

PRAYING THE PSALMS

Did you know, the Psalms are expressed in the “Language of Prayer?”

The Psalms are some of the most beloved poems in Christian and Jewish history. ***In them, man’s words to God have become God’s words to man.*** They teach us the language of prayer and give greater regard to our emotions and their place in our spiritual journey - while also showing God’s heart toward us. In this series we’ll explore the whole range of biblical prayer through the lens of the Psalms and in the process, lead our church to pray through all 150 of them!

This journal is designed to provide daily readings for a month. Because life does happen, we realistically want to engage with 25 psalms each month, providing a “grace period” when we miss a day or two. Our goal is to then do this monthly through additional journals for the next six months. We encourage you to read and pray through one each morning, or time of day that allows you to get into a good rhythm. Read it through a couple times slowly (it’s poetry!), using the **devotional reflections, guided prayer and four questions on the back of each page** to help you read closely. **Then use the whole psalm, a smaller section, or just some key words, to form a prayer of your own.**

Remember, the goal is to allow these poetic prayers to help us learn new ways of talking to and about God. Don’t rush it, allow yourself time to think about what you’re saying. Our prayer is that you learn how to pray (like Jesus did) and sense God’s presence in a new way in 2020!

CREATING A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER...*Like Jesus*

Prayer ***changes our lives and how we engage with our daily circumstances*** when it isn’t something, we do occasionally, but when it’s a habit we cultivate. To understand how to create a rhythm of prayer, we can look at the example Jesus gave during His life on earth:

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed.” (Mark 1:35)

The spiritual space he went to most often in his prayers was the Psalms. (And did you know they are actually the book he chose to quote the most from all of the Old Testament books?)

WAYS TO CREATE A HABIT:

- **HAVE A CERTAIN TIME**

Jesus got up early in the morning to spend time with His Heavenly Father. Make a daily appointment with God — whether it's first thing in the morning, at lunch, or in the evening — and faithfully keep it. The more you do it, the more it becomes a habit you can't live without!

- **HAVE A CERTAIN PLACE**

Jesus had a specific place He went to pray. Having a designated place to pray helps us remove distractions and frees us to worship and pray out loud.

- **HAVE A CERTAIN PLAN**

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He gave them a prayer outline that we now call, "The Lord's Prayer."

I recommend starting the habit of "10 + 10 Prayers." 10 minutes of reading your Bible and meditation + 10 minutes of prayer and reflection, as a starting point to practicing praying through the Psalms. As we pray every day, our plans for our prayer time can vary, but it helps when we have a plan for connecting regularly with God.

A THE PSALMS TEACH US HOW TO ASK OF GOD AND GIVE HONEST RESPONSES

As you pray the psalms, you will find they prompt you to pray in many different ways, which include:

- Asking for a specific desired outcome.
- Asking for protection of loved ones.
- Asking for wisdom about an upcoming decision.
- Expressing anger about something that happened.
- Expressing regret or ask forgiveness for something.
- Expressing thankfulness for a meal.
- Expressing thankfulness for something other than a meal.
- Gaining a better understanding of something in the Bible.
- Getting help in improving a particular area of my life.
- Overcoming a temptation I'm facing.
- Seeing another person become a follower of God (Christian).
- Seeking peace during a difficult time.
- Telling God how great He is.
- Staying calm or focused in an upcoming stressful situation.

TRACK YOUR PRAYERS

When we pray, God is not only working in our lives, but also in the lives of people we are connected to. That means if we truly are asking God to help or guide, *it will be a process that may take longer than we think!* We get impatient and expect results immediately, however anything that has some degree of complexity (like relationships, work or other personal circumstances) requires God to work *in every part of it!* The word "patience" literally means, "waiting for something to come into maturity." This is helpful for us to consider as we expect God to answer our prayers and wait for Him to move in His timing (Psalm 34:10).

Psalm 26

Test Me

After every teaching, there is always a test. We remember that from school, but sometimes forget to expect it when we taught the things of the Lord. David asked the Lord to instruct him in his ways in Psalm 25. Now he is praying for God to test his heart. He wanted his motives sifted to make sure they were pure.

We never have to be afraid of the tests that God brings into our life. They are there to solidify the work that God is doing. Information goes from being *simply rational* and becomes *deeply personal* when we are tested with it! We *should* want God to prove the work he is doing in us.

There are four areas David wants to be tested: relationships, purity, worship, and integrity. These four are vital to every believer's faith. They cover the places where most Christians struggle. If we worked on improving in these, we would see our intimacy with Jesus increase and our faith mature.

The first area where David wanted to be tested was in his relationships. David was willing to walk alone to keep his integrity. He didn't spend time with liars and hypocrites and hated those who did evil. He knew that hanging out with these types would corrode his heart to the things of the Lord. They would challenge him to compromise his faith and eventually his desire to do what they did would grow. He knew the best thing to do was to avoid them.

The second area David wanted to be tested was in his purity. An appropriate condition for being close to God. If sin crept into his heart, he would feel distant, and he wanted communion with the Lord more than anything. Keeping his hands pure was a metaphor for sin. Hands that were washed clean were ones that had been forgiven of their sins. This allowed him to enter into the presence of God and glorify him.

The third area David wanted to be tested was in his worship. He loved being in the tabernacle. He wasn't allowed to construct the temple so he would go to the tabernacle which was housed on Mount Zion. In Psalm 84 he tells us that one day in the courts of the Lord is better than a thousand elsewhere. He loved to honor God and give Him the worth that he was worthy of.

The final area David wanted to be tested was in his integrity. He wanted his walk to be pure and holy before the Lord. Integrity is doing the right thing when no one is watching. David committed to walking in integrity. In verse twelve he says that his foot stands on level ground. This gives us the picture that *our life is stable because we are doing the right thing*. As we walk the path that God has given us we would do well to ask God to test us like David. These tests will expose areas that need work in our heart and show us how much we have grown.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me not to want to skip the test, to settle for just information. You are working in my life and I thank you for that! Please be patient with me when I fail the test and when I pass, use what you have created in me for your glory! Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 27

My Light

Where do you turn when your world starts to fall apart, and fear raises its ugly head in your heart? What or whom do you run to first medication? A stiff drink? Your spouse? A friend? Is the Lord your first thought or a last resort? Stress and fear are like the warning lights on the dashboard of your car. They remind you to fall back on the Lord.

David had learned that lesson. “The LORD,” he said, “is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (v. 1). God didn’t just give David light and deliverance and security; God was all those things to David. David’s trust is in the Lord Himself, not just in what the Lord is able to do.

When a storm is coming, my sometimes-fearless companion, Nigel will put his ears back and want to sit on my lap. It reminds me of the same way we climb into God’s arms when life gets scary. It’s the only secure place to be. Fear is one of life’s most paralyzing problems. We fear the known, and we fear the unknown. Psalm 27 is a song designed to slay the dragon in your life—or at least to keep it cornered and under control.

David gave us some practical ways to face fear:

First, *he declared what he knew to be true about God* (vv. 1-6). One of the best ways to bolster your courage is to remind yourself of who God is and to reaffirm your trust in Him.

Then *David expressed what he needed from God*. He wasn’t shy about letting God know what he wanted— “Hear, O LORD... answer me... Do not hide Your face... Do not leave me nor forsake me... Teach me Your way” (vv. 7-11).

Finally, *David advised himself to wait for the Lord’s deliverance* (v. 14). I don’t like to wait. I get stressed—and impatient. But waiting can be a time of peace and even a time of rest if we wait for the Lord to show His power and grace in our lives. Waiting for God is hard, but that is often the time we draw closest to Him in trust and confidence.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when the storms come, please remind me that you alone are my light and salvation and I need not be afraid. Help me to wait on you and discover you more in the storm. I will wait in your time for the storm to pass and declare your praises when it does, Amen

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 28

My Strength

Sometimes I'm not listening when I should be. My wife or kid or co-worker is trying to communicate important information, and I'm focused on something on another planet. I usually get something like this: "Are you listening to me?" We are a little reluctant to say it that bluntly to God, but there are times we feel that way.

"Are You really tuned in, Lord? Are You even listening to what I say?" After all, God has the Middle East to keep in order, stars and planets to maintain, Satan to keep track of—and millions of people talking to Him at once. How can He possibly concentrate on what I'm going through right now?

That's how David felt when he wrote Psalm 28. Enemies and evildoers surrounded him (again), and he wondered if God was turning a deaf ear to his cry for help. He had been to God so many times that he thought God was getting tired of hearing the same old requests. If you have been reading the Psalms up to now, you might also feel like David is starting to sound like a broken record. However, God hadn't forgotten David—and He wasn't suddenly hard of hearing.

The Lord doesn't ignore us, either. Sometimes God wants us to wait patiently for His intervention. At other times God seems to hide Himself from us so we will seek Him more fervently. But one thing is clear: God is never too distracted to give us personal attention. "Blessed be the LORD, because He has heard the voice of my supplications!" (v. 6).

In your situation, you might have to say those words purely by faith right now because it doesn't seem like God has intervened to help you. But you can know with absolute confidence that He has heard your cry and will prove to be a shield and a fortress. I may get distracted and tune out, but God never does.

Prayer: Dear God, when anxiety invades my life, help me to know you are near. When blessings come, give me eyes to see them and a grateful heart to express them. When burdens come, give me the humility to bring them to you. When I fail, help me to see where things have broken down. When I have successes, help me to praise you for your provision. When I don't know what to do, help me to ask you for guidance. Amen

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 29

The Lord of the Storm

I love thunderstorms. I'm fascinated by the sheer magnitude of their power. When the thunder starts rumbling, I watch the lightning flash and the wind blow. (I also pray that trees don't fall and houses don't get damaged). For storm lovers, we're in good company when we watch them. David liked them, too. On this particular occasion he watches a big one form to the west of his palace out over the sea. He sees the black, rolling clouds and the streaks of lightning as the storm moves closer to land. Sheets of rain soak the coastal plain and the foothills. Finally the storm sweeps over Jerusalem and moves off to the north.

As the lightning flashes and the thunder shakes the palace, David sits on the patio singing: "The God of glory thunders; the LORD is over many waters" (v. 3). David hears more in the storm than booms and crashes. David hears the Lord—not in words, but in a dramatic demonstration of His power. David's heart leaps in adoration to God.

As you imagine this powerful thunderstorm rolling in off the Mediterranean Sea, prompting David to lift his voice in adoration and praise to God. Imagine now the divine assembly of heavenly beings who surround the throne of God offering thunderous praise. The worship of God has its greatest momentum when God's creatures in heaven and on earth join together to praise him.

Psalm 29 is a major putdown of the Canaanite god Baal (pronounced "bale"). He was worshipped as the god of thunder and rain and as the source of fertility and good harvests. Baal is pictured in Canaanite art with lightning bolts in his hands. David wants his people to understand one thing: Baal is not in charge of the storm; the God of Israel is. If you want to read about a contest between the Lord and the false god Baal, check out the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18. The God who sent lightning (supposedly Baal's specialty) was to be worshipped as the true God.

The God who can control a powerful storm can also protect His people. Think about that the next time you find yourself in a thunderstorm. Don't hide under the covers. Watch for a while—and let your heart praise the God who sits enthroned above nature's most powerful forces.

Prayer: (Re-read the Psalm aloud as an expression of praise)

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 30

Resurrection Song

Every person with cancer or Alzheimer's disease or kidney failure is a reminder that we live in a world cursed by sin and death. We aren't sure what sickness David had before he wrote Psalm 30, but it almost took his life. Only God's power brought him back from the brink of death.

It's possible that it wasn't even David who was sick. One day David decided to count all the men in Israel of fighting age. He thought it would be interesting to know just how big an army he could raise in a national emergency. God, however, saw David's act as an expression of pride and a lack of trust in the Lord's promise to protect Israel.

In judgment God gave David three choices: three years of famine, three months of oppression under an attacking enemy, or three days of plague. Which would you choose? David picked the plague—and seventy thousand people died. So much for a big army. God halted the angel carrying out the judgment at the farm of Ornan the Jebusite. (You can read the whole story in 1 Chronicles 21.)

David saw God's angel standing there, and he begged God to strike him and his family with disease rather than any more of his people. The angel told David to build an altar to the Lord in that place. David purchased the land from Ornan and offered sacrifices to God—and the plague ended. Israel and David were "healed" in response to David's cry to the Lord. The spot where David offered sacrifices was the very spot God appointed for the temple, the permanent place of worship in Israel. Maybe that's why this song was sung when the temple was dedicated.

It was a reminder of how God healed the nation. Maybe that's also why David wrote: God's "anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life" (v. 5). God turned David's grief into dancing. Psalm 30 is a good song to sing when God heals you—from sickness, from sin's destruction, from the devastating scars of disobedience, and from division in your family or church.

God brought David back from the brink of death—and He can do the same in our desperate situations. Psalm 30 has been used down through the centuries by the Jewish people to praise God for His restoring power. Hundreds of years after David wrote this, when the Jews returned from exile in Babylon and rebuilt the destroyed temple, they sang the same song. God had once again "healed" His people.

Psalm 30 is read today in Jewish synagogues at the Festival of Hanukkah, the celebration of the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus in 165 BC after it had been defiled by a Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes. Our God is a healing God.

(Prayer: If sick [or someone you know], ask for healing. When healed, thank Him for it.)

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 31

David was in trouble again. This time he was totally surrounded. Maybe he was trapped inside a besieged city. Saul and his army had tracked David to a small town and have shut down every escape route. It was only a matter of time before they broke through the wall and found David—or before the residents of the city turned David over in order to escape slaughter themselves. What made the situation worse was that David’s men weren’t with him. He had no protection, no support, no help, no escape. “Fear is on every side” (v. 13) sums up how he feels, and only the Lord can make a way out.

We aren’t told how David escaped the situation. Saul and his army may have been forced to leave so they could handle another problem somewhere else. David may have been able to slip through the enemy lines at night or to hide when the search of the city was made. Eventually God made a way out—just as He will make a way for you. In the meantime, hide yourself in the shelter of God’s presence. “Be of good courage,” David says, “and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD” (Psalm 31:24).

Psalm 31 struck a chord in the heart of Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet who lived 450 years after David. He was trapped in the besieged city of Jerusalem, and he used some of David’s best lines to express the hopelessness of the situation (see Jeremiah 17:18; 20:10; 22:28). Jeremiah especially liked the “fear is on every side” sound bite.

David, Jeremiah, and countless other people have felt trapped in a hopeless situation with no one to turn to but the Lord. If that’s how you feel as you read this, then Psalm 31 is your psalm. If you think no one can help but the Lord, you’ve come to the right Person because the Lord is a specialist in impossible situations. Take refuge in the Lord. Pray Psalm 31 as your own cry for help to the Lord. And when He delivers you or when the siege in your life ends, give Him praise for His faithful love. Jesus died with Psalm 31:5 on His lips: “Into Your hands I commit My spirit” (see Luke 23:46).

Jesus had faced the agony and abandonment of the cross and, in the process, He had completed what the Father had sent Him to do. With complete trust in His Father, Jesus released His spirit and died.

Prayer: Lord, when I feel overwhelmed and lack capacity for the challenge, please be my source and strength for overcoming the obstacles that come my way. Please prompt me to remember the times you have you have helped me, and to always give thanks for your great care and love. Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

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What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 32

Sin's Downward Spiral

David had it all—wealth, power, influence, success. He was at the top of his game. Then he stayed home one spring when he should have been out in the battle with his soldiers. He was up on the roof when he should have been in his office. The woman next door was taking a bath when she should have pulled the window shade. David didn't fall into sin; he walked in, eyes wide open. The affair got complicated when the neighbor, Bathsheba, became pregnant.

David manipulated events to get her husband, Uriah, put in the worst of the fighting at the war front. After Uriah's funeral, David took Bathsheba into his own care and back to his own home. David thought it was all very well concealed. He looked like a hero. No one knew the whole story. No one could connect the dots of David's sin and deceit. No one except David—and, oh, yes, one other person—God. For about a year David (and God) kept silent.

God was waiting for David to admit his sin; David was hoping God would forget the sin. In his heart, however, David was dying. "When I kept silent, my bones grew old" (Psalm 32:3). He still kept up appearances, of course—still went to church, still played the part. But no psalms were written that year. The joy that had filled David's life slowly drained away.

David used four different Hebrew words to describe his sin before God. Each one gives us greater insight into our own acts of disobedience and wrong. Each one pushes us farther from a close relationship with the Lord:

- **Transgression** (Psalm 32:1) means "to rebel"; it's a deliberate & willful act of disobedience.
- **Sin** (Psalm 32:1) comes from a Hebrew word that means "to miss the mark," "to go in the wrong way." God sets the standard for our behavior, we choose another direction.
- **Iniquity** (Psalm 32:5) means "to twist or pervert"; we take God's good gifts and we twist them into actions or attitudes that dishonor Him.
- **Deceit** (Psalm 32:2) is the process of deception we use to convince ourselves and others that we are living honestly before God when, in fact, we are not.

Clearly, the songwriter traces the downward spiral of wrongdoing. It is a notorious tailspin with which most of us are familiar. *First*, we rebel or revolt against God's revealed will. *Next*, we miss the way He marked out for us, the path of righteousness. *Then*, guilt grabs us and we go through the inner torment of severe uncomfortable feelings. Without relief, the daily grind of an unforgiven conscience can drive a person mad...*Hopefully*- we start to wake up, turn to God, get real honest, and seek his forgiveness. When we experience God's grace and cleansing, we are *blessed*—the word means "happy, complete, healed, made whole."

-Sin will discourage us; trying to hide our sin will destroy us. Real freedom, genuine joy, true healing come only when we confess our sin and receive God's abundant, forgiving grace.

Prayer: Father, help me when I'm caught up in sin's deceitfulness, my own denial and unreality. Help me to turn to you and discover forgiveness, re-direction...and life again! Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 33

Some of the people in Israel had it all wrong. They thought the Lord belonged to them; in reality, they belonged to the Lord. God is not just one deity among many. He is the only God, the true God, the sovereign Ruler over all the earth. God even rules over people who don't believe in Him or acknowledge Him. God reigns over the atheist.

This psalm reminded Israel (and reminds us) of how great the Lord really is. He is the Creator who spoke the universe into existence. He is the Ruler who can bring our best-intentioned plans to nothing but whose own plans stand forever. God is the Watcher who looks down on all who live on the earth. "He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works" (Psalm 33:15). The Lord is the Protector who guards those who belong to Him, "those who hope in His mercy" (Psalm 33:18).

Maybe your view of God is too small. If you see the Lord sitting in heaven, crossing His fingers and hoping everything on earth will work out somehow, you need to step back and get the big picture. God is the One who made it all, who keeps it all, and who controls it all to accomplish His desires and plans.

He is also our Father. We are under His eye and in His hand. He is our hope and our help. When you see God through the glasses of Psalm 33, all you want to do is worship Him, trust Him, and serve Him. Sing or speak Psalm 33 back to God as your own personal expression of adoration. After all, He's watching the response of your heart right now. Security is not found in rulers or weapons but in the watchful eye of the Lord.

Psalm 33 teaches one of the most important and most difficult principles of a life lived for God's glory: Rescue comes from God alone—and it comes to the person who "waits for the LORD" (v. 20). Those who trust in human power, wisdom, or cleverness will ultimately be disappointed. Even kings have to learn that deliverance does not come from a superior army or more powerful weapons (vv. 16-17). Sometimes God leaves us in difficult places or situations so that we will trust Him more as we wait for His deliverance.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for making me a part of such a Great Story as Yours! Help me to align my heart, mind and will with Yours. Thank you for all the ways you attend to my life and the lives of the people who trust you. Help me to cooperate with your desires and plans that I might have the privilege of being a part of the Great Story you are fulfilling through Jesus and His Church. Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 34

When the Angel of the Lord Goes Camping

David was trying desperately to escape from Saul's murderous hunt for his life. Thinking that Saul would never look for him in the enemy's camp, David fled to the city of Gath, one of the five main Philistine strongholds. But Gath was the hometown of Goliath, the giant of a man David had killed a couple of years earlier. David was recognized and taken to the king, the Abimelech of Gath, whose name was Achish (aakish). David couldn't run away. He certainly couldn't fight his way out. So he pretended to be mentally disturbed. He drooled on himself. He scratched at the doorposts. Achish said, "I've got enough crazy people in my government. I don't need one more!"—and he threw David out. (You can read the story for yourself in 1 Samuel 21:10-15.) David ran to a cave in the wilderness and composed this song of praise for God's mighty deliverance.

"The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (v. 7). Only the Lord knows how many millions of His people have been blessed and encouraged by this psalm. I've read it, and prayed it over people who were in pain, in prison, in panic, in fear for loved ones far away. Reader of this psalm find its meaning deeply personal and helpful when we fear for people who are under threatening conditions. The truths of God never fail to bring calm assurance to their hearts.

The first ten verses of the psalm express David's praise to God for His goodness and grace. After David escaped from the king of Gath, he went out into the wilderness to a cave. The cave became a church as David raised his voice to God in worship. "I sought the LORD, and He heard me" (v. 4). David had been looking at the wrong things. He had been looking at Saul, who was chasing him; looking to Achish in Gath to protect him; looking to his own cunning to get him out of difficult situations. *He had been looking everywhere except to the LORD.* "Those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing" (v. 10).

The key to this psalm (and to lowering the stress level in our lives) is the realization that the Lord is present in every situation of life. He has not abandoned us. We are not limited to our own resources. A God of compassion and grace and power goes through the situation with us.

In the middle of Psalm 34, David's emphasis changed. He turned from praising God to teaching those around him. "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD" (v. 11). Verses 11-22 read like the book of Proverbs—short, wise sayings, designed to help us live honorably before the Lord. David didn't want his experience wasted or forgotten.

When we find ourselves in various troubles, we have a psalm to sing. The focus, as always, is the Lord—the Lord delivers, the Lord redeems, the Lord hears, the Lord saves.

Prayer: Dear Lord, encamp your angels around those whom I worry about. Loved one may be far off or close by, regardless, may your presence and protection be with your people. Thank you for hearing my cry and being my rescue! Amen

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 35

Vengeance and Spiritual Warfare

Psalm 35 is an *imprecatory* psalm. “Imprecatory” means *the writer calls down divine vengeance on his enemies*; Jews and Christians have been embarrassed sometimes by these cursing psalms; C. S. Lewis thought they were written in a “spirit of hatred.” As you read it, you might think, “*What about turning the other cheek and loving your enemies?*”

A little perspective might help us understand why a psalm like this is even in the Bible. David was handling his anger toward his enemies in the right way. He was not taking matters into his own hands but was committing the whole thing to God in prayer. Furthermore, David had a right to be angry with those who were doing what was wrong. “Hate what is evil” can be found in both the Old Testament (Amos 5:15) and the New Testament (Romans 12:9).

Another point to keep in mind is that whenever we pray for good to triumph, we are also asking for evil to be defeated. If we pray “Your kingdom come,” we are also asking for the present kingdom of this world to be destroyed. Jesus, if you remember, had some very harsh words for those who stood in opposition to Him.

So how do we read this psalm—or pray this psalm today? Psalm 35 helps me remember that my enemies are in God’s hands. Those enemies may be flesh-and-blood people who attack me, or they may be spiritual enemies, powers of darkness, who seek to lead me away from a walk of obedience and love for Christ. Wherever the opposition comes from, I can ask God to protect me—“Fight against those who fight against me” (Psalm 35:1). We aren’t alone in the battle. Jesus the warrior is with us.

When it’s obvious someone is sided with evil by clearly manifesting the bad fruit to go along with it, how should you pray? I think it is good sometimes to just complain to God (*not so much other people*) about what’s angering you. Then pray for that person to have their eyes opened and their heart convicted. *Because* - in their own way they are likely under the blinding spell of the evil one. (I would hope that would be the same prayer for me under those conditions!)

If seems like powers of darkness are at work, we fight through our prayers and our solid connection with the Lord. We allow verses 1-3 remind us to “*put on the whole armor of God*” (Eph. 6:10-18). We remember who we are and Whose we are – God’s children. We don’t consent to anything other than the Lord’s will and remain in His safe care. We *let the shield of faith extinguish the arrows of the evil one*. We take authority over it in Jesus name and by the power of his shed blood. We ask Jesus to fight the battle for us and we remain in Him.

Prayer: Lord, may I verbalize my complaints regarding the evil or underhanded ways of others that seem to work against me, to You and You alone. I pray for their eyes to be open to their fruit and for deep conviction that leads to repentance. Help me in my own anger to not sin, but to cooperate with your redemptive purpose in their lives. I pray that all involved may come to delight in Your righteous ways. Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 36

The Destiny of Choices We Make

We live in a day of choices. Whether it's the grocery store, the movie theater, or five hundred channels on cable television, we are overwhelmed with options. The Bible gives us choices, too—but there are only two options. Life or death, light or darkness, truth or error, God's way or our own way—that's it, one or the other. David offered the same choices to the people who first sang his psalms. Psalm 36 brings us back to the same choice we had in Psalm 1. We can live a life that ignores God or a life that embraces God. The choice is ours.

In the end, the way of the wicked leads to death—separation from God. If we choose to live apart from God, He ultimately gives us what we choose. Those who take refuge in the protective love of God, however, find life—a whole new kind of life, eternal life. “For with You [the Lord] is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light” (v. 9).

What choice have you made? Human darkness or God's light? It's not a choice we make just once. Options confront us all the time— will we follow God's light or our own way? The world around us says we are getting better—more enlightened, more tolerant. God says humanity is drifting farther and farther from Him. Whom are you going to trust? Whom are you going to follow?

The Psalm then pivots to God's hospitality. Even more profound than that, it describes how choices directed toward Him result in a life that is blessed at the deepest levels. God desires to be the source of all that is good in our lives. He longs to overwhelm us with his love and generosity!

The Gospel writers often pictured Jesus at a banquet or a meal or a wedding feast. Jesus loved to sit down at a table and spend time with people. I think He liked it because it was a taste of what eternity will be like. We will certainly spend time in worship in the New Creation and will reign with Christ and serve Him there, but we will also enjoy times of festive joy around God's table. God is a wonderful host. David rejoiced in God's provision in this life and the next: “*They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures*” (v. 8).

The psalmist offers a vision of a future in which God's original intention for his creation actually works. In that future, the wicked “lie fallen—thrown down, not able to rise!” (36:12). Although the world is currently broken, suffering under the consequences of human sin and evil, the time will come, says the psalmist, when God will set all things right and the wicked will get their just due.

Prayer: Father, help me to process my choices in a way that my thoughts and habits are aligned more and more with Yours. Thank you for Your great grace along the way and Your deep love demonstrated through Your profound hospitality. Prepare my heart to be fit to live with You forever! Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 37

This Psalm feels like it is straight out of Proverbs. It is very matter of fact and ground level in it's practicality. If you want to get the most out of Psalm 37, underline every command as you read: *"Do not fret... trust in the LORD... do good... delight yourself also in the LORD... commit your way to the LORD... trust also in Him"* (vv. 1-5).

Most of us don't like being told what to do, but these instructions are different. These are the words of a wise, impassioned mentor or a loving father who wants only the best for his student or his child. These are words we need to take to heart if we are going to live successfully in a corrupt and corrupting world.

It's not hard to be bothered by the success of evil and blatant corruption. Crooked CEOs siphon money from large corporations to finance lavish lifestyles. Politicians enter office with minimal assets and conclude their term multi-millionaires. Husbands hurt their wives, parents abuse their children. Employees rip off their employers, co-workers steal credit-while perception managing and gravytraining, managers in turn-scapegoat employees. Big companies avoid taxes with high powered attorneys and accountants who are loophole savvy and bamboozlers with stacks of paper-and honest people seem to get penalized in the process. *Dark stuff indeed!*

That's where Psalm 37 helps us out. How do we respond when life seems so unfair? Not by fretting over it—and not by getting angry at life's injustices (Psalm 37:8). The proper response is to refuse to play the same game the wicked play. What God calls us to do first is to develop confidence in the Lord—trust Him, delight in Him, commit to Him. The next response is to cultivate faithfulness in our lives—identify with the righteous, not the wicked. Psalm 37 tells us how to do that.

Life isn't fair. Sometimes the wicked seem to prosper and the godly suffer. In the end, God will set everything straight. Until then, live faithfully and trust God. Simple? Yes. Easy? No.

Jesus knew Psalm 37. In His most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quoted Psalm 37:11 as one of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). The New Testament writers got the message of Psalm 37, too. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:24 wrote: "He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it". That echoes Psalm 37:5—"Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." Peter, another apostle of Jesus, said this: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). In the end, God will put everything right.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, when injustice occurs in my life, please give me the wisdom to see it for what it is and name it accordingly. Help me then to respond in the most constructive way possible. To know the boundary line where I need to take responsibility for it, and where I need to trust you to handle it in Your time. Help me to live out and model your better ways as I trust you in these kinds of circumstances. Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 38 (Sin?) Sick...?

David wrote Psalm 38 when he was sick. It may have been after his sin with Bathsheba, when he tried to hide his adultery and his arrangement of her husband's murder. Whenever it was that David wrote this psalm, he knew that the sickness he was experiencing was God's chastening in his life. This disease wasn't punishment: it was discipline. It didn't spring from God's anger but from God's love.

God wanted David to admit his sin and allow God to cleanse and forgive him. But up until now, David had refused to own it. Guilt, pain, infection, weakness, depression-all pressed down on David's body until finally David turned back to God in repentance. God's discipline is not designed to push us away from Him; it's designed to draw us back to Him.

This Psalm reveals the very real connection that happens sometimes between our sin and our physical sickness. That understood, please don't live under the conviction that all sickness is the result of personal sin. I've seen Christians beat themselves up because they thought a cold or cancer was God's discipline for some sin. The fact is that sometimes godly, obedient Christians get sick. Disease is part of the fallen world we live in.

However, sickness can also be God's discipline if we continue on a path of disobedience and God wants us to stop. There's no uncertainty about it when it happens. We know what God is doing. We are just unwilling to confess our sin and face the consequences. There is often an undeniable connection between "soul health" and "physical health." We need God's wisdom to discern when one is causing the other because of our own misguided choices and attitudes.

When we take the matter to God, in a spirit of self-evaluation, with honesty and ownership of the problem, we are then prepared for true repentance. It can be amazing how quickly the change in our spirit begins to take effect when we position ourselves in this way. We have a Great High Priest and A Great Physician that offers a powerful remedy to our predicament!

The next time you get sick, ask God to heal you. Take full advantage of the good things God has provided to help restore you to health-doctors, medication, surgery, therapy, rest. If the sickness persist, however, give quiet consideration to your spiritual health. Be open to God's Spirit. He won't play games. If there is an issue, He will make it very clear. Then pray David's prayer in psalm 38. The Lord the Savior, will come quickly to help.

Prayer: Father, give me the wisdom to see when my sickness is from living in a broken world and when it is the result of rebellion or things I need to resolve with You. Help me to see it for what it is as I search my heart for anything that might lead to conviction and repentance. If I have wronged you or others, lead me through a process of healing in my soul, body and relationships. Thank you for your holy blood that was offered for my forgiveness and healing. Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 39

Life Under the Sun and Life in the Son

Psalm 37 parallels the book of Proverbs and addresses the perceived prosperity of the wicked. Psalm 38 parallels the theme of the book of Job as it tackles the suffering of the righteous. Psalm 39 fits alongside the book of Ecclesiastes as David ponders the emptiness of life. (Read Ecclesiastes 2:17-26 and 5:10-15 to get a sense of the despair Solomon felt as he looked at life “under the sun” but apart from God.)

David is troubled by how short and fragile human life really is: perhaps he is sick or maybe he has hit one of those “milestone” birthdays and has to face the fact that he is growing older.

Birthdays can sometimes be depressing, not so much because of aging, but because they remind us what we haven’t accomplished so far. We follow the daily routine of working and paying bills and going to church, but where are we going? What impact will we have on anyone in the relatively few decades of life we are given? If children are in the picture we feel cheated by time. One moment we are bringing them home from the hospital, and the next moment we are sending them out the door. Billy Graham said, “The greatest surprise in life to me is the brevity of life.”

Psalms 39:4-5 – O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah.

King David invites God to press upon him the shortness of life—and in doing so he discovers the greatness of God and the brevity of man. However, ultimately David’s murmurings with God lead him to realizing that his hope is not in this world, but that his hope is centered in God. David writes, “*And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you*” (Psalm 39:7). In other words, “*Lord, why am I bothered with the length of my days when my hope is in You?*”

The Good News is that there is more to life under the sun, there is *new life* in the Son! We have a hope that this life is not all that there is. There is a New Creation that we now anticipate and this awareness changes how we now view life under the sun. All is not vanity (Ecclesiastes) and in the this life, one day we will be “no more” (vs. 13). However, we are confident that where the Psalm leaves off, Jesus picks up and the story and changes our view of our destiny. “*In Him we now have life, and life more abundantly*” (John 10:10).

Prayer: “O LORD, You are my hope! Save me from trusting in my health and my wealth. Keep me centered on You moment-by-moment and day-by-day, for Your glory and the advancement of Your mission. Help me to keep perspective on my priorities during the days you have given me. Help me to trust what happens in this life, matters for the life we anticipate in your New Creation. Amen.”

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 40

I Waited For the Lord and He Heard My Cry

Waiting for the Lord has finally paid off! In Psalms 37, 38, and 39, David waited for the Lord to intervene and rescue him. In Psalm 40 the Lord did exactly what He promised to do. God always shows up. He may not come at our time or on our term, but in His wise and perfect plan, God rescues us.

Until God comes, we wait. Not the angry, pacing kind. Not the impatient “slow drive-through window” kind. David waited with patient expectation, or more accurately, *anticipative* expectation where he is standing on tip-toes. He knew that God had heard his cry for help. He knew that God would come to his aid. He was just not sure when or how God would meet the need. So he waited with eyes wide open and heart pounding, eager to hear.

Think back to your last crisis. Was your first impulse to call out to God for help and deliverance? Once you prayed did you trust God to be actively at work for your good in the situation? Then, did you wait expectantly for God’s intervention? That’s the response of a faith-filled heart.

God doesn’t just rescue us from the bad situations: He also opens up wonderful new opportunities. He takes us out of the mud and puts our feet on solid rock. He changes our cry for help into a new song of praise to Him—at least that’s what is supposed to happen. The problem is that we don’t often sing the new song God gives.

God rescues us in response to our plea, and we don’t always thank Him. David spoke up in the great assembly (vs. 10). He stood up in church and told everyone how God had moved in a powerful, unexpected way to deliver him.

Psalm 40 doesn’t end, however, before David finds himself in a new crisis. (vs. 13) That is the way life is—one crisis, one struggle, after another. But God is always there to help. If we are waiting in eager expectation, He will show up right on time.

Finally, going back to verses 6-8, which are quoted in the book of Hebrews and applied to Jesus. Here’s how the connection works: The Lord had chosen David as King of Israel because David had a heart to fully obey the Lord (1 Sam. 16:7; Acts 13:22-23). From David’s descendants, God had brought Jesus, the promised Deliverer—and Jesus stands in David’s tradition of obedience to the Father. You’ll probably never see these words on a Christmas card, but that’s where they belong. Just before Jesus stepped out of heaven into human history, Jesus pledged to the Father in the words of Psalm 40:6-8. He was faithful to His calling, proving He will be faithful to us in our time of need!

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that “blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust.” Help me to remember that you are faithful by your very character. Let that become the basis for my own security as I trust you in all circumstance and with all things. Help me to be grateful when I see how much you have been that faithful presence all along. Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 41

Your light

Psalm 41 reads like a “Davidic Chapter Review.” It covers all the big topics mentioned so far:

- Sin that needs forgiving (Psalm 32, 38)
- Sickness that needs healing (Psalms 6 and 38)
- A cry for help is heard and new song emerges (Psalm 40)
- And a whole lot of complaining about enemies (Most Psalms so far!)

Not sure when the Psalm was written, however it is the “swiss army knife” of the Psalms. The best part of the Psalm is how the Lord worked powerfully in David’s circumstances (and in ours).

As you read the Psalm, underline or circle everything the Lord does: The Lord delivers...the Lord preserves...the Lord blesses...the Lord strengthens us on our sickbed and restores us to health...the Lord has mercy on us...the Lord upholds us. Its easy in the tough times to focus on the problems; *David challenges us to focus on the Lord*. What do you need Him to do in your life? Whatever you need, He is able-and anxious-to do.

With that said, betrayal seems to be the main underlying theme. David knew what it was like to have a close friend turn against him. One of the most painful experiences of his life was when his own son Absalom rose up in rebellion against him. The wound was compounded when David’s trusted friend Ahithophel deserted him to help the rebellious son. David said his friend “lifted up his heel against me,” a metaphor for the kick of a horse - stunning and unexpected.

If you’ve had a trusted friend or spouse or child turn against you, you know how David felt. You know how Jesus felt, too. One of Jesus’ closest followers, Judas Iscariot, turned out to be His betrayer. Jesus even quoted Psalm 41:9 as a prediction of His own betrayal by a close friend (John 13:18). Jesus never took revenge on His betrayer. He just kept reaching out to him in grace - and Judas turned away from Jesus’s love forever. Jesus can help you respond in grace to your betrayer, too. Easy to say, hard to do.

In that event, David made sure his own life was in order and right with God. In the peace and security of that knowledge he was able to weather the painful seasons when the “public story” was being crafted and edited against him. Under these conditions the only thing he could control was how he healthily managed his connection to God.

Prayer: Father, if and when betrayal ever happens to me, give me the wisdom to know how to respond the most constructively. Give me the heart to know how to respond the most graciously. Bring to my awareness those things I’m doing that work against me. Help me to turn outward in a spirit of love and generosity. Help me to recognize any injustice against me and then give it to you. Help me to not fall into a mindset of helplessness or victimhood. Help me trust that You and You alone can work through this for everyone’s good. Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 42

The sons of Korah were a group of musicians who sang and composed music in the temple in Jerusalem. This is the first Psalm to designate someone other than David as the author. In this Psalm the writer describes a period when he felt far from God and longed to return to the place of worship.

Do you remember a time when you were your thirstiest? For me it was while farming in the late summer. I can still remember the sensation of thirst, the color of the water jug I used and even the peculiar flavor of the well water from the farm. Never had I been so thirsty, never had water tasted so good!

That's how the psalmist felt when he wrote the Psalms - like a deer hunting frantically for water in a time of drought. The writer was not thirsty for water however, he was thirsty for God. For some reason, this believer was separated from God's temple. Maybe a business trip or family emergency or a physical condition had kept him from worshipping in Jerusalem. He thought about those times of worship in the past (vs. 4) but had no opportunity in the present.

Furthermore, the psalmist was discouraged - his soul, his inner being, was cast down (42:4-5; 43:5). His discouragement reveals another dimension to his longing after God. What if the writer had not just traveled physically from God's visible presence in Jerusalem but had also walked away from a life of obedience to God as well? In that place of separation from the Lord, the Psalmist comes to his senses and experiences a renewed longing to be in God's presence, worshipping before Him.

How long has it been since you have been thirsty for God? Maybe as you read this you feel far from the Lord. You might be discouraged or depressed; you might be exhausted from pursuing success or financial security; you might realize as you stop for a minute and really think about it, that *you are the one* who has put such distance between yourself and God. No wonder you are discouraged. Let the Holy Spirit use the words of these psalms to stir a longing for God in your heart. Then pursue a restored relationship with the Lord as if your spiritual life depended on it - because it does. Life and light and joy and peace are found only in a right walk with God.

Jesus said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38).

Finally, who were these "sons of Korah?" Korah was an Israelite who lived during the days of Moses and Israel's exodus from Egypt. He was killed in rather dramatic fashion for rebelling against the Lord (see Numbers 16). Korah died, but his sons escaped judgment and eventually became the worship leaders in the temple. In gratitude to God for His mercy, they dedicated their lives to His praise. Their job was to lead choirs of Levites as they sang to the Lord.

Prayer: Lord, I pray that my soul may be replenished in you alone. As you do so, I pray that because of your mercies, I will declare your praises. Thank you for sustaining my soul, Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 43

Psalm 42 Part 2

Psalms 42 and 43 were originally a single psalm, an individual lament expressing a deep longing for God - who seems absent in the light of persecution by enemies. The absence seems at least partly, or perhaps largely, a result of being physically separated from the temple, since the psalmist calls to God from the land of Jordan, the heights of Hermon – from Mount Mizar.

The psalm opens with a striking and memorable image of the psalmist's thirst for God's presence, similar to the thirst of a deer panting for water, and is a model for those who long for a concrete experience of God's presence. Christians reading this psalm recognize that they can enjoy intimate communion with God through Jesus wherever they are.

Unlike the Old Testament, where God made his presence known in special ways in physical places, such as the temple, we can now commune with God in any physical place. Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit, making us both individually (2 Cor. 6:14–18) as well as corporately (1 Pet. 2:4) - the very temple of God!

Even so, Christians can certainly experience a sense of God's absence and a longing for his presence. Psalms 42 – 43 provide a model prayer for Christians when they desire a more tangible sense of God's presence.

Christians reading the opening of the psalm, where the composer likens his longing for God to a deer's longing for refreshing water, are drawn to John 4, where Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that *'whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life'* (v. 14).

In addition, we think of John 7:37–38, where, speaking of the Spirit, Jesus tells the crowd, *'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.'*

Pivoting from water to light, the Psalmist appeals to God to *"Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling!"* When we think of light in ancient times, it refers to either the light from a flame or the brilliance of the sun. Both provide illumination, but they can also provide comfort.

God's light not only exposes deep things in our souls, but it also can produce the assurance of warmth. It can illuminate our surroundings, bring clarity to our path, and instill confidence in God's direction. In a deeply profound way it is indicative of God's glory at work in our lives.

Prayer: "O LORD, light up my life with Your truth! Shine Your light into the dark places of my soul. Overwhelm me by the warmth of Your loving kindness and draw me in to Your holy presence, for You are my joy. Amen."

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 44

Covenantal Boldness

Psalm 44:18: "Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path."

Israel, through the psalmist, complains about God's failure to lead them to victory. The psalm begins by remembering their great victories, particularly at the time of the conquest, thanks to God their Warrior. But now the situation is different, and disturbingly so. As a community, they lament their defeats and turn to God to remedy the situation.

Like we'll discover of the individual of Psalm 77, the community here questions God's loyalty and faithfulness. They have upheld their end of the covenant; now it is time for God to uphold his. If they had sinned against God, they would have deserved it, but far from it, they had remained loyal to the covenant. They call on God to spring to action on their behalf before they are completely crushed.

Psalm 44 is a psalm that reminds us that we have permission to be bold in our requests to God. Christians can take heart that God will hear our bold, questioning prayers and will answer them. We too can pray to God when our lives are going badly and ask him to come and help us in our trouble.

However, the covenant is not a mechanism that thwarts God's freedom. We know that God loves us and will care for us, although that care may not express itself as we think it should. Accordingly, Paul cites verse 22 of our psalm as part of his strong affirmation that *"nothing can separate us from the love of Christ"* (Rom. 8:31–39; see v. 36).

We may be under severe attack, but we are able to face death because 'we are more than conquerors through him who loved us' (Rom. 8:37). As Jesus hung on the cross, he could have thought this is a violation of his relationship with his Father. By all accounts, it looked as if evil was victorious. But, of course, it wasn't. Resurrection followed crucifixion. God had the victory, and now his Son reigns at his right hand.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the New Covenant we have in Christ Jesus. It reminds me of the responsibility I have to declare and maintain my allegiance to You alone. It also reminds me, Lord, of your promises that cannot be shaken and of Your unending faithfulness. Help me to be bold yet respectful and to claim the promises you call us to receive. May they sustain me when doubt begins to settle in and I wonder if you are there. Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 45

A Love Song

This psalm was composed as a love song to exalt the love of King Solomon for his bride. However as you read it, it's clearly intended to be a statement regarding the true King of Israel, the Lord God. For us it turns into a messianic psalm that pictures the future Messiah (Jesus).

The "bride" can be viewed through three lenses: First it referred to one of Solomon's wives, perhaps his first wife, the wife of his youth and his heart. The bride of the King can also be understood as the nation of Israel. The Lord often referred to Himself as Israel's husband. Finally the psalm can be applied to the church in the New Testament, the bride of Christ.

This psalm is a hymn about the majesty of Christ and His marriage to a bride. Four aspects of that majesty are emphasized:

1. Christ the Man (vs. 2)
2. Christ the King over all (vs. 3)
3. Christ the Lord (deity) (vs. 6)
4. Christ the Bridegroom (vs. 13-15)

The power of this is seen in the Hebrews chapter 1. (This chapter is worth reading so stop right now and take a look!) Now that you've read it (*right?*). You can appreciate how Jesus is superior to everyone and everything else – including angels and the fallen archangel (Lucifer), watchers and demons. They are merely servants – faithful or rebellious, Jesus however is the unique (only one of it's kind) Son of God.

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus for making us sons and daughters of God. By your blood and victory we are transferred from the rule of the evil one to adoption into your family. Help us to be a faithful bride as your church. May your rule be proclaimed and the nations find redemption through the gospel. May we see a day when all bow down to you alone and declare your praises forever. Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 46

Temple Theology (or) “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”

Psalm 46 is a hymn that celebrates God’s presence in the midst of Jerusalem. Although it does not mention Mt. Zion explicitly, it points to the holy place where the Most High dwells, which is Mt. Zion. Thus, along with Psalms 48, 76, 84, 87 and 137, Psalm 46 is a “Zion” hymn.

Why is this important? In the minds of the Israelites, God’s presence on Zion brings protection to the city and its people. The thing neglected however is the condition that it must be appropriated by faith; otherwise, it becomes presumption. The Israelites learned the latter, as proclaimed by Jeremiah, when they assumed that the mere presence of God’s dwelling in the city secured it from harm from the Babylonians.

In his temple sermon, Jeremiah mocked those who looked upon the temple as a lucky rabbit’s foot against defeat (Jer. 7:4). God could abandon his house (and did; see *horrifically*, Ezek 9 – 11).

After all, although the temple was a tangible sign that God was in their midst, it was God, not the temple itself, who served as Israel’s defense. Christians who read this psalm believe that God no longer makes his special presence known in Jerusalem or, for that matter, in any specific physical location.

Jesus taught that the temple would be destroyed. He said, ‘I will raise it up again in three days’ (John 2:19), which the disciples later realized was a reference to the resurrection. In other words, Jesus saw himself as the very presence of God, rendering a building representing God’s presence on earth obsolete (see also John 1:14). The tearing of the curtain of the temple at the time of Jesus’ death also indicates the breaking forth of God’s holy presence throughout the world (Matt. 27:51).

In other words, when faced with the chaos of life, the Christian reader of the psalm finds confidence in Christ’s presence with them (‘surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’, Matt. 28:20). Martin Luther surely read the psalm this way and was inspired to write, ‘A Mighty Fortress Is Our God’, which answers the question of the source of God’s protective strength in our lives by pronouncing in the second stanza, ‘Christ Jesus, it is he.’

Finally, the picture of Jerusalem with a river running through it was not describing actual Jerusalem, but presenting a metaphor of provision and protection. In the book of Revelation, in a passage perhaps anticipated by Ezekiel 47:1–12, heaven is described as the new Jerusalem, where ‘the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal’ flows ‘from the throne of God and of the Lamb’ (22:1).

Prayer: God, you are my refuge - a safe place we can run to for protection. God, you are my strength when trouble finds me. You are my shield and fortress and when not, you walk safely with me through the fiery trial. Amen (Feel free to sing “A Mighty Fortress...” back to Him)

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 47

The Sons of Korah Knock It Out of the Park (And So Does God!)

This worship psalm exalts God as the King over all the earth. It depicts God's enthronement because of his warring activity and his subduing the nations so that they recognize his sovereignty over them. The picture celebrates God's greatness and domination.

As you might guess, God was not becoming King for the first time. As Psalm 93:2 puts it, 'Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.' That said, it is true that military victory, which seems to be the background of this psalm, allows an occasion to celebrate God's kingship anew. This pattern follows the episode in Exod. 15:1–18 where the story combines a celebration of God's defeat at the Red Sea with a proclamation of his kingship).

The picture of the kings of the nations, described as in an uproar in [Psalm 2](#), submitting to the sovereignty of Israel's God as universal King *is yet to be realized*. Certainly, as the God of all, he deserved this worship, but except for occasional and temporary moments (see Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel), the pagan kings never acknowledged this truth. [Psalm 48 will continue this theme of God's dominance over a united front of rebellious kings (see vv. 4–7).]

The New Testament describes a time when God's universal reign in Christ will be recognized, beginning with the ascension. Quoting Psalm 68:18 Paul applies the picture of God's victorious return to heaven to Jesus who ascends on high with captives in his train (Eph. 4:7–10). This victory is an already-not yet reality, since evil powers remain that are still active. The book of Revelation looks forward to the day when this vision will become a full reality.

At the ground level, we tend to ask people "to make Jesus their personal savior and Lord (King)." If they say "yes" then we declare another soul is saved and we move on. *However* the good news is *so much larger* than a reduced gospel of individualized personal fire insurance or some simple formula. We misread people if we trust they will naturally align behind their new King by just getting them to consent through persuasive technique or fear. Compliance to a formula does not create allegiance to a king, even if it might be a good start. People need to become part of a something larger that declares His praises, loves each other and learns the art of *gracefully growing* and *getting along* in the family they have been adopted to - God's family.

By design, we should get a glimpse of what that reign of Christ is like when we look at the church. Men, women and children from every nation and ethnic background unite together in praise and submission to King Jesus. We freely consent to live under His authority; pleasing Him because he rescued us from captivity and established us in blessings! He is King and as narcissistic as we are sometimes, we are not! His grace, goodness and love conquer our hearts and win over our allegiance. *And* as it authentically flows relationally to others, it wins theirs!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we look forward to a day when you reign over every person and every heart. Use me to play a role in declaring that you alone are King. And to do so in a way that is winsome and compelling as your Spirit enables and the fruit of the Spirit emerges in my life! Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 48

The Sons of Korah (Greatest Hits!)

Psalm 48 is an invitation to an open house – or more accurately “an open city.” We are welcomed into the city of Jerusalem, “*the city of our God*” (vs. 1). The psalmist threw open the gates and gave us access to every part of the city. “*Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.*”

The psalm extols Jerusalem, the city which surrounds Mount Zion, the place where the temple is located. The praise of Jerusalem and Zion is really a way of praising God himself. Zion, and Jerusalem in which it is located, is beautiful because of the presence of God in its midst.

God’s presence renders Jerusalem impregnable, as the psalm makes clear, particularly in verse 8. However, as the historical books indicate, Israel grew presumptuous about God’s protection of the city. They reasoned that if God was in the city, then he would not allow anything to happen to it, no matter how they behaved.

They should have known better, though, since, even at the temple’s dedication, Solomon made it absolutely clear that God does not really live in the temple. After all, ‘The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!’ (1 Kgs 8:27).

Jeremiah highlighted their presumption in his temple sermon (Jer. 7), and Ezekiel described God’s abandonment of the temple (Ezek. 9 – 11) on the eve of the building’s destruction by the Babylonians. Tragically, after the city was devastated and the temple destroyed, the author of Lamentations bemoans the sad condition of the city, even alluding to Psalm 48: *All who pass your way clap their hands at you; they scoff and shake their heads at Daughter Jerusalem: ‘Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?’* (Lam. 2:15)

The temple was indeed rebuilt some decades later, after King Cyrus (where Bucyrus - “Beautiful Cyrus”, Ohio gets its name!) allowed a return of the exiles to Jerusalem, but this temple too was destroyed in AD 70 by the Romans. To Christians, the ultimate expression of God’s presence on earth is not a building, but a person: Jesus Christ. Among the many New Testament passages that connect Jesus to the temple, we can quote John 1:14: *‘The Word became flesh and made his dwelling (“tabernacled” the Greek word here) among us.’*

The idea now centers on Jesus the Messiah. He is with us, amongst us and in us. The beauty of our lives is a reflection of the beauty His presence alive in us. However it is a relationship we can presume either! We have to tend it like any to keep it healthy. Then tell it to following generations (vs. 13). Children and grandchildren need to hear it and learn to nurture it as well.

Prayer: Father it is an act of unbelievable grace that you are present in my life. Thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus. Help me not to presume upon his presence in my foolish moments. Thank you for the richness and beauty life takes on when you inhabit this space! Amen.

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 49

Sons of Korah vs. Jeff Bezos & Co.

People like Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk have a dream to escape this earth. Their belief is that we are close to the moment of humanity's undoing. They really don't want to be here when it happens and so their business models are based on an *extractive form* of capitalism that harvests resources away from communities and toward an audacious space goal. They imagine the prospect of leaving this planet and establishing life somewhere else. Their ambitions are pretty staggering because they are simultaneously working on projects that they hope will lead to *defeating their own mortality* – (see “Unity Biotechnology” for example). Their convictions are based on the belief that science can create solutions to this dilemma through biotechnological enablement. (Articles are numerous on their declared ambitions).

Then of course we have the 2500+ year old Psalms. This one speaks to the universal, timeless pattern of the impulses alive and well in rich people and poor alike. This one is also a pretty harsh indictment on the “possibility thinkers” we just mentioned. The Psalm more harshly labels their kind as the wicked fools of the world, who seem to prosper and lord it over the righteous wise. The wealthy intimidate others. They boast in their riches and trust their wealth to save them.

The *wise psalmist* reassures himself and others that their riches will not save them from the ultimate threat, namely death. On the other hand, God will redeem him (and others like him) from death, so that he will live with God forever. The psalm continues to assure God's people that, even though they might not prosper in this world, God cares for them and will save them from death.

The psalm is a rare glimpse in the Old Testament of the hope of the afterlife for God's people, but it is just a glimpse. We do not hear much detail at all. While there is still mystery, Christian readers do have a fuller understanding. For one thing, we know how death was defeated.

The psalm said that no-one could pay a ransom for himself or another to be delivered from death, although, amazingly, God could redeem a person. The New Testament shows that it is Jesus Christ, who offered his life for us, that pays the ransom and redeems us from death. Jesus told his disciples that ‘the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Matt. 20:28; cf. Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6). According to the book of Hebrews, Jesus ‘has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant’ (9:15).

The Psalm offers three warnings that have yet to be proven wrong: Wealth will not prevent death, determine our eternal destiny, or bring true satisfaction and joy.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to relate to wealth in the most constructive way possible for myself and others - and to find my security and confidence in You. Thank you Jesus for ransoming me from death and using me to redeem the world when others want to check out from it. Amen

What is the poem about?

What is felt?

What is requested?

What is declared?

How does it prompt you to pray?

Track your prayers:

Psalm 50

Covenant Relationships and Their Boundaries

This psalm brings a charge of covenant-breaking against evil people in the midst of Israel. While some are obedient, others disobey. Some offer sacrifices with a pure heart, while others do so just for show. The covenant was a legal agreement that structured the relationship between God and his people. He is the great King and they are his vassal people. A “vassal” is a holder of property on conditions of obligation and allegiance. The conditions define the acceptable boundaries of the relationship.

As a legal agreement, the covenant had witnesses (the heavens and earth), and God now appears to bring a case against the wicked (“covenant counterfeits”) in order to call judgment upon them. The laws of the covenant were sanctioned by *blessings and curses* (see e.g. Deut. 27 – 28), and these “fakers” were about to experience the latter. In an act of grace, the psalm does end with a final appeal to covenant-breakers to remember God before they are destroyed.

This kind of talk gets our attention here, because Christians too are in covenant relationship with God in the New Covenant established by Jesus (Luke 22:20; Heb. 8; 10:15–16). It’s the reason we “examine” ourselves for “covenant compliance,” every time we take of the New Covenant meal (Lord’s Supper, 1 Cor. 11:28). “Examine” is a legal term that Paul uses again in 2 Cor. 13:5 when he tells them to “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith...” Paul uniquely bends the legal language into an intimately personal reality defined by boundaries.

Boundaries are necessary for relational health. They keep people functioning in a healthy way and stave off the dysfunctionality that leads to relational chaos. They establish trust and expect trustworthiness, they define roles and responsibilities, as well as define limits on what we are expected to do - as they pertain to the specific people in the relationship. Healthy boundaries imply respect for the relationship agreement. This is why we examine ourselves, we desire to keep it healthy in our relationship with Jesus. We also examine ourselves because we want to keep it healthy with the other people who are in that agreement with us (i.e. believers). As a warning, Psalm 50 reminds us not to fall into an empty ritualism, but to maintain a vibrant and obedient relationship with God.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for nourishing me with Your Word. It is life to my body and soul. Help me to realize the power of Your Word in my life. Open my eyes and ears to know You better as I spend time in the scriptures. Teach me, renew me and make me strong in You and faithful to the new covenant agreement that brings so much life. Help me to keep Your words in my heart and to do Your will. Show me how to use Your Word to bring renewal to my life and to bring others to You. I trust You to sustain me in your “covenant faithfulness.” Help me to be faithful through my connection with you. Amen.

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How does it prompt you to pray?

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