

Scripture and Incense

A Bible Study for Asian Heritage Month on Psalm 141:1–4

This one-hour Bible study is contemplative, using a *lectio divina* method. It is not so much a debate or active verbal engagement, as discernment through listening, silence, and creative engagement.

A group of three to four is enough, but more participants is better. As the leader, ready a place where people can sit and read the Bible. You might encourage participants to sit on the floor (on a mat, ideally), which is one Asian way of sitting. A projector and computer should be available to watch a YouTube clip (7 mins) as a part of the contemplation. For creative engagement, prepare a table with paper and water paints and brushes or crayons/coloured pens.

The theme is incense. The group will learn how incense is understood in the Bible and in Judeo-Christian tradition. Please use the sermon ideas in “Surrounded by So Great a Cloud of Witnesses,” the 2018 Asian Heritage Month service posted on www.united-church.ca, to communicate how using incense has been viewed as unchristian or even heretical.

There are four steps to *lectio divina* : Read, Meditate, Pray, and Contemplate. For the last step, you will facilitate a critical and creative reflection.

Step 1 Read Ps 141:1–4 (2 min)

Read the text aloud slowly, with people taking turns to read one verse each.

Step 2 Mediate (3 min)

Have a time of silence. Then, invite people to take turns saying one word that comes to mind.

Step 3 Pray (5 min)

Repeat step 1. After a moment of silence, this time, go around and say a prayer in one sentence to God.

Step 4 Contemplate (45 min)

You are invited to watch a YouTube video made by the World Council of the Churches (7 min)

<https://youtu.be/SwmnL2-X9fo>

Go to a table with art supplies. Draw/paint something that comes from watching the video. This can be done individually, but also collaboratively. (15 min)

Share what you drew and why. (8 min)

Share other reflection from watching. (15 min)

For the group leader, one critical insight to draw from this visual resource is the use of incense and invoking ancestors (especially the 1991 Canberra reference of Hyun Kyung Chung and Aboriginal ritual in Australia, as well as the 1983 Vancouver General Assembly's reference on Indigenous peoples' cultural contribution in Canada). This insight may also lead to a complicated issue on gospel and culture, attitudes of Western Christian superiority and the dismissal of non-Western cultural and spiritual traditions and practices.

Go back to the painting station and observe what you and each other drew. Redraw or revise the painting after verbal reflection with members of the group, to see if there is anything you as individual and as a group want to change or modify.

Closing

You may sing a hymn—"Lord, Your Hands Have Formed" (MV 181); "With the Wings of Our Mind (Ttugoun Maum)" (VU 698)— and/or identify what further learning may be available for the group.

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