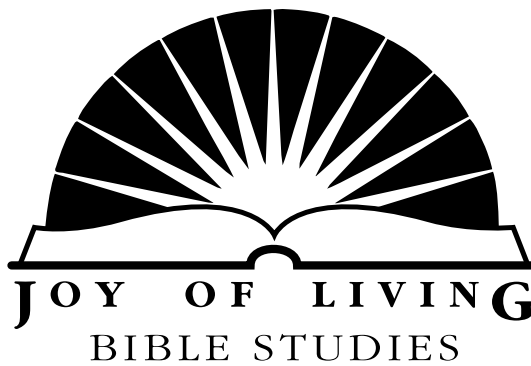


Psalms of Faith

Lesson 1



Preface

For centuries the Psalms have been read and loved by people from many backgrounds and viewpoints, largely because, being poetry, they speak to the heart directly. They laugh, they sing, they weep, they rail, they cry out in pain, fright, derision, joy, and the sheer delight of life. Consequently, many read them solely to find an answering spirit to their own mood.

But the Psalms are much more than poetry. Many of them bear the title *Maskil* or teaching psalm. They are thus intended to instruct the mind as well as to encourage the heart. They are designed not only to reflect a mood, but to show us also how to handle that mood; how to escape from depression, or how to balance exaltation with wisdom. This quality is the mark of their divine character. They are not merely human folk songs, reflecting the common experience of men, but they relate also the wisdom and release that ensues when a hurt or a joy is laid at the feet of God.

It was a great personal joy to me to share these studies with the responsive congregation of the Peninsula Bible Church....It is my prayer that God will use these studies to open many eyes to the beauty and help of the Psalms.

Introduction

The Psalms are particularly appropriate for our day because they relate the experiences of believers of the past, reflecting the emotional upsets, problems, and disturbances that saints of old have gone through. They are wonderful for helping us in our own emotional pressures.

There is no book like the Psalms to meet the need of the heart when it is discouraged and defeated, or when it is elated and encouraged. This book is absolutely without peer in expressing these emotional feelings. The Psalms are helpful simply because they teach us how to find our way through many types of problems. These marvelous folk songs are much like the ballad style of music that was so popular in the late '60s and early '70s, simply recounting what various men and women of the past have experienced.

Most of the Psalms were written by David. Others were written by his choir leaders in Jerusalem, and the names of Asaph, Jeduthun, Ethan, and others appearing in the Psalms are royal choirmasters. One or two were written by Moses, and one or two by King Solomon. There are several Psalms whose authors it is impossible to identify. The whole book is a collection that has been put together by the ancient Hebrews in order that we might understand what the people of God have gone through and how they found their way out of their troubles.

The Psalms divide into five books, which are similar in theme to the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The first book of Psalms ends with Psalm 41 and echoes the theme of Genesis, an introduction to human life and a revelation of the needs of the human heart. It is the book of foundations. The second book of Psalms begins with Psalm 42 and runs through Psalm 72. This corresponds to the book of Exodus. That is the book of redemption, the story of God's moving in human history to change and redeem people and save them from themselves.

The third book begins with Psalm 73 and goes through Psalm 89. It is like the book of Leviticus, the book in which Israel learned how to draw near to God, how to worship Him through the provision God made for His people, the tabernacle. Then Psalm 90 to Psalm 106 constitutes the fourth book, which goes along with the book of Numbers, the book of wilderness wandering, of testing and failure. Finally, the fifth book covers Psalm 107 to Psalm 150 and is like the book of Deuteronomy, the second law, i.e., the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which sets us free from the law of sin and death (see Romans 8:2). It describes the way by which God finally accomplishes the redemption and sanctification of His people, the changing of human beings into the kind of men and women He originally designed.

APPENDIX

The following is an excerpt from *What the Bible Is All About*, by Henrietta C. Mears (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1983; pp 189-194; used by permission). It provides further background on the Book of Psalms.

MAN (Psalms 1—41)

1. Man blessed (Psalm 1)
2. Man fallen from his high position and at enmity with God (Psalms 2; 14)
3. Man restored by his blessed Redeemer, the Man Christ Jesus (Psalms 16—41)

In this section we have a collection by David of the psalms that tell of the state of man—his blessedness, fall, and recovery. Psalm 1 tells us of the road to success. Everyone wants to prosper. No one wishes to fail. The psalmist says that everyone may prosper. Think of it! It will be well for every young person to master the rules for success laid down here.

Things Not to Do

1. Refuse to walk in the counsel of the ungodly; do not take their advice or follow the pattern of their lives.
2. Refuse to stand in the way of sinners. Standing is even a lower step. When you stand in sin, it shows that you have been brought under the spell of evil.
3. Refuse to sit—to take the scoffer's seat is to take the most despicable place possible. He sits idly watching the struggles of his fellows and cares not that many are losing the fight. You ask him, "Isn't there great need in this world?" "I suppose," he answers, but just sits and plays the cynic. He is sure "that every minister, missionary, or Christian worker is either a fool or a hypocrite."

Things to Do

1. Read the Bible.
2. Delight in it.
3. Meditate upon it.

The more you read the Word the more you want to. As one great Christian leader has said, "The gospel feeds you, then it makes you hungry." It never grows stale. You cannot read it too often or too much.

Things That Result

When the Christian has followed the don'ts and dos, what results? Three things (Psalm 1):

"Planted"—*like a tree planted [transplanted] by the rivers of water*—the settled and steadfast life in a luxuriant soil;

"Purposive"—*he bringeth forth his fruit in his season*—the productive life;

"Prosperous"—*his leaf also shall not wither*—the abiding, happy life.

Other psalms in this group that show the final blessings of man because of the glorious work of the Man Christ Jesus are Psalms 22; 23; 24.

Psalm 22 tells of the Good Shepherd giving His life for His sheep. We see the cross and hear the cries of our dying Saviour. As you read this psalm, you will recognize the facts.

Psalm 23 tells of the great Shepherd keeping His sheep. We read, *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want*. He promises to guide and provide and keep me.

Psalm 24 tells of the chief Shepherd in His glory rewarding His sheep. He is my King and He is coming to reign in power and great glory.

Psalm 22 gives a picture of Calvary. We see the crucifixion portrayed here more clearly than in any other part of the Old Testament. The psalm opens with the cry of our Lord in the darkest hour of His life; *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* It closes with, *He hath done this*. The original Hebrew means, *It is finished*—the last cry of the Saviour.

Psalm 22:6, *I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people*. This tells us of the offense of the cross!

Read and compare these verses:

Psalm 22:1	Matthew 27:46
Psalm 22:6-7	Luke 23:35-36
Psalm 22:6-8	Matthew 27:39,41,43
Psalm 22:12-13	Matthew 27:36,44
Psalm 22:28	1 Corinthians 15:23-24

Poured out like water ... my heart is like wax; it is melted (Psalm 22:14). This depicts excessive perspiration due to physical torture. It also means the breaking of Jesus's heart.

He tells us why His heart was broken. *Reproach hath broken my heart* (Psalm 69:20). In John 19:34-35, we read

that *one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.*

Jesus died of a broken heart. He bore the reproach and shame for others. The bearing of our sins which hid Him from His Father's face, broke His heart. Death by a broken heart is very rare. It is caused by intense agony of suffering.

My tongue cleaveth to my jaws (Psalm 22:15). This verse describes intense thirst. The account in the New Testament said, *Jesus ... that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.* Yes, Psalm 69:21 says, *In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.* Read John 19:28-29.

They pierced my hands and my feet (Psalm 22:16). Crucifixion! The Roman method of death by crucifixion is described here. The Jewish law did not know of this method. These words give the description of death by crucifixion—hands and feet nailed to the cross—bones of hands, arms, shoulders out of joint due to hanging from the cross, straining bone and muscle.

They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture (Psalm 22:18). Even the act of the soldiers is described here. See Matthew 27:35.

ISRAEL (Psalms 42—72)

1. Her Ruin (Psalms 42—49)
2. Her Redeemer (Psalms 50—60)
3. Her Redemption (Psalms 61—72).

Here in this section we find additional psalms compiled for use in the Temple. It opens with “a cry” from the depth of oppression—Psalms 42—49. It ends with the King reigning over the redeemed nation. *He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth* (Psalm 72:8). Read this glorious psalm.

There are several psalms of penitence, but the chief is Psalm 51. It is a psalm of David. If you turn to 2 Samuel 11 and 12, you will find the story of David's sin. When you read this, notice three things that David said. When Nathan the prophet was telling David the story of the despicable fellow who took the only lamb belonging to the poor man, we hear him say to David: *Thou art the man.* David did not try to dodge the issue but said, *I have sinned against the LORD.* Then Nathan reassured him, saying, *The LORD also hath put away thy sin* (2 Samuel 12:13).

We think it strange when we read that David was *a man after his [God's] own heart.* When we compare what other kings would have done under the same circumstances, we are not so surprised. But David confessed and

said, *I have sinned against the Lord* (2 Samuel 12:13). That is what sin is—breaking God's law.

You notice in the psalm these words, *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight.* This psalm is a prayer of contrition and confession. David cries for mercy from a God whom he knows is merciful and full of loving kindness.

We learn from this psalm that we must confess our sin to God (1 John 1:9) and that God is just to forgive. Whenever a man is sincere in his confession to God, He will cleanse his sin.

THE SANCTUARY (Psalms 73—89)

In the psalms of this third section we see the sanctuary mentioned or referred to in almost every one. This section is concerned almost entirely with material used in worship services and needs little comment.

We see God's counsels in relation to the sanctuary. The sanctuary is seen from its ruin to its restoration in the fullness of blessing.

THE EARTH (Psalms 90—106)

- Blessing needed (Psalms 90—94)
- Blessing anticipated (Psalms 95—100)
- Blessing enjoyed (Psalms 101—106)

The first of this group of psalms was written during the wanderings in the wilderness. The psalms are not arranged in chronological order.

Read the opening verses of Psalms 90 and 91 together. *LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.* If God is our dwelling place on this earth, we shall live in confidence, sheltered by the Almighty. Christ says, *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you* (John 15:7). The secret of a godly life is abiding in the Almighty. When the devil attacked Him, the Lord quoted from Psalm 91. But Christ was victorious because He lived in the place described by this same psalm. We are told that there is a point of perfect calm at the center of a cyclone. There may be raging storms, snares, pestilences, terror by night, darkness, and destruction, but when the soul is abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, it is safe.

If you wish to praise the Lord for His goodness, read Psalm 103. It is full of worship, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. This is great exercise for the soul.

THE WORD OF GOD (Psalms 107-150)

All the teaching in the psalms is grouped around the Word of God. This section opens with Psalm 107 which gives the key: *He sent his word, and healed them.*

Psalm 119 is the great psalm of the whole book. It extols the Word of God which is the great revelation of the heart and mind of the Lord. This book is *sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb* and *above gold, yea, than much fine gold* (Psalm 19:10). Almost every verse speaks of God's Word or law or precepts or statutes.

Value God's Word:

1. It blesses little children—Matthew 19:14.
2. It strengthens young men—1 John 2:14.
3. It sanctifies and cleanses all who read it—Ephesians 5:26.
4. It protects the widows—Exodus 22:22-23.
5. It honors the aged—Leviticus 19:32.
6. It offers eternal life to everyone—John 3:36.

Praise is the highest duty that any creature can discharge. Man's chief end is to glorify God. There is no heaven either here or in the world to come for people who do not praise God. If you do not enter into the spirit and worship of heaven, the spirit and joy of heaven cannot enter you!

The Psalms begin with the word "blessed." This word is multiplied in this book. The book seems to be built around this first word. There is not one "woe" in the entire Psalms.

How can we make the Psalms our own in experience?
Why do you like the Psalms?
What psalms can you quote?

Probably no other book has so largely influenced the turning points in men's lives, given expression to their deepest experiences, and woven itself into every fiber of their character, as the book of Psalms.

THE POSITION OF THE BOOK

Hold your Bible in your hand and turn to the middle of the book. Most often you'll open to the Psalms. Not merely is this true physically. There is a deeper truth. The Psalms are central also in human experience.

This book is used by Hebrew and Christian alike even in our day. The Psalms were for use in the Temple, for which many were prepared. They were written for the heart to worship God out under the open heavens or in the pit of despair or in a cave of hiding. When you find yourself in deep need you can always find a psalm which expresses your inmost feeling. Or, if you have an abounding joy, the words are there for you too.

It is the book for all who are in need, the sick and suffering, the poor and needy, the prisoner and exile, the man in danger, the persecuted. It is a book for the sinner, telling him of God's great mercy and forgiveness. It is a book for the child of God, leading him into new experiences with the Lord. It tells of God's law in its perfection and pronounces blessings upon the one who will keep it.

SELECTED PSALMS IN TIMES OF NEED:

To help you make the Psalms a part of your devotional life, a place to stop and rest awhile, here is a list of where to find Psalms of:

Instruction: 1;19;39
Praise: 8;29;93;100
Thanks: 30;65;103;107;116
Repentance: 6;32;38;51;130
Trust: 3;27;31;46;56;62;86
Distress: 4;13;55;64;88
Hope: 42;63;80;84;137
History: 78;105;106

Study Questions

Before you begin each day:

- a. Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- b. Use only the Bible for your answers.
- c. Write you answers and the verses you used.
- d. Remember that the challenge questions are for those who have the time or inclination to do them.
- e. Personal questions are to be shared with the class only if you wish to share.
- f. If you desire, insert your name in the assigned verses to make them more personal.

First Day: Read the Introduction to the Psalms.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the notes on the Psalms, or from your teacher's lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, tack it to your bulletin board, on the dashboard of your car, etc. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its "address" (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read all of Psalm 1 concentrating on verse 1.

1. What three actions are we told *not* to do if we want our life to be blessed (happy)? (See Psalm 1:1.)

2. a. Read Ephesians 2:1-3. When we walk according to this world who are we seeking to please?

- b. According to Isaiah 53:6 when we choose not to follow God's "way," whose "way" are we choosing?

3. a. Read Romans 8:5-8. When we choose to live according to our own sinful nature, what do we have our minds set on fulfilling?

- b. What attitude does the sinful mind have toward God? (See Romans 8:7.)

- c. How does God feel about this "sinful nature"? (Romans 8:8)

4. a. Read Ephesians 2:4-5. According to these verses what will God do for us? Why will He do this? Try adding your name as you write these verses if you wish.

- b. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. How does He accomplish this?
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- 5. a. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17,18. When we are in Christ what type of creation are we? What happens to our old nature?
 - b. What happens to our relationship with God?
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- 6. Personal: Read John 3:16. Have you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins, reconcile you to God, and give you a new nature and eternal life? If not, why not take a moment and do it now? If you have, write a brief thank you prayer to God.

Third Day: Read all of Psalm 1 concentrating on verse 2.

- 1. What is our attitude and focus to be if we wish to be blessed, according to Psalm 1:2?

- 2. a. Read 2 Peter 1:2-4. How do we obtain grace and peace? (See verse 2.)
 - b. Personal: Have you found His grace and peace? If so, share how you have experienced this in your life.

 - c. How does God's divine power give us what we need to live a godly life? (See 2 Peter 1:3.) What does God do for us through the promises in His Word? (See 2 Peter 1:4)

- 3. a. In 2 Peter 3:18 what are we told to grow in?
 - b. In 1 Peter 2:2 what are we told to do to accomplish this growth?

- 4. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. Where does Scripture originate? List some of the things Scripture is useful for.

- 5. Challenge: Read Colossians 3:16. In your own words write what it means to have the "Word of God dwell in you." If you wish, look up the word "dwell" in your dictionary.

- 6. Read Romans 12:2a. What happens to us as our minds are renewed by God's Word?

Fourth Day: Read all of Psalm 1 concentrating on verse 3.

1. What is the result of God's blessing according to Psalm 1:3?

2. What is the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23?

3. Challenge: Read Mark 4:14-20. What is the seed that is being sown? (See verse 14.) What happened to the seed that was sown on good ground? (See verse 20.)

4. a. Challenge: Read Mark 4:23-25. In verses 23-24 if we hear and act upon what God says what will be given to us?

b. What happens to those who hear God's Word but don't act upon what they've heard? (See Mark 4:25.)

5. a. Read John 15:5-8. In verse 5 what is necessary for us to bring forth fruit? Try adding your name as you write this verse.

b. In verse 7 what does Jesus say that He wants to have remain in us?

c. Who is glorified when we bear fruit? (See John 15:8.)

6. Personal: Write a brief prayer expressing to God your desire to be fruitful and bring Him glory.

Fifth Day: Read all of Psalm 1 concentrating on verses 4-5.

1. According to Psalm 1:4-5, does the wicked person bear spiritual fruit? What will happen to them?

2. According to 2 Corinthians 5:10 where will all believers appear?

3. Challenge: Read 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. What will believers receive at this judgment? (See verse 14.)

4. Read Revelation 20:11-15. Those who have *not* put their faith and trust in Christ and therefore have not had their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be at this judgment. According to verse 15 where will those whose names are *not* written in the Book of Life be placed?

5. Personal: Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, to take away your sins (see John 1:36) and write your name in His Book of Life? If not, why don't you take a moment to do it right now. If you have, write a thank you prayer.

6. Read 1 John 5:13. Why was this written to those who believe? This would be a good verse to memorize.

Sixth Day: Read all of Psalm 1 concentrating on verse 6.

1. What promise and warning do you find in Psalm 1:6?

2. Read Proverbs 3:5-6. As we trust in the Lord what has He promised to do? Try adding your name as you write this.

3. Read Psalm 37:23-24 and Psalm 36:12. Describe the difference between the path of the righteous and the unrighteous.

4. Challenge: Read Psalm 23:1-4. Who leads and guides us? List some of the paths and places He leads.

5. According to Psalm 48:14 and Hebrews 13:5 how long will He guide us?

6. Share your memory verse with someone and tell them what it has meant to you.