

THE PURPOSE OF THE PSALMS

Author Harold Fickett writes, "The Psalms tutor my soul in my love for God."

To rightly understand the psalms the book needs to be viewed not as a treatise on theology, but as a diary of relationship. Genesis through Esther records the history of Hebrew people... *the steps of their feet, and the works of their hands* - whereas the psalms describe *the beat of their heart*. It's a journal of devotion.

Philip Yancey writes, "More than any

other book in the Bible, Psalms reveals what a heartfelt, soul-starved, single-minded relationship with God looks like."

The psalms are prayers, and reflections, and even complaints from men who loved God dearly while struggling with the realities of life. Remember, author Ron Allen's 7 word theme for the book of psalms, "Life is hard, but God is good."

HOW TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMIST

In Psalm 69:1 David is drowning in trouble, "waters have come up to my neck..." And he's not handling it very well.

He admits to crying so much he's become exhausted. Remember, this is the champion of Israel... weeping like a baby.

David is depressed - he's been sitting in sackcloth - he's tried to punish himself by doing without food - his own parents no longer recognize him.

David has become the object of ridicule and scorn. Israel's whipping boy.

But in the midst of his depression he cries out to God. Verses 13-14, "But as for me, my prayer is to You... deliver me out of the mire..." He remembers God's kindness in verse 16. He trusts in the multitude of God's tender mercies.

In verse 22 he goes a step further and calls for God's judgment.

By the end of the psalm David works his way out of his depression and ends praising God.

In a discussion on the psalms, author Philip Yancey writes, "Instinctively, we want to 'clean up' our feelings in our prayers, but perhaps we have it backwards. Perhaps we should strive to take all our worst feelings to God."

Yancey is suggesting that God is not impressed with politically correct prayers. He wants us to pour out our emotions on the table - the good, bad, and ugly - and with God work our way through the pain until we reach again the place of praise.

Devotion Box - Thirsting For God

Psalm 42 begins, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God..."

On occasion my kids forget to leave the dog her water.

Our furry friend spends all day with no means to quench her thirst. It's always fun to watch her eagerness when we finally deliver her with a sloshing bowl of water. A *parched pooch* doesn't take a measured sip or two... she vigorously laps and gulps up the water.

The psalmist says this is how he longs for God. As a deer pines for the water brook - as a thirsty dog craves a bowl of water - so does his soul thirst for God.

Guys, every soul thirsts for God. There's a deep down longing in every person... *the God-shaped void* - exists in every man. As one author put it, "I use to say: 'There is a God-shaped hole in me.' For a long time I stressed the absence, the hole. Now I find it is the shape which has become more important." The psalmist looked and tasted, and discovered only God can satiate his thirst. What about you? Have you spent time in the presence of a thirst-quenching God?

GOD'S LOVE SONG

Psalms 45 is called "A Song of Love."

It's a wedding song that celebrates a royal marriage. Different possibilities for the subjects have been offered: Solomon and the Shulamite, or Hezekiah and Hepzibah (the daughter of Isaiah). Figuratively though, the marriage envisioned in Psalm 45 is the romance between God and His people – ultimately, Jesus, and His bride, the Church.

Verses 1-9 *focus on the King.*

Verses 10-17 *spotlight his bride.*

The highpoint of the psalm are verses 10-11. Here the bride is told how to prepare her heart for intimacy with the king. Guys, this is how we should ready ourselves for worship. This is how to deepen our walk with God. There're four steps: *listen, consider, incline, and forget.*

1) She's told, "Listen, O daughter". In other words, cease your squirming and avoid the distraction. Corral your wandering thoughts, and be attentive.

When it comes to spending time with God I'm always amazed how easily I'm distracted. John Donne once confessed, "I neglect God and his angels for the noise of a fly, the rattling of a coach, the whining of a door."

Let's listen.

2) "Consider". Fix a gaze upon the king. Direct a focus.

3) "Incline your ear". Literally, *stretch out* – pull as near as possible. It reminds me of a teenage girl sitting on the console of the car to be close to her boyfriend.

4) "Forget your own people". The bride won't fully give herself to her husband if she still focuses on mom and dad- and the life she's left behind. The same is true in our relationship with God. Philippians 3:13-14 tells us, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

To walk with God: 1) *listen*, 2) *consider*, 3) *incline*, 4) *forget*.

AMAZING GRACE

In the preface to Psalm 42 we find evidence of God's amazing grace. The psalm is labeled "A contemplation of the sons of Korah." The infamous Korah was the rebel who led the revolt in the wilderness against Moses and Aaron. Numbers 16:32 describes how God put down his coup d'tat, "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up..." Apparently, earthquakes have an appetite for sour tastes – one eats up Korah, his sidekicks, and their families...

...Everyone that is except the sons of Korah. Why his offspring were preserved we don't know, but we do know they were appreciative of God's mercy. Here we find the sons of Korah responded by playing a key role in the temple worship.

Nine psalms are tied to Korah's kids. It's ironic that some of the most spiritual psalms were written by the sons of one of the Bible's most blatant blasphemers.

Devotion Box - Be Still

Commentators tend to agree Psalms 46-48 were written at the time of the Assyrian assault on Jerusalem. Assyria was a rising empire bent on world conquest. They'd overthrown Syria and Israel, and were headed to Egypt. Only Jerusalem, and the Jewish king, Hezekiah, stood in their way.

When Hezekiah looked over the walls of God's city he saw 185,000 of the meanest troops on the planet camped against him. All he could do was pray. And remember what happened, God sent an Angel who slaughtered the entire army in a single night. The next morning Hezekiah surveyed the carnage, and took up a pen to document God's deliverance...

Psalm 46:10 is the highpoint of Hezekiah's song, "Be still, and know that I am God..." Hezekiah did nothing – he never raised the first finger – he sat still, while God did the work.

Guys, often our activity just gets in God's way. We need to learn to sit still, and trust the Lord until He tells us to move. So often the urge is to grab the bull by the horns – take matters into our own hands – *but be still, and let God be God.*

Devotion Box - On Guard Against Gossip

Here's a riddle: "I am more deadly than the screaming shell of a gun. I win without killing. I break hearts, and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind... I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as the sands of the sea, and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive. My name? *You guessed it, "Gossip".*

The tongue is deadly.

Every Christian needs to be on guard against gossip!

DAVID'S DAY OF RECKONING

Psalm 51 is entitled, "A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." David thought the whole sordid mess had been swept under the rug. Yes, it cost an innocent man his life - and a godly king his integrity - but the painful chapter was finally over... *or so David thought.*

It was a year after David's adultery when Nathan paid him a visit.

Guys, when we sin we have 2 choices - we can *confess*, or *conceal*. Confess your sin - repent of your sin - and God will forgive. *Conceal* your sin, and God will *reveal*. Eventually the truth will come out anyway. It's always *best to confess*.

Psalm 51 is a classic - it's one of the most passionate prayers of repentance in all the Bible.

He begins pleading for mercy, and asking God, "blot out my transgressions". In other words, erase it from the record. "Wash me... cleanse me... my sin is ever before me." David swept his sin under a rug, but not a moment went by that it didn't torment his conscience. It was burr in his saddle - a pebble in his shoe. Rather than swept under a rug, his sin needed to be blotted out.

Notice, David says to God in verse 4, "Against You, You only, have I sinned..." Wait a minute... David sinned against Bathsheba, his wives and children, Uriah, the nation... but he realizes that first and foremost his sin was against God. There's no such thing as a harmless sin. All sin breaks the heart of God.

In verse 5, David admits it's his nature to sin - as it is for all people. It's not just that we sometimes miss the mark - our aim is flawed. None of us shoot-straight.

In verse 7, David cries out, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... The word "*wash*" refers to women who took their garments to the river to beat the dirt out on the rocks. David gives God permission to beat the evil out of him if necessary.

He asks in verse 10 "Create in me a clean heart, O God..." Man's spirit is too stained to be cleansed. That's why David asks for a new heart. He wants God to cut out his old, sin nature, and plant in him a new nature that loves God and desires purity. We need a heart that's soft and compliant, not hard and rebellious. *God specializes in heart transplants.*

If a burnt offering had been able to cleanse David he would've offered a million bulls and goats - but it took more - God wanted "a broken and a contrite heart".

David's confession expresses just such a heart... and in response to David's brokenness God's generous Spirit restored to him the joy of his salvation!

WHEN YOU OFFER A SACRIFICE

Psalm 50:10, God says why would He want a bull or goat when "every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills."

I hope you don't give an offering because you think God needs the money! You're misguided if you serve Him because you think He can't get the job done without you. When you offer God a sacrifice it's not because He needs what you're giving - *it's because you need to give.*

A sacrifice reveals a right attitude. We make a statement to God when we give our money, or time, or talent, or praise, or service. We're telling God we love Him, and appreciate all He's done.

Devotion Box - Bottled Water

Psalm 56:3-4 shows us how David dealt with his fears. He didn't buck up. He didn't take a course in the power of positive thinking. He simply trusted in God's mercies. Verse 8, "You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?" Here's the first example of bottled water.

God loves us and cares for us. So much so, He gathers our tears. He keeps them in a bottle - or for some of us, an 80 gallon drum. One day His joy will compensate us for the tears we've shed. He might just turn our tears into a sweet elixir.

Devotion Box - Betrayed

In Psalm 55 David deals with a deep wound. He's betrayed by a friend. The old saying is true, "Against a foe I can defend - but heaven protect me from a disloyal friend."

In verse 4 David pours out his pain, "My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me." He wishes he could run away.

Ahithophel was David's close friend - they worshipped God together.

But their friendship ran aground when David tore apart Ahithophel's family. Understand, Ahithophel had a granddaughter by the name of "*Bathsheba*" Ahithophel never let go of the bitterness he felt toward David for violating his granddaughter. He turned on his friend by joining Absalom's revolt.

It crushed David to have a best friend turn into an avowed enemy. In Psalm 55 he sorts out his feelings, and in verse 22, "casts his burden on the LORD."

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org

Calvary Chapel Announcements - August 20, 2000 - pick up the latest issue of "LikeMinds" - 8/30 Dennis Zech "Ministry Through Mystery" - 9/10 Morning Baptism - 9/17 Morning Baby Dedication

For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapel.org/stonemountain/biblescan.htm

Next Bible Scan - August 27 - Psalm 73-89

"my expectation is from Him." - Psalm 62:5

Bible Scan Memory Verse

IMPRECATORY PSALMS

Psalm 58 is another "imprecatory psalm". "Imprecate" means "to curse", and in these psalms God uses David to call down judgment on his evil enemies.

This is one of the most vicious of the imprecatory psalms. Look at verse 6, "Break their teeth in their mouth, O God!" *Lord, bust their chops!* Again at verse 8, "Let them be like a snail which melts away as it goes, like a stillborn child of a woman, that they may not see the sun."... venomous curses.

If you question whether David should pray such a prayer toward his, and God's enemies, listen to a quote by commentator Graham Scroggie, "If it is right for God to destroy, it cannot be wrong for His servants to rejoice in what He does." God is serious about sin. He's angry with the wicked. His judgments will all be righteous.

DEVOTION BOX - THE INNER LIFE

We're given the context for Psalm 60, "When (David) fought against Mesopotamia and Syria of Zobah, and Joab returned and killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt."

The narrative is in 2 Samuel 8. David has become king, and is gobbling up his surrounding enemies. Twice 2 Samuel tells us, "And the LORD preserved David wherever he went." The Davidic blitzkrieg was on. But what 2 Samuel 8 doesn't tell us that we learn from Psalm 60 is that David's victories were won through prayer.

Like the church, David's army did a lot of it's fighting on it's knees. 2 Samuel shows David outer life – his military triumphs, but Psalm 60 reveals his inner life – his broken spirit, and repentant attitude. Guys, sometimes we get so wrapped up in the outer life of great men, and desire to emulate their exploits – we forget that the inner life comes first.

A PSALM FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

Psalm 71 is "Grace for the Grey-headed".

It was written by a Hebrew senior citizen. Here's a heavy metal psalm. When you get a little older you find you're into heavy metal – *teeth of gold, hair of silver, and lead in the pants.*

The psalmist says to God in verse 5, "You are my trust from my youth..." He's spent a lifetime walking with God. There's a Jewish proverb that applies, "For the ignorant, old age is winter. For the learned, old age is a harvest." Hey, if you want your senior years to be a harvest and not a winter - then spend the years leading up to it learning how to follow the Lord.

His old age made the psalmist feel weaker and more vulnerable. He prays in verse 9, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails..." He knows He needs the Lord's protection more than ever.

Old age brings it's aches, and pains, and loss of energy – but it shouldn't rob us of our enthusiasm for life, and opportunities God may lay before us.

The psalmist pledges himself in verses 17-18, "O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come." That's fantastic.

Rather than back off in service for God, the psalmist wants to take it up a notch. He wants to share what he knows of God with the next generation while he still can... Oh, that every senior citizen would have the same attitude.