

EXPERIENCING THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE
Session 1: An Introduction To Psalms (and life!)

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God... (1 Peter 3:18a)

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11)

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you... (James 4:8a)

"This book flows out of the two great passions energizing my life. The one is a passion for God. James 4:8 has marked me: "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." To commune with God by faith in deep personal fellowship is the highest fulfillment one can experience. I have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, and I want more...My other passion is for Holy Scripture, the primary vehicle for bringing us near to God. It is perhaps expected that a seminary teacher will show a certain reserve or formality with the Bible, to maintain his professional bearing. But I can't do that. I love the Bible. "The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life," Jesus said in John 6:63. Spirit and life! What else is there worth having? And how else are they to be found, but through the Word of God?" (from "A Passion for God: Prayers and Meditations on the Book of Romans," by Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr.)

"Instead of being the target of talk-show jokes, the Christian church *could* amaze the world with two impressive qualities: her wisdom from God's Word, and the nearness of her God. We Christians have in the Bible a treasure that the modern world does not even believe exists, namely, Truth. And we also have a prayer-hearing God who is able to orchestrate events and transform our lives for his glory in the spiritual conflict engulfing the world today. There could be nothing more socially relevant than a new generation of Christians who know the Bible profoundly and who experience the reality of God daily in their souls. That will renew the church today..." (Ortlund, Jr., "A Passion for God")

Title (Of the whole collection):

- "Psalms" (Greek *psalmos* - Luke 20:42; Acts 1:20; 13:33; also Luke 24:44; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)
- "Praises" (Hebrew title - *tehillim*)
- "David" (Hebrews 4:7 quoting Psalm 95; also Luke 20:42-43 quoting Psalm 2)

Psalm Titles ("superscriptions"): Only 34 Psalms lack any superscription (1-2; 10; 33; 43; 71; 91; 93-97; 99; 104-107; 111-119; 135-137; 146-150)

- "David" (3-41; 51-70 [71]; 138-145)
- "For the director of music" (4-6; 8-9; 11-14; 18-22; 31; 36; 39-41; 42; 44-47; 49; 51-62; 64-70; 75-77; 80-81; 84-85; 88; 109; 139-140)

- “Jeduthun” (39; 62; 77; see 1 Chronicles 16:41-42; 25:1, 6; 2 Chronicles 5:12)
- “Sons of Korah” (42 [43], 44-49, 84-85, 87-88)
- “Asaph” (50, 73-83)
- “Solomon” (72; 127)
- “Heman the Ezrahite” (88; see 1 Kings 4:31 or 1 Chronicles 6:16, 33, 39, 43-44; 15:17, 19; 16:41-42; 25:1, 4-6; 2 Chronicles 5:12; 35:15)
- “Ethan the Ezrahite” (89; see 1 Kings 4:31)
- “Moses” (90)
- Historical Background (3; 7; 18; 30; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56; 57; 59; 60; 63; 142)
- “With stringed instruments” (4; 6; 54-55; 61; 67; 76)
- “For flutes” (?) (5)
- “According to sheminith” (6; 12; see 1 Chronicles 15:21)
- “According to gittith” (8; 81; 84)
- “Selah” (3-4, 7, 9, 20-21, 24, 32 39, 44, 46-50, 52, 54-55, 57, 59-62, 66-68, 75-77, 81-85, 87-89, 140, 143)
- “To the tune of ‘The Death of the Son’” (9)
- “To the tune of ‘The Doe of the Morning’” (22)
- “To the tune of ‘Lilies’[or ‘The Lily of the Covenant’]” (45; 60; 69; 80)
- “According to mahalath [mahalath leannoth]” (53; 88)
- “To the tune of ‘A Dove on Distant Oaks’” (56)
- “To the tune of “Do Not Destroy” (57-59; 75)
- “Psalm” (3-6; 8-9; 12-13; 15; 19-24; 29-31; 38-41; 47-51; 62-68; 73; 75-77; 79-80; 82-85; 87-88; 92; 98; 100-101; 108-110; 139-141; 143)
- “Shiggaion” (7)
- “Miktam” (16; 56-60)
- “Maskil” (32; 42; 44-45; 52-55; 74; 78; 88-89; 142)
- “Song” (18; 30; 45-46; 48; 65-69; 75-76; 83; 87-88; 92; 108; 120-134)
- “Psalm of Praise” (145)
- “A petition” (38; 70)
- “For teaching” (60)
- “For the Sabbath” (92)
- “For giving thanks” (100)
- “A prayer” (17; 86; 90; 102; 142)

Arrangement: (Final collection served as the “hymnbook” for Israel’s worship after returning from exile in Babylon – Five books probably reflect the foundational books of Genesis - Deuteronomy [Torah = “Law”] in Israel’s faith)

- Book 1: Psalm 1-41 (doxology:41:13)
- Book 2: Psalm 42-72 (doxology: 72:18-19)
- Book 3: Psalm 73-89 (doxology: 89:52)

- Book 4: Psalm 90-106 (doxology: 106:48)
- Book 5: Psalm 107-150 (doxology: 150 or even all of 146-150)

Collections: The final collection of Psalms includes smaller collections of psalms under various headings and themes.

- David (three collections: 3-41; 51-70; 138-145)
- Asaph/Sons of Korah (two collections: 42-50; 73-88)
- Topical (five collections: God's kingship, 93-100; psalms of praise, 103-107; songs of ascent [pilgrimage], 120-134; "Hallelujah" psalms, 111-113 and 146-150)

Dates: Psalms covers virtually the entire Old Testament period. Psalm 90 carries the title "A prayer of Moses, the man of God," which takes us all the way back to the second book of the Bible, Exodus. Other psalms are clearly written after the people of Israel have returned from their captivity in Babylon which brings us to the end of the Old Testament period.

*****Note:** The Psalms are frequently quoted in the New Testament. This is another example of the intimate connection between the Old and New Testaments (Matthew 5:17-20; Luke 24:24-27, 44; 2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Types of Psalms: Laments (individual and corporate), Hymns of Praise, Royal Psalms, Wisdom Psalms, Psalms of Thanksgiving, Salvation History Psalms, Songs of Zion (Jerusalem), Songs of Trust

Literary Features: Psalms is a collection of songs, prayers and poems carefully designed to communicate God's truth to us. One of the most distinguishing features of the Psalms is the use of Hebrew poetry - i.e. parallelism (37), alphabetic acrostics (25, 119), repeated refrains (42-43; 136), etc.

Theme: EXPERIENCING THE FULLNESS OF GOD'S PRESENCE

"Experiencing"

- We are created to be beings who experience life: we feel, think, our bodies respond (brain, heart, sweat glands, skin, stomach, etc). The Psalms leave us with no doubt about this experiential aspect of our being.
- We evaluate our experience according to what we believe (our understanding of what is true and how we determine what is true).
- Experience is often treated as the goal of life. Therefore, we try to have certain experiences that we know we enjoy or that others have told us we will enjoy. ? [i.e. person who is looking for that one experience they had of God years ago: longing for a particular worship experience like one you once had; wanting to feel the closeness you experienced with God at a retreat; getting back that love you once knew in your marriage; the small group you were a part of that changed your life, etc.]
- We also tend to determine what is good and bad by the experiences we have. [ex. When we come to church and it is exciting, uplifting, people are exceptionally friendly that day, the kids happily go to the nursery or their classes, we sing songs you love to sing, the pastor talks about your favorite topic and says what you want him to say about it; or perhaps, you just feel good about the service that day, you really enjoy yourself = A good worship service.]
- Experience is usually treated as that which you can't argue against. [When one side wants to find support for their particular view of a war, they go to someone who has experienced war. Each side appeals to war veterans and "experts" to support their side. It doesn't matter that these "experienced" people come to radically different conclusions based on their experiences, people still tend to think that you can't argue against experience and the conclusions people come to based on their experiences.]
- If it is true (and it is) that people who have the same or similar experiences come to radically different conclusions based on their evaluations of those experiences, it must not be the experiences themselves that are the key element, but that by which we evaluate our experiences. [How do we determine which "expert" is right when they disagree? Usually by what we believe already (which is often simply based on the way we have evaluated previous experiences).]
- So who are our "experts"? Who will we turn to when we experience things in our life that we don't know how to handle?

- It is quite clear from Scripture that God designed us to experience life, but what role does that experience play in our lives? Should we evaluate our lives by our experiences? If we do, should that be the only factor in our evaluation? Or should it at least be the primary factor? A minor factor? Does experience make someone an expert in that area? If not, what role does it play? By what criteria should we evaluate our experiences? What kind of experiences should we seek? How should we respond to different experiences?

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever. (Psalm 111:10)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. (Proverbs 9:10)

And he said to man, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding." (Job 28:28)

"the Fullness of God's Presence"

- The Bible speaks of God being present in different ways.
 - God's omnipresence: He is present everywhere at all times (Psalm 139; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Acts 17:28; Colossians 1:17).
 - God's presence to sustain: God keeps his creation in existence and functioning the way he desires for it to function (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3)
 - God's presence to curse (bring judgment): God punishes sin partially in this life and fully in eternity (Psalm 9:3-6; Amos 9:1-4; Romans 1:18-32; 2:4-5; Revelation 14:9-11).
 - God's presence to bless: The manifestation of God's presence to communicate himself and his favor to his people. (Psalm 16:11; James 4:8)

- The Psalms are amazing compositions that deal with the depths of who God is and what he does in the context of our real life experiences. Psalm 1 launches the book with the word "blessed." To be blessed is to have God's favor (approval) and all that goes with it. It includes both present aspects of his blessing and the ultimate reality of his blessing that we will experience throughout eternity. Thus, we should expect that God will provide some current experience of the benefits of our salvation, but we should recognize that the "fullness" of our experience of his blessing awaits us after this life.
- In other words, we will not experience the fullness of God's presence to bless in this life in the ultimate sense. (no sin, no Satan, no pain, no tears, perfect joy, love, peace, contentment, etc.)
- The Psalms reach us in this "already but not yet" approach to experiencing God's presence. They lead us into how we can seek and experience the fullness of what God has for us here and now as we eagerly await the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:11-14).