

## “Meeting God in the Psalter: A Practical Guide to the Psalms” Part 1 – Reading and the Psalms

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### I. Introduction: More than a “default switch.”

#### A. The devotional *purpose* of the Psalms

“The book of Psalms is a collection of the prayers, praises, meditations, and liturgies of ancient Israel that were set to poetic form and deposited in the sanctuary for use by individual worshippers and choirs.”<sup>1</sup>

- To guide our prayers and praises as we await the coming of His kingdom.
- To make us wise as we meditate upon the pages of the Psalter and to engender hope in the promises of God as we wait patiently for God’s divine Deliverer.

#### B. The devotional *focus* of the Psalms

##### Calvin (16<sup>th</sup> C):

*I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, “An Anatomy of all the 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. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.... It is by perusing these inspired compositions, that men will be most effectually awakened to a sense of their maladies, and, at the same time, instructed in seeking remedies for their cure. In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book.*<sup>2</sup>

##### Athanasius (4<sup>th</sup> C):

*[I]n the Psalter...you learn about yourself. You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you do not merely hear and then pass on, but learn the way to remedy your ill. ...For I think that in the words*

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<sup>1</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishers, 2006), 262.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin in “The Author’s Preface” to Calvin’s *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, p. xxxvii.

*of this book all human life is covered, with all its states and thoughts, and that nothing further can be found in man. For no matter what you seek, whether it be repentance and confession, or help in trouble and temptation or under persecution, whether you have been set free from plots and snares or, on the contrary, are sad for any reason, or whether, seeing yourself progressing and your enemy cast down, you want to praise and thank and bless the Lord, each of these things the Divine Psalms shows you how to do, and in every case the words you want are written down for you, and you can say them as your own.*<sup>3</sup>

### **Luther (16<sup>TH</sup> C):**

[Each saint], whatever his circumstances may be, finds in its psalms and words which are appropriate to the circumstances in which he finds himself and meet his needs adequately as if they were composed exclusively for his sake.

## **II. Why should I read the Psalms?**

### **A. To learn how to be deeply occupied with God**

- To treasure his word
- To delight in his worship
- To reflect on his character/attributes
- To rehearse his redemptive acts in history
- To anticipate his final victory

### **B. To learn how to praise God**

- To dispel unworthy loves
- To expose worldly concerns
- To teach our hearts *how* to praise and worship Him
- To see God vindicate his own name

### **C. To learn how to trust God**

- To give voice to our prayers, pouring out our hearts
- To express our emotions without “emoting”
- To trust his care in all manner of situations
- To find helpful examples of repentance, hope, faith, love, and lament.

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<sup>3</sup> Athanasius, *The Life Of Antony And The Letter To Marcellinus*, translated by Robert C. Gregg, (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 101-129.

One reason we love the Psalms is because they tell us so much about God. The Psalms give us a dialogue with God in which we speak our joys and sorrows to God, and God for his part meets our needs and receives our praise.<sup>4</sup>

### III. *How Should I Read the Psalms?*

Read the selected psalm, and reread it, over and over again, becoming keenly familiar with its content. Read it a sufficient number of times until you become intimately familiar and thoroughly saturated with its message.

A. *Note the Speaker:*

B. *Note the Focus:*

C. *Note the Purpose:*

D. *Note the Emotion:*

E. *Note the Genre:*

F. *Note the Repetition:*

G. *Note the Whole:*

H. *Note the Stanza:*

I. *Note the Theology:*

J. *Note the Opportunity*

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<sup>4</sup> Michael E. Travers, *Encountering God in the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), 12.

**IV. When Should I read the Psalms?**

- A. Early in the morning or late in the evening
- B. Listen to it read (many audio versions)
- C. At breakfast or dinner with family
- D. In carline at school, doctor's office
- E. On long trips
- F. At your desk over lunch
- G. At someone's bedside who is sick or dying
- H. When called upon to pray publicly (before you pray or as part of your prayer)
- I. In public (Acts 8:30 "do you understand what you are reading?")

**V. Recommended Resource (for devotional reading of the Psalms)**

William Varner, *Awake O Harp: A Devotional Commentary on the Psalms* (Kress Biblical Resources, 2011).

John Calvin, *Heart Aflame: Daily Readings from Calvin on the Psalms* (P & R Publishing, 1999).