

Rich Humphrey

SESSION 2 | Psalms for When Life is Hard

I. Why Do We Study the Psalms?

The Psalms Teach Us How to Speak to God

“If you want your prayer life to be shaped by the word of God — as I hope you do! — you cannot do better than to make the Psalms a central part of your prayer lives. For in the Psalms we have words that God has given us to speak to God.”

John Piper - Desiring God

¹ In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me! ² Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me! ³ For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me; ⁴ you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. ⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

Psalm 31:1-5

The Psalms Teach Us How to Posture Our Heart In All Life's Seasons

“I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, An Anatomy 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

The Psalms Are Ultimately The Prayers of Christ

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

Psalm 24:3,4

“I have become persuaded that Jesus Christ is the subject and object of the Psalms, that His majestic divine-human person is woven into the warp and woof of the Psalter, and that He is the preeminent singer of Psalms, the focus of the Psalter, and the one without whom the Psalms cannot be understood aright. I therefore want to place Christ in the foreground of our reading of every Psalm and to do so in ways that are shaped by the New Testament”

Christopher Ash

II. Psalms of Lament

What are the Psalms of Lament?

Psalms of lament are prayers and songs that give voice to grief, pain, confusion, fear, or suffering—spoken honestly to God in faith.

¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

Psalm 22:1,2

⁶You have put me in the depths of the pit,
in the regions dark and deep.

⁷ Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.

Psalm 88:6,7

¹How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

Psalm 13:1

The Structure of the Psalms of Lament

- ¹ How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
- ² How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
- ³ Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,
⁴ lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.
- ⁵ But I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
- ⁶ I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Psalm 13

1. Address to God (v.1)

- God is named and approached personally
- Even in distress, the psalmist turns toward God

2. Honest Articulation of Suffering (v.1b - 2)

- Includes pain caused by enemies, injustice, sickness, betrayal, or God's apparent absence

3. Petition (v.3-4)

- A request for God to act
- Often urgent and specific

4. Expression of Trust (v.5)

- Recalling God's character or past faithfulness

5. Praise or Vow of Praise (v.6)

- Confidence that God will be praised when deliverance comes
- Sometimes anticipatory rather than immediate

Why God Gives Us Psalms of Lament

1. He Desires Our Honest Prayers

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

Psalm 62:8

Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears.

Hebrews 5:7

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:6,7

2. The Psalms Give Us a Pattern of Setting Our Minds on the Truth

“Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?”

Martin Lloyd-Jones

3. They Show Us the Immense Love of Our Empathetic Savior

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Psalm 13:1

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Psalm 22:1,2

III. Imprecatory Psalms

What are the Imprecatory Psalms?

Imprecatory psalms are those in which the psalmist calls on God to oppose, restrain, or judge enemies.

²⁴Pour out your indignation upon them,
and let your burning anger overtake them.
²⁵May their camp be a desolation;
let no one dwell in their tents.
²⁶For they persecute him whom you have struck down,
and they recount the pain of those you have wounded.
²⁷Add to them punishment upon punishment;
may they have no acquittal from you.

Psalm 69:24-27

⁹May his children be fatherless
and his wife a widow!
¹⁰May his children wander about and beg,
seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit!
¹¹May the creditor seize all that he has;
may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil!
¹²Let there be none to extend kindness to him,
nor any to pity his fatherless children!

Psalm 109:9-12

How Do We Pray the Imprecatory Psalms?

“The Psalms themselves give no indication that some parts are authorized responses to God (to be echoed by us) while other parts are natural but unauthorized cries of the anguished soul (to be omitted by us). So we are faced with a decision: either we regard the Psalms—all the Psalms and the whole of each psalm—as a God-given, authorized response to shape our prayers, or we treat the Psalms as a resource for our praying, such that we pick the bits that seem to us inspiring and worthy.”

Christopher Ash

The only one who can ultimately pray these prayers is Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can pray these prayers from a sinless heart, with no selfish motives of revenge, such as those that plague our hearts when we are maligned or wronged.

Christopher Ash

With great caution and humility, we need to learn to let Jesus lead us in these prayers, which are all expressions of the petition “Your kingdom come, / your will be done, / on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). We may pray them in our praying of the Psalms but only in Christ our covenant head. We do so with hesitation, deeply aware that they can be sullied by our mixed motives, and yet we do join with Christ in praying, “Your kingdom come,” in the words given us in the Psalms.

Christopher Ash

¹ Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods? Do you judge the children of man uprightly?

² No, in your hearts you devise wrongs; your hands deal out violence on earth.

³ The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.

⁴ They have venom like the venom of a serpent, like the deaf adder that stops its ear,

⁵ so that it does not hear the voice of charmers or of the cunning enchanter.

⁶ O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!

⁷ Let them vanish like water that runs away; when he aims his arrows, let them be blunted.

⁸ Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime, like the stillborn child who never sees the sun.

⁹ Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns, whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away![c]

¹⁰ The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked.

¹¹ Mankind will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth."

Psalm 58

When we pray the imprecatory Psalms:

1. Remember that they are the prayers of Jesus
2. Pray for repentance for enemies and evildoers
3. Relinquish judgment on our enemies to God
4. Long for evil to be done away with and God's Kingdom to come
5. Rejoice that Christ has taken the imprecation for our evil upon Himself

Group Prayer Through The Psalms:

Psalm 142 (Lament)

Psalm 58 (Imprecatory)

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