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## Lesson 1: Introducing the Psalms

*What is your favorite psalm?*

*Are there any events in your life that you associate with the psalms that are your favorites?*

*What are some reasons you have turned to the Psalms in your lifetime?*

### **Authors of the Psalms:**

- David – wrote 73 psalms total
- Asaph – 12 (50, 73-83)
- Sons of Korah – 11 (42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88)
- Jeduthun – 39, 62, 77
- Solomon – 72, 127
- Moses – 90
- Heman – 88
- Skeletor – Psalm 151 (joke!)
- Ethan – 89

We don't always know if the headings are accurate (they were not original) or if they meant an author or something like "in the style of so and so"

*What are the Psalms?*

### **The Psalms are divided into 5 books just like the Torah/Pentateuch**

- Goldingay points out (Psalms vol 1) that Psalm 1 is about instruction, as is the Torah.

## Different genres in the Bible

*What is a genre?*

### The Psalms are a poetic expression

Here are the main tools in the toolbox of the Hebrew psalmists (written 3000 years ago!)

#### Types of Psalms:

That is zooming in a bit...let's zoom out

- Lament Psalms – Roughly 80
- Praise – Roughly 100
- Wisdom – 20

John Goldingay, OT scholar said the Psalms give us 4 ways to speak to God (for everyone – intro):

1. You are great!
2. Help! One word prayer!
3. I trust you
4. Thank you

#### Exercise:

- Look through the psalms and try to find an example of each of the 4 ways to speak to God from above (put all four on the screen).

Psalms is the most quoted book of the OT in the NT (68 quotations)

**Exercise** – Look at your New Testament and try to find a few places the psalms are quoted in the NT

**Prayer time** – find a psalm to use for your prayer time and have someone read the psalm as a prayer



## Lesson 2: Psalms of Orientation

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann noticed something interesting about the psalms. They fit into three categories. He wrote this,

“The following discussion is organized around three quite general themes, poems of *orientation*, poems of *disorientation*, and poems of *new orientation*. It is suggested that the Psalms can be roughly grouped this way, and the flow of human life characteristically is located either in the actual experience of one of these settings or is in movement from one to another<sup>1</sup>”

- Psalms of Orientation – all is well with the world
  - “Human life consists in satisfied *seasons of well-being* that evoke gratitude for the constancy of blessing. Matching this we will consider “psalms of orientation,” which in a variety of ways articulate the joy, delight, goodness, coherence, and reliability of God, God’s creation, God’s governing law.<sup>2</sup>”
- Psalms of Disorientation – life is a mess
  - “Human life consists in anguished seasons of hurt, alienation, suffering, and death. These evoke rage, resentment, self-pity, and hatred. Matching this, we will consider “psalms of disorientation,” poems and speech-forms that match the season in its ragged, painful disarray. This speech, the lament, has a recognizable shape that permits the extravagance, hyperbole, and abrasiveness needed for the experience.<sup>3</sup>”
- Psalms of New Orientation – things were a mess but back to being good again
  - “Human life consists in turns of surprise when we are overwhelmed with the new gifts of God, when joy breaks through the despair. Where there has been

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<sup>1</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1984). [\*The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary\*](#) (p. 19). Fortress Press.

<sup>2</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1984). [\*The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary\*](#) (p. 19). Fortress Press.

<sup>3</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1984). [\*The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary\*](#) (p. 19). Fortress Press.

only darkness, there is light. Corresponding to this surprise of the gospel, we will consider “psalms of new orientation,” which speak boldly about a new gift from God, a fresh intrusion that makes all things new. These psalms affirm a sovereign God who puts humankind in a new situation. In this way, it is proposed that psalm forms correspond to seasons of human life and bring those seasons to speech. The move of the seasons is transformational and not developmental; that is, the move is never obvious, easy, or “natural.” It is always in pain and surprise, and in each age it is thinkable that a different move might have been made<sup>4</sup>”

**Question for the group: What do the psalms mean to you? When have you turned to them and found them helpful?**

### **Psalms of Orientation**

There are seasons of life where things are at peace. The Hebrew word is Shalom. It means more than just absence of war. Shalom means wholeness of life. This is life at its best. God created a good and ordered world that is meant to be enjoyed. Psalms of orientation recognize this order and celebrate the God who makes it so.

Brueggemann breaks these down into five categories with examples:

1. Songs of Creation (Psalms 145, 104, 33, & 8)
2. Songs of Torah (Psalms 1, 119, 15, & 24)
3. Wisdom Psalms (Psalms 37 & 14)
4. Songs of Retribution (Psalm 112)
5. Occasions of Well-Being (Psalms 133 & 131)

Let’s explore a few of these psalms to see how the psalmist expresses a life well oriented/centered on God.

#### **Songs of Creation (Psalm 145)**

**Activity:** Take some time as a group to read Psalm 145 together

**Activity:** Read it again in another translation.

**Activity:** Have someone tell it in their own words.

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<sup>4</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1984). [\*The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary\*](#) (p. 19). Fortress Press.

What is impossible to tell in English is that this psalm is an acrostic.

- It is like an A-Z list of God's faithfulness and goodness.
- God's faithfulness is complete

We see a few things in this psalms that help us understand God, ourselves and the world better.

**Question:** What does this psalm teach you about God?

**Question:** What does it teach you about the world God created?

**Question:** What does it teach you about humanity?

**Discussion & Prayer:** Discuss what is good about God that is deserving of praise and spend some time in prayer praising and thanking God for these things and for who He is (his character and qualities)

**Question:** Can you think of a time God upheld you when you had fallen? What happened and what did God do to help you?

**Sing:** Sing a song of praise and thanksgiving that is directed at God. By that, I mean, where any "you" in the son is God.

### **Songs of Torah (Psalm 1)**

**Activity:** Take some time as a group to read Psalm 1 together

**Activity:** Read it again in another translation.

**Activity:** have someone tell it in their own words.

This is a Torah psalm because of the delight in the Law of the Lord. The Law (Torah) of the Lord is something the wise delight in. At this point in time we would also say the New Testament serves this function because we have more Revelation now than they did when Psalm 1 was written.

God's word helps us conduct our lives in an ordered and oriented way. Without the Word of God we would be like the wicked who are "blown away like chaff". Chaff are the parts of the wheat head that aren't edible. Those parts are thrown out and cast into the fire.

**Activity:** Take some time as a group to compare and contrast the righteous vs the wicked in Psalm 1. What are the differences between them? Why does this matter to us today?

**Discussion & Prayer:** Spend time talking about how the Word of God is a blessing to you. Pray and thank God for His Word and the blessings it brings you to help you live the oriented life. Pray also for those who are outside of Christ and who need that stability, help and protection.



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### Lesson 3: Psalms of Disorientation

As was stated in the previous lesson, the psalms can be divided into three types: Orientation (all is well), disorientation (all is not well) and new orientation (things were rough but are back to being whole and right again).

This lesson will focus on the psalms of disorientation.

A large percentage of the psalms are Lament psalms. This reminds us that the psalms aren't just sugar coating everything in life. They are real and they go deep into the depths of hard human experiences.

Some examples of disorientation psalms include:

1. Personal Lament (Psalms 13, 86, & 35)
2. Communal Lament (Psalms 74, 79, 137)

#### Personal Lament (Psalm 13)

**Activity:** Take some time as a group to read Psalm 13 together

**Activity:** Read it again in another translation.

**Activity:** have someone tell it in their own words.

It is clear that something is wrong but we don't know what. And that is helpful because if it were specific, maybe we couldn't relate to the words of this psalm so well. This allows us to fill in the situation with our own situation and allow these words to become our words in times of trouble.

**That brings us to a helpful practice – praying the psalms.**

Often people sing the psalms because they were songs. Have you ever prayed the psalms?

Psalm 13:1-2 is the perfect pray for certain hard situations.

**Question to consider:** Have you ever felt like (or actually did) say the words from verse 1-2 to God? What was going on?

**Question:** Are you currently lamenting about anything?

**Question:** Is there anything the gathering/group can pray about for you?

**Discussion & Prayer:** Discuss reasons you have for lament. Don't gloss over the difficulty. Let it all sink in. If no one has anything, thank the Lord! If someone does, then pray Psalm 13 over them.

### **Communal Lament (Psalm 74)**

**Activity:** Take some time as a group to read Psalm 74 together

**Activity:** Read it again in another translation.

**Activity:** Have someone tell it in their own words.

Notice the difference in pronouns between Personal Lament and Corporate Lament. The Personal lament is "I/me/my" and Corporate is "we/us/our".

This is the cry from the community for God to deliver the community from peril.

There is a difference between God rejecting us and us feeling like God has rejected us (vs 1).

**Question:** What is the difference between actual rejection by God and feeling rejected by God? Is it possible to not be actually rejected but very much feel rejected? Why?

We might pray in a similar manner and go through some similar shifts in our prayer when we are in distress like this:

- 1 – Start with the big question on why God hasn't helped yet (74:1)
- 2 – A call for God's remembrance and attention (74:2-3)
- 3 – Telling God the details of the destruction that have taken place (74:4-8)
- 4 – Telling God why we are so concerned about his inaction (74:9-11)
- 5 – A turn to faith and trust (74:12)
- 6 – A statement of God's past deeds of power and victory (74:13-17)
- 7 – A final plea for help (74:18-23)

**Prayer:** If there are things about your gathering that are lamentable, you might pray through this order and fill in your specifics.

**Question:** Is there anything that makes it hard to complain or cry out to God like this? If so, what is it and why?

Don't be afraid to take everything – every emotion – to God in brutal honesty. He can handle it!



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## Lesson 4: Psalms of New Orientation

As was stated in the previous lesson, the psalms can be divided into three types: Orientation (all is well), disorientation (all is not well) and new orientation (things were rough but are back to being whole and right again).

This lesson will focus on the psalms of new disorientation.

These are psalms where things were in really bad shape, they cry out to God and God delivers them.

Some examples of new orientation psalms include:

3. Thanksgiving Songs (Psalms 30, 40, 34, 138)
4. Thanksgiving Songs of the Community (Psalms 65, 66 & 124)
5. Once and Future King (114, 29, 96 & 97)
6. Thanksgiving Generalized to Confidence (Psalms 23, 27 & 91)
7. Hymns of Praise (Psalm 103, 117 & 135)

These psalms usually state that there was some kind of trouble or people in despair and God showed up and delivered them. Let's explore a few of these psalms to see how the psalmist expresses a life well oriented/centered on God.

### Personal Lament (Psalm 30)

**Activity:** Take some time as a group to read Psalm 30 together

**Activity:** Read it again in another translation.

**Activity:** have someone tell it in their own words.

Go through this psalm together and look for two things: 1) the past trouble and 2) God's deliverance and present positive situation.

**Activity:** Talk about the things God has delivered you from. Then, spend some time praising and thanking God for all that he has rescued/delivered those in the gathering from.

Like the last lesson's psalm there is a structure this psalm that we can learn from, especially in 30:6-10:

1. I was secure (30:6)
2. Tough things happened (30:7)
3. I called out to God/prayed (30:8-10)
4. God turned the situation around (30:11-12)

This is moving from orientation to disorientation to new orientation all in six verses! This is how life moves and the psalms give us help in how to express what we are going through, how to engage God in what we are going through and reminds us of how faithful God is in coming through at the right time.

### **Hymns of Praise (Psalm 103)**

**Activity:** Take some time as a group to read Psalm 103 together

**Activity:** Read it again in another translation.

**Activity:** Have someone tell it in their own words.

**Question:** What is the word that stands out in this psalm the most to you? For many, it is the word "praise".

**Question:** Which do you think it is? Orientation or new orientation?

**Prayer & Praise:** Spend some time in prayer (singing as well if that fits your gathering) praising God for all the wonderful things He has done for His people.



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## Lesson 5: Psalms in the Gospels & Acts

### Psalms in the Gospels:

Jesus quoted from the psalms more than any other Old Testament book. Let that sink in a moment. Of all the times Jesus mentioned or quoted scripture to people in the gospels, it was most often the Psalms. More than Isaiah. More than Genesis. The Psalms!

Here are some of the ways the Psalms are used in the Gospels

1. Psalms as Prophecy (Psalm 22 at the cross in Mt 27:46 or Psalm 118:22 Jesus quotes that predicts he would be rejected – see Mt 21:42). See also Psalm 41:9 predicts Judas dipping the bread with him will betray him – found in all four gospels)
2. Psalms in Jesus' Teaching (Matt 22:41-46 uses Psalm 110:1)
3. Psalms in Jesus' Death (Psalm 31:5 – into your hands I commit my spirit in Lk 23:46)
4. Psalm 2:7 “you are my son” at Jesus' baptism in Lk 3:22
5. Psalms in Jesus' worship (at Last Supper the songs sang after Passover were the Hallel Psalms in Mt 26:30)
6. To explain and prove the resurrection of the dead (and of Jesus) via Psalm 16:10 in Acts 2:25-28 and 13:35-37

The psalms played a significant role in just about every aspect of Jesus' ministry. The Psalms were speaking the good news of the coming king 500-1000+ years before Jesus walked the earth!

**Question:** Why do you think, after all we have studied, that the Psalms played such a large role in Jesus' ministry and message?

There is a category of psalms called “enthronement psalms” and these may have been used when a new king ascended the throne. This has relevance for Jesus because Jesus is “Christ” and “Christ” in Greek is basically “Messiah” in Hebrew and it means the anointed King. When we say “Jesus Christ” we are saying “King Jesus”. The psalms recognize the coming King over and over again!

We looked at Psalm 74 in Lesson 3 (Psalms of Disorientation). Take note of 74:12,

“But God is my King from long ago;  
he brings salvation on the earth.”

Jesus’ name means Yahweh is salvation” and King Jesus is our Savior. The Jewish people in general and the psalms in particular looked forward to a coming King/Messiah who would save/rescue/deliver them from their oppressors. Jesus was and is that Messiah. He is enthroned in the heavens at God’s right hand.

Let’s look at a psalm from the ministry of Jesus.

### **Psalm 22 – “My God, my God...why have you forsake me?”**

**Activity:** Take some time as a group to read Psalm 22 together

**Activity:** Read it again in another translation.

**Activity:** Have someone tell it in their own words.

**Activity:** Make a list of things in this psalm that happened to Jesus at his trial and crucifixion.

This psalm is a prophesy of Jesus’ death. It begins on a note of personal lament but then moves to new orientation by the end. This mirrors what happened to Jesus. While things were bad and he did die on the cross, God would hear his cry for help and raise Him from the dead.

**Question to consider:** Did God forsake Jesus on the cross? Does this psalm teach that?

### **Psalms in Acts:**

The psalms are all over the book of Acts. They quote the psalms in Acts 1:20 in replacing Judas. Peter preaches the gospel by using Psalm 110 in Acts 2. Peter again uses the Psalms when speaking about Jesus to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:11 quoting Psalm 118:22). When they gather to pray at the end of Acts 4, once again they quote the psalms (Acts 4:25-26 quoting Psalm 2:1-2). And all of this is just the first four chapters of Acts!

From these few examples we can see that they used Acts to share the gospel, defend their actions and be encouraged by the fulfillment of what God was doing.

Acts was foundational not only to the ministry of Jesus but also the work of the first Christians and early church.

**Activity:** Go through the footnotes in your Bible in the book of Acts and find more places that the Psalms are quoted. Discuss those in your gathering. What was going on? Why did they connect things with the psalms in the instances you found?

**Prayer & Praise:** Spend some time in prayer (singing as well if that fits your gathering) praising God for the Scriptures including the Psalms, Gospels and Acts!



## Lesson 6: Psalms in the New Testament Letters

### Psalms in Paul:

#### Paul knew the OT

Paul was a scholar. He was trained by Gamaliel, who was a Pharisee and Paul was also a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). This means he knew the Old Testament very well.

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.” – Acts 22:3

Paul was trained in the Old Testament and was zealous for it. The Pharisees knew the scriptures inside and out. Paul knew the Psalms and used them extensively in his letters.

#### Paul viewed the OT as inspired scripture:

- The Old Testament contained truth that they still followed after Jesus was on the earth. Some say the OT was “nailed to the cross” based on a misunderstanding of Col 1:14.
- They understood the OT to be the inspired word of God – 2 Tim 3:15-16

### Psalms in the General Letters:

The psalms also show up in the General letters (Revelation-Jude).

1 Peter 2:7 quotes Psalm 118:22 – stone the builders rejected to teach about Jesus

1 Peter 3:10-12 quotes Psalm 34:12-16 – to show we should live ethical lives

1 Peter 4:14-16 alludes to Psalm 89 and 69 – understanding suffering in light of Jesus

We see the influence of Psalms in Hebrews, James, 1 John 2 Peter and Jude

### Psalms in Hebrews:

In fact, Hebrews makes use of the psalms more than any other letter in the New Testament.

- Psalm 2:7 “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” Quoted in Heb 1:5 & 5:5
- Psalm 8:4-6 quoted in Heb 2:6-8 – humiliation and exaltation of Jesus
- Psalm 22:22 quoted in Heb 2:12 – Jesus connection and solidarity with us
- Psalm 45:6-7 quoted in Heb 1:8-9 – eternity of Jesus
- Psalm 95:7-11 quoted in Heb 3:7-11

- And several others...

The Hebrew writer was well acquainted with the Psalms and preached the gospel out of the Psalms, just as Peter did in Acts 2!

**Question to consider:** What makes the Psalms an important witness to Jesus and the Gospel, even though some were written 1000 years before Jesus was on the earth?

**Activity:** Go through the footnotes in your Bible from Hebrews to Jude. Look for the psalms in the footnotes, then look up to see what is being discussed and which verses from the psalms are quoted. Discuss those in your gathering. What was going on? What connection with the Psalms did the New Testament authors make based on your findings?

**Prayer & Praise:** Spend some time in prayer (singing as well if that fits your gathering) praising God for His eternal attributes that we find in Hebrews and the Psalms – that he is righteous, that he was humiliated for us, that he is eternal, etc.



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## **Lesson 7: Psalms in Revelation**

### **Psalms in Revelation:**

The Psalms are not quoted as often in Revelation but the influence of the Psalms is still heavy in Revelation. The imagery created in the Psalms is brought over into Revelation in a number of instances.

### **Here are some examples of the images and themes carried over from the Psalms into Revelation:**

- Kingship and Enthronement: Psalm 96:10, 99:1 echoed in Revelation 19:6
- Cosmic Conflict: Psalm 150 echoed in Revelation 5:11-14, 7:9-12
- God as Creator and Judge:
  - o Psalm 146:6 – “He is the Maker of heaven and earth”
  - o Rev 4:11 – “You created all things and by your will they existed”
  - o Psalm 96:13 – He will judge the world in righteousness
  - o Revelation 19:11 – in righteousness he judges and makes war
- Lament Psalms
  - o Psalm 79:10 – “How Long, O Lord”
  - o Rev 6:10 – “How long before you will judge and avenge our blood?”
- Kingship of the Lord & Lamb
  - o Psalm 110:1 – Sit at my right hand
  - o Rev 3:21 – I will grant him to sit at my right hand
  - o Psalm 89:27 – I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth
  - o Rev 1:5 – the ruler of kings on earth

### **Other parallels:**

- Psalm 22:16-18 – ““For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet... they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”
- Rev 1:7 – ““Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.”
- And...
- Psalm 46:4 – ““There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.”

- Rev 22:1-2 – “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb... on either side of the river, the tree of life.”

While quotations of the psalms aren't as evident in Revelation, the echoes and fingerprints are all over the imagery of the book of Revelation.

**Question:** Of all the uses we just went over, which one stands out to you and why?

The most prominent use of the Psalms in Revelation is the Kingship of Jesus. Jesus is the enthroned one. Just as various psalms were used when they installed a new king in Israel, these same psalms are used to talk about the current state of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords...sitting at the right hand of God and sovereign over all creation!

Jesus is the suffering lamb who looks as if he has been slain and yet is alive again. He has suffered and His people suffer and cry out “How Long O Lord?”

The book of Revelation was written to people who were living at a time where you could be forced to worship Caesar and it was important to know who the true King really was.

Revelation is a powerful reminder that God wins and that we, as his people will come out of this on the winning team.

That is not just true of the first readers of Revelation in the first century – it is true of us today as we live in a world that worships all kinds of things that are not God. We need to be reminded to hang in there...to stay faithful. King Jesus is coming!

Remember Psalm 74? Here is verse 12 again,

“But God is my King from long ago;  
he brings salvation on the earth.”

**Question to consider:** Why do we need reminded today that Jesus is King and not someone or something else?

**Last, the book of Revelation is like the Psalms in that it is full of praise and worship**

We are reminded that Jesus is worthy of praise and worship. We see this in passages like Revelation 7:12 and 11:17-18 that connect with Psalm 29 and 150.

**Activity:** Go through the footnotes in your Bible in the book of Revelation and find more places that the Psalms are quoted. Discuss those in your gathering. What was going on? Why did they connect things with the psalms in the instances you found? (See Chapters 2, 12, 15 & 19)

**Prayer & Praise:** Spend some time in prayer (singing as well if that fits your gathering) praising God and King Jesus for how they use their power and authority to deliver us from the evil in the world!



## Lesson 8: Practical Uses of the Psalms Today

We have looked at:

- How the psalms are structured (orientation, disorientation and new orientation)
- How the psalms are used in the Gospels, Acts, Letters and Revelation

Finally we will look at some practical things we can do with the Psalms to help us in our faith and mission.

First, we can get to know the psalms to get a deeper understanding of God and Jesus.

- The psalms can deepen our understanding and our faith
- We learn how God operates in relation to the outcry of his people
- We learn how crying out to God, even complaint on God's seeming inaction is a faithful act – you can't argue with a God who you don't believe exists
- Read Psalm 22 again!

Second, the Psalms can help us be more evangelistic

- The prophetic psalms (like Psalm 22) were written long before Jesus came and are so specific that they can help people see this is not made up or an accident
- This provides an apologetic for the truth of the scriptures for believers (strengthen our faith) and unbelievers (to bring them to faith).
- What are the chances that all these things are said 1000 years in advance to someone who has no control over the situation?

Third, it can inform our prayer life and prayer language

- Gives us words to say in prayer – How Long, O Lord or the Lord is my refuge...my rock!

**Exercise:** Go through the psalms and find lines/verbiage you can take note of that you might incorporate into your prayers to God.

**Exercise:** Teach Breath Prayer (Psalm 23)

Fourth, we can learn to meditate on the psalms on a regular basis.

- Psalm 1 – on his word he meditates day and night

**Exercise:** Lectio on Psalm 1

**Homework:** DBS Psalm 23

### **Discovery Bible Study Questions for Psalm 23**

Read Psalm 23

Re-Read Psalm 23

Tell it in your own words

What does Psalm 23 teach you about God?

What does Psalm 23 teach you about people (including yourself)?

What is one thing you can do with what you have learned from Psalm 23 (write a simple “I will” statement and do it this week)?

Who is one person you can share something you learned with this week (look for opportunity)?