

“Meeting God in the Psalter: A Practical Guide to the Psalms”
Part 2 – Praying and the Psalms

I. Introduction

Letter to Marcellinus

“ . . . The Psalter has certainly a very special grace, a choiceness of quality well worthy to be pondered for . . . within it are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed, and seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given . . . You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failure 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 . . . Whether he has kept the Law or whether he has broken it, it is his own doings that the Psalms describe; every one is bound to find his very self in them and, be he faithful soul or be he sinner, each reads in them descriptions of himself . . . Under all the circumstances of life, we shall find that these divine songs suit ourselves and meet our own souls’ need at every turn.”¹

II. Reasons to *pray* the Psalms

- A. Informed the early church’s prayers
- B. Learn how to pray in faith
- C. Learn how to express yourself to God
- D. Learn how to focus prayers upon spiritual things
- E. Learn the language of prayer

III. Principles for praying the Psalms

- A. Read the Psalm.
- B. Understand the Psalm.
- C. Narrow your focus.

“ . . . let each select from it, as from the fruits of a garden, those things of which he sees himself in need.”²

- 1. God?
- 2. People?
- 3. Perspective?
- 4. Response?

¹ Athanasius, *The Life Of Antony And The Letter To Marcellinus*, translated by Robert C. Gregg, (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 101-129.

² Ibid, 101–129.

- D. Pray the Psalms.
 - 1. No right way
 - 2. Praying the *meaning* of the Psalm
 - 3. Don't have to pray every word

IV. Suggestions for praying the Psalms

- A. Have a plan to incorporate them into your life.
- B. Start with shorter, simpler Psalms.³
- C. Pray the Psalm.
 - 1. Re-state the Psalm.
 - 2. Paraphrase the Psalm.
 - 3. Respond to the Psalm.

V. An example for praying a Psalm: 73:21–28

- A. Re-state the Psalm.
- B. Paraphrase the Psalm.
- C. Respond to the Psalm.

VI. Recommended Resources

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).

³ Some suggestions: Psalm 1, 3, 6, 8, 16, 19, 23, 30, 32, 42, 51, 63, 73, 84, Ps 139