

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD YOUR LOVE IS BETTER THAN LIFE SO I WILL  
MY SOUL FINDS REST IN GOD ALONE LORD SITS ENTHRONED ON HIGH  
THE LORD REIGNS THE NATIONS TREMBLE MY GOD MY GOD WHY HAVE  
I WILL SING OF YOUR LOVE AND PRAISE THE LORD FROM THE HEAVENS

# PSALMS

## OF GREAT FAITH

### Curriculum For Adult Bible Classes and Small Groups

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**PSALMS  
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## PSALMS CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

As we read the Psalms we're likely to discover something about God, or find some wisdom for how to live life. We might encounter a prophetic reference to Christ, or be reminded of the ways God saved his people throughout history. Many psalms teach us how to cry to God in lament, while others inspire us to praise him with everything we possess.

In the Psalms we learn how to deal with opposition from enemies. We learn dependence on God in all of life's circumstances. Being the praise of Israel, these songs reveal what life was like in the community of God; the community that had a real, living relationship with their God.

It may be tempting to view these as antiquated, and irrelevant texts. Instead, as Bernhard Anderson claims, the Psalms "speak for us 'out of the depths' (Ps. 130:1) of our human existence" (Anderson 11).

These are prayers to be prayed. They are songs to be sung. They are instructions to meditate on. This is poetry to read aloud. This is literature to be inspected. This is history to learn from. This is our story to know.

The following psalms will be discussed in this curriculum:

#	LESSON	PSALMS
1	Introduction to Psalms	
2	Royal / King	2, 47, 93, 97, 99, 113
3	Torah / Teaching of God	1, 19, 112, 119
4	Wisdom	14, 37, 49, 53
5	Blessing	20, 115, 128, 134
6	Individual Lament	13, 22, 42, 43
7	Communal Lament	74, 137
8	Zion / Jerusalem	48, 84, 87, 122
9	Narrative / History	78
10	Trust	23, 25, 121
11	Thanksgiving	96, 105, 106, 107, 118
12	Creation	8, 19, 65, 111
13	Praise	117, 150

In addition to the notes and discussion questions provided, you may find it helpful to consider these ideas for class participation each week:

1. Write a psalm matching the type of psalm being discussed that week.
2. Evaluate the songs sung in church, looking for themes similar to psalms being discussed.
3. Invite someone to read (or recite) the week's psalms (or sections of the psalms).

## **PSALMS CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES**

As a result of this study, participants will ...

1. Articulate how the Psalms foretell the work of Jesus.
2. Identify several names of God used in the Psalms that have special meaning to them.
3. Recite from memory two different types of Psalms.
4. Explain three New Testament passages that quote from the Psalms.
5. Select a Psalm to pray that fits a given situation (lament, thanksgiving, praise, trust).
6. Perform an act on behalf of the overlooked or outcast in the name of God.
7. Form new relationships with other class members.

# PSALMS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Participants will ...

1. Acquire a general knowledge of the Psalms, including authorship, types of psalms, and why we study them.
2. Outline their expectations of this study and begin to think about what they want to learn.
3. Select a psalm to memorize over the next few weeks.

### Introduction

The best way to study and know the Psalms would be to sing them with Israel during some experience between them and God, knowing the history of God with his people. In this way we would know:

- Music: melody, tempo, volume
- Words
- Present experience in community: what's happening between Israel and God; context
- Past experience in community: the history of God with Israel
- How they were interpreted: what they meant to Israel

We can't go back and do that. But we do have some of these clues in the Psalms. What we've been given is like a giant puzzle to piece together.

### Notes

#### I. Name

In the Hebrew Bible the title is *tehillum*, which means “songs of praise.” (Anderson, 15)

The early Christian community read the psalms from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. The primary title used was *psalmoi*, referring to “songs sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments.” (Anderson, 15)

Read Luke 24:44. What is written about Jesus in the Psalms?

“Jesus said, ‘Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’” (Lk. 24:44)

“The Book of Psalms” comes from the New Testament (Jesus, Peter, and Paul)

“Jesus said, ‘David himself declares in the book of Psalms, ‘The Lord said to my Lord ...’” (Lk. 20:42)

“Peter said, ‘For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘May his place be deserted ...’” (Acts 1:20)

“Paul said, ‘As it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son ...’” (Acts 13:33)

## The Psalms were regarded as Scripture by Jesus and the Jews

In John 10:34 Jesus quotes from Psalm 82:6 and says, “Is it not written in your Law,’ and later refers to this as the “word of God.” Finally, he says, ”the Scripture cannot be broken.” It appears that at this point in Jewish history the Psalms were regarded as God’s word and Scripture. (Ps. 86:6 – “I said, ‘You are ‘gods’; you are all sons of the Most High.”)

There is further evidence of this in these places:

In Matthew 21:42 Jesus said, “Have you never read the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes.’” This is a quote from Psalm 118:22,23

In John 15:25 Jesus said, “...They have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’” This quote from the “Law” is from Psalm 35:19 and 69:4.

And finally in John 13:18, while predicting his betrayal, Jesus said, “This is to fulfill the Scripture, ‘He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me’” This quote is from Psalm 41:9.

## II. Arrangement / Structure

Arrangement in 5 books is probably a copy of the Torah (Pentateuch, divided into the 5 books of Genesis through Deuteronomy)

- Book I: Psalms 1-41
- Book II: Psalms 42-72
- Book III: Psalms 73-89
- Book IV: Psalms 90-106
- Book V: Psalms 107-150

## III. Date and Time of Writing

### A. Monarchy (pre-exile)

The Psalms, for the most part, were used originally in the Temple services during the preexilic period (from David to the fall of the First Temple: 1000 to 587 B.C.)

The fact that David wrote many of them and the many references to the king in the Psalms imply they were used during this time.

## B. Exile

In its present form of 5 books the Book of Psalms comes from the period of the Second Temple (the Temple of Zerubbabel which was rebuilt in 520-515 B.C. during Haggai & Zechariah. This Temple stood until it was superseded by the Temple of King Herod, begun around 20 B.C.)

- a. Psalm 137:1 “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept ...” gives us a clue that this psalm was written during the exile.

## IV. Authorship

	AUTHOR	# OF PSALMS	SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
A.	David	73	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 68, 69, 70, 86, 101, 103, 108, 109, 110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145
B.	No author recorded	50	1, 2, 10, 33, 43, 66, 67, 71, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 102, 104, 105, 106, 107, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 123, 125, 126, 128, 129, 130, 132, 134, 135, 136, 137, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150
C.	Asaph	12	50, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83
D.	Sons of Korah	10	42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 84, 85, 87
E.	Solomon	2	72, 127
F.	Moses	1	90
G.	Heman	1	88
H.	Ethan	1	89

## V. Types of Psalms

1. Royal / King / Anointed One (2, 47, 93, 97, 99, 113)
2. Torah / Teaching of God (1; 119)
3. Wisdom (14:1; 53; 127:1)
4. Blessing (1; 15; 20; 112; 128)
5. Individual Lament (13, 22)
6. Communal Lament (44, 60, 74, 79)
7. Zion / Jerusalem (48, 84, 122)
8. Narrative / History (44; 78; 105; 106; 135; 136)
9. Trust (23; 25)
10. Thanksgiving (105; 107)
11. Creation (8; 19; 29)
12. Praise (8:1; 113:1, 117, 134, 149, 150)

### 13. Other Distinctions

- a. Judgment: 50, 58, 82, 94
- b. Prayers: 51, 86, 90, 102, 142

An example of how the Psalms speak to specific circumstances: (Andre Resner)

Praise	“the dark valley is no where in sight” (Ps 148)
Trust	“before the dark valley” (Ps 23)
Lament	“in the dark valley” (Ps 3-7, 9, 10)
Thanksgiving	“out of the dark valley” (Ps 116)

### VI. Alternative Organization of Psalms (Walter Brueggemann 1984, 19)

- A. Orientation – season of well-being; reliability of God; his creation and reign
- B. Disorientation – anguished seasons of hurt; lament
- C. New Orientation – turn of surprise with new gifts from God; joy breaks through despair

New Testament Example: Philippians 2:5-11

Orientation: “Though he was in the form of God ...”

Disorientation: “He emptied himself ...”

New Orientation: “Therefore God has highly exalted him ...”

### VII. Literary Observations

#### A. Alphabetic Acrostic Psalms

each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet:  
9 and 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145

See Psalm 119 for a specific example.

We miss part of the poetic creativity because of translation.

#### B. Recurring refrains – like a chorus, these lines are repeated in the psalm

8:1,9 – “Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.”

24:7,8 and 24:9,10 – “Lift up your heads, O you gates ... that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.”

42:5,11 and 43:5– “Why are you downcast, O my soul?...Put your hope in God...”

46:7,11 – “The LORD Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

59:6,14 – “They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city.”

67:3,5 – “May the peoples praise you, go God; may all the peoples praise you.”

80:3,7,19 – “Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.”

99: 5,9 – “Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.”

106:1; 107:1 - “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever.”

107:8, 15,21,31 - “Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men”

136:1-26 – “His love endures forever.”

C. "To the tune of ..."

- 9 – "The Death of the Son"
- 22 – "The Doe of the Morning"
- 45, 69 – "Lillies"
- 56 – "A Dove on Distant Oaks"
- 57, 58, 59, 75 – "Do Not Destroy"
- 60, 80 – "The Lily (Lillies) of the Covenant"

D. To Be Sung With Instruments

- 4 – "with stringed instruments"
- 5 – "for flutes"
- 6 – "with stringed instruments"
- 54 – "with stringed instruments"
- 55 – "with stringed instruments"
- 61 – "with stringed instruments"
- 67 – "with stringed instruments"
- 76 – "with stringed instruments"

E. Psalms for Specific Occasions

- 30 – "For the dedication of the temple"
- 45 – "A wedding song"
- 60 – "For teaching"
- 62 – "For Jeduthun. A psalm of David"
- 70 – "A petition"
- 77 – "For Jeduthun. Of Asaph"
- 86 – "A prayer of David"
- 90 – "A prayer of Moses, the man of God"
- 92 – "For the Sabbath day"
- 100 – "For giving thanks"
- 102 – "A prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament..."
- 120-134 – "A song of ascents"
- 142 – "A prayer"
- 145 – "A psalm of praise"

F. Historical Events Cited In Title

- 3 – "A Psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom."
- 7 – "Of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjamite."
- 18 – "Of David ... He sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul."
- 30 – "A psalm. A song. For the dedication of the temple. Of David."
- 34 – "Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left."
- 51 – "A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba."

- 52 – “Of David. When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: ‘David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.’”
- 54 – “Of David. When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, ‘Is not David hiding among us?’”
- 56 - “Of David. When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.”
- 57 – “Of David. When he had fled from Saul into the cave.”
- 59 – “Of David. When Saul had sent me to watch David’s house in order to kill him.”
- 60 – “Of David. For teaching. When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.”
- 63 – “Of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.”
- 142 – “Of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer.”

#### G. Notations in Introductions

- “For the director of music” (4, 20, 21, 22, etc.)
- “a shiggaion of David, which he sang” (7) “he sang” (18)
- “selah” (3:2,8; 9:16,20 etc.) probably a break or interlude in the recitation for an instrumental intermezzo.

#### H. Poetic Parallelism / Repetition

- 24:1 “The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it; the world and all who live in it.”
- 95:3 “For the LORD is the great God; the great King above all gods.”
- 113:3 “The LORD is exalted over all the nations; his glory above the heavens.”

### VIII. Language Borrowed From Neighbors (Anderson, 42-46)

A. In writing the psalms, Israel borrowed from Sumerians, Babylonians, Canaanites, and Egyptians. There is similar language in all their writings.

B. Israel probably borrowed tunes from the Canaanites and used them in worship to God. (We do this today. For example, over the past 2 decades Amazing Grace has been sung by youth to “Peaceful Easy Feeling,” a tune from the Eagles)

C. Israel borrowed words from other nations as well.

1. Psalm 29 is an adaptation of a Canaanite hymn originally sung to Hadad, the god of the storm. (Anderson, 44)

2. Psalm 104 is very similar to the “Hymn to the Aton,” an Egyptian hymn to the sun found in the tomb at Tell el-Amarna, Egypt, the capital of the reforming Pharaoh Akhen-Aton of ca. 1380-1362 B.C.

## IX. Names of God in the Psalms

A. There are basically two words used for deity in the Psalms:

1. Elohim (God)
2. YHWH (personal name for God)
  - the Tetragrammaton (four consonants)
  - scholars believe was once spelled “Yahweh”
  - the personal name was so sacred it was withdrawn from ordinary usage
  - YHWH was substituted by “Adoni” (meaning Lord)

B. Other names are attributed to God that describe his character (see additional notes on “Names of God in the Psalms”)

## X. Why study the Psalms?

A. They teach us how to worship

- These are the songs and prayers of our ancestors; they were used in Israel’s worship
- We can pray them, sing them, read them, meditate on them, memorize them, recite them, etc. They are a resource for worship.

B. They teach us how to live and be faithful

- The psalms are expressions of diverse human emotions when people were pleased with God, desperate for God, and angry with God. These are real words of real people dealing with real life. They are some of the best praise songs ever written. They are also some of the most honest, angry prayers ever written.

Praise:

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” (Ps. 8:1,9)

“For you, O Lord, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods” (Ps 97:9)

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.” (Ps 42:1)

Lament:

“May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them ... Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.” (Ps. 69:23,24,27,28)

### C. They teach us about God

See additional notes on “Names of God in the Psalms”

#### Character of God

“Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens; your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains; your justice like the great deep.” (Ps. 36:5,6)

“You are resplendent with light, more majestic than mountains rich with game.” (76:4)

“You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness.” (86:15)

### D. They teach us about Jesus / (See “Psalms Quoted In The New Testament” Material)

“The psalms not only anticipate the advent of the King who would inaugurate God’s kingdom but portray the passion and struggle he would undergo in fulfilling his task ... The whole history of Israel, from the oppression in Egypt and on, was a passion story in which Israel experienced the reality of God in the midst of suffering ... As Christopher Barth observes, ‘Jesus and Israel belong together, and their respective histories cannot be understood apart from each other.’ From the Christian point of view the story of Jesus and the story of Israel constitute one story: the story in which God is involved personally and redemptively in the historical experiences of a people to open a way into the future in which all peoples ultimately may find true peace.” (Anderson 232).

#### Psalm 2

“the Anointed One.” (2:2)

“You are my son.” (2:7) (Heb. 1:5)

#### Psalm 8

“What is man that you are mindful of him; the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet.” (8:4-6) (Heb. 2:6-8)

#### Psalm 22

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (22:1) (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34)

“All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads; ‘He trusts in the Lord, let the Lord rescue him.’” (22:7,8) (Mt. 27:41-44; Mk. 15:31,32; Lk. 23:35-39)

“They have pierced my hands and feet.” (22:16) (Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Lk. 23:33; Jn. 19:18)

“They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” (22:18) (Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Jn. 19:23, 24)

“I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.” (22:22) (Heb. 2:12)

#### Psalm 31

“Into your hands I commit my spirit” (31:5) and Ps. 31:9-13 (Luke 23:46)

#### Psalm 40

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.’” (40:6-8) (Heb. 10:5-7)

Psalm 41

“Even my close friend, who I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” (41:9)

“I know that you are pleased with me for my enemy does not triumph over me.” (41:11)

“In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever.” (41:12)

Psalm 45

“Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” (45:6,7) (Heb. 1:8,9)

Psalm 69

“I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother’s sons” (69:8) (Jn 7:5)

“Zeal for your house consumes me.” (69:9) (Jn. 2:17)

Psalm 72

“All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him.” (72:11)

“May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun.” (72:17)

“All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.” (72:17)

Psalm 78

“I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things from of old.” (78:2) (Mt. 13:35)

Psalm 89:19-29

Psalm 110

“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” (110:1) (Heb. 1:13)

“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.” (110:4) (Heb. 5:6)

Psalm 118

“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.” (118:22) (1 Pt. 2:7)

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (118:26) (Mt. 21:9)

E. We are instructed to sing the Psalms ...

1. to God

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” (Col. 3:16)

2. to each other

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.” (Eph. 5:19)

## Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a favorite psalm? What makes it special to you? When you think of the Psalms, what comes to mind?

2. What songs do we sing from the Psalms?

The Lord's My Shepherd (23)  
Oh Lord, Our Lord (8)  
Praise the Lord (148)  
Hallelujah Praise Jehovah (148)  
Come Let Us Sing (95)  
Unto Thee Oh Lord (25)

As A Deer (42)  
Create In Me A Clean Heart (51)  
I Will Enter His Gates (100)  
Step By Step (63)  
We Exalt Thee (97)

3. How has the music of cultures throughout the ages influenced the music of the church? (even music today)?

4. What are some ways the church could make better use of the Psalms?

5. What are your hopes for this study of the Psalms? What would you like to learn?

6. Begin to think about a psalm you would like to know better. Pick a psalm that you would like to memorize and reflect on it.

## Additional Activity

Distribute the Scripture addresses for the psalms listed in the discussion of how the Psalms teach us about Jesus (X. D. above). Ask individuals or small groups to read those Scriptures and answer the following questions:

a. Is this psalm talking about Jesus or someone else?

b. How do the New Testament writers interpret this verse?

## **PSALMS EVALUATION**

1. How do the Psalms foretell the work of Jesus? Offer a few examples of specific quotes in the psalms that point to the life or work of Jesus.
  
2. List several names of God used in the Psalms that have special meaning to you. Why are they significant?
  
3. Write out two psalms here of different types.
  
4. List three New Testament passages that quote from the Psalms (or write three Psalms quotes that New Testament authors used in their writing.)
  
5. For each situation below list a psalm that would fit the situation:
  - a) a friend is suffering from chronic pain and has been praying for healing that hasn't happened.
  
  - b) while worshipping with your family on a vacation in the mountains you want to read something that fits the context of your environment.
  
  - c) you've just received good news that God answered specific prayers for recovery.
  
  - d) you are faced with a difficult decision about a job transfer and don't know what to do but you do trust that God will be with you.
  
6. Give an example of how you have imitated (or could imitate) God's compassion for the poor and needy.
  
7. List the names of several people in this class you have come to know better because of this study.