

# Praying Through the Psalms

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## Introduction

- A. Psalms was the inspired *prayer and praise book* of the Old Testament.
  - 1. Of the 238 direct quotations from the O.T. 116 of them are from the Psalms.
  - 2. It was the second most quoted book by Jesus from the O.T.
- B. It is a very practical book because it deals with *every emotion in the human spectrum*.
  - 1. The Psalms serve as *unique models of devotion*.
  - 2. Instead of *God speaking to man*, the Psalms are mostly *man speaking to God!*
  - 3. They show us how we can *effectively and acceptably* pray and praise God.
  - 4. They also can be used strategically and effectively as we minister to others.
- C. It is important that we learn to *“speak God’s language”* as we communicate with Him. We can do this by saturating our mind with scripture (Col 3:16-17).
  - 1. Get in the habit of “pleading the promises of God” back to Him. See Ps 143:1.
  - 2. Use all Bible prayers as models of your own, not just the Psalms. Paul’s prayer in Col. 1: 9-12 is one of my favorites to pray both as my own as well as for others.
- D. This handout is designed to assist you in using the Psalms as a tool of effective prayer and ministry.

## I. **“MY SOUL CRIES OUT FOR GOD” – “As the deer pants after the water brook, so pants my soul after Thee” Ps 42-43. This category fits beautifully for prayers of Praise and Adoration.**

- A. God is Holy – Ps 99. He serves as the basis of Adoration Ps 95-97, and Worship Ps 98-100.
- B. *Thirsting* for God – Ps 63:1-8. ***“Following hard after Thee.”***
- C. *Praising* God – 20 Psalms focus on praise. Some of the most powerful examples are: Ps 8, 7:7-11, 71:22-24, 95, 33, 34, 40, 92, 105.
- D. *Joy in God’s house* – Ps 84, 122, 137:5.
- E. In the *presence of God* – Ps 91, 23.
  - 1. Delights the soul as His protection is known. Shepherd’s tender shield and comfort.
  - 2. The shadow of the Almighty is one, the saints who dwell in the secret place of the Most High.
- F. God in nature – Ps 104, 29, 19:1 ***“The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork.”***
  - 1. *Hear God’s voice in the thunder, God’s breath in the twilight breeze.*
  - 2. *God sword gleams in the lightning bolts and provides the needs of all creatures.*
- G. Love for God and thus His Word – **Ps 119 “The Holy alphabet for Zion’s scholars.”**
  - 1. God’s word is a lamp to guide, a spring of comfort, and a fountain of hope.
  - 2. Ps 19: 7-14 ***“They are more desirable than gold, yes fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.”***
- H. *God’s care for all!* Ps 121:1-8 ***“Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep, the Lord is your keeper. The Lord will protect you from evil; He will keep your soul.”***
- I. God is our *refuge and shelter* – 46, 61, 62. ***“An ever present help in time of trouble.”***

## II. **THE PROBLEM OF SIN.** The Psalms deal with man as a sinner.

- A. Seven are so charged with a sense of sin and of its deadly fruits that they are known as **penitential Psalms**. Ps 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 143.
  - 1. How could God forgive David such great sins? Look at his great examples of repentance.
  - 2. David ***“treasured the word of God up in His heart that he might not sin” (Ps 119:11).***
- B. Confessing individual sin and seeking forgiveness. – Ps 32, 51.

1. Ps 51 is a *cry for mercy*. Never did a soul cry and plead more powerfully for forgiveness!
  2. God cannot despise a broken heart that is crushed with a sense of sin.
- C. *Collective confession* – 78, 95, 106. *God's kindness* is affirmed in Ps 105.
- D. *Conquering sin* --- Ps 130 “***Out of the depths I cry, hear my voice, for I know forgiveness is found in Thee.***” He begins in the pit and ends with the joy of salvation!
1. The greatest victory is triumph over sin, first in the heart, then in one's life.
  2. The cry is heard --- Ps 139:23, 19:13, 119:133!
  3. Ps 84 goes from *strength to strength*. Victory over sin is sure! “**Blessed is the man that trusts in Thee.**”

### III. WRESTLING WITH DOUBTS. It is acceptable to express these to God!

- A. How can it be possible in a world over which a wise and just God presides, that the wicked should prosper and the righteous suffer? This is the question hotly debated between Job and his three friends.
1. A partial solution is found in Ps 37 which deals with the brevity of godless prosperity, and the certainty that *well-doing will lead to well-being*.
  2. These poems *soar up to God*: Ps 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14.
- B. Another solution is found in Psalms 73 which depicts God's attitude toward the wicked and the righteous. God's longsuffering is not indifference. See also Ps 17, 22, 25, 26.
- C. The wicked will be suddenly overthrown while the righteous will live forever in the enjoyment of communion with God. The fleeting pleasures of proud scoffers pale into insignificance before the glories of everlasting fellowship with God. See Ps 139, 1, 2, 9, 20, 23.

### IV. OUT OF THE DEPTHS. After battling through doubts, one emerges with renewed faith and hope!

- A. “***If out of the depths. we cry, we shall cry ourselves out of the depths!***” *Maclaren*
- B. **Ps 88 is unique in that it is sad and plaintive from beginning to end.** It is said to be the darkest prayer in the Bible. *No way of hope appears*. The singer has long cried out for deliverance *from bodily weakness and from loneliness*. For comparable help read Ps 90, 91, 92:1-2.
- C. Out of the depths of persecution and slander the author of Ps 31 exclaimed: “***In the refuge of Thy presence wilt Thou hide them from the plotting's of man. Thou wilt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.***” See also Ps 33, 34, 35.
- D. Out of the depths of disaster and defeat the authors of Ps 60, 74, 79, and 89 cry to God.
1. The Psalms deal with the sore trial of the exile and Babylonian captivity (586-7 BC).
  2. When we suffer from calamities, whether from a church split or a monetary reversal these Psalms can be appropriate. Ps 60 closes with hope and confidence!

### V. ETHICAL IDEALS

- A. Morality in the Bible is rooted in the Psalms. True religion blossoms and becomes fruit in the highest ethics known to man. Unquestionably in the Psalms we reach the high water mark of OT practical piety, the best that the OT can exhibit of true heart religion.
1. **Psalm 1** opens with a vivid contrast between the righteous and the wicked.
  2. **Psalm 15** is the most complete description of a good man to be found in the Psalter, a beautiful picture of the *ideal citizen of Zion*.
- B. What sort of man will the Lord receive as an *acceptable worshipper*?
1. Psalm 131 makes **humility** a prime example of goodness.
  2. Ps 133 magnifies **the spirit of brotherly love**.
  3. Humility and brotherly love are a guaranty of peace in the home, the church and the nation.

4. Ps 24 is a wonderful collection of ethics. **“He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who does not lie or swear deceitfully – he shall receive a blessing from Jehovah” (Ps 24:4-5).**

**C. The Ethics of Speech.** The Psalmist calls upon God to awake and confront the blatant foes of truth and righteousness and the lies and slander the wicked often promote. **See Ps 12, 52, and 120.**

**D. Ministering to the Needy.** **Ps 82 is a plea for justice. Evil judges are one day to confront the great judge.**

1. **Ps 41 is a plea for kindness.** Similar to the words of Jesus: **“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.”**

2. **The ideal ruler is both just and beneficent (Ps 72:2, 12-14).**

## **VI. OPPOSING THE WICKED. THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS.**

**A. Imprecatory = “To pray against.” Ps 60:12 “Through God we shall do valiantly, for He is the one who tramples down our enemies and adversaries.”**

**B. To be a good lover one must know how to hate. See Ps 55, 58, 59.**

1. The excitement of battle throbs in many of the Psalms.

2. The enemies of righteousness are victorious and defiant.

3. Their taunts drive the psalmists to importunate prayer. God’s honor is at stake and His cause in peril. See Ps 83, 109, 140.

**C. More than 20 Psalms contain prayer for the defeat and overthrow of the wicked.**

1. Warlike imagery of the boldest kind is found in many of the imprecatory passages.

2. Many of the curses pronounced against the wicked are startling and painful.

3. The most severe curses are found in Ps 35, 69, and 109:8-13.

**D. “These Psalms are not for private injuries, but only in so far as the suffering singer is a member of the community which represents God’s cause, does he ask the descent of God’s vengeance, not for himself, but for the insults and hurts inflicted on righteousness.” Maclaren**

1. These Psalms focus on the passionate desires for the destruction of evil, a burning zeal for the triumph of truth, which is God’s cause, and an unquenchable faith that He is just.

2. Keep in mind that these are poetry and not prose and that the language of oriental poetry is that of exaggerated passion. The champion of God’s people prays for the overthrow of His foes. The enemies cursed are men who break every moral law and defy God.

3. **“Do not I hate those, Oh Jehovah, that hate Thee? Am I not grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred. They are become mine enemies (Ps 139:21ff).**

E. We ought to use the imprecatory Psalms in the light of our Lord’s teaching. We cannot pronounce curses on our personal enemies. The heavenly artillery may be turned against the drug dealers, the pornography industry, child trafficking, the brothel, terrorists, and the casino, though we must not forget to pray for the conversion of the persons who are engaged in these lines of business.

## **VII. THE FUTURE LIFE IN THE PSALMS.**

**A. “If a man dies, shall he live again” Job 14:14?** What answer do the Psalms give to Job’s cry for light?

1. The OT vision of the afterlife was much more vague and unsure than we have today.

2. The NT teaching from Jn 14 and Rev 21-22 provide us much more detail in our post-cross world than the OT saints possessed.

3. Sheol is often a reference to the place of departed spirits, not just the grave.

4. Life everlasting in the presence of Jehovah is the prospect with which the author of Ps 16 refreshes himself.

- B. The vision of God's face after the sleep of death is better than worldly prosperity (Ps 17:13-15).
1. The author of Ps 73 wins rest for his distressed mind in the assurance of a fellowship with God that cannot be broken (Ps 73: 23-26).
  2. God will finally take the singer to Himself. Illust. "When all of God's singers get home!"
  3. Psalm 49 registers the high water mark of OT faith in a future life. **"But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol. He will receive me" (Ps 49:15).**
  4. *Death becomes the end of the wicked who trusted in riches, while God redeems the righteous from the power of Sheol and takes the believing soul to Himself.*

## VIII. THE MESSIAH IN THE PSALMS.

### A. The Suffering Savior.

1. While hanging on the cross, the mind of our Lord turned to the Psalter.
2. Jesus voiced the terrible anguish of His soul in the opening words of Ps 22 and breathed out His spirit at the end with the trustful words of **Ps 31:5 "Into thy hands I commend my spirit."**
3. Jesus also invited the fulfilment of a Messianic prophecy **in Ps 69:21 by saying, "I thirst."**
4. The NT tells us what happened around Jesus from the perspective of the crowd. While the OT is a picture of what was happening inside Jesus. What was going on inside His heart and mind? What was it like to bear the sins of the world?

### B. The Conquering King who never forced Himself on anyone.

1. Ps 2 and Ps 110 describe the Messiah as Jehovah's son, a mighty conqueror, who shall overwhelm all foes and reign supported by Jehovah.
2. Some who oppose the Messiah, will perish, others will enter His army as volunteers, and will enjoy the fruits of victory. **"It is better to sit on His throne than to be His footstool."**

### C. The Growing Kingdom

1. The glorious missionary outlook of the Psalter is found in Pss. 47, 67, 96-100, and 117.
2. All nations are exhorted to forsake idols and worship God and in the end the whole world is united in the worship of the God of Israel (Ps 47:7-9).
3. Ps 67 is a bugle call to all nations to unite in the worship of the true God.
  - a. Ps 96-100 paint the character of God as a basis of appeal to all nations to turn from idols and worship the God of Abraham.
  - b. Ps 96 and 98 exalt His righteousness; Ps 97 His power and dominion; Ps 99 His holiness and His fidelity to Israel, while Ps 100 tells of His goodness.
  - c. Idols will finally go down before a God worthy of men's reverence and love!

## Conclusion:

- A. **"God warms His hands at the heart of a man or woman engaged in fervent prayer."**
- B. **"The Psalms were not written in heaven for angels, but by inspired men for men and their original setting is in the depths of the human heart."** Let them be a great resource for us!
- C. Many find prayer a struggle. It may be the most difficult of all spiritual works, and yet it may also be the most *rewarding*.
  1. We can teach all types of important truths and not be a threat to Satan.
  2. It is only when we couple truths with prayers of faith that we successfully resist him (Jas 4:7).
  3. When a person of faith fervently kneels in prayer, not only is mountains moved, but Satan trembles!
- D. May we use these Psalms and **let David lead our minds** so that we may restore the role of prayer in the church that it had in the N.T. and usher in the revival among us that is needed so desperately!