



THE PSALMS TRIED & TRUE

A Greek InterVarsity
Bible Study on six Psalms

Introduction

The Book of Psalms (the Psalter) is a rich collection of 150 songs. They range from songs of praise to deep lament. There is great thanksgiving and tremendous struggle. The title of the book in Hebrew means “Book of Praises.” However, there are several types of Psalms. The three major categories are hymns, laments and songs of thanksgiving. A helpful way to categorize this would be as psalms of Orientation (hymns—when all seems to be well), Disorientation (laments—when perhaps you have fallen into sin or are being persecuted), and Reorientation (thanksgiving—when you are set aright again and give thanks to the One who accomplished it for you).

Amazingly in a book called the “Book of Praises” the most common psalm is one of lament. Yet in all but one they end in praise. In fact the entire book pushes towards a climax of praise in Psalms 145-150. This gives great hope as we not only realize, but also are encouraged, that we don’t stay in a bad place but move forward in God’s strength as we take refuge in Him. That is the theme of the entire book—“Blessed are all who take refuge in the King.” And that King is none other than Jesus Christ. Each of these Psalms points us to Him—either in His person or His work of saving sinners from an eternity separated from Him. It is here that we are instructed how to pour out our emotions in both the good and the bad to the One who can truly make a difference. It is here that we learn how to praise and pray. It is here that we learn who we are in relation to a perfect and holy God.

Psalms All Around Us

Our encouragement is to take the time and learn from these songs of struggle and joy—from these songs of faith. Also, there are many Christian songs that have been written based on specific psalms. Here is a list of some of these songs. Enjoy!

Songs taken from the Psalms

- “Flown Free” by Over The Rhine (The Message: Psalms Album)
- “Psalm 13” by Shane & Shane (Upstairs or Psalms Album)
- “Psalm 62” by Shane & Shane (Pages Album)
- “Revive Me” (Psalm 143) by Shane & Shane (Psalms Album)
- “Psalm 145” by Shane & Shane (Psalms Album)
- “Psalm 131” by Waterdeep (Everyone’s Beautiful Album)
- “40” by U2 (War Album)
- “King of Glory” by Chris Tomlin (Arriving Album)
- “God Be Merciful to Me” by Jars of Clay (Redemption Songs Album)
- “Even When” by Jeremy Camp (Restored Album)
- “I Repent” by Derek Webb (The House Show Album)
- “Your Love, O Lord (Psalm 36)” by Third Day (Time)

PSALM 13

Psalm 13 is an example of the most prominent type of psalm in the book- a psalm of lament. These are also called “psalms of disorientation”, speaking of a time of possible sin, suffering or persecution. The psalmist is very honest with his feelings, which can help the reader who is also struggling. Every lament except one ends with a word of praise, which is also something that can encourage the reader.

Discussion Starter

Has anyone (or someone you know) ever been lost or lost another? (i.e. getting lost at the mall when you were 5 years old)

Pray and read Psalm 13

Discussion Questions

- What is going on in the psalm? Put it into your own words.
- What words are repeated and how do they contribute to the mood of the psalm?
- What does it mean that God would “hide his face” from the psalmist?
- Have you ever felt like God was “hiding” from you, that you couldn’t sense His presence? Describe what that was like?

- What does the Psalmist ask of God? What do you think of this bold request?
- By verses 5 & 6 what change do you notice in the Psalmist's outlook? What do you think enables the writer to end with these verses?
- We do not know the psalmist's specific problem, but we do know that he was hurting and who he went to for help. Is there something in your life that is causing you pain that needs God's presence, power, love?
- How would meditating on verses 5 & 6 this week help you go to God even when things are difficult
- Lastly, if you are struggling to believe vs. 5-6 spend some time reading John 3: 1- 21 asking God to help you understand His great love shown in Christ on the cross.

Prayer Idea

Write down your area of pain that you'd like to see God's presence in. Spend time this week talking to God about this need. Also, other laments that you might resonate with are Psalms 3, 40, 61, 86.

PSALM 23

Psalm 23 is surely one of the best known and most loved passages in scripture. Hopefully this familiarity will encourage some newcomers to attend the chapter study. Studying the passage will undoubtedly reveal things in the text that were not otherwise discovered.

Discussion Starter

Share a story, either good or bad about taking care of a pet.

Does anyone know anything about sheep or being a shepherd? Because shepherding is not very common in the US the following information will be helpful before looking at Psalm 23.

From The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery:

Conditions of shepherding in ancient Palestine provide the foundation for figurative references. These conditions were very different from most modern practices. Sheep were not fenced in and left to fend for themselves. Instead they were totally dependent on shepherds for protection, grazing, watering, shelter and tending to injuries. In fact, sheep would not survive long without a shepherd. Sheep are not only dependent creatures; they are also singularly

Pray and read Psalm 23

Discussion Questions

- What are some actions/ characteristics of the shepherd as seen in verses 1-4?

- How does the above description of sheep further help in understanding the heart of the shepherd?
- The shepherd is used to picture God and his heart for His children. How have you seen God care for you like a shepherd for his sheep?
- Verses 1-3 spoke of everyday needs. Verses 4-5 moves to our needs in crisis. What provides the psalmist comfort during his crisis?

From The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery:

To protect sheep against predators, shepherds would carry two pieces of equipment, the “rod and staff” of Psalm 23:4, one of them a club like weapon and the other the familiar crook used for protection, rescue and placing across the backs of sheep to count them as they

Verse 5 reveals the peace and provision of God. Even in dire situations God is able to grant peace. Verse 6 speaks of God’s goodness and love pursuing us. Share a time of struggle and how God took care of you or a current struggle where you need God’s comfort.

In John 10:11-16 Jesus describes Himself as the good shepherd. In laying down His life for us, Jesus provides a way for His sheep to “dwell in the house of the Lord forever”. Jesus mentions “other sheep that are not of this sheep pen” who need to be brought in also. Who in your life needs to know about this amazing Shepherd?

Prayer Idea

Ask God to take care of you in your places of need and to reveal Himself as a loving shepherd to a friend who doesn’t yet know Him.

PSALM 51

Discussion Starter

When you are in the wrong is it hard for you to admit it? Why or why not?

Background to be read or summarized: 2 Sam 12:1-16, v.16 is when this Psalm was most likely written.

Pray and read Psalm 51

Discussion Questions

SECTION 1: THE DESIRE TO BE FORGIVEN (1-6)

- What are some of the words David uses to describe how he is feeling?

- What are some words that David uses to describe God in these verses?
- How does David's response help us understand how our wrong doings, our sin, affects our relationship with God?
- How do you interact with God when you realize you have done wrong (*sinned*)?

SECTION 2: RENEWAL HAPPENS (7-13)

- What are some of the phrases or images that David uses in asking for God's forgiveness?
- What do these images seem to point out about God's forgiveness of our sin?
- David gives a lot of images of forgiveness, which of these do you connect with the most? Why?
- How is it that through faith in Jesus we receive this forgiveness? OR Today, how are we able to receive this forgiveness? (1 John 1:9-10, 4:15)

SECTION 3: PRAISE (v.14-17)

- How would you describe David's emotional state after confessing his wrongdoing and asking for forgiveness?
- Why do you think David is able to respond the way he does?

- Has there been a time in your life where you desired and then experienced the joy and freedom David expresses?
- Which of the three postures that we find David in do you relate to most (needing to confess/ feeling guilty, being cleansed, joyful and free)? Which of these postures do you see your Greek chapter in?

NOTES:

Hyssop – “David's mind goes to that original Passover, when the firstborn of Egypt were stricken dead and the houses of Israel that had blood on the door frames, were passed over. What does this have to do with David's request? Here it is. God directed the Israelites to take a branch of hyssop and dip it in blood and paint the door frames with it.” Paul Tripp The hyssop points to the Passover blood of the lamb being spread on doorposts with hyssop. Ultimately to the way Jesus became

Prayer Idea

The leader can close in prayer by rereading 1 John 1:9, giving some time of silence (tell the group you are going to do this) for people to talk to God on their own and then close by thanking God for this forgiveness found in Jesus. v.11 The Holy Spirit was an anointing on a king so this was dealing with his office not his salvation. He was concerned with being removed as king. Other penitential/ confession psalms you can read are Psalms 6, 32, 38, 102, 130 and 143.

PSALM 82

Discussion Starter

When you look at the people and situations around you, where do you see pain and injustice?

Pray and Read Psalm 82

Summarize the following Background of the Text:

In addressing the “gods”, God is not acknowledging pagan deities or recognizing the existence of other supernatural beings like himself; rather, he is addressing the earthly judges and administrators of his law whom he has set up to represent him. These leaders would be today’s pastors, priest, bishops, or any other church leader. You can substitute the word “leaders” in verse 1 and 6 for “gods” in your discussion – it has the same meaning. “Leaders” is used in the questions below.

Discussion Questions

- What groups of people are mentioned in this Psalm?
- What are the leaders doing wrong that is addressed in this passage?

- Who/what in our world (society, politics, campus, our own communities) are the unjust people or systems society as a whole often defends? (verse 2)
- Who in our lives are the weak and fatherless? (verse 3-4)
- What are areas of the world, our city, the Greek community that break your heart? What areas/people do you know need rescue?
- Just like the “leaders” in this Psalm, many Christians today don’t live up to the standards and lifestyle God’s called them to. Have you ever witnessed hypocrisy like this? How did you respond? (verse 6-7)
- As I mentioned in the background of the text the “leaders” are the ones set apart by God to live their lives in a way that brings truth and justice to the world in God’s name. How does that change how you view yourself? (more or less valuable to God’s purposes and plans? Empowered? Hopeless?)
- God commands Christians, just like these “leaders” to take action against injustice (verse 4) – where do you see yourself in this passage?

Prayer Idea

What area of the Greek system/our city/a people group/etc. do you feel God’s calling you to make a difference in? Pray as a group for these areas.

PSALM 103

This is a hymn of praise, celebrating the abundant goodness and love of the Lord for his people. It is the first of four psalms reflecting on God's dealings with his people from creation to exile. Psalm 103 introduces the sequence by recalling that Israel's survival in time of Moses was due to God's steadfast love. It begins with each individual singer exhorting his or her own soul to bless the Lord, and then goes on to list the benefits that the soul should be careful not to forget. Christians enter into the joy of this psalm as they celebrate how the biblical story that has developed since that time has displayed even more of God's goodness and kindness. (ESV commentary)

Discussion Starter

What is something that happened in your life recently that you consider to be a blessing?

Pray and read Psalm 103

Discussion Questions

- What is David's posture/ attitude towards the Lord here?

- What are the good things the Lord does for his children? (vs. 3-7)
- What do we know about God's character through this Psalm?
- What other observations stand out to you?
- Looking at verse 10, why does God not repay us according to our sins? Have someone read Ephesians 2: 1-8. How is it that God forgives us?
- Re-read vs. 11-12. Why is this so significant for believers?
- "Fear him" is repeated 3 times. What does that mean?
- Read vs. 17-18. What do we receive from God? How should we respond?
- How does God feel about you?
- Does that affect the way you live?

Prayer Idea

What are some specific ways you can honor and glorify God in your everyday life? Pray as a group for these things.

PSALM 145

The book of Psalms appropriately ends with six songs of praise. Psalm 145 introduces this closing sequence with a powerful look at God's right to receive praise and man's duty to give it.

Discussion Starter

Share a time when you really praised something and why (a movie, good meal, etc).

Pray and read Psalm 145

Discussion Questions

- In verses 1-3 the psalmist begins by describing himself in the act of praising God. What words does he use to describe this praising? What else do you notice about his praise of God?
- This psalm lists out many characteristics of God. Name as many of them

as you can, using the categories (a) who God is, (b) what He has done and (c) what He will do.

- In light of who God is, what sort of responses do we see in this Psalm?
- What could it look like to live out verses 4-7 in your Greek house/ on campus?
- Looking back at the promises of God (what He will do), which promise do you resonate with and need to hold onto?
- Often times when life is difficult we forget that God is the One to run to. Also, at times God can seem big and distant. The best example of God's love and faithfulness is found in Christ. God sending His Son to earth is His mightiest and most gracious act. Read Ephesians 2: 1-5. Why did God send His Son to earth? How does believing/ remembering this help in day to day life?
- How can this good news of God's mighty act(s) be passed on to the "next generation" in your Greek chapter?

Prayer Idea

Close in prayer by asking people to express short phrases of praise to God. For example someone may say, "God I praise you for bring loving." This is a good way to "practice" praying out loud.

FOR MORE RESOURCES & STUDIES

Visit greekiv.org

Other Greek IV Studies Include:

- *The Jesus Who Ignites Controversy*
- *The life of Joseph*
- *Esther*
- *Desperate Women Encounter Jesus*
- *Straight Up: The Book of James*
- *Psalms: Tried and True*

