

The Psalm- Shaped Life

How to Live and Pray the Psalms

Seven Rivers Church, Winter 2023

- [10] With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!
- [11] I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.**
- [12] Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes!
- [13] With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.**
- [14] In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.
- [15] I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.**
- [33] Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes;
and I will keep it to the end.
- [34] Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.**
- [35] Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for I delight in it.
- [36] Incline my heart to your testimonies,
and not to selfish gain!**
- [37] Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things;
and give me life in your ways.
- [97] Oh how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.**
- [98] Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.
- [99] I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.**
- [100] I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
- [103] How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!**
- [105] Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.**

Excerpted from Psalm 119, ESV

CLASS 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALMS

I/ Introduction to the Psalms

A. What are the Psalms?

i. The Psalms are _____

ii. The Psalms are _____

iii. The Psalms are _____

iv. The Psalms are _____

v. The Psalms are _____

B. How did we get the Psalms?

C. Why should I care about the Psalms?

“Wherever you turn the laborer at the plough sings Alleluia: the toiling reaper beguiles his work with Psalms: the vine-dresser as he prunes the vine with his curved pruning-hook sings something of David’s. These are the songs of the province: these, to use the common phrase, are its love ditties: these the shepherd whistles; these are the laborer’s implements.”

–St. Jerome, 386 A.D.

“If we keep vigil in the Church, David comes first, last, and midst. If early in the morning we seek for the melody of hymns, first, last, and midst is David again. If we are occupied with the funeral solemnities of the departed, if virgins sit at home and spin, David is first, last, and midst. O marvelous wonder! Many who have made but little progress in literature, many who have scarcely mastered its first principles, have the Psalter by heart. Nor is it in cities and churches alone that at all times, through every age, David is illustrious; in the midst of the forum, in the wilderness, and uninhabitable land, he excites the praises of God.” –St. Chrysostom

“Although all Scripture breatheth the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of Psalms.” –Ambrose of Milan

“I will never find on earth a richer storehouse, though the whole palace of revelation is open to me. Blessed have been those days in meditating, mourning, hoping, believing, and exalting with the Psalms.” –Charles Haddon Spurgeon

“No single Book of Scripture, not even the New Testament, has, perhaps, ever taken such hold of the heart of Christendom. None, if we may dare judge, unless it be the Gospels, has had so large an influence in moulding the affections, sustaining the hopes, purifying the faith of believers.” –J.J. Stewart Perowne

II/ The Psalm-Shaped Life

“You may rightly call the Psalter a Bible in miniature, in which all things which are set forth at more length in the rest of the Scriptures are collected into a beautiful manual of wonderful and attractive brevity.” -Martin Luther

“What various and resplendent riches are contained in this treasury, it were difficult to find words to describe...I have been wont to call this book not inappropriately, an anatomy of all parts of the soul; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror.” -John Calvin

“The Psalms are unlike any other portion of Scripture. This is the one book of the Bible written to God. We are taught in many other places in Scripture how to pray. But the Psalms are themselves prayers. In this way the Psalms are uniquely suited to foster communion with God. The Psalms give voice to our hearts. The wide range of human feelings is here given concrete expression. We are given language to address God with thanks and praise, but also with our feelings of desolation or despair or overwhelming guilt because of our sin. And through it all we see the Savior walking through the Psalms.” -Dane Ortlund

“The Psalms are full of power and passion, horrendous misery and unrestrained jubilation, tender sensitivity and powerful hope. Anyone at all whose heart is open to new dimensions of human experience, anyone who loves good writing, anyone who wants a window into the bright lights and dark corners of the human soul – anyone open to the beautiful expression of a larger vision of reality should react to these poems like someone who hasn’t had a good meal for a week or two...Sing these songs, and they will renew you from head to toe, from heart to mind. Pray these poems, and they will sustain you on the long, hard but exhilarating road of Christian discipleship.” -N.T. Wright

“A Psalm is the calm of storms, the arbiter of peace: it stills the stormy waves of thought. It softens the angry spirit, and sobers the intemperate. A Psalm puts demons to flight: it summons the angels to our aid; it is a weapon in the midst of alarms by night, a rest from the toils of the day; it is a safeguard for babes, a decoration for adults, a comfort for the aged...For a Psalm calls forth tears even from a stony heart.” -Basil of Caesarea

III/ Tools for Understanding the Psalms

A. Hebrew parallelism

B. Titles

C. Organization

- Book I (Psalms 1 – 41)
- Book II (Psalms 42 – 72)
- Book III (Psalms 73 – 89)
- Book IV (Psalms 90 – 106)
- Book V (Psalms 107 – 150)

D. Genres/Types of Psalms

- **LAMENT** (most common)
 - individual – e.g. 3, 6, 42-43
 - corporate – e.g. 44, 77
- **PRAISE/HYMN** – e.g. 8, 98, 103, 104, 145
- **THANKSGIVING** (response to an answered lament)
 - individual – e.g. 30, 66
 - corporate – e.g. 47, 48
- **SONGS OF CONFIDENCE** – e.g. 23, 27, 91
- **DIVINE KINGSHIP** – 29, 47, 93, 95-99
- **SONGS OF ZION** – e.g. 46, 48, 76, 87
- **ROYAL** – 20-21, 45, 89, 132, 144 (includes “**MESSIANIC**”: 2, 22, 72, 110)
- **SONGS OF ASCENT** – 120-134
- **REDEMPITIVE HISTORICAL** – 78, 105, 106
- **WISDOM** – 1, 37, 49, 73, 112
- **WORD OF GOD** – 19, 119
- **RIGHTEOUS MAN** – 15, 101
- **PENITENTIAL** – 25, 32, 51, 130, 143
- **PRAYERS FOR BLESSING** – 67, 108
- **LITURGICAL** – 92, 24, 68, 81
- **CURSINGS** (common) – e.g. 35, 58, 69, 109, 137
- **AFTERLIFE** – 16, 17, 49, 73
- **SEEKING GOD AND HIS BEAUTY** – 27, 63, 84

E. Overarching theme?

IV/ Psalm 1 & 2 (“Gateway to the Psalms”)

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” –Luke 24:44, ESV