

Psalms⁸

Let me state the obvious upfront

- There is no way for me to be able to scratch the surface of the book of Psalms in one hour

This is a survey class

- We are taking the airplane route
- We are looking at broad themes

I believe there is great benefit to survey classes

- They provide a different perspective than what we are used to hearing

Many years ago, here is what John Calvin wrote about the Psalms

- [“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.”](#)
(Comm. p. xxxvii)

Whatever situation you face, there is most likely a psalm that corresponds to that situation

- Whatever emotions or thoughts you may be dealing with, there is most likely a psalm that addresses it

The book of Psalms has been used of the Lord in my life

- It is one of my “go to” books when I need encouragement, assurance, and comfort

Keep in mind that the poetical books deal with a specific, individual focus

- This makes them very easy to relate to
- This makes them very easy to apply to our situation

The Hebrew title of the book emphasized “praise songs”

- When the Hebrew text was translated into Greek, the name *Psalmoi* was given (“the songs”)

The Greek word for psalms denotes the plucking or twanging of strings

- In other words, the assumption is that these psalms would be accompanied by music⁹

⁸ This lesson references material from Capitol Hill Baptist Church’s core seminar on the Old Testament. <http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/class-1-introduction-to-the-old-testament/>

⁹ MacArthur, 595.

The book of Psalms was the God-given prayer and praise book for the nation of Israel in their Temple worship¹⁰

- They would set these psalms to music and offer them back to God

The NT speaks of the early church singing psalms

- It is used to being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:19) and filled with the Word (Col 3:16)
- Of course, being filled with the Spirit and being filled with the Word go hand-in-hand

There are seven known authors of the psalms

- David – wrote 73 psalms (3-9; 11-32; 34-41; 51-65; 68-70; 86; 101; 103; 108-110; 122; 124; 131; 133; 138-145)
- Asaph – wrote 12 psalms (50; 73-83)
- Descendants of Korah – wrote 10 psalms (42; 44-49; 84-85; 87)
- Solomon – wrote 2 psalms (72; 127)
- Ethan – wrote 1 psalm (89)
- Heman – wrote 1 psalm (88)
- Moses – wrote 1 psalm (90)
- Anonymous – 50 psalms, 1/3 of the Psalter (1-2; 10; 33; 43; 66-67; 71; 91-100; 102; 104-107; 111-121; 123; 125-126; 128-30; 132; 134-137; 146-150)

The Psalms are broken down into five (5) books

- Book 1 – 1-41
- Book 2 – 42-72
- Book 3 – 73-89
- Book 4 – 90-106
- Book 5 – 107-50

Your Bible may or may not have those distinctions

- I have written these five sections on the first page of Psalms
- Then at the beginning of each section, I have listed that section (i.e., Book 1, 1-41)

Every one of these sections within Psalms ends with a note of praise and doxology to God

- Book 1, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting to everlasting. Amen, and Amen” (41:13)
- Book 2, “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders. ¹⁹ And blessed be His glorious name forever; And may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen” (72:18-19)
- Book 3, “Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen” (89:52)
- Book 4, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, "Amen." Praise the LORD!” (106:48)
- Book 5, “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!” (150:6)

¹⁰ Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 152.

Some have speculated that these five books relate to the five books of the Pentateuch¹¹

- But there isn't clear evidence to understand why there are five books of the Psalms

The last five psalms (146-150) begin with the phrase, "Praise the Lord"

Here are some interesting facts about the book of Psalms

- It is the longest book of the Bible – in length and number of chapters
- It is the book most alluded to in the New Testament
- It contains the shortest chapter in the Bible – Psalm 117 (2 verses)
- It contains the longest chapter in the Bible – Psalm 119 (176 verses)
- Psalm 117 is also the middle chapter of the entire Bible (1189 total chapters in the Bible)¹²

The events discussed in the book of Psalms reach from creation to post-exilic events

- The actual process of compiling these psalms took place over a 1,000 year period (ca. 1410 B.C. to 430 B.C.)¹³

Obviously, this took place over a number of centuries by a number of men

- But all of this process was supervised and superintended by the Holy Spirit

I have given you a break-down of the psalms and their respective authors

- I enjoy this type of analysis

Human authors of the Psalms						
Author	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4	Book 5	(total)
David	37	18	1	2	15	73
Asaph	0	1	11	0	0	12
Sons of Korah	0	7	3	0	0	10
Solomon	0	1	0	0	1	2
Ethan	0	0	1	0	0	1
Heman	0	0	1	0	0	1
Moses	0	0	0	1	0	1
Unknown	4	4	0	14	28	50
# different authors	2	5	5	3	3	

Number of verses per psalm						
Author	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4	Book 5	(total)
1-10 vs	14	9	3	5	27	58
11-20 vs	18	16	10	6	9	59
21-30 vs	6	4	2	3	5	20
31-40 vs	2	2	0	1	1	6
41-50 vs	1	0	0	2	1	4
51-75 vs	0	0	2	0	0	2
76-150 vs	0	0	0	0	1	1

¹¹ Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament, Psalms*, 484.

¹² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, 154.

¹³ Gerard Chrispin, *The Bible Panorama*, 228.

Look with me at Psalm 3

- I want you to see something that may or may not be obvious in our English Bibles

My Bible has some beginning text at Psalm 3

- “Morning Prayer of Trust in God” – this is not part of the Hebrew text; this is extra info designed to give a summary of the book
- “A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son” – this is part of the Hebrew text and should be read along with the psalm

The Hebrew Bible actually treats these superscriptions or titles as the first verse of the psalm¹⁴

116 of the 150 psalms have these superscriptions or titles¹⁵

- I encourage you not to skip over this part of the inspired text

The Psalms make much of parallelism¹⁶

- This is a poetical way in which the psalmist stress their point by various means

Synonymous parallelism is when the first line is restated in the second line

- Psalm 2:1, “Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing?”
- Notice that this is essentially the same statement made twice

Antithetic parallelism is when the first and second lines oppose one another

- Psalm 1:6, “For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish”

There are other types of parallelism that I won’t discuss this afternoon

- But pay attention to how Hebrew poetry is put together
- Is the second line repeating the first line, opposing the first line, or doing something else?

There are some psalms that implement an acrostic or alphabetical arrangement¹⁷

- Some of these are psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145

The most familiar one of these is Psalm 119

- The first 8 verses begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet
- The second 8 verses begin with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet
- Etc.

The Hebrew alphabet only has 22 letters

- So $8 \times 22 = 176$

¹⁴ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms, Vol 1 (1-41)*, 41.

¹⁵ MacArthur, 595.

¹⁶ MacArthur, 597.

¹⁷ MacArthur, 597.

We also need to realize that Hebrew poetry makes use of figures of speech

- Rivers clap their hands (Ps 98:8)
- Hills sing for joy (Ps 65:12)
- Mountains skip like rams (Ps 114:4)
- God's enemies melt like wax (Ps 68:2)
- God Himself rides upon the clouds (Ps 104:3)

Keep this in mind when you read Hebrew poetry

- Not everything is to be taken literally
- Allow room for figures of speech, metaphors, etc.

What do we do with the imprecatory psalms?

- Those psalms that have the author pray against people
- Such as Psalm 58:6, "O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth"

Let's keep a few things in mind regarding these imprecatory psalms¹⁸

- They call for *Divine* justice rather than human revenge
- They ask God to punish the wicked, thus vindicating His righteousness
- They condemn sin, not preferential issues
- Even Jesus Himself called down a curse on several cities and told His disciples to call down curses on those cities that did not receive the Gospel message (Mt 10:14-15)
- David prayed for judgment because the enemies were not just causing harm to him personally – they were also causing harm to God's people corporately¹⁹

Another thing to keep in mind is that the imprecatory psalms are prayers

- No human, not even King David, had the ultimate authority to command God to strike down his enemies

These were expressions from the heart of various psalmists who saw injustice

- They submitted their desires and requests to the Lord
- They trusted Him to act in a way that was best

The psalms teach us much about the character of God

- These psalms remind us of God's total character
- Not just the parts that we might naturally pick and choose

As far as organization, we don't have the imprecatory psalms all bunched together

- We don't have the praise psalms all lumped together
- Rather, these psalms are a bit scattered and disorganized

¹⁸ Wilkinson & Boa, 157.

¹⁹ MacArthur, 155.

This is how life happens, isn't it?

- We can't easily compartmentalize our lives into nice, neat sections of time
- Sometimes, life is like a scrambled egg

One of the convicting things to me as I study the psalms is just how little revelation these authors had

- There was certainly no New Testament available to them
- What they had of the Old Testament was very limited

Yet, these authors had such a rich theology

- Their vocabulary is filled with praise to God
- Their confessions were deep and sincere
- They did the best with what they had been given

This is a rebuke to us, isn't it?

- We have the complete written revelation of God in His Word

Psalms portray living "real life in the real world"²⁰

- The various Psalms portray real people facing real issues while looking to the real God

Christians can sometimes put on a happy face and pretend like everything is ok

- But the Psalms portray a true sense of honesty, transparency, and vulnerability
- We would do well to learn to emulate the psalmists

As I mentioned earlier, the Psalms seem to touch on a wide range of emotions and experiences in the human life

- I want to walk through a sampling of these to give you a foretaste of how impactful the Psalms can be for you²¹

The psalmist longs for God with his entire being

- "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God" (Ps 42:1)

The psalmist cries out to God when he is afraid

- "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You" (Ps 56:3)
- "Save me, O God, for the waters have threatened my life" (Ps 69:1)

When the psalmist sensed that everything was against him, he said these words

- "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps 73:26)

²⁰ MacArthur, 596.

²¹ Michael E. Travers, *Encountering God in the Psalms*, 13.

When sin overwhelms the psalmist

- “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge” (Ps 51:3-4)

When the psalmist wants reassurance and comfort

- “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Ps 23:1-6)

When the psalmist looks around and sees the wicked prospering

- “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart! But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Ps 73:1-3)

The list could go on and on

- For every emotion and experience you are facing, there is at least a psalm that seems to speak to that very issue

As we said earlier, the book of Psalms was the inspired hymn book for Israel

- The Psalms lead us to worship
- The Psalms lead us to encounter God in the midst of our daily lives, choices, circumstances, and challenges

I can tell you from personal experience, that the Psalms are some of my go to passages at various times of my life

- Forgiveness and pardon in times of deep conviction; I go to Psalm 32 and 51
- Encouragement and reminder that God is good; I go to Psalm 34
- Struggling when I see unbelievers seemingly prospering while believers struggle; I go to Psalm 37

What psalms have been helpful for you in your Christian life?

- Anyone want to share with the group?

In his helpful book, *Praying the Bible*, Don Whitney outlines how you can read a verse or few verses, then pray it back to the Lord

- It is a way to merge prayer with reading the Word
- What better way to pray than to pray God’s very Word back to Him?

I have found the Psalms to be extremely easy to engage with this practice

- Confession
- Praise
- Proper perspective
- Repentance

I want to give you a brief outline of several types of psalms that you will encounter

- You may group these slightly different than me²²

I. Praise psalms

In these types of psalms, the author praises God for who He is and what He has done

- The focus is on the Lord Himself

These types of psalms lift our thoughts toward God

- They direct all of our attention, focus, and energy on the Lord
- Their goal is for us to worship this great God

It shouldn't surprise us, then, that some of these types of psalms were used in corporate worship

- The Song of Ascents, for example, were sung by Jews as they approached the Temple (Ps 120-134)

II. Lament psalms

These are psalms that ask help from the Lord for something

- In a time of need, the psalmist turns to the Lord

Here are some examples²³

- Enemies surround the psalmist and threaten his life (Ps 35)
- The psalmist is falsely accused (Ps 35)
- The psalmist may need to confess sin (Ps 51)

This type of psalm reminds us that there are situations where the only source of hope can be found in the Lord Himself

- So prayer is made to the Lord

But even when we are asking something from the Lord, we are worshipping the Lord

- Because we acknowledge that He alone can meet our needs
- So even the asking is a way we can worship the Lord

²² Travers, 47-57.

²³ Travers, 50.

Listen to this commentator as he describes the lament psalms

- “One of the most predominant themes in the Psalter is lament; this reminds us again and again that many of the psalms are prayer songs. Laments, or prayers, are cries to God in times of need, whether sickness, affliction, slander, war, or some other crisis”²⁴

III. Royal/kingship psalms

Royal psalms focus on the king

- Either the earthly king
- Or the heavenly king

Most of the psalms speaking of the earthly king point to King David

- David is such an important character in the Old Testament

The psalms that speak of the heavenly king are prophecies of the coming King

- Thus, they are prophetic passages speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ

Here are some psalms that would fit into this category (Ps 2; 20; 21; 45; 72; 132)

IV. Thanksgiving psalms

This is similar to the praise psalms, but with a slight nuance

- Praise psalms worship God for who He is and what He has done
- Thanksgiving psalms offer gratitude to God for something He has done for the individual or God’s people

Another slight distinction is that the thanksgiving psalms are in response to specific prayers

- The author is praising God for answering his prayers

In these psalms, the author praises the Lord, then calls upon the congregation to join in on the thanksgiving

- The word “thanks” is used 50x in the book of Psalms
- The word “praise” is used 123x in the book of Psalms

Here are some psalms that would fit into this category (Ps 34; 40; 69)

²⁴ Ross, 111.

V. Wisdom psalms

These psalms teach God's people how to live godly lives

- They show the contrast between the godly and the ungodly
- They highlight how the righteous and unrighteous live in very different ways

You might think of these psalms as giving a "character sketch" of the godly man²⁵

- They help to illustrate how the godly man or woman lives his/her life

Psalms 1 is perhaps the most famous of the wisdom psalms

- It contrasts the godly man with the ungodly man

Other psalms which would fit into this category are Ps 111 and 112

In our remaining time, I want to give you some characteristics of Biblically spiritual people²⁶

- Said a different way, what does it look like to reflect the godly person as reflected in the Psalms?

I. Giving of praise

If there are psalms that command us to praise the Lord, then godly individuals should be praising the Lord!

- To do so is to obey Scripture
- Many of the psalms explicitly call believers to worship the Lord

Look with me at Psalm 145

- "A Psalm of Praise, of David. I will extol You, my God, O King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable" (145:1-3)

If you look at Psalm 146-150, the opening verse of each psalm begins with these words, "Praise the LORD"

- The fact that the book of Psalms ends on this crescendo note of praise is telling

Our lives are not about us

- We exist for God
- We should reflect this in the way that we live

²⁵ Travers, 55.

²⁶ Dever, 486-502.

II. Honesty

I am thankful that the Psalms don't portray life through rose-colored glasses

- They don't portray a "grin and bear it" mentality

In a word, the psalmists are honest

- If they weren't, we wouldn't be able to relate to them so well

Think through the range of circumstances that they faced

- Sorrow
- Disorientation
- Pain
- Distress
- Anger
- Abandonment
- Betrayal
- Fear

This takes us back to the lament category of psalms

- The author is crying out to God because He is the only Person who can help

One writer says that there are 62 psalms that would be characterized as laments²⁷

- If that's accurate, then more than 1/3 of the psalms are laments

Listen to Psalm 74:1, "O God, why have you rejected *us* forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?"

- What emotions are mentioned?

Listen to Psalm 10:1, "Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide *Yourself* in times of trouble?"

- Have you ever felt distant from God?
- If so, you aren't the only One!

I mentioned this earlier, but I will repeat it here

- As Christians, we need to learn to be more honest with one another
- If we're struggling and need help, let someone know!

²⁷ Dever, 489.

III. Remembering

As we read the Psalms, we should take note of how often the authors recall the great works of God in their lives

- Whether individually or corporately

They mention great acts such as

- Creation
- The Exodus
- God's provision at various times

Look with me at Psalm 136

- The second half of every verse is the same, "**For His lovingkindness is everlasting**"
- In other words, *God has been faithful*

If you leave off that second part, you are basically listening in on a history lesson

- **136:10** To Him who smote the Egyptians in their firstborn,
- **136:11** And brought Israel out from their midst,
- **136:12** With a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
- **136:13** To Him who divided the Red Sea asunder,
- **136:14** And made Israel pass through the midst of it,
- **136:15** But He overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,
- **136:16** To Him who led His people through the wilderness,
- **136:17** To Him who smote great kings,
- **136:18** And slew mighty kings,
- **136:19** Sihon, king of the Amorites,
- **136:20** And Og, king of Bashan,

I would say that, as a whole, we are a forgetful people

- When we do stop and remember what God has done, we are moved to worship and praise the Lord

IV. Biblical morality

Reading the Psalms reorients us to a Biblical sense of right and wrong

- It resets us to what God's standards are

Psalm 1 reminds us how God defines godliness vs. ungodliness

- It reminds us of the end of the wicked

Listen to Psalm 15:1-3

- “A Psalm of David. O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend”

We can't allow the world to reshape our definition of right and wrong

- Reading the Psalms helps to remind us of God's viewpoint

V. Repentance

As we study the book of Psalms, the godly person is one who is constantly repenting

- Consistently confessing sin and turning away from it

Listen to these words from Psalm 32, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity” (32:1-2a)

Psalm 51 is David's personal confession to the Lord after his sin with Bathsheba

- The picture there is of a broken man
- A man who was honest about his sin

The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:10, “godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret”

VI. Trusting

The godly person is also known for his/her trust in the Lord

- We must find our rest and security in the Lord and in Him alone

We are constantly tempted to place our trust and hope in earthly things

- But these are just false securities that could be taken away at any time

Trust is so basic to the Christian life

- Without trust, a person can't be a Christian!

Listen to Ps 62:5-6, “My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken”

VII. Giving thanks

The godly person is finally marked by a deep sense of gratitude

- A thankfulness that permeates our lives

Of all people, shouldn't Christians be the most thankful people?

- But we aren't always thankful

As I mentioned earlier, "thanks" is used in the book of Psalms 50x

- It is a recurring theme

We should be amazed that God hears our prayers

- But we oftentimes forget this
- When we forget, we are not being thankful

Listen to these verses from the NT about being thankful

- "always giving thanks for all things" (Eph 5:20)
- "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess 5:18)

The book of Psalms is such a rich treasure

- If you aren't in the practice of reading the Psalms on a regular basis, I would encourage you to do so

Next month, we will discuss Proverbs and Ecclesiastes