

For the past six months or so, I've been feeling like there was something missing. I've had this inkling that it was the Psalms. So, beginning about six months ago, I began reading the Psalms in earnest. I began teaching on the Psalms. I began reading books and articles about the Psalms.

And I've come to believe that Cambodia desperately needs the Psalms. I believe the Psalms may in fact provide the bridge for Cambodian believers, helping them connect the Gospel to their heart.

Here are some reasons why I believe this:

**1)** Cambodians, in general, have a hard time identifying and allowing emotions. This is not a uniquely Cambodian problem, of course, but it is a Cambodian problem. The lifelong practice of denying difficult emotions and burying past hurts and pain KEEPS people wounded. It's like denying the existence of a wound, or at most, accepting that there's a wound but just covering it up and never dealing with it.

**2)** The Holy Spirit uses healed people to heal people. People who have come face to face with a Savior can help people be saved. People who have come face to face with a Healer can help people be healed. I believe that heart-level emotional healing is a major -- and often overlooked -- part of discipleship.

**3)** There is so much fear and anger here, and without a robust theology that addresses a biblically adequate response to pain and suffering, Cambodian believers are left to figure it out on their own. What we see happening, therefore, could be explained like this: when difficult or painful emotions surface in a Cambodian believer, his or her core beliefs and values take over. So that, even if a person has "believed" in Jesus for a long time, when hard stuff happens, he reverts to the "old ways" and well-worn cultural paths. The Psalms can begin to etch into the hearts of new believers new responses, new "paths." The Psalms show the way.

**4)** For too long we have tried to speak information from our heads to theirs, through seminars, trainings (and trainings and trainings!), and yet we still often see emotional immaturity. It is not the young believers' fault. Missionaries have done a pretty bad job of modeling anything other than information transfer. In addition to teaching the mind, Jesus also cared for bodies AND hearts.

**5)** The Psalms speak to core human needs and feelings without resorting to cliché. Often, we use clichés to smooth over human interaction, which can be helpful. However, we often use clichés as tools of avoidance. The Psalms teach us not to avoid uncomfortable feelings. They also teach us to pray even with (or because of) the uncomfortable emotions. They teach us what it means to feel things. Indeed, the range of emotions addressed and allowed in the Psalms is much wider than what we'd typically be comfortable with in our churches.

**6)** We've expected people to follow Christ and "be healed already." I believe people can choose to follow Christ and be saved immediately, but often, the long work of transformation is just

that – long work. It’s made even longer if we avoid speaking to the core of the new disciple; namely, his or her heart.

### **Moving Forward, a Few Questions:**

*Is it reproducible?* I’m assuming here that we don’t want to rely on texts or booklets. The Navigators have produced and translated several booklets on inner healing that might be valuable. However, they require a high degree of literacy, as well as quite a bit of time and training. Perhaps these resources could be further developed and used in modular-type training that remains simple enough that a new believer could take the training and pretty quickly pass it on. In that situation, some printed material would probably be warranted. For now, however, I am assuming the absence of the printed word outside of the Scriptures.

*Is it effective?* It is very difficult for Cambodians to identify past emotions/emotional pain. Therefore, this whole process hinges on a gentle and reproducible way to help new believers identify their own emotions (past and present) and experience those emotions *with Jesus present*. To that end, one of the most important aspects of all of this is that the facilitator (or trainer) must not only teach, but model, what’s going on. Put another way, with this material, the trainer must speak from his or her heart. If that doesn’t happen, it will be highly unlikely that this model will yield fruit as hoped.

### **Overview of the Process**

Psalm → Emotion in the Psalm? → Ever felt that emotion? → When? → Ask God to show you first time you felt that emotion → Ask God if any lie/belief comes from that memory? → God, what is the Truth?

May be able to simplify this process using body language, which should be easily memorable:

1. Start with hands, representing reading or “holding” the story.
2. Move from hands to heart, representing feeling the emotion of the story.
3. From heart to head, representing the memories of prior experiences of that emotion.
4. From head to God, representing a turning to God.
5. From God back to head, representing God revealing lies that were believed.
6. From head back to heart, representing God revealing Truth to our core.
7. From heart back to hands, asking God who he wants us to share Truth with.

### **1. Psalm**

State brief history of Psalms, “prayer book of the Bible,” quoted by Jesus, etc.

Perhaps choose one emotion to look at, but don’t tell disciples what it is. Let them identify the feelings after you’ve told the story and they’ve repeated it several times.

### **2. What emotions are present in the Psalm?**

Note: this is by no means an exhaustive list, and there may in fact be more than one emotion present in the story/passage. Again, remember, the goal is not to “teach” the passage in the typical sense, but to allow the disciple to engage with the passage, feeling the emotions that

are present. Some of these Psalms show the Psalmist's response to the emotions, others just leave the strong feeling there, without showing a "correct" response. It's therefore important that the facilitator NOT try to teach a correct response. Allow the disciple to engage with the passage and hear from God. Of course, if someone in the group begins to grossly misinterpret the passage or surfaces some major theological error, the leader should correct, but this will probably happen rarely.

Guilt: 32, 51,

Embarrassment: 44:9-16

Revenge/Enemies: 5:9-10, 7:1-9, 9:13-20, 10, 13, 23, 28, 31, 35:1-10, 40, 41:4-12, 44:9-26, 55, 58, 59, 69, 70, 137

Grief: 6:6-7, 31:9-18, 38

Despair: 42:1-5, 77:1-3, 116

Abandonment/Betrayal: 13, 22:1-11, 41:4-9, 55:12-14

Anger: 5:8-11, 139:19-22, 69:19-28, 109:19-25

Fear: 55:4-8, 46:1-3

Anxiety: 38:17-22, 94:16-19, 139:23-24

Additionally, a story from the Gospels could be used, using as the focal point the emotions of the people in the story. For example, what did the lame man feel before Jesus? What did the woman at the well feel before Jesus? What did Jesus himself feel on the cross? In the same way, after identifying the emotions, proceed to point 3. The goal is to get the disciple to identify the emotions in the story and identify with that emotion. When people aren't used to seeing emotions, they will begin to answer with facts. They will begin to tell the story accurately, but only factually. It may take some prodding at first, but once the pattern is established, the disciple should be able to quickly identify a possible emotion from the text.

### **3. Have I ever felt that emotion?**

It's a simple question, but powerful. Allow the disciples the time and the space to sit with the passage and their own hearts.

Have I ever been told NOT to feel this emotion? By whom? Why did they tell me that?

Am I afraid of feeling this emotion? Do I usually push away or bury this feeling? What might happen if I begin to feel those feelings?

If these questions generate deep fear in the disciple, it might be appropriate to pause and ask Jesus to provide safety. “Jesus, can you show me a safe place where I can go when I feel afraid like this?” Or, “Jesus, can you show me why I’m afraid to feel this emotion?”

#### **4. When was a time that I felt that emotion?**

You want the disciple to begin to feel the emotion and not just talk about it. If the disciple stays up in their head, it will be very hard for the process to continue. If they begin to tell a story but they’re only relaying facts, gently ask, “Thank you for sharing that story. What is the feeling behind those facts?” Or, “What did you feel when that happened?” Maybe reiterate that Jesus cares very much about our hearts, and our hearts are where we store our feelings.

Asking something like, “What did that little girl feel when that happened?” or “What did that little boy feel when that person did that?”

As part of this process, the facilitator may ask himself or herself, “What are the feelings behind what the disciple’s saying?” It’s rarely just about the facts. There are usually feelings and needs that are under the surface. If you can identify those and then ask a few key questions that shows the person you really see them, often, the person will begin to open up. That’s not the whole goal, of course. The point is to help them identify their own emotional pain and then take that to Jesus and let him heal it.

- Remember, anger can be a sign that something hurts. Anger may indicate sadness, and is usually a secondary emotion.
- Our emotions are like a bridge, leading us to the place of pain.
- Often, when we experience VERY STRONG emotions or pain, it’s not just coming from whatever’s going on right now. The roots are probably deeper and from what happened in the past.

#### **5. “God, would you show me the first time I felt this emotion?”**

Often, our painful emotions cycle back again and again, and there is great benefit from seeing an early experience and letting God speak directly to that. It is not necessary to search and search for an early memory, however, giving God the space and freedom to connect us to a past experience can be very beneficial.

#### **6. “God, were there any lies that I began to believe at that time?”**

This is probably the simplest concept in any healing prayer ministry. That is, if I believe lies about myself, others, or God, the end result is pain. Satan, as the father of lies, knows this, and longs to keep us living in lies. His power over us is destroyed by Truth.

#### **7. “God, what is the Truth that you want me to know about this memory/situation?”**

There must be great reliance on the Holy Spirit at this point. The power of a person hearing from God, personally, is amazing, especially when the truth God reveals deals directly with long-believed lies.

Often, simply inviting Jesus into the memory can be very healing. After inviting Jesus to be present in the memory, you may ask, “What do you see Jesus doing or saying?” Ask Jesus to bring truth in whatever way he wants. When He does, and I’ve seen this many, many times, it is amazing.

There is a danger that the other disciples in the group will immediately begin to “problem solve” and tell the person what THEY think God is saying. There may be a time for teaching later, but during this process, advice-giving should be limited or completely absent.

That being said, the small group could be ideal, allowing each individual to process past pain out loud and hopefully to feel loved and cared for by God’s people.

This must always be aligned with what we know of God through the Scriptures. However, God may reveal a picture or a phrase to the disciple that is not directly from the Bible, but that aligns with solid Biblical principles.

To conclude, encourage the disciples to remember whatever it is God has shown them. Is there anything they can do that would help them remember the Truth God revealed? Help them realize the importance of remembering and meditating on the Words of God.

### **Recap**

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### **Further Resources:**

Psalms: the Prayer Book of the Bible, Bonhoeffer

<http://www.amazon.com/Psalms-The-Prayer-Book-Bible/dp/0806614390>

The Case for the Psalms: Why They are Essential, NT Wright

<http://www.amazon.com/Case-Psalms-Why-They-Essential>