

Praying Through the Psalms

Adapted from *Praying With The Psalms*

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Why Pray through the Psalms?

Why should we root our prayer life deeply in the psalms and prayers of the Bible?

The Psalms teach us to pray through imitation and response

We do not choose God; God chooses us (John 15:16). Everything we do toward God is a response to God's initiative. Prayer, therefore, is primarily answering speech. 1 In 2 Samuel 7, God sent David a prophetic word (vv. 4-16) and David then responded with a prayer, saying, literally: "O Sovereign LORD, you have spoken . . . so your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer" (vv. 19, 27). God's speech creates real prayer. Real prayer is always an answer to God's revelation. The Psalms are both prayer and revelation about God — the perfect soil for learning prayer.

The Psalms take us deep into our own hearts

They do so a thousand times faster than we would ever go if left to ourselves. The Psalms also force us to deal with deep suffering and pain before we arrive there. They force us to look at praise and thanksgiving when we don't feel them at all. All exercise is "against the grain" and so the Psalms pull and push us emotionally beyond our normal capacities.

The Psalms force us to deal with God as he is

This is the most important reason of all. There is a difference between praying to an unknown God whom we hope to discover in our praying, and praying to a known God, revealed through Israel and Jesus Christ, who speaks our language. The Psalms were not prayed by people trying to understand themselves. They are not the record of people searching for the meaning of life. They were prayed by people who understood that God had everything to do with them. God, not their feelings, was the center. God, not their souls, was the issue. God, not the meaning of life, was critical. Feelings, souls, and meanings were not excluded — they are very much in evidence — but they are not the reason for the prayers.

How:

1. Choose a Psalm and read it once for comprehension.
2. Pray the psalm several times.
 - (a) First, simply pray some of the petitions/statements to God, very close to the language in the psalm, but also somewhat in your own words.
 - (b) Next, turn some of the statements into petitions to God. This will mean that even more of the prayer will be in your own words.
 - (c) Do some praising, repenting, and supplication on the basis of some of the psalm's statements. This will be completely in your own words.

Categories of Psalms

- Aspiration/longing
5, 17, 27, 63, 67, 84, 86, 101, 108, 119, 123, 126, 131, 141
- Confession of sin
6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 79, 90, 106, 130, 143
- Confidence
(In God) 4, 7, 9, 11, 16, 23, 25, 26, 28, 31, 41, 52, 56-57, 61-62, 71, 91, 118, 121, 129, 144
(In God's Kingdom) 46, 48, 68, 76, 82, 87, 93, 94, 125, 132-134
- Creation/glory/holiness
8, 19.5, 24, 65, 99, 104, 115, 145, 148
- God's Wisdom/Sovereignty
29, 47, 89.5, 96, 97, 139.5, 146
- Grace/Redemption/mercy
19.5, 98, 100, 111, 113, 114, 117, 122, 147, 149
- Lament
(Deserted by God) 13, 22, 39, 42-44, 60, 69, 73-74, 77, 79-80, 85, 88, 89.5, 137
(Despair) 39, 88
(Enemies) 3, 10, 12, 35, 54-55, 59, 64, 70, 83, 94, 102, 109, 120, 140, 142-43
(Justice cries) 58, 109, 137, 139.5
- Royal/Messianic
2, 20, 21, 22, 45, 72, 110, 118

- Thanks
18, 30, 34, 40, 66, 75, 78, 103, 105, 107, 116, 124, 136, 138
- Wisdom
1, 14, 15, 36, 37, 49, 50, 53, 81, 112, 119, 127, 128
- Worship itself
33, 67, 92, 95, 135, 150