

Psalms: Family readings

A psalm is a poem or song. And there is a whole book of them in the Bible! They are full of emotions, pictures, images and words, and all the every-day stuff of living daily as God's people.

Written from the Exodus (Psalm 90) through the Exile (Psalm 74 and 137), they were probably compiled as a set of five books sometime after God's people returned to the land of Israel, after the Exile.

Arranged in five books, with David probably the most prolific author, the psalms are songs/poems which God's people sang as they navigated life together, as well as individually.

This would also have been the case for Jesus—these are his songs and poems and prayers. But they are more than that—They also point to him:

⁴⁴ Then He told 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, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

Luke 24:44-45

It would not be saying too much to say that we can sing these psalms now because Jesus is these psalms then. They are the hymn book of God's people, across the ages, with their fulcrum in Christ. They speak to our hearts and emotions and minds and hands and feet—to the whole of us—as they are sung by God's people in all the ages.

Study 1: Psalm 1

How happy is the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked,

or take the path of sinners,

or join a group of mockers!

² Instead, his delight is in the LORD's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.

³ He is like a tree planted beside streams of water that bears its fruit in season

and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers.

⁴ The wicked are not like this;

instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not survive the judgment, and sinners will not be in the community of the righteous.

⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.

Comprehend

1. What kind of human is described in verses 1-3?

What do they avoid? And what do they delight in?

What is the image used for them?

2. What kind of human is described in verses 4-5?

What is the image used to describe them?

What is their future?

3. What is the explanation for these two types of human existence?

Consider

4. Looking at Genesis 2:4-24, and Genesis 3:17-24, what echoes can you see in Psalm 1?
5. Looking at Matthew 4:1-11, and Matthew 5:1-20, what echoes can you see from Psalm 1?
6. Who is the man described in Psalm 1:1-3? Who is the human described in Psalm 1:4-5?

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7. Left to your own devices, which way of life described in Psalm 1 comes naturally and normally to you?

What problem do you face?

8. How does a verse like John 3:16 help you understand what you can have from Psalm 1 by God's love and mercy?
9. How would this change your life? And how would you then be able to live Psalm 1:1-4?

**Study 2:
Psalm 2**

***Why do the nations rebel
and the peoples plot in vain?***

***² The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers conspire together against the LORD and His
Anointed One:***

***³ "Let us tear off their chains
and free ourselves from their restraints."***

***⁴ The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord ridicules them.***

***⁵ Then He speaks to them in His anger
and terrifies them in His wrath:***

⁶ "I have consecrated My King on Zion, My holy mountain."

***⁷ I will declare the LORD's decree:
He said to Me, "You are My Son;
today I have become Your Father.***

***⁸ Ask of Me,
and I will make the nations Your inheritance
and the ends of the earth Your possession.***

***⁹ You will break them with a rod of iron;
You will shatter them like pottery."***

***¹⁰ So now, kings, be wise;
receive instruction, you judges of the earth.***

***¹¹ Serve the LORD with reverential awe,
and rejoice with trembling.***

***¹² Pay homage to the Son, or He will be angry,
and you will perish in your rebellion,
for His anger may ignite at any moment.
All those who take refuge in Him are happy.***

Comprehend

1. In verses 1-3, what question does the psalmist ask, and what prompts such a question?

2. What is the response, in verse 4?

What is the response, in verse 5?

What is the action, in verse 6?

3. What does this king declare as God's 'decree', in verses 7-9?
4. What is the warning that emerges out of this king being enthroned, in verses 10-12?

Consider

5. What did God declare about his Son, Jesus, in Matthew 3:13-17?
6. How did the rulers respond to Jesus, in Matthew 2:1-12, and Matthew 22:15, and Matthew 26:1-5?
7. In what state does Jesus ascend to heaven, and with what status? (Matthew 28:16-20)

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8. By nature, how do we join in Psalm 2:1-3?
9. How are verses 10-12 echoes of Psalm 1?
10. How does Psalm 2 apply Psalm 1, and what can we learn from this about dealing with Jesus?

**Study 3:
Psalm 51**

For the choir director. A Davidic psalm, when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone to Bathsheba.

***Be gracious to me, God,
according to Your faithful love;
according to Your abundant compassion,
blot out my rebellion.***

***² Wash away my guilt,
and cleanse me from my sin.***

***³ For I am conscious of my rebellion,
and my sin is always before me.***

***⁴ Against You-- You alone-- I have sinned
and done this evil in Your sight.***

***So You are right when You pass sentence;
You are blameless when You judge.***

***⁵ Indeed, I was guilty when I was born;
I was sinful when my mother conceived me.***

***⁶ Surely You desire integrity in the inner self,
and You teach me wisdom deep within.***

***⁷ Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.***

***⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones You have crushed rejoice.***

***⁹ Turn Your face away from my sins
and blot out all my guilt.***

***¹⁰ God, create a clean heart for me
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.***

***¹¹ Do not banish me from Your presence
or take Your Holy Spirit from me.***

***¹² Restore the joy of Your salvation to me,
and give me a willing spirit.***

***¹³ Then I will teach the rebellious Your ways,
and sinners will return to You.***

***¹⁴ Save me from the guilt of bloodshed, God, the God of my
salvation,
and my tongue will sing of Your righteousness.***

15 Lord, open my lips,

and my mouth will declare Your praise.

16 You do not want a sacrifice, or I would give it;

You are not pleased with a burnt offering.

17 The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit.

God, You will not despise a broken and humbled heart.

18 In Your good pleasure, cause Zion to prosper;

build the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings;

then bulls will be offered on Your altar.

Comprehend

1. Read the superscript (which is part of the psalm), and skim through 2 Samuel 11-12... what prompts this psalm?

2. Read 2 Samuel 12:13-14.
Confronted by his sin, what did David do immediately? And what did God do immediately? And what was not avoided?

3. Looking at Psalm 51, what does David ask for? (vs.1-2)

Who does David ask, and why? (vs.3-4)

What does David recognize? (vs.5-6)

4. In verses 7-11, David repeats his requests in slightly different ways. What does he request? (cf. 1 Sam.16:26)

5. When God grants David's request, what will he do? (vs.13-15)
6. What deep truth does David recognise? (vs.16-17)

What wider implications are there for this? (vs.18-19)

Consider

7. What doctrine of sin does this psalm reveal?
8. How do you think Jesus fits in as the fulfilment of this psalm, given that he never sinned? (look at 2 Samuel 7:11-17)
9. When sin takes place—any sin—who is offended and affected?

What does this mean when it comes to dealing with our sins?

10. What does this tell you about the nature and person of Jesus, especially his 'fully God' nature?

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11. How does a psalm like this change/confront/remind you of what sin means and where we need to go to have our sin dealt with?

13. How might this psalm change your perception and understanding of forgiveness?

How might this psalm give you humility in repentance, and joy in forgiveness?

Study 4:
Psalm 103

Davidic.

*My soul, praise the LORD,
and all that is within me, praise His holy name.*

² *My soul, praise the LORD,
and do not forget all His benefits.*

³ *He forgives all your sin;
He heals all your diseases.*

⁴ *He redeems your life from the Pit;
He crowns you with faithful love and compassion.*

⁵ *He satisfies you with goodness;
your youth is renewed like the eagle.*

⁶ *The LORD executes acts of righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.*

⁷ *He revealed His ways to Moses,
His deeds to the people of Israel.*

⁸ *The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger and full of faithful love.*

⁹ *He will not always accuse us or be angry forever.*

¹⁰ *He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve
or repaid us according to our offenses.*

¹¹ *For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is His faithful love toward those who fear Him.*

¹² *As far as the east is from the west,
so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

¹³ *As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.*

¹⁴ *For He knows what we are made of,
remembering that we are dust.*

¹⁵ *As for man, his days are like grass--
he blooms like a flower of the field;*

¹⁶ *when the wind passes over it, it vanishes,
and its place is no longer known.*

17 But from eternity to eternity the LORD's faithful love is toward those who fear Him, and His righteousness toward the grandchildren ¹⁸ of those who keep His covenant, who remember to observe His instructions.

19 The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.

20 Praise the LORD, all His angels of great strength, who do His word, obedient to His command.

21 Praise the LORD, all His armies, His servants who do His will.

22 Praise the LORD, all His works in all the places where He rules.

My soul, praise the LORD!

Comprehend

1. What does the psalmist 'command' his own soul to do? (vs.1-2)

Why? (vs.3-5)

2. The psalmist takes a brief detour into history—what does that affirm? (vs.6-7)

How does this deal with the contradiction of a holy God dealing with sin in grace?

3. The psalmist brings all this into the present tense, and the present audience in verses 8-10. What does he affirm, what is its foundation, and what definition of 'grace' is given?
4. What series of images gives colour to this? (vs.11-13)?

Why does God do this? (vs.14)

5. What contrast emerges here, and what reassurance? (vs.15-19)

6. How does the psalm finish—naturally? (vs.20-22)

Consider

7. What picture of God is presented here? Why is this so amazing?

How is this picture so different to that held by our world?

8. What do we learn about the doctrine of grace here?

9. How does a passage like Ephesians 2:8-10 affirm that God's grace stays the same?

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10. What is so amazing about grace?

11. What does grace drive the psalmist to do? (vs.20-22)

Is this what characterises our lives as God's people now?
Why/why not?

Study 5: Psalm 117

***Praise the LORD, all nations!
Glorify Him, all peoples!
2 For great is His faithful love to us;
the LORD's faithfulness endures forever.
Hallelujah!***

Comprehend

1. What does the psalmist? Who does he command to do this? (vs.1-2)
2. What is the reason for this? (vs.2)

Who do you think the 'us' is?

Consider

3. How do Psalm 19:1-6, John 3:16, and Romans 1:19-20, amongst many verses, help us understand the big picture of Psalm 117?
4. What do you think it is call to do, in terms of God?
5. Does this change how you understand 'us'? Why/why not?

Contact

6. Share how you have experienced verse 2...
7. Share how you live verse 1... or why you might not...

