



Psalms

Big Idea:

The songs of God's working in human history.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The book of Psalms is 150 Hebrew poems or songs, 73 of which are connected to King David. There are additional authors including Asaph and the sons of Korah and many other anonymous authors.

The Book of Psalms covers the entire gambit of human emotion and experience and expresses it in beautiful poetic language. There are many allusions and direct references that we see in the New Testament that are drawn from this song book. Imagine in 200 years people were to look back at our writings and references, they would regularly encounter references and allusion to the music we hear every day on the radio and streaming on our devices.

Read:

Psalm 2:7 – Mark 1:11- Hebrews 5:5

The book of Psalms was collected during the exile of the Jewish people and the collection is laid out in a very interesting way. Psalms is broken into 5 parts, your translators may have noted that in your version, section 1 starts at Psalm 3. The first two Psalms can be thought of as an introduction to the entire book.

Read:

Psalm 1

Questions:

What stands out in this Psalm?

What is celebrated?

What is condemned?

Notice that in verse 2 the word Law is used in some translations. What is meant by that is the first 5 books of the Hebrew bible or Genesis through Deuteronomy. This section is called the Torah which means Teachings and is a key for the Jewish communities identity. Some scholars believe that the division of the book of Psalms is mirroring the first 5 books of the law and meant to teach us how to live life in the same way the books of the law do.

Read:

Psalm 2 and 2 Samuel 7:12-16

Questions:

What stands out from these passages?

How do you see a future hope tied to the passages?

Notice what blessing is associated with in each of the first two Psalms.

Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann believes there are three broad categories of Psalms that you can find in the book. They are orientation, disorientation, reorientation.

What he means by that is that we often find ourselves in times where everything makes sense or orientation. Times when we feel sunk into a pit or disorientation and finally times when we realize God has lifted us out of the pit and we are grateful or reorientation.

Read: Orientation

Psalm 24

Question:

Where do you see the authors desire to be redirected to focus on God in this Psalm?

Read: disorientation

Psalm 13

Question:

Do you have difficulty with God admitting things are difficult and a struggle or does this come more naturally to you?

Read: Reorientation
Psalm 97

Question:

How does the author of this Psalm praise God differently than you may?

These broad categories can be broken down even further.

Orientation

- Creation – in which we consider the world and our place in it.
- Torah – in which we consider the importance of God’s revealed will.
- Wisdom – in which we consider the importance of living well.
- Narrative – in which we consider our past and its influence on our present.
- Psalms of Trust – in which we express our trust in God’s care and goodness.

Disorientation

- Lament – in which we/I express anger, frustration, confusion about the experience of God’s absence.
- Penitential – in which we/I express regret and sorrow over wrongs we have done.

Reorientation

- Thanksgiving – in which we thank God for what God has done for us/me.
- Hymns of Praise – in which we praise God for who God is.
- Zion Psalms – in which we praise God for our home.
- Royal Psalms – in which we consider the role of political leadership.
- Covenant Renewal – in which we renew our relationship with God.

Question:

How do these categories help you understand or relate to the book of Psalms?

Many Psalms also express a communal desire for some of the categories listed above. For instance a people a nation or group can lament for the sin of the group and ask for Gods blessing. Or a family may come together and ask for wisdom for the group as a whole.

Question:

Discuss how can you and your community use these categories to pray for your friends, your community and world for God to make an impact?

The most quoted Psalm in the New Testament is 110. Jesus even uses it to help correct some teachers who were questioning his claim to be the King promised in the Old Testament. Jews had an understanding that a son could never be greater than the father. Yet in Psalm 110 David is calling the messiah which would be his descendant his lord or greater than he himself was.

Read:

Psalm 110

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. Its entire focus is on delighting in and the wisdom gained from reading the law. It also goes through each letter in the Hebrew alphabet and each line in the original language started with the letter of their alphabet.

Read:

Psalm 119: 1-2, 9, 17, 25, 33, 41-42.

Imagine if every time you thought of the letter A that you also thought, “A word from the Lord is true.” Or the letter B “Blessing come from the word of the Lord”. This is how the Jewish people made a Gods law a part of every aspect of their lives.

Read:

Deuteronomy 6:1-8

Discuss:

As a group think of ways to weave the word more tightly into our every day lives.

Group Practice:

If you ever find yourself in a place of uncertainty on what to pray praying a psalm can be a healthy exercise.

On your own:

It is easy to miss that there are often commands or instructions for life in the Psalms, they command us often to be wise, to rejoice and to turn often to scripture. Decide how you can become more obedient to the Psalms you read.