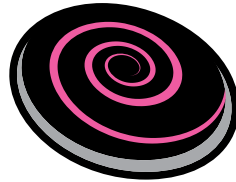


# Questioning Worship

Engaging All God's Peoples

Sample Chapter



A RESOURCE FOR TALKING ABOUT  
INTERCULTURAL WORSHIP





## 4. Prayers, Theological Reflections, and Preaching

In its simplest terms, theology is about the study (*ology*) of God (*theos*). But theology is also often described as “faith seeking understanding.”

How does exploring questions help with seeking understanding about faith?

### Getting Started

What was the most memorable sermon that you can think of? Why? What do you remember about it?

What does prayer mean to you?

Set up a couple of prayer stations in the space, and discuss where people felt most connected to God and how.

**Prayer station 1:** Instructions to say “God be with you” (or another prayerful phrase) in different postures: sitting, standing, kneeling, with hands out, with eyes closed, and so on.

**Prayer station 2:** Have *Voices United* available, with the various versions and translations of the Prayer of Jesus bookmarked (pp. 914, 916, 921–27). Browse and find the those that speak to you most directly.

### Inclusive/Expansive/Evocative Language for God in Our Hymnals

MV 5 “Holy Spirit, You’re Like the Wind”  
MV 17 “God in the Darkness”  
MV 20 “God of Still Waiting”  
MV 44 “Shadow and Substance”  
MV 49 “When We Seek Language”  
MV 159 “In Star and Crescent”  
MV 126 “Are You a Shepherd”  
VU 265 “Creating God, Your Fingers Trace”  
VU 267 “Like a Mighty River Flowing”  
VU 268 “Bring Many Names”  
VU 312 “Praise with Joy the World’s Creator”  
VU 390 “How Great the Mystery of Faith”



## Focusing Questions

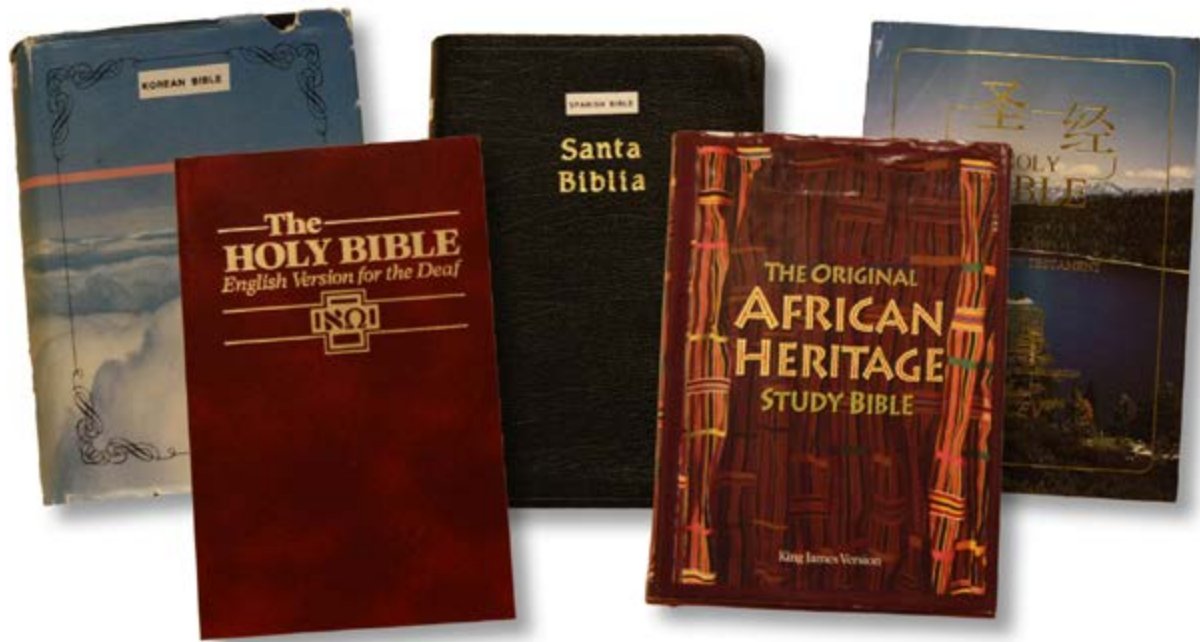
### Pastoral Prayers



1. *Cultural diversity can be honoured in prayer.*
  - What cultural references are used when praying?
  - Are prayer styles offered from different cultural traditions?
  - Is praying in different formats acknowledged (praying through music, art, dance, drama, body movement)?
2. *Prayer comes from the heart, and the heart speaks in many languages.*
  - What languages are the prayers in? How are multiple languages used in prayer? What opportunities might there be for people to pray in their own languages?
  - What language and/or imagery is used in prayers that might be harmful?
  - Are your prayers directed at God, or are they meant to persuade the people gathered?
3. *Communal prayers are challenging, because we—diverse peoples—attempt to speak as one voice.*
  - What assumptions are made about the shared experiences in the congregation (for example, all have adequate food to eat, all are upper middle class)?
  - Are blessings associated with status, security, and/or material possessions?
  - Do we ever speak inappropriately on behalf of others (describing people as “voiceless,” assuming people’s suffering, generalizing experiences)?
  - Are prayers directive or leading in ways that are not helpful (written from a dominant person’s experience—for example, confessing about racism from a privileged perspective)?



## Scripture Readings and Theological Reflections



1. *We all bring our unique cultural understandings of God to our reading and interpretation of scripture. When we come together with our different understandings of the text, we are able to deepen and broaden our understanding of God and scripture.*
  - In the theological reflection or in the interpretation of the passage, what voices have been considered in the reading and preparation of the text (non-Western scholars, post-colonial interpretations, diverse interpretations, marginalized voices from within your communities)?
  - Whose voices are involved in bringing the scripture to life (readings, dramas, children's stories, sung responses)?
  - Who are the voices that the community listens to and on behalf of? How do you find ways to let diverse voices speak for themselves (for example, direct testimonies from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, stories about the current Black experience in Canada, stories of people living with different disabilities)?
  - How are the biblical texts interpreted? Who might be affected by decisions regarding interpretation? Whose perspectives might be missing (for example, people who are perceived as victims)? How are people's resilience and strength named?
  - How are under-represented and often-stereotyped communities (Jews, Pharisees, women at the tomb, people who are sick/living with disabilities, the people who are unnamed in scripture) celebrated and lifted up? How are the significant contributions of these communities named and honoured?



2. *To preach interculturally, one must intentionally engage in self-examination, life-long learning, and reflection through ongoing prayer, education, training, consultation, and evaluation of one's intercultural engagement.*
  - How are leaders who are doing theological reflection encouraged to reflect on their context and systemic injustices (sexism, racism, ageism, heterosexism, ableism, ethnocentrism)? How do you recognize and celebrate opportunities for learning and growth?
  - Who will be listening to this sermon? How do they discover and hear the stories of what is happening in their community, and how are assumptions checked and transformed?
  - When expertise is needed, how is it sought?
3. *Preaching enables everyone to be invited into a deeper reflection on God in their lives.*
  - In the proclamation of the word through preaching, are there several entry points into the liturgy? Are the examples, imagery, and message developed in worship relevant and contextual to people's lives?
  - How do you preach to the now, with an understanding of the past, present, and the future? What is needed for a good contextual analysis? How might you analyze your own cultural context, and the cultural context of your congregation—and engage this effectively in sermons?
  - What tools are given to people to help them imagine other ways of understanding and thinking? For instance, how is cultural awareness heightened and encouraged?
  - How do preachers deepen empathy and cultural competencies? How can opportunities be created that help the preacher experience and reflect on being “othered”?



There are many types of preaching stoles from different cultural communities. The choice can be difficult—if you have a personal connection to a community, or if that stole has been given as a gift from a member of that community, it makes sense to wear it freely and perhaps to tell the story of its significance. But to wear another culture's stole because it is “pretty” or “exotic” can be cultural appropriation.



## Working Together

Do a communal prayer.

Start with a scripture that is likely well known to people in your group.

One example is the Canaanite or Syrophenician woman. Her story is found in Matthew 15:21–28 and Mark 7:24–30. Consider her story from the perspectives of the woman, Jesus, the disciples, the woman’s daughter, and the crowd/by-standers.

Alternatively, invite participants to use the passage for the upcoming lectionary. Read the scripture from an upcoming worship service and answer the following questions together:

1. Listen to this story again from the perspective of the
2. Then from the perspective of the
3. What perspectives might not be present?

## Moving Forward

What can you do individually and as a community to learn more about the experiences of others?



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