



Praying the Psalms

Growing our Prayer Lives, Using His Words

The Nature of the Psalms

“The book of Psalms has a unique place in the Christian Bible. One reason for its singular role, as noted by Athanasius...is that most of scripture speaks to us while the Psalms speak for us” (Anderson, ix).

“We recite this prayer of the Psalm in Him, and He recites it in us” (Peterson, 4).

The Psalms will keep us centered on God. Our needs, fears, sins, and struggles will be seen and communicated in light of his power, goodness, and presence.

The Psalms are “prayers that train us in prayer” (Peterson, 7).

The Results of Praying the Psalms

“God comes and speaks – his word catches us in sin, finds us in despair, invades us by grace. The Psalms are our answers” (Peterson 5). **The language of the Psalms become our prayer language.** They guide our hearts and words through each moment of our life.

“We don’t learn the Psalms until we are praying them” (Peterson, 12). We can pray the exact words of the Psalms, or we can paraphrase them into our own **words learning from God how to pray.**

We plunge deep into the Psalms and they plunge deep into us. The thoughts and feelings associated with our best and worst moments of our life can be found in these prayers. The Psalms guide us in how to respond to God. **Our lives become centered around our fellowship with the Father** as we seek him using the words he gave to us.

Purpose of This Study

The Psalms can be studied to increase our knowledge of God, our passion for his Word, to deepen our understanding of human struggles..., but this study will be focused primarily on the role of the Psalms in teaching us how to pray.

We seek to learn from the Psalms, pray through the Psalms, and grow in our intimacy with God and others through the journey. Praying through the psalms influences our words directed toward God and impacts our own hearts at the same time. “We recite this prayer of the Psalm in Him, and He recites it in us” (Peterson, 4).

Therefore, our desire is to not only read and understand a Psalm, but to relate our life, our story, and the state of our heart to the author’s and pray with them to God. “We will not be looking here primarily for ideas about God, or for direction in moral conduct. We will expect, rather, to find the experience of being human before God exposed and sharpened” (Peterson, 12). All of us have times of joy, sadness, thanksgiving, and even despair. The Psalms explore all of these emotions and give us an example of how to take our hearts (joyful, broken, or bleeding) before the Lord with openness, honesty, and hope.

“We don’t learn the Psalms until we are praying them”

– PETERSON, 12

Common thoughts people have when they start praying the Psalms (Whitney, ch. 8):

- My mind doesn’t wander.
- My prayer was more about God and less about me.
- The time was too short.
- It seems like a real conversation with a real person.
- The psalm spoke directly to the life situation I am in right now,
- I thought more deeply about what the Bible says.
- I had greater assurance that I was praying God’s will.
- I prayed about things I normally don’t pray about.
- I prayed about the things I normally do pray about but in a new and different ways.

How to Use This *Praying the Psalms Study*

1. Pick a Psalm and Thoughtfully Read Through It.

Write down a couple of your thoughts, observations, or prayers on the Psalms Observation page.

2. Create Themes.

As you read each psalm, take the time to create a simple, memorable theme for each. You can record your theme on the ***Overall Theme*** line.

Through different times of your life (praise, despair, thankfulness, broken relationships, joy, fear...) you can quickly look through your themes to find a psalm that can bring you guidance, insight, and comfort into each moment.

3. Study the Psalm and Pray Through It.

You will also have blank copies of the ***Psalm Observations*** page to fill out if you would like to go a little deeper with a psalm.

Seek to Understand

- List what you learn about the Lord
- Create a brief outline of the psalm

Stay to Pray

- Understand the position of the author (circumstances, stated purpose and situation, expressed emotions...)
- Pick moments recent and distant that relate to the author.
- Pray through this psalm.

Psalm _____

Overall Theme _____

Brief Outline of the Psalm

Type of Psalm

Context (Author & Situation)

Application: How can you relate to the author's situation and emotions? How can you apply this psalm to your prayer life?

Descriptions of God

Prayed through this Psalm

On the back of this page, you can write out a prayer reflecting this psalm in your own words.

Example – Psalm 100

How would you summarize the psalm?

This is a psalm of thanksgiving and praise.

What did you learn about God and your relationship with him from this psalm?

- My relationship with God is active. I am called to shout, serve, come, know, enter, and give!
- He is my Creator.
- We are his people.
- I am a sheep in his pasture – he will protect, care, and lead.

What did you learn about prayer?

- It's a chorus of the whole earth to address God in worship.
- I am called to come before Him into his presence. I come with joy and with songs on my lips.
- I come before the one who has created me, therefore He knows me. I can be honest, open, and transparent.
- I come with thankfulness.
- I come to bless his great name.
- I pray with the knowledge that his love is unending and his faithfulness extends to all generations.

Is there an area of your life or a time in your life where you can relate to the author's situation and the feelings expressed in this psalm?

- Many songs reminding me of the work and love of Christ cause me to respond to God like this psalm.
- Blessings in my life and in the life of my family give me pause for thanksgiving and praise.
- It's a time of joy when I join with others in prayer and praise.

Spend some time praying. Use the psalm to help you think of ways to express yourself to God. You can even simply pray through the psalm as though they are your own words.

Reflections on Psalm _____

How would you summarize the psalm?

What did you learn about God and your relationship with him from this psalm?

What did you learn about prayer?

Is there an area of your life or a time in your life where you can relate to the author's situation and the feelings expressed in this psalm?

Spend some time praying. Use the psalm to help you think of ways to express yourself to God. You can even simply pray through the psalm as though they are your own words.