

Why were the Psalms chosen for this year's study?

1. There has been some interest for a long time by our leaders to study the Psalms
 2. It is our practice to move back and forth between the Old and New Testaments so that we can all see how the whole scripture fits together with one beautiful story – the story of Christ
- A. Psalms takes us into another genre of writings – poetry! We have studied stories, letters, sermons (Hebrews). Now we move to poetry. 9/11 – Poetry allows us to connect our shared history and experiences, our shared images, with an immediacy, an experience where emotions meet the mind

Creates a **more intense experience**

Creates a **more intimate experience**

One word or one line can bring a whole wealth of information, a richer picture of factual information, a stronger impact

We need to get in touch with **Old Testament images: shepherds, riverbanks, sheep and goats, shields and armor, fortresses, chariots, rocks and wilderness, the temple**

“The more you learn about the ordinary lives of ancient Israelites, the more clarity you will have in seeing the pictures the ancient poets painted with their words.” (Futato, p. 48) and it opens a window into the life of first readers – those who first heard, knew, and understood the Scripture as it painted pictures of their ordinary life in order to explain an extraordinary and very separate but loving God. Then you and I can better understand what God is trying to say.

So, are the Psalms just a random collection of 150 poems?

Poems were written between 1400 BC (Psalm 90, Moses) and 400 BC (unknown psalmist)
1,000 years!

The Psalm text was fixed (no more psalms allowed) in AD 100

The book of Psalms was pronounced authoritative (true Scripture) in AD 1000, and accepted by both the synagogue and the church

The book of Psalms is **divided into 5 books**. Each book ends with a doxology.

Book 1 Psalm 3-41; Doxology: Psalm 41:13

Book 2 Psalms 42-72; Doxology: Psalm 72:18-19

Book 3 Psalms 73-89; Doxology: Psalm 89:52

Book 4 Psalms 90-106; Doxology: Psalm 106:48

Book 5 Psalms 107-150; This book is a doxology to the whole book of Psalms

(according to Old Testament scholar, Mark Futato) Psalms 1 and 2 are an introduction to the book of Psalms – they set the main themes

Psalm 1 – the book of Psalms is an instruction manual or guidebook that answers the questions: **How can I be wise? How can I be blessed?**

To be **blessed** is to be truly happy, to have a full life, to have endurance in life, to have a life of significance, well-being, and contentment. The word **blessed** is used **28x** in the Psalms.

The answer: Wisdom and blessedness can only come as I meditate on the Law of the LORD (the Torah), God's instruction and teaching books – Genesis through Deuteronomy – the 5 books of Moses

The Psalms are “an instruction manual for living a truly happy life.” (Futato, p. 67)
True happiness comes to those who are holy. (Proverbs 16:20)

Meditate – “low animals sounds like the cooing of a dove, or the growl of a lion; “to read in an undertone,” or “to mutter while meditating.”” (Futato, p. 68)

The mind – **think on, remember, consider, study**

The heart – **digest, make it a part of your life, delight in God, love God**

The soul – **confess your sins, take refuge in His mercy and forgiveness**

This is not vain, mindless repetitions; It is a **purposeful focus on reading, knowing, and applying the Word of God to our lives**

Psalm 2 – The LORD reigns! Our God is King!

God reigns through His Anointed One (Messiah)

When King David was anointed with oil, it was a symbol of the Holy Spirit empowering him for his calling as King, as God's Anointed One.

God's intention: That man was created to enjoy the happy (blessed) life

That “David and his descendants would serve as mediators of this truly happy life.” (Futato, p. 75)

The Psalms are in the OT. Jesus is in the NT. So I can't really learn anything about Jesus, can I?

The book of Psalms captures in its themes the greatest themes of all of Scripture!

Genesis 1-2: God is King! The LORD reigns! The man who lives in holy obedience to God will live a blessed life.

Genesis 3/David and all the kings of Israel/Us: Sin has conquered us and we need a greater Anointed One. “The book of Psalms can be read as a manual for instructing ancient Israelites, and us, how to live in the absence of the Davidic King, who was promised the nations as his inheritance in Psalm 2.” (Futato, p. 81)

The book of Psalms moves from lamentation to praise, from suffering to glory – this is the story of all God's people after Genesis 3. This is our story.

Book 1 – David is the Anointed King – **David is the picture of God reigning through His Anointed One.**

Book 2 – **Solomon is now the Anointed King – The kingship goes on, but it is short lived. Sin crumbles God's ideal picture.**

Book 3 – **There is no Anointed King – We need a greater Anointed King, one that can never crumble or fail.**

Book 4 – **Live in faith in God that He will bring the great Anointed King, that He will fulfill His promises to His people**

The LORD is our refuge while we wait

He has promised to bless the nations

Book 5 – **The King is coming! He who is coming is both divine and the greatest, final, forever Anointed One**

Christ came to Israel and to the nations

Christ will someday come again to bring all His people in to a final, glorious rest and blessed life

Susan, you yourself are a poet, and know a lot about poetry. But some find poetry intimidating, or frankly aren't interested in the technical aspects. But you seem to like that. How would you convince someone that understanding poetry "form" can help us understand God's word?

(read quote)

Tim Keller tells us that we are called to apply the psalms to our lives “The Psalms contain heights and exuberant outbursts that melancholic types would never produce on their own. There are depths of heart insight that extroverted people might never discover. There are complaints and blunt questions to God of which introverted and compliant people are less capable. We would never produce the full range of biblical prayer if we were initiating prayer according to our own inner needs and psychology. It can only be produced if we are responding in prayer according to who God is as revealed in the Scriptures.” (Keller, p. 59-60)

Frankly, some of the Psalms sound a lot alike. Do I need to read them all?

I hope you do over your lifetime. Some have become favorites to me. Some have spoken to me differently, at different times of my life. Obviously we are going to explore particular psalms this year. But I would recommend all of them to you as devotional study.

1. They are Scripture. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and or marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” II Timothy 3:16 says, “**all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent (complete), equipped for every good work.**” Because they are Scripture, they can change us, grow us, comfort us, rebuke us.
2. Because they are Scripture, they teach us about the character and work of God.
We need to know that in order to keep going.
3. They are incredibly open and honest. They remind us of our shared humanity. We see ourselves in the words. I am afraid, I am lonely, I wonder if God cares, I am angry, I am envious – why do good things happen to the most rotten people, and bad things happen to me?
4. They are universal in expressing life's experiences (even when some are listed as written by David in a specific circumstance) to connect with all nations at all times.
5. They give hope when there is none. They lead us back to God.

Okay, so tell us about some of the features of Hebrew poetry. What makes it special, and why should I care?

I love your question! Anytime we read the Bible, we should be asking ourselves three things: **What does this text tell me about the life of first readers?** I need to understand the pictures in their **Old Testament context**. Otherwise, I may not get the message.

Secondly, **what does it then tell me about God? All of scripture is about God first, not us. We don't go to Scripture to have our needs met, but to get to know God.** The more we know and understand who God is, the better we have perspective on our own lives.

Thirdly, we should ask ourselves, **So What? What does this mean to me? How should understanding this passage, understanding God's character or His works change me? What is He asking of me? How should I be living?** Why don't we go into a psalm and see how it works:

Psalm 4

The Line

one complete thought, usually made up of two terse sentences (but can be more sentences in a line), each terse sentence = cola

The Parallel Line – colas that correspond with each other – note that the second cola is always indented (see how easy it is to identify a line?)

6. Saying the same thing in two different ways:

**But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
The LORD hears when I call to him. (Psalm 4:3, ESV)**
(set apart the godly for himself=the LORD hears when I call)

7. Making comparisons/opposites

**You have put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and wine abound. (Psalm 4:7 ESV)**
(Knowing you, God, finding my joy in you, is greater than all those other people and their stuff)

8. To give more information

**Offer right sacrifices
and put your trust in the LORD. (Psalm 4:5 ESV)**
(What does worship look like? Right sacrifices, trust)

The Strophe – lines grouped together with a common theme

**Be angry and do not sin;
Ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.
Offer right sacrifices
and put your trust in the LORD. (Psalm 4:5 ESV)**

(How can I be steadfast while I am struggling? Don't sin in my frustration, don't look for revenge or gossip. Recognize our common sinful nature. Be humble. meditate on His faithfulness, worship Him, trust Him to meet my needs, to know what I need, to provide what I need)

The Stanza – Two or more strophes that are related (there is always a space between stanzas. You can't miss it!)

**Be angry and do not sin;
Ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.
Offer right sacrifices
and put your trust in the LORD. (Psalm 4:5 ESV)**
(Real worship)

**Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you. (Psalm 139:7-12)**
(Everywhere I go, everywhere I am, God is there)

Now, I've read the psalm, looked at its parts and the meaning. I pray and ask God to speak to me. I think about what the psalm is telling me. I write the strophes and stanzas down in my own words. It often becomes a prayer. (I will read my paraphrase and thoughts)

Psalm 4 notes

Vs. 1 – Something's wrong. I remember how you have helped me before. Be gracious and hear my prayer. Answer me.

Vs. 2-3 – God speaks: How long will men prefer lies to the truth? Their words are empty and vain.

Psalmist speaks: I know the I AM has set apart His people for Himself. He hears us when we call.

Vs. 4-5 – God speaks: When vain and empty words make you angry, do not sin. Do not let their words lead you to thoughts of revenge. Do not think over and over about their evil words. Instead focus your mind and heart over and over on My words, My faithfulness. Worship Me. Trust Me.

Vs. 6-7 – Psalmist speaks: Many cry out, "Show us some good. Remember us, LORD. Bless us." Are they asking for stuff? How about stuff? First I remember how much you have blessed us. The world is full of stuff that gives people happiness. But it is always fleeting. And I also realize that my joy in you is so much greater than any stuff.

Vs. 8 Now I can sleep. You alone, I AM, You keep me safe and at peace.

Note: There is a lot in this psalm about speaking, about words, about evil words and how it keeps us awake at night.

Prayer:

Dear Jesus: This world is all wrong. It scares me. I can't sleep. I worry about safety. I need you. Help me. You have helped me before. I know you are listening. God, I know this world is all about lies. Good is wrong. Evil is good. It is all upside down. Even words are being attacked. So many good words are being used against You and so many who love You. It makes me mad. Forgive me for harboring evil against those who speak lies, who speak wrongly and badly about You, or who pervert beauty and goodness and call it evil, and then praise evil and call it good. They do not know the truth. Help me to remember Your words of truth. Bring me back to Your Word. Help me be quiet, meditating on Your Word, listening to You speak through your Word. Take away the angry words in my heart. You are faithful. You do listen. I can trust You. You are the I AM, the one who hears, who claims me as your own. I hear many calling out for your goodness, asking for your help. I wonder how many think that more things, more stuff, will help and protect them – Houses behind gated walls, more money, extra water and supplies. I wonder if they think that your blessings means more stuff. I think about these things, too. But I realize it

is You that I need. It is you that I really want. Not my stuff. What good is my home, my clothes, If I don't have You? My joy in stuff fades. My excitement in my new kitchen fades and I take what is new for granted. The dishwasher dies. The plumbing needs repair. I want a new sweater. I buy new shoes. My stuff wears out. You never wear out. You always bring me hope and joy, even in awful and scary times. You are always with me. I can count on You no matter what. Now I can sleep. Thank you, LORD. I rest in You.