

Psalms: Prayers of the Heart

Intro:

People look into mirrors to see how they look; people look into the psalms to find out who they are. The Psalms are an excellent way to discover ourselves, they show us the shape of our souls, realities deep with in us and help us to present ourselves before God as honestly and thoroughly as we are able.

The Psalms are poetry and Psalms are prayer at the same time. We need to keep this in mind as we read the Psalms otherwise we may misuse or misunderstand the Psalms. Poetry is language that is descriptive, it is language that is used with intensity. Poetry tells us what our busy lives, eyes and ears miss around us and with in us. Poetry helps us to see reality when it is hard to see. Knowing this will help us as we read the Psalms to not be primarily looking for ideas about God in the Psalms or for moral conduct but we will find what it means to be human beings before God.

Prayer is language used in relation to God. It gives words to what we sense or want or respond to God. God speaks to us, our answers are our prayers. The Psalms are prayers, they are provided not to teach us about God but to train us in responding to him. We don't learn the Psalms until we are praying them. We need to keep this in mind as we read and study the Psalms – poetry requires that we deal with our actual humanity and prayer requires that we deal with God, who is determined on nothing less than the total renovation of our lives.

The Psalms are different to other parts of scripture in that the main question we need to ask when we come to the Psalms is not "What is God saying to me" rather "How do I answer the God who speaks to me". In the course of learning language we learn how to answer our parents, our teachers, our employees and our friends but we do not get very much practice in answering God. The Psalms train us in answering God. Therefore when we come to the Psalms we are learning to pray not to study, although the two are interconnected. (adapted from Eugene Peterson)

This is only an introduction to the Psalms and I pray it will give you the motivation to spend more time immersing yourself in the Psalms and in so doing immersing yourself in God and responding to Him.

Psalm 3 **Praying our Trouble**

Psalm 3 is the first prayer of the psalter, The first two psalms were like introductions that prepared us for prayer. Prayer begins with the realization that we can not help ourselves, so we must reach out to God. "Help" is the basic prayer. We are in deep, deep trouble and if God cannot get us out we are lost, if God can get us out we are saved. If we don't know we need help, prayer is just on the side, a matter of mood or good manners. But the moment we know we are in trouble prayer becomes a matter of life or death.

- 1) What is the worst trouble you were in last week? Where did you go for help? Did you get help?

- 2) Read Psalm 3. This was written by David when he fled from his son Absalom. Briefly summarize this story from 2 Sam 15-18

- 3) Deliver/deliverance is a keyword in this psalm. What do we learn about the nature of deliverance through its various uses here?

- 4) David's prayer naturally divides into 5 sections: v1-2,3-4,5-6,7 and 8. Name each section with a single word or phrase.

What progression do you see from each section to the next?

- 5) David describes his foes in verse 1-2, Do you ever feel overwhelmed or threatened by people or circumstances? Give an example

- 6) What action is God described as taking in this Psalm?

Are you used to thinking of God in these ways? Explain

7) What actions is David described as taking in the psalm?

To what extent do these characterize you when you are in trouble?

8) The emotional centre of the Psalm is v5. Take this seriously and ponder its significance. When we are sleeping, what are we doing? What is God doing?

9) What Kind of trouble are you in right now?

10) What in this psalm do you think will help you to pray your trouble?

11) Take an image or phrase from Psalm 3 and use it to pray your trouble. Plan to continue during the week.

Growing in Relationship:

Share how your week has gone, how have your times with God been going, have you had any opportunities to share Jesus with people, how is your prayer life going?

Growing through Prayer:

From the study and what you have shared about your week spend time praying with each other.

Psalm 8
Praying our Creation

Prayer is an orienting act. We begin to discover who we are when we realize where we are. Disorientation is a terrible experience. If we cannot locate our place we are in confusion and anxiety. We are also in danger, for we may act inappropriately. While praying Psalm 8 we find out where we are and some important aspects of who we are.

- 1) When traveling have you ever woken up and not known where you were? It is very disorientating. What does it feel like to be disoriented?

- 2) Read psalm 8, note the first and last sentences. What is the significance of these "bracketing" sentences for the psalm even before we know its contents?

- 3) Why do you think the psalmist contrasts what children and infants say with what foes and avengers say in verse 2?

- 4) Browse through the psalm and note every word that refers to what God has created. How do these things reveal God's glory?

- 5) Benard Logan once said "when an animal doesn't have anything to do they go to sleep; when humans don't have anything to do they ask questions." What kind of question do we find at almost the exact centre of this psalm. (v4)

What kind of answer is adequate to it?

- 6) What evidence do we have that God is mindful of us, that he cares for us?

- 7) Verse 5 comments on our position in creation. How does it contrast with positions we are put in by Non-biblical authorities?

- 8) Verse 6 comments on our responsibility over creation. In what ways do you feel and not feel responsibility for your environment?
- 9) The psalm lists 6 creatures (v7-8) over which we have entrusted responsibility. Name 6 other items over which you accept responsibility.
- 10) "Ruler" and "under his feet" (v6) can be twisted into excuses to exploit and pillage. What is there in this psalm to prevent such twisting?
- 11) How does psalm 8 compare with the way you view yourself?
- 12) How does this psalm help orientate you in the world?

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Psalm 51
Praying our Sin

Along with the basic fact that God made us good (Ps 8) is the equally basic fact that we have gone wrong. We pray our sins to get to the truth about ourselves and to find out how God treats sinners. Our experience of sin does not consist in doing some bad things but in being bad. It is a fundamental condition of our existence, not a temporary lapse into error. Praying our sin isn't resolving not to sin anymore, it is discovering what God has resolved to do with us as sinners.

- 1) As Christians we know we are sinful. Why then is it so painful to be confronted with a specific sin?

- 2) Read Psalm 51. The Psalm title refers this prayer to David's adultery with Bathsheba. Briefly summarize the details of this episode in 2 Sam 11-12.

- 3) How many different words are used for the word sin in his prayer?

What does this tell us about the nature of sin?

- 4) What is God asked to do about sin? (count and name the verbs)

- 5) If I have been a sinner from birth (v5) sin must be something more than doing wrong things. What else could it be?

- 6) V1-9 exhibit a heightened awareness of sin. What do they make you aware of?

- 7) V10 is the centre sentence. How does it centre our prayer?

What does Jesus have do with this?

- 8) Forgiveness is an internal action with external consequences. What are some of them? (v13-17)

Again how does Jesus fulfill these verse?

- 9) What do you understand as a "broken and contrite heart" to be? (v17)

What is your experience of this condition?

- 10) According to v18-19, what is the relationship between personal forgiveness and social righteousness?

- 11) Ps 51 makes us aware of how sinful we are, and it makes us less actively sinful. How do you see it working that way in you?

- 12) In your prayer time be quiet before God, in silence confess your sins to him and accept his forgiveness and grace.

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Psalm 103
Praying our Salvation

What God has done for us far exceeds anything we have done for or against Him. The summary word for this excessive, undeserved, unexpected act by God is salvation. Prayer explores the country of salvation, tramping the contours, smelling the flowers, touching the corners. There is more to do than recognize the sheer fact of salvation and witness to it, there are unnumbered details of grace, of mercy, of blessing to be appreciated and savoured. Prayer is the means by which we do this.

- 1) Think of one of the best things that ever happened to you. Describe some of the details why it was good.

- 2) Read Psalm 103. This psalm expresses the experience (not the doctrine) of salvation. This is what it feels like to be saved. What are your general impressions of the psalm?

- 3) Note the first and last sentences. Like Psalm 8, how does this affect your understanding of the psalm's contents?

- 4) Salvation is more richly complex than we sometimes think. What five actions of God add up to salvation? (v3-5)

How does Jesus fulfill all these?

- 5) What astounding statements about God does the psalmist make in v8-14?

How does Rom 8:31-39 add to this?

From this, what particular statement expands what is puny in your thinking?

- 6) Carefully observe the contrast between us (v15-16) and God (v17-19). Does this make you feel better or worse about yourself? Explain.

- 7) Praying our salvation concludes by praising the saving God. The praise is orchestrated in verse 20-22. Who are the players in this hierarchy of praise?

Who else would you call into the orchestra

- 8) What does it mean for you to be saved?

What dimensions of salvation would you like to explore further?

How does this psalm help you to be motivated to share your salvation with others?

- 9) What personal notes of praise can you add to this psalm? Be sure to pray these with your group as an orchestra of prayer to God.

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Psalm 139
Praying our Purpose

Why are we here? Am I an accident? Am I only slime plus time? Am I supposed to be here? What am I supposed to do why I am here? These are big questions that are answered and given expression in this beautiful Psalm 139. It is a prayer of praise that locates our whole being and purpose in the wonderful God who has had us in his plan from before time began, who knows us intimately and desires us to walk with him for eternity. It is a prayer of response to God who sees nothing and no one as an accident. When looking at Psalm 139 it seems to break up into 5 sections, v1-12, v13-16, v17-18, v19-22, v23-24.

- 1) Read v1-12, what would you say is the theme of these verses?

- 2) Which verse specifically speaks to you?

- 3) Read Rom 8:35-39, How does this add to your understanding of God and your response to Him?

- 4) Read v13-16 What is your response to these verses?

- 5) How can these truths help you live out each day?

- 6) Verses 17-18 are grand statements about God and His thoughts. How do they enlarge your picture of God?

- 7) How can we gain more insight into God's thoughts?

- 8) When you read v19-22 they seem harsh but remember they are a response of the writer to his circumstances. What does it reveal about David's situation at the time?

What do you think drives David's response?

What can we learn from this in relation to our response to circumstances?

- 9) Verses 23-24 are very revealing requests. How do you feel about laying bear your life before God?
- 10) What do you think gives David the confidence to do this?
- 11) Read John 14:1-7 and then the last part of Psalm 139:24 and write down some practical ways that you can be "lead in the way everlasting"
- 12) What are some practical ways we can help each other in this?
- 13) Take some time this week to lay your life before God, to ask him to search, cleanse, heal, restore, invigorate and to "lead you in the way everlasting".
- 14) Look back over Psalm 139 and write out your own response/prayer to God

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Evans Head/Wardell Presbyterian Church

"To see people's lives transformed into vibrant followers of Jesus"



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Name:

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