

1 Read psalm in its context. This should be done when reading any passage of Scripture. NOT one verse only but also the section, and the chapter, and the book, and the whole bible. There is a lot to consider.

2 Determine the genre of the psalm you are reading. Every psalm is unique. No two psalms are exactly alike. Nonetheless, the 150 psalms fall into some basic patterns, reflecting how they were used in their original setting.

Example: Psalm 32 (today's Psalm). This is often referred to as a Psalm of repentance. BUT it has significant "wisdom psalm" features, like: "maskil". "Blessed is the one..." "I will instruct you..." "Many are the sorrows..."

NOTE: Our sermon series is based on certain types of Psalms.

Ash Wednesday = Psalm 102. A psalm of repentance and lament.

Week 1 = Wisdom psalms. Identifying what is "right."

Week 2 = Psalms of Repentance. Repenting of what is wrong in me.

Week 3 = Psalms of lament. Lamenting what is wrong in the world.

Week 4 = Psalms of trust. Turning to God for help (even with wrongs in me or around me).

Week 5 = Psalms of ascent. Preparing to meet God.

Palm Sunday = Royal/Enthronement Psalm. Celebrating God's rule and reign over all.

Maundy Thursday = Thanksgiving Psalm. Psalms that praise God for his work.

Good Friday = Psalm of lament.

Sunday = Psalm of praise.

3 Pay attention to parallels. This is poetry, so one line might describe the next.

Example: Psalm 37 gives us an example of this type of structure. David writes, "Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong." He essentially says the same things twice, doubling down on his point that we should not waste our energy by giving undue focus to evildoers.

4 Dive in to the imagery.

Example: Psalm 22:12-13 "Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring Lion."

David is not literally surrounded by bulls and lions. He is surrounded by people that have ill intent for him. People that are wild and untamed and dangerous.

5 Read the title. Occasionally it tells you details behind the writing. Occasionally it tells you an author. Occasionally it tells you very little.

Example: Psalm 102 - a prayer for one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord.

The author is not named but the title tells us how it was used and when we might use this particular Psalm.

6 How is the Psalm used in the New Testament?

Example: You will find that the closing verses (25-28) are quoted in the letter to the Hebrews. In chapter one, God quotes these verses "ABOUT HIS SON." So...Psalm 102 was a foreshadow of Jesus.

7 Let the Psalm teach you how to pray. You probably do not pray or even think of God like the ancient Hebrews did. We can learn a lot.

At your table:

1 Was there any ah-ha! information in the 7 points above. If so, share briefly what it was for you.

2 Psalm 32 is written from experience. The author has experienced something and desires to share his experience. Read Psalm 32. What was the author's experience? How might his experience help us?

Large group Debrief

Back at your table:

1 How do you feel inside when you hear the word "confession"? What sort of images pop up in your mind when you think about the process of confession to God?

2 When you think about the grace of God, what positive images pop up in your mind? How do those pictures in your mind make you want to move closer to God?

3 Have you taken time to consider YOUR faith story and how you can share it naturally?