

SEVEN MEDITATIONS ON THE

PSALMS

I said to the Lord,

**“YOU ARE MY LORD. APART FROM YOU I HAVE NO
GOOD THING.”**

Ps 16:2

Meditations on the Psalms

The Psalms, with their beautiful language and poetic imagery, help us to understand how God works in myriads of ways in both the best and the worst times in our lives. Importantly they help us to *express* our emotions towards God in our everyday lives and prayers. Although we will not be studying Psalm 16, the quotation on the cover perhaps sums up David's attitude towards God. He sees God and his mercy in everything that is good, and nothing is good unless it comes from God's favour. May we come to this same experience!

Reading the Psalms is different from reading many other parts of the Bible in at least two ways:

(i) although we will *learn* much about God, his world and ourselves from the Psalms, nonetheless the Psalms are primarily prayers. So there is a sense in which they are God's people talking to God, rather than vice versa; and

(ii) much of the Bible is narrative or teaching, which we study in order to understand and apply to our current situation. However we are invited to use the Psalms as they stand, as our own prayers; we are invited to move back into the world view of 2,500-3,000 years ago. This will sometimes be a challenge, because we are so infected by the modern secular and scientific way of thinking, which leaves God out of the understanding of everyday life.

So our home church group meetings this term should be something like group prayers, as we meditate on, and share in, the prayers of God's people of old.

Memory Verses?

The suggested prayer for each week is based on a short quotation from the Psalm. They are all wonderful verses, worth making "part of yourself" by memorising them. You will then be able to use them regularly in your own prayers. I encourage you to have a go at learning them.

Related Passages

Each week the “question” for day 5 (sometimes also day 4) refers you to related passages in the Bible. Your meditation on the Psalm will be deeper and more meaningful if you can set it in the broader context of the Bible as a whole. If you have time, you could read one or more of these passages before your home church group meets.

Hymns/Songs

The Psalms have inspired countless hymns and songs. A few of these are reproduced on the next page. You could read or sing them in your group or privately.

Max Gilbert 1999

SONGS FROM THE PSALMS

1. Let the Words of My Mouth.

(Scripture in Song 124; Psalm 19:14)

Let the words of my mouth and the
meditations of my heart,
Be acceptable in thy sight O Lord,
O Lord my strength,
O Lord my life.

2. Be Still and Know

(Songs of Fellowship 340; Psalm 46:10)

Be still and know that I am God. Be
still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.

3. God is our Strength and Refuge

(Hymns for Today's Church 527; Ps 46;

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God is our strength and refuge,
our present help in trouble;
and we therefore will not fear,
though the earth should change!
Though mountains shake and
tremble,
though swirling floods are raging,
God the Lord of hosts is with us
evermore!

There is a flowing river,
within God's holy city;
God is in the midst of her -
she shall not be moved!
God's help is swiftly given,
thrones vanish at his presence -
God the Lord of hosts is with us
evermore!

Come, see the works of our maker,
learn of his deeds all-powerful;
wars will cease across the world
when he shatters the spear!
Be still and know your creator,
uplift him in the nations -
God the Lord of hosts is with us
evermore!

4. Change My Heart O God

Scripture in Song 482 Ps51:10; Rom9:21

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Change my heart O God,
make it ever true,
change my heart O God,
may I be like you.
You are the potter,
I am the clay.
Mould me and make me,
this what I pray.

5. Bless the Lord O My Soul

(Scripture in Song 123; Ps 103:1)

Bless the Lord O my soul,
Bless the Lord O my soul,
and all that is within me
bless his holy name.

6. Angels Help Us to Adore Him

(From Hymns for Today's Church 38; Ps 103:20-22)

Angels, help us to adore him;
you behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him,
all that is in time and space:
Alleluia, Alleluia!
Praise with us the God of grace.

7. I Will Sing

(Scripture in Song 198; Psalm 104:31,33)

Let the glory of the Lord endure
forever,
Let the Lord be glad in his works,
I will sing unto the Lord as long as
I live,
I will sing praise to my God, while I
have my being.

8. O God Our Help in Ages Past

(Hymns for Today's Church 37; Ps 90)

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter in the stormy blast,
and our eternal home:

Beneath the shadow of your throne
your people lived secure;
sufficient is your arm alone,
and our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
or earth from darkness came,
from everlasting you are God,
to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in your sight
are like an evening gone;
short as the watch that ends the night,
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away;
they pass forgotten, as a dream
dies with the dawning day.

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come:
be our defence while life shall last,
and our eternal home.

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Week 1

THEME: God reveals his glory and life-giving law.

SONG: 1

Day 1 Psalm 19:1-6 God's glory in his Creation.

The psalmist describes the sun as being “like a champion rejoicing to run his course”? Do you ever think about the sun like this? Should you?

Day 2 Psalm 19:7-11 The Lord's life-giving law.

What are the eight characteristics of the law (statutes, precepts etc) as described in these verses?

Day 3 Psalm 19:12-14 Prayerful reflection by the Psalmist.

What does it mean to relate to the LORD as “my Rock” and “my Redeemer”.

Day 4 Revelation of God through Creation

Some other parts of the Bible which speak of the revelation of God through his creation are Ps 8 (esp. v3-4); Ps 33 (esp v6-9); Acts 14:15-17; Rom 1:20. Read one or more of these.

Day 5 God's law

God's law is praised in a similar way in Ps 1 and Ps 119 (eg v97-112). Read one or both of these.

STUDY PASSAGE Psalm 19

To Discuss:

1. Describe a time when you were particularly aware of God as a result of an experience of his creation (eg the grandeur of the stars or mountains; or the power of the seas or storms; the complexity and ingenuity of living creatures)?

2. Exactly *what is it* that the heavens, the skies and the sun declare? (v1-6) Give some examples where observing nature could lead us to wrong conclusions about what is right and wrong behaviour?

3. What are six effects of God's law? (v7-8,11) Do you *really* believe that God's law can do these things to you? Choose one or two of these effects, and discuss (i) what it means; (ii) times when you have experienced this effect; and (iii) how you might go about enjoying this effect to a greater extent.

4. God reveals his glory in his creation. He reveals his will for mankind in his law. Discuss the psalmist's response to these revelations of God (v12-14). What are the elements of his response? Do you respond in the same way? We are blessed with an even greater revelation of God in and through Jesus (John 1:17-18; Matt 11:25-30). How does that affect our response to God's revelation?

PRAY *"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."* Psalm 19:14; Song 1.

Week 2

THEME: God, our refuge and strength.

SONGS: 2 and 3.

Day 1 Psalm 46:1,7,11 Refrain: God is our refuge.

In times of trouble, on whom did the Israelites rely?

Day 2 Psalm 46:2-3 God is present even in cosmic destruction.

When God's creation starts to dissolve, how do God's people react? Why?

Day 3 Psalm 46:4-6 God is present with his city/people.

In contrast with the cosmic destruction in v2-3 and the 'fall' of those who oppose God (v6), how does God relate to his city/people?

Day 4 Psalm 46:8-10 God is present with his New Creation.

What 'works of the LORD' are described here?

Day 5 Related passages.

Read Psalm 23 for another description of how God brings comfort in distress. For NT passages which show how Ps 46 is fulfilled in Jesus, see one or more of Acts 2:16-21; Luke 21:25-33; Jn 1:14; Mat 1:23; Luke 2:14.

STUDY PASSAGE Psalm 46

To Discuss:

1. Describe a situation of trouble in which you needed a 'refuge'. Where did you look for it? Did you find it?

2. Last week we saw that Psalm 19 speaks of the revelation of God's glory in his creation. Psalm 46:2-3 shows that God is present even when his creation is in turmoil. In what ways do you think that creation and our lives are presently in turmoil? In what ways is God as an 'ever-present help'? How do you deal with the fact that sometimes it appears that God is 'absent'?

3. What does it mean to you personally that

- "God is my refuge"?
- "God is my strength"?

4. "*Be still and know that I am God.*" (v10) What are some things in life that make it hard to "be still"? What can we do to "slow down" and find refuge in the presence of God?

PRAY Come before God in the light of his words to us, "*Be still and know that I am God.*" *Ps 46:10.* (Song 2). Continue praying in the words of Psalm 23.

Week 3

THEME: God forgives and renews me.

SONG: 4.

Day 1 Psalm 51:1-2, 18-19. Prayer for God's mercy on David (v1,2) and on the Nation (v18-19).

What reasons does David give for why God should show him mercy?

Day 2 **Psalm 51:2-6. David's confession.**

When did David commence being sinful? What does this mean about the nature of sin?

Day 3 **Psalm 51:7-12. David's prayer for renewal.**

Apart from forgiveness, what does David pray for?

Day 4 **Psalm 51:13-17. David's promised response.**

What does David promise to do in response to God's forgiveness and renewal? (v13,14,15)

Day 5 **Related passages.**

Psalm 51 is the most famous of the 7 "penitential" psalms (ie Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). Read Psalm 32, which recounts what happened when David was reluctant to confess his sin, and perhaps gives the background to Ps 51:8. Jesus' parable of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) echoes the content and even the language of Psalm 51.

STUDY PASSAGE Psalm 51

To Discuss:

1. This psalm is King David's prayer of confession concerning his adultery with Bathsheba. Briefly recount that event (2 Sam 11). Why did "the thing which David had done displease the Lord"? (2 Sam 11:27)
2. What are some potential physical, emotional and spiritual consequences if we refuse to confess our sins? (Ps 32:3-4; Ps 51:3,8). Describe your experience of this.
3. Discuss the pros and cons of the view that in God's eyes we are 'basically good' but that we sometimes do 'wrong things'? Consider especially v5 and v10. Do you accept or reject the view? What is the essence of sin (v4)?
4. In v7-12, David makes a series of requests for God to deal with his sins and his sinful nature. What are these requests and what do they mean? What is your experience of these blessings?
5. Psalm 51 stresses *God's* actions in forgiving and renewing us. But what does he require of us? (v17). What does "a broken and contrite heart" mean? Is it something we 'do', independently of God, or is it part of the renewal which only God can grant (v10-12)?

PRAY *"Create in me a new heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*
Psalm 51:10 (Song 4)

Week 4

THEME: God, compassionate and gracious.

SONGS: 5 and 6.

Day 1 Psalm 103:1-2. Call to personal praise of God.

How do you praise with your “inmost being”?

Day 2 Psalm 103:3-5. Praise for God’s goodness to individuals.

Which of God’s blessings on individuals does the psalmist highlight?

Day 3 Psalm 103:6-19. Praise for God’s compassion and graciousness to his people (ie “those who fear him”).

How many times do words such as “compassionate”, “love” and “gracious” appear in these verses?

Day 4 Psalm 103:20-22. Call for universal praise.

Who and what is called to praise God in these verses?

Day 5 Related passages.

Many psalms praise God for his love to his people, especially Psalms 146-150. Read one or more of these psalms. Also compare Exodus 34:5-7 with Ps 103:7-10. For fulfilment in Jesus, refer Luke 1:46-55.

STUDY PASSAGE Psalm 103

To Discuss:

1. What is one of the best things that has ever happened to you? What was so good about it?
2. What are “his benefits” (v2)? How have you experienced these benefits?
3. What are the exulted ways in which v8-14 describe God’s love for his people? Discuss in what ways (if any) meditating on these words has expanded your own way of understanding or expressing God’s love for you?
4. Explain the difference between mankind and God according to v15-17. In your life, what things encourage you to accept or reject this understanding of yourself and God? How does accepting this reality influence the way we relate to God?

PRAY according to Ps 103:2. *“Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”*

Week 5

THEME: God, creator and caretaker.

SONG: 7.

This psalm is a poetic hymn with 7 stanzas. Stanzas 1 and 7 have similar themes, as do stanzas 2 and 6, 3 and 5, while stanza 4 is the climax. This sort of structure (called a *chiasm* or cross-over) is common in the psalms.

Day 1 Psalm 104:1-4, 31-35. Praise God, who is (i) clothed in the splendour of his creation, and (ii) rejoicing in his works.

What does “he stretches out the heavens like a tent” mean?

Day 2 Psalm 104:5-9, 27-30. God the creator of the earth; and sustainer and creator of the living creatures on earth.

Note how God formed the physical earth (v5-9) and its living inhabitants (v30).

Day 3 Psalm 104:10-18, 24-26. God cares for the animals of the land and air; and of the sea.

Note the ways in which God is intimately involved in the daily care of his creatures.

Day 4 Psalm 104:19-23. God’s creation: everything with its right function and time.

In what ways do these verses describe God’s creation as ‘ordered’ rather than ‘chaotic’.

Day 5 Related passages.

This creation hymn reflects Genesis 1, as do Psalms 8 and 33 to a lesser extent. Col 1:16-17 and Heb 1:2-3 show that it is through Jesus that God created and sustains the world.

STUDY PASSAGE Psalm 104

To Discuss:

1. When you say, “the sun is setting”, do you really think that the earth is standing still and the sun is going down? If not, why do you speak this way? Think of some other common phrases which we use, even though we have been taught that they are not scientifically true.

2. Read the psalm out loud slowly, pausing occasionally to say what each section means.

3. In the light of Psalm 104, discuss these possibilities:

- (i) God made the world so that it works according to certain natural laws, and then left it to operate by itself (except that he might occasionally intervene with a miracle).
- (ii) God is active in the world and with us, on a moment by moment basis.
- (iii) In some way, both (i) and (ii) are true, *or* neither are true.

4. Psalm 104 is a glorious hymn of praise of God’s care for his creation, but it is rather foreign to our modern scientific world view. Discuss whether you personally can use such words (i) in your own prayers, or (ii) in your everyday conversation with Christians, or (iii) with non-Christians. Would it be right to speak like this psalm more often? If so how could we develop the habit?

PRAY Praise God in the words of the psalm, eg “*These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. ... When you open your hand they are satisfied with good things.*” (Psalm 104:27-28)

Week 6

THEME: Life in the shadow of death.

SONG: 8.

Day 1 Psalm 90:1-2. God, the everlasting one.

Compare God with the transience of our human life.

Day 2 Psalm 90:3-6. God, who sweeps men away.

Human life is fleeting (v5-6). Is this by chance, because of our nature, or because of God's specific action to end our lives?

Day 3 Psalm 90:7-12. God's wrath makes our lives "but trouble and sorrow".

Why are we terrified? (v7)

Day 4 Psalm 90:13-17. Prayer for God's favour and mercy.

What specifically does Moses pray for?

Day 5 Related passages.

Read one or more of Genesis 2:7; 3:17-19; Isa 40:6-8; Psalm 103:14-18; Mat 6:28-34; 10:28-31; 2Cor 4:16-18.

STUDY PASSAGE Psalm 90

To Discuss:

1. Discuss the ways in which you find life “but trouble and sorrow” (v10) at your stage of life, eg as a young single person; as a young parent; as your own parents grow old; or as you grow old. How do you react to the shortness of life, and the prospect of your coming death?

2. How is our death related to God’s anger (Psalm 90:3-11; Gen 3:17-19)? How did Jesus’ death deal with God’s anger (Rom 3:23-26; Matt 26:28)?

3. What does Moses seek from God in his prayers made in v12-17? Discuss how God might answer these prayers, both in our earthly lives and in the life to come.

4. How do you understand the “momentary afflictions” of this life (see 2 Cor 4:16-19). How does this affect the way you will live the rest of your earthly life?

PRAY *“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”*
(Psalm 90:12)

Week 7

THEME: God knows me!

Day 1 Psalm 139:1-6. God knows us.

How much does God know about you?

Day 2 Psalm 139:7-12. God is everywhere.

Where can you go to get away from God?

Day 3 Psalm 139:13-18. God made me, wonderful and for a purpose.

When did God first relate to you? This passage figures prominently in assessing the morality of abortion. What relevance does it have?

Day 4 Psalm 139:19-24. Slay the wicked, O God!

How do you react to this prayer? In what way would it be right for us to recover this way of thinking?

Day 5 Related passages.

Concerning God's knowledge and care of us, read one or more of Job 10:8-14; Psalm 138:6-8; Jonah 1:3; Rom 8:27; Heb 4:13; John 2:12-25. Concerning prayer for defeat of the ungodly, Psalms 35, 58, 137.

STUDY PASSAGE Psalm 139

To Discuss:

1. What prompts people to try to hide from God, even though they know that God is everywhere and knows everything? Recount how Jonah tried to flee from God (Jonah esp. 1:1-3). Other examples are Adam & Eve (Gen 3:8), Achan (Joshua 7), and Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) Think about whether you ever do this.

2. From v1-18, discuss how much God does know about you. Explain whether you find this “comforting” or “frightening” or something else.

3. Do you, like David, “know full well” that you are “fearfully and wonderfully made”.(v14) How does this affect your life and relationship with God? Discuss what this means about the modern search for self-esteem and self-identity.

4. Why is David’s prayer in v23-24 the only sensible response to the meditation in v1-22?

PRAY *“Search me O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Psalm 139:23-24*

HOW TO USE THESE NOTES

- 1.** Read the daily Bible readings on the left hand side of the double page, and think about the question for the day. Make a note of your answer and any difficulties you have.
- 2.** The questions on the right hand side of the double page are designed for group discussion. Think about these questions before you go to your discussion group.
- 3.** The study passages follow the morning and evening sermon series. You may find it helpful to take notes of the sermons.
- 4.** Please don't be frustrated if you can't understand or answer the questions: the important thing is that you read God's word.
- 5.** Use this guide for family or personal Bible reading, and if you would like to join a discussion group, please see one of the ministers.

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