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Open and Unafraid: The Psalms as a Guide to Life

Small Group Study: Discussion Guide for Film, “Bono & Eugene Peterson: The Psalms”

TASK

Gather a group of friends together (preferably at least 4-5) to watch the “Bono & Eugene Peterson: The Psalms” short film.¹ Using this resource as a prompt, invite your group into a conversation about the film.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Feel free to use the following list of questions to get the conversation going. And don’t feel obligated to work your way through these questions in any kind of mechanical way. Let the conversation go where it will naturally, mindful of the basic aim of the activity.

- What’s your immediate impression of/reaction to the film? What did you like? What did you not like?
- Did anything about their friendship catch your attention?
- What do you make of their comments about art, poetry and metaphor? Do you think their observations are common or rare in your community?
- What do you think when you hear Eugene and Bono talk about honesty? What do you think makes it so hard for people to be fully honest? What do we fear in choosing to be fully honest? What would we gain if we were? What would help people be more honest with themselves and with other people? Who are people that you think are really good at being honest in this way?
- In what ways do Eugene and Bono’s comments about violence and lament connect to things in your life personally or in society at large?
- Have you ever read a psalm? Does this film make you curious to read the psalms? Do you feel that it’s easy or difficult to read the psalms? What kind of help would you like to get you reading the psalms more regularly?
- Any last thoughts or feelings or impressions?

GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

1. **What is the purpose of this conversation?** Its purpose is to talk about the life of faith as it is conceived within the Book of Psalms. Such a life is lived, at times in honesty, at other times in dishonesty; with joy or in sorrow; in an anger that leads to healing or to violence; in the face of doubt and mortality; with a profound need for deep community; and ultimately in

¹ See here for the YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l40S5e90KY>.

the presence of God, even if God's absence is just as keenly felt on certain days as his presence is felt on others.

2. **Why does such a conversation matter?** From the patristic era to the monastic liturgy of the hours, from John Calvin's use of metrical psalmody to the spirituals that African-American slaves would have sung in the fields, the psalms have functioned as the church's go-to prayer book. Quoted by J. S. Bach and C. S. Lewis, John Wesley and Charles Spurgeon, John Milton and Bob Marley, "The Truman Show" and "The Book of Eli," presidents and peasants, the words of the psalms suffuse not just religious communities but the culture at large.
3. **Should I read an actual psalm before or afterwards?** Yes, if you feel that it would be appropriate to the group.
4. **Should I provide drinks or snacks?** If you can. Drinks and food always make a movie-watching experience better! And they make the conversation flow more smoothly, too.
5. **How long should I plan for this gathering?** Plan to set aside 1.5 hours at least. By the time that people actually arrive, that you watch the film, and that you engage each other in conversation, you could easily use up an hour. An hour and a half will give you breathing room to enjoy a more leisurely and lively discussion.
6. **What is the background for this film?** You can share with them as much of the background to the project as you think might be helpful.

It is a 20-minute short film that was directed by Nathan Clarke of Fourth Line Films from interviews that took place in Lakeside, Montana, on April 19, 2015, and in New York City, on July 29, 2015. It was released by Fuller Studio on April 26, 2016. The film documents the friendship between Bono and Eugene Peterson which revolves around their common interest in the psalms. The film combines three interviews that were conducted by David Taylor, associate professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary

One of the aims of the project was to offer Eugene and Bono an opportunity to be together in the same place. They had known of each other since the early 2000s, but had only had one chance to meet in person in 2009, in Dallas, around the time of U2's 360 tour. This meeting in the Peterson home, not far from Glacier National Park, represented only their second time to see each other in person.

A second aim of the project was that as a result of listening to Eugene and Bono share how the psalms had transformed their lives, audiences for this film would encounter the God of the psalms: a God of hope, healing, justice, grace, goodness, power and truth. We would also hope that people might be inspired to read, pray or sing the psalms themselves, as a way perhaps to understand why U2, for example, rains down on concert-goers sheets of paper from the psalms, taken from Eugene's translation, *The Message*.