 3 cups water
- ¼ cup cooking oil
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar

Mix dry ingredients together. Add wet ingredients and any tint of food coloring you prefer. Cook on low heat, stirring constantly, until it thickens and has the consistency of dough. When you're not using the clay, store it in an airtight container or freezer bag to keep it moist.

Step 2: Form the clay.

Read the following verses from the prophets. These verses will poetically describe the sins that Israel committed against God and each other during the kingdom years. After you've read the passage aloud, have your young child form a clay sculpture representing the sin. Your child should end up with a different sculpture for each passage. At the base of the sculpture, place a piece of paper with the book, chapter and verse of the passage so you'll remember the prophet who inspired each image.

Sculpture 1

Read Jeremiah 19:4–5.

Child sacrifice was forbidden in God's law, but some of the kings brought back the practice of sacrificing children to the Canaanite god called Baal. Baal is a nature god usually depicted with a hammer in one hand, symbolizing thunder, and a crooked staff in the other, symbolizing lightning. Rejecting God's law and worshiping false gods was the primary sin of Israel. They broke the First Commandment.

Sculpture 2

Read Jeremiah 9:1–3.

The people's tongues are like drawn bows ready to shoot deadly arrows. They are full of lies and reject the truth. The image suggests that lying is as deadly as an arrow.

Sculpture 3

Read Amos 2:6.

Oppression of the poor and injustice in general were signs that Israel had abandoned God's law. Poor Israelites were in debt to wealthy landowners. To pay their debts, they often had to sell themselves into slavery. This verse suggests that the wealthy Israelites viewed the poor Israelites as nothing more than a pair of sandals to be bought and sold.

Step 3: Smash down the images from the three sin passages above.

Step 4: Transform sin into holiness.

Sculpture 4

Read Isaiah 11:6.

The prophets did not just focus on Israel's sin. They also expressed God's promise of consolation after Israel was destroyed. Israel fell to Assyria in 721 B.C., and Judah fell to Babylon in 586 B.C. This verse from Isaiah suggests that one day God will remove humanity's sin and bring perfect peace. The image of natural enemies living together, such as wolves and lambs, is a symbol of the peace that God promises. We can enjoy that peace now by living with holiness, integrity and justice.

More Opportunities for Faith Sharing

Who are your enemies? Whom would you rather not see on a daily basis? Is there a person you don't like, someone who rubs you the wrong way? Isaiah 11:6 challenges you to find ways to make peace with this person. Pray for this person each day. Pray that goodness will come to this person in simple ways. Your

prayers may not change the person much, but God will use your prayers to transform your heart. Your prayers, if prayed in good faith with unselfish intentions, allow God to come to you and crush your negative feelings toward this person so that there will be more room in your heart for love and peace. Remember: "...what does the LORD require of you / but to do justice, / and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Psalms

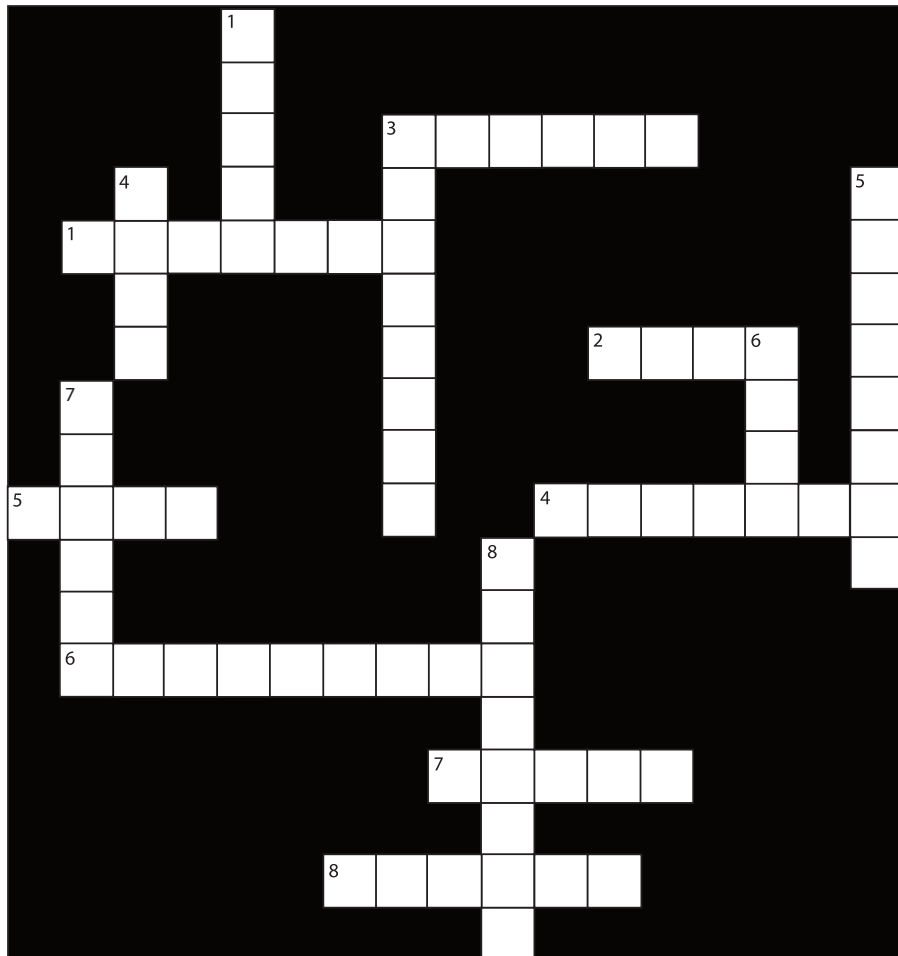
Learning Objective: To explore the poetic images of God in the book of Psalms

The Psalms are a collection of prayers in the Old Testament. They are traditionally credited to King David, who was an accomplished musician, but few scholars think he wrote all of them. The church uses the Psalms each Sunday during Mass following the first reading and for many other prayer settings as well. The Psalms were originally set to music, so we usually sing the Responsorial Psalm on Sundays.

Psalms are very poetic, and their rich imagery is very helpful for prayer. In the book of Psalms, God is described with a multitude of poetic images. Many of those images are found in the crossword puzzle below. There is a key on the page after the puzzle to check your answers when you're finished.

Images of God in the Psalms Crossword Puzzle

You must use the *New Revised Standard Version* Bible for this puzzle to work properly.



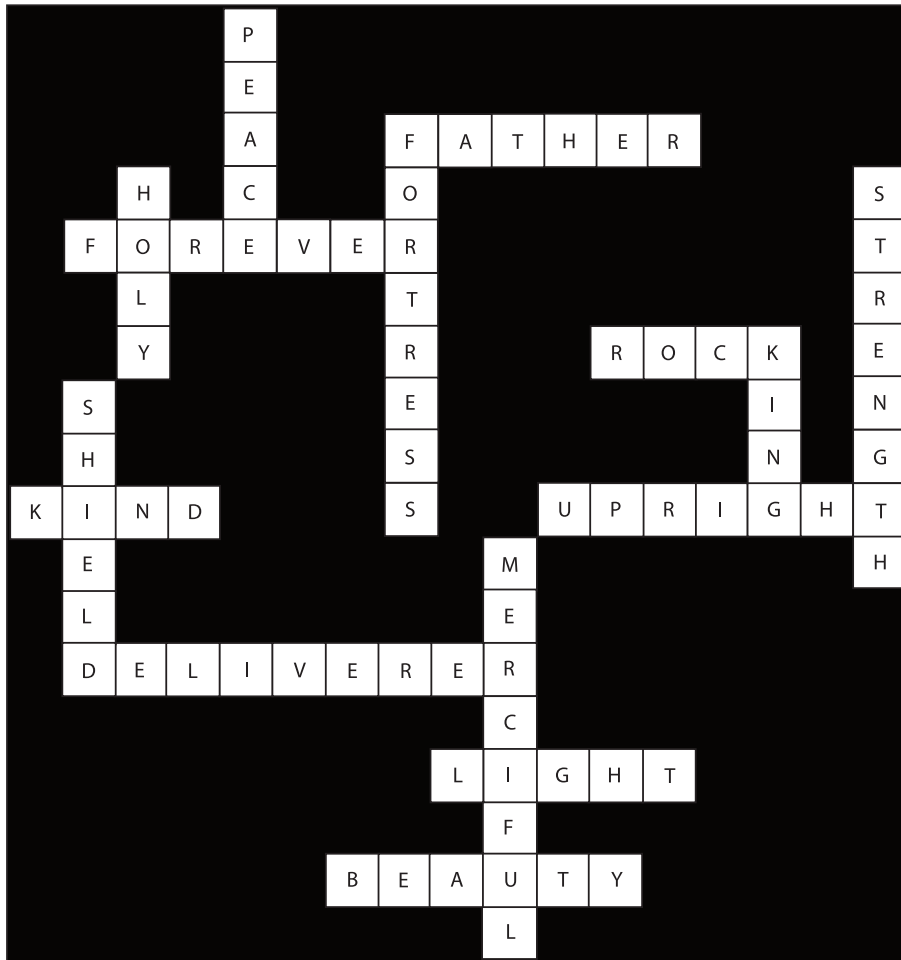
Across

1. Psalm 52:8 I trust in the steadfast love of God _____. (A length of time)
2. Psalm 18:2 The Lord is my_____.
3. Psalm 89:26 You are my _____, my God.
4. Psalm 25:8 Good and _____ is the Lord.
5. Psalm 145:17 The Lord is just in all his ways, and _____ in all his doings.
6. Psalm 40:17 You are my help and my _____.
7. Psalm 27:1 The Lord is my _____ and my salvation.
8. Psalm 50:2 Out of Zion, the perfection of _____, God shines forth.

Down

1. Psalm 85:8 For he will speak _____ to his people.
3. Psalm 31:3 You are indeed my rock and my _____.
4. Psalm 30:4 Give thanks to his _____ name.
5. Psalm 18:1 I love you, O Lord, my _____.
6. Psalm 5:2 Listen to the sound of my cry, my _____ and my God.
7. Psalm 7:10 God is my _____.
8. Psalm 116:5 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is _____.

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Answer Key: God in the Psalms Crossword

Across

1. Forever
2. Rock
3. Father
4. Upright
5. Kind
6. Deliverer
7. Light
8. Beauty

Down

1. Peace
3. Fortress
4. Holy
5. Strength
6. King
7. Shield
8. Merciful

Proverbs

Learning Objective: To discuss the meaning of the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament

The prophets bring the Old Testament to a close with references of hope in a coming Messiah who would renew the faith of the people and bring them the fullness of peace and joy. Alongside the ministry of the prophets, another form of Old Testament literature developed, known as *wisdom literature*. Prime examples of wisdom books in the Old Testament are Job, Wisdom, Sirach, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. Most often, wisdom literature is comprised of writing that offers sound advice about daily affairs.

The book of Proverbs contains several collections of short, wise sayings that are based on the people's experiences of life. Some people say that proverbs are short sayings based on long experience. For example, in Proverbs 15:1 we find the saying: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." You can imagine that the person who wrote this proverb had a lot of experience debating with people, or perhaps the author of this verse at least witnessed and paid attention to what happens when two people debate. The author probably noticed over and over again that if someone attacks you with angry words, the smart thing to do is remain calm and not let your emotions get the best of you.

The basic point is that wisdom comes from reflecting thoughtfully on experiences. By paying close attention to the patterns of life all around us, we can find snippets of God's wise direction for our lives.

A proverb often serves as the moral of a story. The interesting thing about the book of Proverbs is that you don't know the *story* that sets the context for the *moral* to the story. You have to use your imagination to guess what kinds of life experiences might have led someone to utter the various proverbs.

Proverbs: Review and Understanding Activities

For a Younger Child

1. Consider Proverbs 15:1 again: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Develop a hand-puppet play based on this proverb. In one scenario, use a harsh answer to “stir up anger” and then try to act out the same scenario using a soft answer to “turn away wrath.” Use old socks for puppets or simply draw a couple of characters on construction paper and glue them to craft sticks.

For an Older Child

2. Read Proverbs 10 through Proverbs 29. Choose three or four proverbs and act out the stories that form the back story for each proverb. Examine the various possible outcomes and morals of each story.

More Opportunities for Faith Sharing

1. Do you make the best choices when you speak or respond to your parents or siblings?
2. Do you tend to have soft, gentle responses when spoken to, or are you more likely to use harsh words? Which way of speaking do you think yields a more positive response?
3. In what ways do you think you could behave more wisely?
4. Throughout the coming week, concentrate on three or four proverbs. Perhaps write a few on a piece of paper and post the proverbs prominently in your home. Try to implement these wise admonishments and reminders in your family’s daily life.