

Psalms 2011

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Week 1 – Getting the Most out of the Psalms (p. 5-9)

Introduction

Before diving into the Psalms, we're going to take some time this week to orient ourselves, and get to know one another as a group. This will be beneficial in getting the most out of our time together over the coming weeks.

-Take a minute for each member of the group to introduce him/herself.

-Read Peterson, pages 5-7.

-Respond to the following questions:

-How might the poetry of the Psalms helpful for our relationship with God?

-How might we use the Psalms to strengthen our prayer life?

-Read the "Suggestions for Members of a Group Study" on pages 8-9.

Group Covenant

This year, we would like each group to form a "Group Covenant" with one another. It is our hope that during the course of this bible study, your group will commit to fulfilling an agreed upon set of expectations. This will help ensure that everyone in your group is on the same page, and committed to making this bible study the best possible experience it can be.

Your Group Covenant can be in writing or verbal. Here are some sample issues you may want to address with your covenant:

-What time will you meet, and where?

-The Psalms study lasts for ten weeks. How many times is it reasonable to expect a group member to attend?

-Will the members of your group do any reading before they meet? If so, what is everyone expected to read?

-What are common goals for your time together? What can you do to make sure those goals are met?

Additionally, you may want group members to answer the following True/False questions:

-I want music incorporated into the study before or after the discussion

- I want art incorporated into the study*
- I want to bring food or drinks to this study*
- I want to be called upon directly to answer questions*
- I want to take turns leading the study*

Week 2 – Psalm 1

Additional Questions

Questions for the Text

- Why does the author use the word “delight” in verse two?
- How are we to understand the phrase “whatever they do prospers” in verse three? Does this mean that Christians will always get their way?

Questions for Our Lives

- How do we love and share Christ with the scoffers and mockers in our lives, without becoming too influenced by them?
- What ways does our culture make it hard to cultivate a meditative mindset?

Now or Later

Peterson suggests using Psalm 119 in prayer and devotion this week, to help form a meditative mindset. Consider meditating on the following passages during quiet time, or throughout the day during the upcoming week:

Day 1 – Verse 1-24

Day 2 – Verse 25-48

Day 3 – Verse 49–80

Day 4 – Verse 81–104

Day 5 – Verse 105–128

Day 6 – Verse 129–152

Day 7 – Verse 153–176

Music

Psalm 1 Acapella - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsQF8VIJPFM>

[Brian Moss – Joy Will Come to You](#)

http://prayerbookproject.blogs.com/Prayerbook_1/Joy_Will_Come_To_You.mp3

Week 3 – Psalm 2

Additional Questions

Questions for the Text

- Who is speaking in verse seven? How is that significant?
- How can rulers “serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” in a culture where Church and State are separated?

Questions for Our Lives

- How does this Psalm affect our understanding of what rulers and governors should do?
- How well does the government in your country of origin reflect this psalm? What is it doing that you want to see more of? What needs to change?

Now or Later

Peterson suggests you spend some time learning about a ruler, in order to become more aware of how to pray for them. If you are not sure who to pray for, here are some suggestions:

- The highest official in your home country (president, king, prime minister)
- The congress or parliament in your country
- Joseph Deiss, President of the United Nations
- The governor, or other leaders from your state or province
- The mayor, city manager, or superintendent in your hometown
- Gaylen Byker, out-going President of Calvin College, and/or his successor

Music

Jason Goldtrap - Psalm 2 Acappella - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hkpo50UWTsc>

Leonard Bernstein – "Adonai ro-I" (Combination of Psalm 2 and 23) - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcF3t-W3Wi8>

Brian Moss – Kiss the Son

http://prayerbookproject.blogs.com/Prayerbook_1/Kiss_The_Son.mp3

Week 4 – Psalm 51

Additional Questions

Questions for the Text

-What does verse four teach us about how we should respond to sin?

-In verse eleven, David asks God not to take His Holy Spirit away. How might David's understanding of the Holy Spirit differ from ours?

Questions for Our Lives

-Peterson says "our experience of sin does not consist of doing some bad things, but of being bad. It is a fundamental condition of our existence, not a temporary lapse into error." What does he mean by this statement? Do you agree? Why or why not?

-How can we create a Christian culture that is more open about our sin, and our need for forgiveness?

Now or Later

Attempt to do Peterson's exercise at least once this week, focusing on a particular sin, or pattern of sin behavior.

Music

[Wash Me, O God \(from Jazz Psalms\) – Daniel Richardson and Angel Napieralski \(link to bookstore page\)](#)

(Rip from CD)

Chant

[Greek Orthodox \(In English\) - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJ8ufoy4ulw>](#)

[Gregorio Allegri - Miserere Mei, Deus \(Psalm 51\) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFAmQ8Dccm4>](#)

Week 5 – Psalm 103

Additional Questions

Questions for the Text

-How should we interpret verse seventeen, “the LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children?”

-What are common misunderstandings people have with regard to their salvation? What verses in this Psalm help correct them?

Questions for our Lives

-How does understanding the doctrine of salvation enhance our experience of it?

-What role can our *experience* of salvation play when we share our faith with others?

Now or Later

Peterson encourages us to write our own Psalm of praise. For some helpful suggestions about writing your own Psalm, [click here](#) (link to page 18).

Music

[Bless the Lord My Soul – Concord First Assembly](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeGst3a4hO4>

[Bless the Lord My Soul – Taize Community](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGEjKV6eDxY>

Chant

[Psalm 103 - Orthodox Choir of Valaam Monastery \(In English\)](#)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_VjxxONUNE

Week 6 – Psalm 23

Additional Questions

Questions for the Text

- Why would the shepherd's "rod and staff" in verse four be a source of comfort?
- What is the significance of the speaker being seated at the table in the presence of his enemies in verse five?

Questions for our Lives

- How can we tangibly be led to "quiet waters," and have our souls restored by God?
- What is a practical way that you can be reminded of God's faithfulness during a time of fear or anxiety?

Now or Later

On your own, read Isaiah 40 aloud, as Peterson says. This passage is largely about the might and majesty of God, and His centrality over all creation. Take some time to go slowly through it, then think, pray, or journal about these questions:

- How does your view of yourself line up with this passage? Is your attitude similar to the Scriptures? How does a proper view of God and self help us overcome fear, and feel more comfortable?

Music

[Leonard Bernstein – "Adonai ro-I" \(Combination of Psalm 2 and 23\)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcF3t-W3Wi8) -
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcF3t-W3Wi8>

[John Rutter: Requiem 6/7 - The Lord is my shepherd](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovPbeXYUD-g)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovPbeXYUD-g>

Chant

[John Boyer – Psalm 23](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BX3QdTmWoxk>

Week 7 – Psalm 137

Additional Questions

Questions for the Text

-How does this psalm compare in structure to other psalms we've read so far? How might that be significant?

-How might God respond to the author of this psalm?

Questions for Our Lives

-Is there a people group that you see in a similar way as the Israelites saw the Babylonians? Why? How would Christ compel you to respond to them?

-Is there a healthy way to express feelings of hatred in a community of faith? If so, what might it look like?

Now or Later

Peterson recommends praying through Psalms 138 and 139 in order to continue praying through strong emotions. This week, read through Psalm 137, 138, and 139 consecutively at the end of the day. Use these psalms as a jumping off point to process your day, and the variety of emotions you experienced throughout it.

Music

[By the Rivers of Babylon – Croydon SDA Gospel Choir](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gotiViaoLPE&feature=related>

Week 8 – Psalm 6

Additional Questions

Questions for the Text

- What words would you use to describe the language used by David? How is his language significant?
- What is the significance of verse ten? Why would David's enemies be overwhelmed by "shame and anguish?"

Questions for Our Lives

- David's life was often threatened by enemies who wanted to kill him or take his throne. Who are the enemies who cause you grief in your life? How do they threaten or harm you physically, spiritually, or emotionally?
- How often do you weep for/with others? Why might that be an important part of the Christian life?

Now or Later

Peterson encourages us to spend time pouring out our feelings to God. Use the guided prayer below, based on Psalm 6, to help facilitate an expression of your feelings for yourself, or the suffering/struggles of another. Read through the prayer, incorporating the circumstances you are thinking of. Then spend some time thinking, praying, or journaling about how God might respond to this prayer.

Lord and Father,

Have mercy on (). You are God, and () are merely human. Spare () from your anger and wrath. () feels the anguish and burden of (). Take pity Sovereign Lord, for You are great and in control.

Lord, how long will you allow things to be this way? Please do not ignore these prayers. I know you can hear them, for You are always near.

Do not withhold Your love Lord. Do not allow () to wither in spirit, or to lose hope. You are our Lord. Our God. Our King. Please show Yourself in this situation, lest () be lost in tears, and sorrow.

O Lord, () is really struggling with (). Protect () from enemies, and from Satan, the Spiritual enemy. Restore and renew () strength and faith. Show Your presence, and bring healing, and hope where it is needed.

I praise You Lord, because You hear these prayers. You love Your people, and You will always remain faithful to them. Help () to remember that always.

Have mercy on (). Whatever happens, protect ()'s faith, and help () to know Your goodness and wisdom, even if (he/she/they) can not see it.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit I pray. Amen.

Music

[Brian Moss – Heal Me](#)

http://prayerbookproject.blogs.com/Prayerbook_1/Heal_Me.mp3

[Young Adults Choir Laudate! – Psalm 6](#)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQbm1_ymR0A

Week 9 – Psalm 73

Additional Questions

Questions for the Text

- What stands out to you about the structure of this Psalm?
- How does our belief in the Holy Spirit change/shape our reading of this Psalm – specifically, verses 16-17.

Questions for Our Lives

- Psalm 73 speaks of the psalmist's jealousy of non-believers. What worldly beliefs/practices/trappings make you feel jealous sometimes? What does that say about the state of your heart?
- Re-read verses 13-14. Have you ever experienced a time where you felt like that? How did you handle it?

Now or Later

Psalm 49 reiterates the truth of our spiritual condition – apart from God, we have nothing. All earthly wealth, stature, and possessions are temporary, and ultimately meaningless. Read through Psalm 49. Then, commit to praying each day this week for someone you know who is not living in right relationship with God. Pray that he/she will know their need for God, and provide you or others opportunities to show and speak about God's love to that person.

Music

[Boogalu – Psalm 73](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsBv9YQQVjE>

Week 10 – Psalm 150

Additional Questions

Questions for the Text

- Why do you think this is the last Psalm in the Psalter?
- What does the use of instruments and dancing tell us about the nature of praise?

Questions for Our Lives

- How can we practically praise God during the week, outside of Church?
- How should we read this psalm in times of difficulty or stress?

Now or Later

If you have not already, use this last week to write your own (link to page 18) psalm of praise to God for what He has done in your life. You could also write a piece of music or create a drawing/painting/sculpture in gratitude to God. Don't worry if you do not normally consider yourself "artistic" – art can be a unique and powerful way to deepen prayer and express our feelings to God for all people!

Music

[Jubilation Gospel Choir – Psalm 150](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gv-auouzP-4>

[Erez Yechiel – Psalm 150 \(Hebrew with English Translation\)](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jq0dVQnkoHs>

Additional Resources

Suggested Books

How to Read the Psalms, Tremper Longman III, IVP Academic, 1988.

An introduction to the various types of psalms, and how to approach them.

Psalms and the Life of Faith, Walter Brueggemann, Fortress Press, 1995.

A comprehensive overview of the psalms, and their meaning for the Church, by a renowned Old Testament scholar.

Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer, Eugene Peterson, HarperOne, 1991

Peterson provides further guidance for using the Psalms as a tool for prayer.

The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction & Guide to Resources, John D. Witvliet, 2007.

An overview of the way psalms are written, and their various uses in worship throughout church history. Also contains a comprehensive guide to psalms resources.

Commentaries

[What is a commentary?](#) (link to page 19)

NIV Application Commentary Psalms, Gerald H. Wilson, 2002.

Helps readers see the text's application in the contemporary world.

Psalms, James Luther Mays, Interpretation. 1994.

Readable commentary designed for use by everyday people.

Psalms 1-72 and 73 – 150, Derek Kinder, 2009

Brief but thorough overviews of each Psalm, as well as structural analysis and questions of interpretation.

The Psalms as Christian Worship: An Historical Commentary, Bruce K. Waltke and James Houston, Eerdmans, 2010.

Verse by verse exposition of each Psalm from a historical perspective. Written for a scholarly audience.

For more recommended commentaries, visit the [Center for Excellence in Preaching](http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/encounterText/commentaries.php?pNav=cep).
(<http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/encounterText/commentaries.php?pNav=cep>)

Additional Music

[Psalms – Sovereign Grace Music](#)

Contemporary renditions of twelve different Psalms

http://www.amazon.com/Psalms-Sovereign-Grace-Music/dp/B001EGFZ36/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1307717860&sr=8-2

[Psalms from the Soul – Volume 1](#)

Gospel-style psalms and canticles, taken directly from the Catholic Lectionary

<http://www.ocp.org/products/12891>

[Psalms from the Soul – Volume 2](#)

<http://www.ocp.org/products/20743>

[The Psalms Project](#)

Unplugged renditions of thirteen different Psalms

<http://www.thepsalmproject.com/>

What is a commentary?

A Biblical commentary is a work designed to aid the reader in the study of Scripture. Commentaries are usually scholarly in nature (though not always), and they provide explanation and interpretation of a passage by examining the authorship, background, setting, and original language of a passage. They also provide useful cross-referencing and comparison with the rest of the Biblical narrative.

A word of caution when using commentaries – sometimes there is not a clear consensus in the scholarly community about a particular verse, or detail of a story. Although most authors do their best to remain objective, there is always some subjectivity when interpreting Scripture. It is important to remember this when forming an opinion about a passage, and especially when facilitating discussions where a commentary is used.

How do I use a commentary?

Some people think that commentaries are only for pastors and teachers. However, they can be great tools for personal or group Bible study!

For the Psalms study, leaders or group members may want to read through part of one of our [recommended commentaries](#) (link to page 13) before or during the Bible study. The commentary can provide valuable insight into the structure and purpose of the psalm, and help illuminate verses that seem confusing.

Leaders are invited to form additional questions based on commentary materials, if they are interested.

Be sure to visit the [Hekman Library](http://library.calvin.edu/) (http://library.calvin.edu/) to see if you can borrow one of our recommended commentaries!

Learning to Chant Psalms

Singing and chanting the Psalms is an ancient practice in the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, many Protestants have not had exposure to the joy of this spiritual discipline.

Chanting the Psalms can be a powerful experience, because it involves the mind, heart, and body in prayer and worship of God. One does not need to think her/his singing voice must be “good enough” to chant the Psalms. The truth is your true singing voice is beautiful, because it is part of your authentic self, created by God. Although it may feel uncomfortable at first, it is worth the effort!

Below are several resources that may serve as a helpful introduction to the practice of chanting the Psalms.

Helpful Resources

<http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Faith-Tools/Meditation/2000/06/Lesson-1-The-Bare-Essentials.aspx>

<http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/theologyandworship/chant-psalms/>

Chanting the Psalms: A Practical Guide with Instructional CD, Cynthia Bourgeault, New Seeds (2006).

http://www.amazon.com/Chanting-Psalms-Practical-Guide-Instructional/dp/1590302575/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1307114630&sr=8-1

Writing Your Own Psalm

One way that we can respond to the Psalms is to spend time composing a psalm ourselves. We can write poems or songs that are in the spirit and style of the Psalms, or even re-write or paraphrase an existing psalm to fit our modern context.

What makes the Psalms so powerful is that they provide language that we can and should use in prayer. Writing our own psalm is not about trying to replace what is collected in the Bible. Rather, it is a helpful exercise because it challenges us to filter our thoughts and prayers through the Scriptures, while expressing our feelings before God in a powerful way.

Consider modeling a psalm after one that we read during the study, and adopting the words to you or your faith community's current situation. Or, you can also write a psalm based on your own words in a *style* that intrigues you – a lament, or a psalm of praise, for example.

Whatever you do, remember to have fun with it! This exercise is not about being a “great” writer. It's about giving voice to your thoughts and feelings in a way that is honest and honors God. If you get stuck, check out one of our examples below. And if you've got a great psalm you'd like us to post on our website, email the Campus Ministries Staff at psalms@calvin.edu

[Example 1 – Based on Psalm 13](#) (link to page 19)

[Example 2 – A Psalm of Praise](#) (link to page 23)

Based on Psalm 13

A Psalm of Praise
AJ Gretz

Almighty God and Father,
Who is like you?

Who deserves to be called Lord
Or King?

Surely not I, Father.

I am mortal man.
Dust.
And sin.

Though I am full of pride
And I long for glory
I am not like You.
Surely I am not the Lord.

You are the Almighty One.
The Maker of Heaven and Earth.
Of all that is seen
And unseen.

You reign over sky and star.
The waters of the sea
And the foundations of the Earth
Obey Your every command.

O Lord
Have mercy on me.
Help me to remember my place
To serve you in humility
And find security in Your sovereign rule.

Blessed are Your people
Who love You
And are loved by You,
The Alpha and Omega,
Beginning and End.

In You, God, we find our purpose
And everlasting love.
You work for the good of Your people.

Praise You for Your goodness
And faithfulness.
Praise You for Your relentless love
And undeserved grace.
Praise You, Our Lord.
Our God.
Our King.