



He
restores
my
soul

PSALM 23:3

Psalms for Lent

Study Notes

For groups or individuals

Introduction

I hope that this series will give us time to reflect in Lent using the Psalms. These notes are, as always, a starting point. I would suggest that as you start, you seek suggestions from within your own group for how to use the time. Perhaps with worship music, or an image of the cross, a candle or whatever you find helpful for focussing on God. Maybe even make more use of silence or quiet personal prayer and ask the Lord to use his great hymn book to help draw you closer to him, and be more grateful for his love.

I found the following a very helpful introduction to the Psalms from J. Moody's *'Journey to Joy'* and I suggest you either read it together or encourage your group to read it before you start:

'I believe there is a crying need for people who believe the Bible to feel it. (And vice versa for those who feel Christianity, to know more about the Bible.) There is a reason why Jesus frequently quotes from the Psalms and why the Psalms have proved a perennial favourite. They are real. They pull no punches. They tell it as it is. They scare people who wish the Bible said only things that sound pious and nice. But they also help you reconnect between the objective and the subjective, between the truth about God and the truth of God, between fear and faith, between failure and trust, between suffering and joy, and between hate and forgiveness.

All the way through them is the theology of the cross, though the cross in a literal sense was unknown to the authors of the Psalms. And all the way through them is the theology of the resurrection, though Christ's resurrection in a literal sense was unknown to the original authors of the Psalms. The psalms (very occasionally) say things that are quite honest and blunt, even horrible. But then quite honestly and bluntly, you and I feel things that are sometimes horrible.

Because the psalms are inspired by God does not mean that every emotion in them is approved by God. In the Psalms you find people talking to God about their feelings openly in the context of the security of the covenant relationship between God and his people.

These psalms are pilgrim psalms, generally speaking. They are a journey from a long way away to the very heart of God, as represented by the three great pilgrim festivals in ancient Israel. People feel things they would rarely say out loud in church. We need somewhere to go to process those emotions, to inspect them in the light of God, and bring them into line with his will and his way. Such is the great gift of all the psalms.

It is your journey. It is all in relation to God, centres on God, and is intended to honour God. But the psalms frequently (and shockingly for some theologians) love to use the first-person pronoun I, me, or my, as well as the corporate language of plural we. That's my prayer. Enjoy these psalms. They are meant to be read, sung, digested, wrestled over, and most of all put in your backpack and taken with you on a spiritual journey to the father heart of God.'

The introductions for each Psalm in this study are from W. Wiersbe's 'Be Worshipful' and 'Be Exultant' books.

My hope is that we can take steps along that journey across these five Psalms as we move with them:

Praise —> Lament —> Trust —> Thanks —> Praise

I hope you find it a helpful journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Thomas Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

1 Song of Praise (Psalm 100)

Read Psalm 100

'The psalm is a fitting climax to the collection of "royal Psalms" (93, 95—100) and sums up their emphasis on God's sovereign rule, His goodness to His people, the responsibility of all nations to acknowledge Him, and the importance of God's people exalting and worshipping Him.'

For Discussion

- What's your first reaction as you read this Psalm, how does it make you feel?
- Why might the Psalmist call for the whole earth to shout for joy?
- Is there a reason that singing is so closely connected with worship?
- What are the personal reasons the Psalmist gives for why we should praise the Lord?
- In v4 the Psalmist speaks of 'gates' and 'courts' - we no longer have those physical places in the temple, so what is our equivalent?
- Does the Psalm end by looking back, looking forward or both?
- What do you find is most helpful for really praising God?
- When do you feel most like you want to praise the Lord?

Reflection

(Is there a way of responding to what you've heard and discussed that your group feels would be helpful? Maybe try a few different ideas over the course of the next few weeks)

Prayer

As well as your own prayer requests, why not pray that this time in the Psalms would be a helpful journey for us as a Church family wanting to draw closer to God.

2 Song of Lament (Psalm 13)

Read Psalm 13

'This psalm was probably written during David's difficult years of exile when King Saul was pursuing him. By the grace of God, David turned his sufferings into songs and left those songs behind to encourage us in our trials (2 Cor. 1:2–11). In this brief psalm, David deals with his feelings, his foes, and his faith.'

For Discussion

- Have you ever experienced the sense that God has forgotten you?
- Can you empathise with David's sense that God had 'hidden your face from me?'
- How honest is this Psalm about struggles we can have in our minds? Do you find it reassuring that these struggles are reflected in Scripture?
- How does David appeal to God to answer him?
- Can we do the same and call on God to act for us?
- Do you get the sense that David is almost forcing himself to trust God?
- Are we able to do the same, even when life is really hard?
- How does remembering that 'the Lord has been good to me' help even in our own challenges?

Reflection

(This is probably an appropriate week to have a quiet form of reflection. The lament Psalms are here to speak to us and for us when we do feel life's difficulties.)

Prayer

Perhaps focus your prayers on those within or outside the group who are going through a really tough time, calling on God to act.

3 Song of Trust (Psalm 23)

Read Psalm 23

'Certainly this psalm has a message for the sorrowing, but it's unfortunate that it's often only used at funerals, because Psalm 23 focuses on what Jesus does for us "all the days of [our] life" and not just at death (v. 6). David deals with some of the difficult things he experienced during his long walk with the Lord.'

For Discussion

- The Psalm begins in the pasture. Are you able to reflect on times in life when all seems well?
- But it quickly moves on to the darkest valley, and no doubt we all know something of what that feels like too?
- So what is the comfort for David whilst he is 'in the valley?'
- Do you have any experiences you can share of God clearly walking with you through those dark valleys?
- How does v5 show David's confidence in the Lord, even if for now his enemies surround him?
- Why is this often used at funerals?
- How could we make more use of this Psalm for all the every day ups and downs of life?
- Does it help your faith in Jesus as your Good Shepherd?

Reflection & Prayer

Perhaps invite people to share which part or image of this Psalm resonates the most for them right now, and then take it in turns to pray that the Lord would be their shepherd in those situations.

4 Song of Thanks (Psalm 30)

Read Psalm 30

'The psalm opens and closes on a note of thanksgiving (vv. 1, 12; and see vv. 4, 11). The emphasis is on praise to the Lord for rescuing David from a dangerous and difficult situation that included sickness (v. 2), being near death (vv. 3, 9), God's anger (v. 5), weeping (vv. 5, 11), and emotional turmoil (v. 7). But the trial also involved the nation, for David addressed them in verses 4–5. Apparently this was a national crisis that David had helped to precipitate because he disobeyed the will of God.'

For Discussion

- If last week was a song of trust in the middle of challenges, how does the opening verse of this Psalm reflect thanks for coming out of challenges?
- Does anyone have a testimony of how God helped, healed or 'lifted you out of the depths?'
- Why is it good to thank God when we see his power at work?
- What picture do you have of God from verses 5&6?
- Is that your experience too, that rejoicing can follow weeping?
- Do you ever feel you'd like to pray vv8-10 for yourself? You can!
- What does David feel now that the Lord has rescued him?
- Do we feel that sense of praise for the rescue we have in Jesus?

Reflection

(This might be a good week to use some music to sing or listen to, especially songs that thank God for his love, grace and mercy)

Prayer

Maybe build thankfulness into your prayers, giving everyone a chance to specifically thank God.

5 Song of Praise (Psalm 150)

Read Psalm 100

'When you read and study the psalms, you meet with joys and sorrows, tears and trials, pains and pleasures, but the book of Psalms closes on the highest note of praise! Like the book of Revelation that closes the New Testament, this final psalm says to God's people, "Don't worry—this is the way the story will end. We shall all be praising the Lord!" Praise is used 13 times this psalm, and ten of those times, we are commanded to "Praise him."'

For Discussion

- v1 begins with a call to Praise YHWH—the covenant (promise-keeping) name of God. How does remembering his promises help us to praise him?
- The 2nd half of v1 then uses the name El (Elohim) which is about God's unique power and sovereignty. How does remembering that help us to praise him?
- Do we praise God enough for his power and greatness?
- How would you sum up the message of verses 3-5?
- Why do you think the book of Psalms ends with this one?
- How does that relate to the overall story of Scripture, what's the finale that we're still looking forward to?
- Is praising God good for us, or is it for God's benefit?
- What have you found most helpful or encouraging as we've journeyed through these Psalms?

Reflection

It would be good to find a way of praising God—singing, or writing out thanks, listing reasons to praise God... or something else!

Prayer

Pray that the Psalms would continue to inspire us on life's journey

Further copies of these notes and audio of the accompanying sermons are available on our website: www.allsaintswick.org.uk/resources