

## Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

*Psalms* | *Worshiping Through the Seasons of Life*

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We are continuing our sermon series called “*Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet*” where we are going through the entire Bible one book at a time. Each Sunday, we are attempting to look at a book in the Bible as if we were looking at it through the window of an airplane. Our **goals** are:

1. To get a sense of what each book in the Bible is about.
  - a. *What is the main message of this book?*
2. To view how God is making Himself known in each book.
  - a. *What does this book teach us about God?*
3. To see a reflection of ourselves in each book.
  - a. *What does this book teach us about ourselves?*
4. To catch a glimpse of Jesus.
  - a. *How does this book point to Jesus?*
5. To get a vision of how every book in the Bible is connected to the one story that God has written called: ***the Gospel of Jesus Christ***.
  - a. *How is this book connected to the rest of the story?*

So far, the hardest book to preach (in an overview series like this) has been **Genesis** because it has so many crucial stories, and it covers so many years of human history (*over 2,000 years*).

But I think the second hardest book to preach this way (at least for me) is the **Psalms**. Why?<sup>1</sup>

1. It is the **longest** book in the Bible (150 Psalms)
  - Which means there is a lot to see from our window at 30,000 feet.
2. It is the **most-quoted** book in the NT<sup>2</sup>
  - Which means there are many passages that the NT writers thought were really important.
3. It was written by at least 6 different **authors**
  - Which means there are at least 6 different backstories that would be helpful in getting a deeper sense of the various contexts in which the psalms were written.
4. The Psalms span the gap of the **human experience**
  - In other words, they deal with every emotion known to man: everything from total inward peace and rest to full blown rage and horror – and everything in-between.
5. The Psalms deal with a broad range of **topics**: music, suffering, history, relationships, theology, prayer, promises, leadership, joy, sorrow, faith, fear, wisdom, foolishness...
  - Which, again, means that there is just a lot to see when you are trying to look at the whole book at once.

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<sup>1</sup> Another thing that makes it hard to preach one message on the Psalms is that this many Christians’ **favorite** book in the Bible...and I know that this is true for a number of us here at North Center.

<sup>2</sup> Depending on what counts as a “quotation” the NT quotes the Psalms somewhere around 100 times.

So, all that to say, my main goal this morning is not that we would leave feeling like we've got a solid grasp on the Psalms. **My main goal** is simply that we would leave with a growing hunger for God's Word and a desire to spend time this year reading the Psalms for ourselves.

## PRAY

The word "psalms" comes from the Greek word "ψαλμός" which simply means "a song of praise."

- Some of these praise songs sound like **shouts of celebration** (*Psalm 100, 150*)
- Some sound like **prayers** (*Psalm 143*)
- Some sound like **sermons** (*Psalm 1, 19*)
- Some of them sound like **screams** pouring from a shattered heart (*Psalm 61*)
- Some of them are incredibly **detailed** and **intricate** (*Psalm 119*)
- And some are **simple** (*Psalm 117*)
- Some of the songs are **directed to God** (*Psalm 108*)
- Some are **directed at others** (*Psalm 134*)
- And some are directed to the writer's own soul: **self-talk** (*Psalm 42*)
- Some were sung as people were **walking up** to worship (*Psalm 121, 122*)<sup>3</sup>
- Some were sung by those whose **hearts couldn't sink any lower** (*Psalm 22*)

So, when you look out the window at the Psalms, one of the things you see right away is that the landscape is so diverse and colorful. These "songs of praise" have all kinds of **variety**.

As I mentioned, these psalms weren't written by just one person, **nor** were they written at the same time. They stretch all the way back to the time of Moses to after the Jews were released from exile in Babylon (e.g., **Psalm 107**) which means that the Psalms were written over a time period of about 1,000 years.<sup>4</sup>

- Moses wrote one (**Psalm 90**)
- Solomon wrote at least two (**Psalms 72** and **127**)
- Asaph<sup>5</sup> wrote at least twelve (my favorite of his is **Psalm 77**)
- But the majority of the psalms (at least 73) were written by King David.

At some point after God's people had returned from exile in Babylon, somebody (*maybe Ezra?*) took all these individual psalms and began putting them together into a single book.

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<sup>3</sup> A "Song of Ascent" is the title given to 15 of the Psalms (120–134), and many scholars believe that these were sung by worshippers as they ascended the road to Jerusalem to celebrate the works of God. Others think that they were sung by the Levite singers as they ascended the 15 steps into the Temple. And there are other views ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song\\_of\\_Ascents#:~:text=Song%20of%20Ascents%20is%20a,%C4%83%C5%8D%E1%B9%AF%2C%20%22a%20song%20regarding](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_of_Ascents#:~:text=Song%20of%20Ascents%20is%20a,%C4%83%C5%8D%E1%B9%AF%2C%20%22a%20song%20regarding)).

<sup>4</sup> <https://biblehub.com/timeline/old.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Asaph was one of the worship leaders appointed by King David to serve in the House of the Lord (**1 Chr 6:31, 39**).

So, now, when we talk about “the Psalms”, we are talking about a collection of songs written to teach and to encourage God’s people (both as individuals and as a community) in how to worship God in every situation.<sup>6</sup>

Early on in the process of putting this collection of psalms together, they were grouped into five “books” – which some people think was meant to reflect the five books of the Law.<sup>7</sup>

- Book One | 1–41
- Book Two | 42–72
- Book Three | 73–89
- Book Four | 90–106
- Book Five | 107–150

The first two psalms (**Psalms 1–2**) function as an introduction to the book, and the final 5 psalms (**Psalms 146–150**) are like the grand finale.

That’s a very basic look at the structure of the book: collection of songs written to help us worship God through every season of life.

Since there is no way for us to look at all the different types of songs in a single sermon (well...we could, but that would just make it a really long sermon), I think it would be helpful for us to look at how the Psalms help us worship God when we are at the lowest points in our lives.

## **PSALM 22** (A Psalm of David)

### **READ 22:1–2**

Q. What do you notice about David’s words here?

1. The first thing we notice is that these words aren’t describing reality.
  - God has *not* forsaken David (**Deut. 31:6**)
  - And God is *not* far from helping David (**Psalm 46:1**)
    - In fact, in the very next psalm (**Psalm 23**) David says that, even if he is on the verge of death, he will not fear because he knows that God is with him.

Q. So, if these words aren’t describing reality, what is this psalm doing in our Bible?

A. It’s teaching us how to be honest with God about how we really feel. It’s teaching us **emotional honesty**.

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<sup>6</sup> I am here leaning on John Crutchfield’s definition in (DeRouchie, What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About, 336).

<sup>7</sup> Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

- David prays like this because, in this moment, it *feels* like God has forsaken him, and it *feels* like God is a long way away from helping him.
- And so David is telling God what is true about his feelings.

Psalms like this (i.e., **Psalm 22**) are so important for me because **this kind of emotional honesty doesn't come easy for me**. I don't like hurting people's feelings, and it feels to me that this kind of honesty would really hurt God's feelings.

- **Theologically:** I know that God has promised never to forsake me, and so it feels inappropriate to accuse God of forsaking me – even if that's exactly how I feel.
- **Emotionally:** I know how I would feel if somebody I loved deeply accused me of abandoning them...and so it feels unloving for me to accuse God of this.

So even if I really do feel forsaken by God, my *head* and my *heart* will keep me from being honest about it in my prayers. Which means: (1) either I won't pray at all, or (2) I won't be honest when I pray.

The psalms of lament (like **Psalm 22**) are so precious to me because:

1. They help me to keep praying even in my lowest moments.
2. They keep me from treating God as if His emotions were as fragile as mine.

Is your heart full of hope or joy? *Tell Him.*

Is your heart broken or bitter? *Tell Him.*

He can take it! He wants to take it.<sup>8</sup>

And if you don't know how to express your emotions to God, the psalms can help.

1. So (first) the Psalms of Lament teach us how to pray with **honesty**
2. And (second) they also teach us how to pray with **hope**.

Notice that, although David starts with his feelings, he doesn't stay there.

### READ **PSALM 22:3-5**

David starts with **honesty** about how He feels, but then he moves to **hope** about who God is and what God has done in the past.

- Yes, it is vital that we be honest with God about how we feel, but it is equally as vital that we not stay there.
  - There is emotional honesty in verses 1–2, but there is not hope there.
  - The hope comes when David moves from expressing the truth about his feelings to the truth about his God.

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 5:7.

This beauty of the Psalms of Lament is that (1) they teach us how to be honest and raw and vulnerable and transparent about our pain, but (2) then they don't allow us to set up camp in the shadow of our own pity. The Psalmist forces us to lift our eyes to the only source of hope: God.<sup>9</sup>

1. Pray with honesty
2. Pray with hope

Thirdly, notice David's *trajectory* in this psalm.

1. He starts by praying for himself

### **READ 22:1, 11, 19**

He begins by praying for himself, but his heart doesn't get stuck there. As he prays, his heart begins to move outward.

### **READ 22:22–25**

As he prays, his desires move beyond himself, and he begins to think about his brothers & sisters: all those who worship God along with him.

This is called praying with *humility*, because as others begin to increase in his thoughts, thoughts of himself begin to decrease:

- He starts out thinking exclusively about his own suffering, but then as he begins to share that space in his heart with other believers, he is no longer thinking exclusively about himself.

But his trajectory doesn't stop here!

### **READ 22:27–29**

1. His thoughts move from himself
2. To other believers
3. To the ends of the world

What started as a man venting his honest emotions about God has become a man voicing the hopeful expectation of what God will do (not just in his immediate situation) but in drawing people (from every class) to worship Him all across the globe.

But then his heart makes one final move outward!

### **READ 22:30–31**

He finishes his psalm by speaking of hope for future generations (all across the world) who have not yet even been born!

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<sup>9</sup> See Crutchfield in DeRouchie, *What the OT Authors Really Cared About*, 345.

Whatever specific situation he was personally wrestling with when he began praying, that isn't where he ends.

- He ends, not thinking just about himself, but thinking about people all across the globe.
- And he ends, not thinking about his personal situation, but thinking about the worship of God.

That's what it looks like to pray with humility!<sup>10</sup> The Psalms teach us to worship God in every season of our life – whether it feels like we are in the presence of God where there is fullness of joy (**Psalm 16:11**) or whether it feels like God has totally forsaken us (**Psalm 22:1**).

The Psalms teach us to pray...

1. With honesty
2. With hope
3. With humility

And finally, they teach us to pray with Him.

Where else in the Bible do we hear the prayer, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Answer: from the lips of Jesus as He was hanging on the cross.

In fact, the suffering of Jesus is written all over this Psalm.

- Psalm 22:1 – Matthew 27:46
- Psalm 22:8 – Matthew 27:43
- Psalm 22:16 – Matthew 27:35
- Psalm 22:18 – Matthew 27:35

Bible scholars have made various claims regarding Jesus' relationship to the Psalms, but the point this morning is simply to say that when you pray through the Psalms...

- You are praying through truths & promises that Jesus had memorized by heart
- You are praying through emotions that Jesus experienced deeper than anybody else,
- And you are praying through prayers that Jesus prayed when He was at the lowest point in human history.

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<sup>10</sup> And this trajectory is such a beautiful model for our own prayers today – no matter what's on our hearts.

1. Begin by praying for yourself.
  - a. Why?
  - b. Because you cannot give what you don't have.
2. Pray for your those in your church family.
3. Pray for unbelievers (in your family, neighborhood, school, work place & those scattered throughout the world).
4. Pray for the next generation.

## **CLOSE**

Last week, Pastor Stan encouraged all of us to be reading through the Bible every day, and he noted that the church has resources for Bible reading plans for those who would like one.

And as you spend time with God in His Word, I would encourage you to consider spending a few minutes praying through the Psalms on a regular basis. And as you pray, ask God to give you the grace to pray...

- With honesty
- With hope
- With humility
- And with Him.

## **PRAY**

As the worship team makes their way to the front, I want to make a few comments on the response song. It's called a "Song of Accent"...