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# A “Him-book” Designed by God for You

Psalm 25

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**Main aim:** To introduce the most *unique* book in the Word of God and call God’s people to study, live, and share its truth.

## **Introduction:**

A chance meeting. A new school. A new teacher. A new car. A new home. A new neighbor. A new job. A new spouse. A new baby. A new restaurant. A new friend. Introductions can be both *awkward* and *exciting*. Life is full of uncomfortable, uneasy, and clumsy moments. I remember as a 10-year boy being introduced to Charlie Scott, former point guard for the Phoenix Suns, by my aunt Celeste who was his wife. Talk about bunglesome! I could hardly pronounce my first name.

On the other hand, I remember meeting the late Senator John McCain in my pastor’s office which was exciting for a young man from the ghetto who had never met a figure of public authority higher than a police officer. If you are a 5-year old little boy, it might be a wee AWKWARD to be introduced by your parents to the cutest 5-year old girl who is now your neighbor. But on the other hand, if you are an athlete, from an aspect of the sports world, imagine how EXCITING it would be to be personally introduced to your favorite professional player. Life is full of uncomfortable and clumsy moments.

This morning I want to remove some awkwardness by introducing you to a life-changing book located in the center of your Bible—the book of Psalms.

This message will take a different approach to our normal way of biblical exposition or working our way through a text. Can you envision being given access to a treasury of precious jewels and ancient artifacts? Far greater than anything you would see at the Smithsonian, the book of Psalms has been called “the Treasury of David,” Israel’s most famous king. Luther said, “*the Psalter is a little Bible and the summary of the Old Testament.*” Gerhard said, “*the Psalter is a theatre, where God’s allows us to behold both Himself and His works.*”

Some introductions can be BORING with a capital “B.” No one wants to be bored stiff with unimportant and irrelevant details. R.C. Sproul used to say, “*Whatever you do, don’t bore people with the Bible!*” So, let me cut-to-the-chase by giving you four simple heading to frame your thinking for this introduction. Would you think with me about four simple words:

1. Who? Who wrote the Psalms?
2. What? What are the Psalms, and what are they designed to accomplish?
3. Why? Why do we need to study this book?
4. How? How can we most benefit from the Psalms?

## WHO? Who wrote the Psalms?

Like every book in the Bible, the Psalter claims dual authorship—a *divine Author* and *human authors*. While most other biblical books were written by one person, a few of them claim multiple authors—Proverbs being one example. The Psalms is *unique* in that it was a joint effort of many authors from many diverse experiences of life. It is a literary collection from such men as David (credited with writing 75 of the 150 psalms), Asaph, the sons of Korah, Solomon, Moses, Heman, Ethan, and others. Some believe Ezra wrote some of the Psalms. We will become acquainted with them along the journey.

However, **the primary Author** of this sacred book is *God Himself*. In it, God reveals *Himself*. Oh, refuse to let that one fact escape you during this study. If you don't get anything else, lay hold of this, the psalms teach us about God. In them, the God of glory, the Lord of heaven, opens up the windows of heaven and gives us a glimpse of His majestic being and saving nature! But how? In *His names* and *His actions*. For example:

- In Psalm 1:2, God reveals Himself by the name "Jehovah" LORD.
- In Psalm 2:4, God reveals Himself by the name "Adonai" Lord.
- In Psalm 3:2, God reveals Himself by the name "Elohim" God.
- In Psalm 5:4, God reveals Himself as "El" God.
- In Psalm 7:17, God reveals Himself as "El-yohn" Most High.
- In Psalm 68, as in no other Psalm, God reveals all these names, as well as the familiar name made popular by that song from Amy Grant—El Shaddai, or Shaddai, the Almighty.

In fact, turn to Psalm 68 for a quick survey of the names and action of God in this one chapter.

In verse 1, He is a *Conqueror*. In verse 4, He is exalted as the *self-existent, independent, eternal, and unchangeable Jehovah*. But just in case you misunderstand the nature of this One who is God of *Sinai* and the *sanctuary*, David reminds us in verse 5 that He is a "*father of the fatherless and the judge for the widows*." We may give preference to those of rank and privilege and despise or neglect the poor man on the street, but not God. He is no respecter of persons, for He is *full of lovingkindness and tender mercies*.

In verse 6, He is a *Home for the lonely* and a *Liberator for the prisoner*. In verse 8, He is a *Provider for His creatures*. In verse 11, He is a *King who commands*, and there is no army that He cannot rebuke, and no armada that He cannot bring to nothing. In verse 17, *He is exalted above all in holiness*. In verse 19, *He is a consistent burden bearer and a God of salvation and all kinds of deliverances*. Death is not a monarch, but a servant of God, and in verse 24, we are called to *adore God as the King of kings*. In verse 28, God reveals Himself as *the One who commands strength and speaks in power*. *God is exalted* in verse 33, as we are like worms crawling upon the earth. *He alone is strong* in verse 34—so strong that He cannot be resisted. Angels have strength, but it is all derived and limited. *God is majestic*; none is as high as God is high. *He is holy*, and no attribute is more dreadful to sinners than His holiness. He closes in verse 35 by exclaiming, "*O God, You are awesome from Your sanctuary...Blessed by God!*"

**By way of application:** Now what shall we do with this kind of truth? There is one application that we must not forget: Because of who God is, His Word and His worship are suited to beget *awe* and *obedience*. Nothing is more offensive and irreverent than to lack respect and love for the God above. For this reason, one of the marks of true and acceptable worship is a profound sense of reverence for God in worship and obedience to His commands.

One of the great insights that Daniel Block lifted out from Deuteronomy 6 and 10 is that "*if we refuse to live a life of worship during the week, God rejects the worship that we bring on the Lord's day*." It is one of the

greatest misunderstood truths in the Bible. The first example we have in the Bible is seen in the account of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. God rejected Cain's worship and offering, not only because it was the wrong "kind" of offering, but because God rejected him. If you look at the text carefully, it says, "And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard" (Gen.4:4b-5a). The point is that God calls us to worship Him not just with our offerings, or our attendance, but with our lives (Cf. Rom.12:1-2).

## WHAT? What are the Psalms?

The book of Psalms is *a book of poetic praises* with 150 chapters. The Hebrew title of this book means "songs of praise," while the Greek title, Psalmoi, has come to mean "sacred songs sung to musical accompaniment."

Thus, the Psalms is a collection of worship songs sung to God by the people of Israel with music accompaniment. The collection of these 150 psalms into one book serve as *the first hymnbook for God's people*. It is the largest book in the Bible (150 chapters), and the book of Isaiah is a distant second (66 chapters). It contains the largest chapter in the Bible, a unit of 176 verses which contain more verses than many other short books of the Bible. Written over a span of 900 to 1000 years, the entire collection is traditionally divided into five "books," possibly to mirror the five books of the Torah—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The literary style of the Psalms is called *Hebrew poetry*, which is a form of communication that is different than *narrative, prophecy, epistle, parable, or apocalyptic* literature. Hebrew poetry conveys God's message in potent expressions that are colorful, emotional, vivid, picturesque, and concise. English poetry is based on *rhyme and beat*; for example, when most of us think of rhyme and beat, we think of rap music.

In west Philadelphia born and raised  
On the playground was where I spent most of my days  
Chillin out maxin' relaxin' all cool  
And all shootin some b-ball outside of school  
When a couple of guys who were up to no good  
Started making trouble in my neighborhood...<sup>1</sup>

And you know how it goes. Hebrew poetry is different. It doesn't use *rhyming*, but *rhythm* and *parallelism*. **Poetic parallelism** states an idea in the first line and then reinforces it with an array of literary devices in the second line.

Sometimes a psalm *repeats* or *restates* the central idea of the first line for emphasis or dramatic effect. At other times, the first line is stated, and then the second line gives us a *contrast* to drive home the point by stating the direct opposite. The word "but" will often signal the contrast (Ps.1:6; 37:9). **Synthetic parallelism** states the point in the first line and then *advances* or *develops* it in the second line (Ps.1:1-2, Ps.19:7-9).

**Emblematic parallelism** is easy to detect because the words "like" or "as" are used (Ps.42:1). There are other kinds of parallelism that we will learn about, but I fear that I am treading on the borders of boredom, so let me shift by bringing you into an illustration to help.

I was never a "murder mystery" kind of person. Shows like "Murder She Wrote" or books by Agatha Christy carried no appeal or temptation for me. However, author Heather Dubrow tells of an interesting "murder mystery" in a piece she wrote entitled, "Murder at Marplethorpe." Let's see if you can solve this one with me.

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<sup>1</sup> DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*

The clock on the mantelpiece said ten thirty, but someone had suggested recently that the clock was wrong. As the figure of the dead woman lay on the bed in the front room, a no less silent figure glided rapidly from the house. The only sounds to be heard were the ticking of that clock and the loud wailing of an infant.

Who is the dead woman, and how did she die?

Who is the silent figure?

Why is the infant crying?

What is the significance of the time?

If you are an avid reader of mysteries, you may have already identified **the dead woman** as *the murder victim* and suspect that **the silent figure** is *the murderer*. **The baby is likely crying** because *the violent murder has awakened him or her*. **The clock's accuracy** is significant because it marks the probable time of the murder.

Clear your mind of this story now, and I'm going to read the same paragraph again, except this time under the title: *The Personal History of David Marplethorpe*. Got it. Here we go.

The clock on the mantelpiece said ten thirty, but someone had suggested recently that the clock was wrong. As the figure of the dead woman lay on the bed in the front room, a no less silent figure glided rapidly from the house. The only sounds to be heard were the ticking of that clock and the loud wailing of an infant.

Who is the dead woman, and how did she die? Who is the silent figure? Why is the infant crying? What is the significance of the time?

If we ask ourselves the same questions, with that simple title, you'll come up with different answers. Since biographies usually open with the birth of the hero, it is most likely that the baby is David Marplethorpe. The dead woman must be his mother who has tragically died in childbirth; the silent figure is probably the midwife leaving the scene. The time is the time of Marplethorpe's birth. It might be surprising to realize that our interpretation of a text, is to a great extent determined by our identification of its genre.

This rather lengthy example from Dubrow's book illustrates well the importance of genre identification. It determines the reading strategy of a particular text. If you think this brief story is a *murder mystery*, you will read it one way. If you think it is a *biography*, you will interpret it differently. When we read the Psalms, it will be important to determine what *type of psalm* we are reading.

There are seven literary types.

1. **Wisdom Psalms**—these provide practical guidelines for godly living and give pointed direction for righteous living in the pursuit of God's will. (*Ps.1, 37, 119*)
2. **Messianic Psalms**—these describe the coming rule of Christ and portray Him as the undisputed sovereign King over heaven and earth. (*Ps.2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 47; 68; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144*)
3. **Lament Psalms**—these are highly emotionally charged psalms which record the writer's heart cry to God for divine deliverance from trouble and pain. They are filled with realism and anguish and teach us that your anguish, as painful as it is, is a good sign. It is a sign of faith. Anguish is not normal, but it is not unusual. In the lament psalms, an assumption is being made, and it is this: our misery may arouse and move God to action and mercy (this is no psychological hoodwinking). Lament is the language of the soul (Steven Mitchell) and teaches us that we are allowed to talk to God like this and

have questions for God, but that is different than questioning God. (Ps.3-7; 12-13; 22; 25-28- 35; 38-40; 42-44; 51; 54-57; 59-61; 63-64; 69-71; 74; 79-80; 83; 85-86; 88; 90; 102; 109; 120; 123; 130; 140-143).

4. **Imprecatory Psalms**—Dale Ralph Davis said that the imprecatory psalms are like the embarrassing relatives to the church. We don't want them to be read or heard in the worship. However, imprecatory psalms call upon the Lord to do what He has already said He would do. (Ps.7; 35; 40; 55; 58-59; 69; 79; 109; 137; 139; 144)
5. **Thanksgiving Psalms**—here we will discover that God's people are to express deep gratitude for God's abundant blessings, whether individual or national. (Ps.8; 18; 19; 29; 30; 32-34- 36; 40; 41; 66; 103-106; 111; 113; 117; 124; 129; 135; 138; 146-148; 150)
6. **Pilgrimage Psalms**—these are festive psalms which promote a celebrative mood of praise for God as Israel recalled His goodness to them as they traveled to Jerusalem for their annual feasts. (Ps.43; 46; 48; 76; 84; 87; 120-134)
7. **Enthronement Psalms**—these are awe-inspiring, majestic psalms which describe Gods sovereign rule over all His creation and the providential care by which He sustains, controls, and directs all He has made. (Ps.48; 93; 96-99)

What are the Psalms? They are the "Him-book" of the church. They allow us to eavesdrop on Israel's worship at its highest and the righteous' prayers at its lowest to give us a "realism of true faith." Dear friends, we don't have to always look like everything is okay. In a fallen world, it often is not, but God still reigns in the heart of His people.

- Hengstenberg—"The Psalms are expressions of holy feeling, which can be understood by those only who have become alive to such feeling."
- Horne—"The Psalms present religion to us in the most engaging dress: communicating truths which philosophy could never investigate, in a style that poetry can never equal."
- Athanasius—calls it, "an epitome of the whole Scripture."

The Psalms not only instruct us, but they also record the heart experience of believers. Within them, "every emotion whichever swept over the keyboard of the human soul" finds a place. The Psalms appeal to the whole person; they demand a total response.

## **WHY? Why do we need to study this book?**

The Psalms inform our intellect, arouse our emotions, direct our wills, and stimulate our imaginations. When we read the Psalms with faith, we come away changed and not simply informed. Of course, the whole of Scripture is radically life-changing, but the Psalms address the modern Christian in a more direct way.

No matter where a person is in the Christian life, whether up or down, soaring or struggling, there is a psalm that speaks directly to the spiritual state of his/her heart.

There are three reasons why we ought to study the psalms personally and corporately.

1. To teach us about God

"The psalms are a verbal portrait gallery of God, in that many of them provide us with a striking picture of God. While none of these pictures is complete in itself—and indeed all of them together do not give us a comprehensive picture of God—they do provide a true glimpse of the nature of our God and our relationship to Him."—**Derek Kidner**

The Psalms provide us with instruction about God and our relationship to Him.

2. To teach us about worship

Dale Ralph Davis quoting Eugene Peterson once said, "the church has lost how to pray, because it has lost its need for the psalms."

"As we read the Psalms, we are entering into the sanctuary—the place where God meets men and women in a special way. We will see that the conversation between God and His people is direct, intense, intimate, and, above all, honest."—**Tremper Longman**

"In the Psalms, we looked into the heart of all the saints, and we seem to gaze into fair pleasure gardens—into heaven itself, indeed—where blooms in sweet, refreshing, gladdening flowers of holy and happy thoughts about God and all His benefits."—**Martin Luther**

"What various and resplendent riches are contained in this treasury, it were difficult to find words to describe....it is an anatomy of all parts of the soul; for there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror."—**John Calvin**

3. To teach us about the reality of faith

The Psalms are hard and easy to study. They are hard because they make us grapple with the hard realities of life and faith and God...but they are easy because they allow us to cheat by dropping in on other people's prayer and worship. The first Psalm written was Psalm 90, by Moses. The last Psalm written was 127. But they are not arranged like that because life is like that. It doesn't always line up like you planned, but it always lines up with God's plan.

The Psalms were written to guide believers in the proper worship of God and, when they are used rightly, they are to be:

- Sung devotionally. (*Eph.5:19; Col.3:16*)
- Prayed fervently. (*Acts 4:25-26*)
- Preached evangelistically. (*Acts 2:25-28, 31, 34-35*)
- Taught expositionally. (*Luke 24:44; Rom.3:10-14, 18*)

The primary purpose of the Book of Psalms is found in its intensely God-centered focus to direct our hearts toward Him in every experience of life.

## HOW? How can we most benefit from the Psalms?

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg and ignited the spark of the Reformation. In the years preceding the Reformation, Luther was chiefly studying and teaching two books of the Bible. Almost everyone associates Martin Luther with the Book of Romans, particularly Romans 1:17, which reads, "The just shall live by faith." But Luther was converted not only by his study of Romans, but also by his study of the Psalms.

On August 16, 1513, he began lecturing on the first book of Scripture that he had ever taught—the Book of Psalms. These two books of inspired Scripture—Romans and Psalms—radically changed the direction of his life.

The Psalms gave Luther an unconquerable spirit and indomitable will to trust God, no matter what happened to him. In his latter years, during the traumatic days of the Reformation, Luther often became discouraged and suffered bouts of despair and even depression. The entire world, he felt, was against him. But in those dark and difficult hours, he would turn to his beloved coworker Philip Melancthon and say, "Come, Philip, let us sing the Psalms." They would often sing a version of Psalm 46 set to music:

A sure stronghold our God is He,  
A timely shield and weapon;  
Our help He'll be and set us free  
From every will can happen.

We know this song today as "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*"—perhaps one of the greatest hymns of the church.

A mighty fortress is our God,  
a bulwark never failing;  
our helper he amid the flood  
of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
doth seek to work us woe;  
his craft and power are great,  
and armed with cruel hate,  
on earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,  
our striving would be losing,  
were not the right man on our side,  
the man of God's own choosing?  
Dost ask who that may be?  
Christ Jesus, it is He;  
Lord Sabaoth, His name,  
from age to age the same,  
and He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled,  
should threaten to undo us,  
we will not fear, for God hath willed  
His truth to triumph through us.  
The Prince of Darkness grim,

we tremble not for him;  
his rage we can endure,  
for lo, his doom is sure;  
one little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers,  
no thanks to them, abideth;  
the Spirit and the gifts are ours,  
thru Him who with us sideth.  
Let goods and kindred go,  
this mortal life also;  
the body they may kill;  
God's truth abideth still;  
His kingdom is forever.

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