



CITIZENS *for* PUBLIC JUSTICE

## ***Living Justice and the Psalms***

Week 4: Emotional Poverty

*[Have someone share the **definition of emotional poverty**]:*

“Material poverty can have an exacting toll on those who experience it. In addition to the increased risk of illness and exclusion, it can lead to **emotional** poverty. That is, vulnerability, isolation, and intense emotional suffering. But emotional poverty is not the exclusive domain of “the poor.” Anyone can fall victim to its brokenness. God invites us to acknowledge our own weakness, as doing so allows us to both experience God's tremendous grace, and to respond faithfully to the physical and emotional needs of others.” (p. 27, *Living Justice*)

*[Invite members to be silent before saying this or another **opening prayer**]:*

God of all, grant us the strength and help to face the wounds of the past. We plead that those suffering from emotional poverty will not neglect or suppress the hurt or the pain. Empower each of us to face these things, to seek You for healing, and move on by Your grace and power. We pray that our past hurts will no longer hurt, hinder, or destroy our present and future. **Amen.**

(Taken from: [http://www.prayerclosetministries.org/assets/PDF/PW-Prayer\\_EmotionalHealing.pdf](http://www.prayerclosetministries.org/assets/PDF/PW-Prayer_EmotionalHealing.pdf))

*[Ask a member to **read this passage of Scripture** aloud]:*

**107:1-3, 17-22** (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

<sup>2</sup>Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble

<sup>3</sup>and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

<sup>17</sup>Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction;

<sup>18</sup>they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.

<sup>19</sup>Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress;

<sup>20</sup>he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction.

<sup>21</sup>Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind.

<sup>22</sup>And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

*[Allow each person a few moments to **respond to this question**]:*

What stands out to you about this passage?

*[Allow for some silence and then ask a member to **read the discussion aloud**]:*

Psalm 107 is a song that praises the steadfast love, or *hesed* in the original Hebrew, of God. When we call out to God we can rest assured that God hears our calls. The promise expressed in Psalm 107 is that God not only hears but acts. When we call out in our times of trouble, God will hear, heal and save us.

This can be a hard promise to believe when one is suffering from emotional poverty. Emotional poverty separates a person from God and others. It isolates. It contains. It condemns. It has the power to take away appetite, to take away hope, to remove the will to live (v.18). Emotional poverty is not synonymous with depression but the two can be linked or occur at the same time.

Yet Psalm 107 offers a response for such situations: cry out to God. Cry out to God! Let the response to isolation and alienation be to create and deepen relationships with God and one another. Cry out to God for help and help can be found. God's steadfast love will ensure it. This help comes in many forms: church groups, the community of friends and family, counseling services, social programs. God's love can be evidenced and experienced through individuals, groups, and society at large. Sometimes slowly, but surely, it draws us out of our isolation and suffering.

Even though we may suffer from emotional poverty, God is already present and working through those around us. When we recognize and open ourselves up to this love, the sense of isolation can begin to fade. God hears our cries!

When we are better aware of the reality of emotional poverty, we can better recognize and respond to the people in our midst who are suffering from it. When we too hear the cries of those suffering from emotional poverty, we can intentionally act as living examples of God's love. We are called to live in relationship with others. Called to break down the barriers, both from society and within ourselves, that create and perpetuate emotional poverty. The emotional poverty around us can be lessened through our own actions. When we join God's efforts to care for those around us, nothing is impossible. We can hear, bear witness, and thank God for the steadfast love that has the power to save every person who is suffering from emotional poverty.

*[Have someone **read aloud from Living Justice**: ““Suffering, Coping and Healing.” By Angela Johnston, page 30-31.]*

*[Try the **suggested activities** on p. 32-33 of Living Justice]*



*[Spend a few moments allowing everyone to **respond to the following discussion questions**]:*

1. What does it mean to be a child of God?
2. Many of us suffer the silent pains of abuse, mental illness, addiction or isolation. How might we seek God's embrace and begin the journey to wholeness?
3. Reflecting on the discussion and personal experience can you identify a time when you were affected by emotional poverty? (You can choose to share this experience or not). How did your faith affect your understanding of the situation? Did faith play a part in resolving or coping with the situation?
4. Would you consider the model presented in Psalm 107 as a good coping mechanism in times of emotional poverty? Have you ever cried out to God? What was the response? Keep in mind that God works in, and through, many means and people.
5. What can be done to help people confronting emotional poverty? What can we do as individuals and as a community?

*[Close with **another reading** of Psalm 107 and the **prayer** by Rev. Adam Snook on p. 34 of *Living Justice*]*