



# 2018 SUMMER PSALMS CURRICULUM

## Introduction

This summer, we get the privilege of mining the riches of the psalms from the pulpit and in our small groups. Why are the psalms so rich in content and vividness? A primary reason is the stunning breadth of the psalms. You can see this in a few ways

Firstly, the psalms have a stunning breadth in genre and tone that enables it to fit every season in our lives. Indeed, Athanasius was right when he said, “Whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book [the psalms] you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you . . . learn the way to remedy your ill.”<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, the psalms have a stunning breadth in how they are used in the Christian life. It can be used individually, in the home, with small groups and in formal church gatherings. This makes it the perfect book to live in both our Sunday services and small group this summer, and we pray that it is also the perfect book to live in your families and hearts this summer.

## THE CHALLENGE WITH THE PSALMS’ STUNNING BREADTH

While the wide variety of emotions and circumstances that the Psalms address is certainly a great strength, it can also present great challenges as we read and pray the Psalms. We feel comfortable with the psalms that praise God to the heavens, but we tend to squirm when we encounter psalmists firing complaints at God. They just seem so inappropriate and improper to us! So what are we to do with psalms that can often feel so foreign to us?

In this curriculum, we want to help to make the Psalms less foreign by studying 3 different psalms of different types: A wisdom psalm (Psalm 19), a lament psalm (Psalm 4) and a praise psalm (Psalm 95). In these, we will see a taste of how to relate to God at our highest and at our lowest. We will be equipped for the storms of life before they hit, during the thick of it and after they pass. And it is our prayer that as you dive into these texts, you will not only read these psalms, but sing them to one another and sing them from the heart (Eph 5:19).

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Wenham, *Psalter Reclaimed*, p 15

# **How to Use this Curriculum**

For each session, you will encounter the following sections and with corresponding instructions:

## **Introduction**

This section will serve to introduce the type of the Psalm and how it can be used as we pray to God. Read this section to help you understand how to use the psalm.

## **Read**

Read the passage slowly two or three times, stopping to understand and savour God's word.

## **Observe**

Write down what you have observed from the psalm, what strikes you and what questions have arisen. Be prepared to share your observations with your small group.

## **Meditate**

Look at the previous two sections ("Read" and "Observe") and answer the following questions:

**Adore** – What did you learn about God for which you could praise or thank him?

**Admit** – What did you learn about yourself for which you could repent?

**Aspire** – What did you learn about your life that you could aspire to, ask for, and act on?

Be prepared to share your meditations with your small group.

## **Discover**

Read the given meditation and incorporate insights you discover into the "Meditate" section above. Look up the passages in the brackets for further insight.

## **Pray**

Use the provided prayer as an "on-ramp" to start praying. Then, "get on the highway" by praying through your adoration, admission and aspirations in the "Meditate" section. May this section serve as a birthing area for the collective prayers of your small group.

# **Acknowledgements**

All of the "Discover" and "Pray" sections are taken from Tim Keller's "The Songs of Jesus". In fact, the entire curriculum is largely adapted from this precious resource. It is highly recommended.

The "Introduction" sections are taken from a mixture of Tim Keller's "The Songs of Jesus" and Tremper Longman's "How to Read the Psalms".

## **SESSION 1: Psalm 19 – The Perfect Word**

### **Introduction**

Psalm 19 is a WISDOM psalm. Similar to wisdom books such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, wisdom psalms lay out the way to live skillfully and righteously in the world God created. They are guides to “the good life” as God designed it. One key feature of wisdom psalms is the use of Hebrew poetic style to contrast wise, righteous living (e.g. “A wise son brings joy to his father,”) against foolish, wicked living (e.g. “but a foolish son grief to his mother.”)

### **Read**

<sup>7</sup> The law of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure,  
making wise the simple;  
<sup>8</sup> the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is pure,  
enlightening the eyes;  
<sup>9</sup> the fear of the Lord is clean,  
enduring forever;  
the rules of the Lord are true,  
and righteous altogether.  
<sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.  
<sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.  
<sup>12</sup> Who can discern his errors?  
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.  
<sup>13</sup> Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;  
let them not have dominion over me!  
Then I shall be blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression.  
<sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable in your sight,  
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

### **Observe**

In verses 7-9, what are some of the ways the psalmist describes God’s word? What are some of the effects of God’s word?

Verse 10 gives a vivid imagery of God’s word. How does this imagery help us see the treasure that it is?

According to verses 11-13, how does God’s word reveal who we really are and guard us from our sin?

## **Meditate**

Look at the previous two sections ("Read" and "Observe") and answer the following questions:

**Adore** – What did you learn about God for which you could praise or thank him?

**Admit** – What did you learn about yourself for which you could repent?

**Aspire** – What did you learn about your life that you could aspire to, ask for, and act on?

Be prepared to share your meditations with your small group.

## **Discover**

Nature tells us about God's reality and power but not about his saving grace (verses 7–14). Only the Bible can enlighten the spiritually blind (verse 8) and "refresh the soul" (verse 7). Since the Hebrew word for "soul" means one's psyche or self, the Bible has the power to show and restore your true identity. For the Bible to do all this, you must accept that it is perfectly true and trustworthy in all its parts (verses 7–9). Then don't just study it but let it search you (verses 11–14). Finally, ask Jesus, the Word made flesh, to give you his Spirit in order to find him in the written Word. The result will be wisdom, joy, and sweetness.

## **Pray**

Lord, I am so grateful that you don't make us guess who you are but that you speak directly to us. But if the Word is going to be sweet and life-giving to me, I must let it examine, search, and warn me. Help me have the discipline and faith to let it do that in my life. Amen.

## **SESSION 2: Psalm 4 – Joy Apart From Circumstances**

### **Introduction**

Psalm 6 is a LAMENT psalm. This is the prayer of someone in suffering and difficulty, who is wrestling with God's will, perhaps questioning his ways, and seeking help to understand and endure. J. I. Packer comes right out and calls this kind of petition "complaining." He admits that no one likes people who whine and complain, but he points out that in the Bible, when "bad things happen to good people . . . they complain with great freedom and at considerable length to their God. And Scripture does not seem to regard these complaining prayers as anything other than wisdom."

### **Read**

- <sup>1</sup> Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!
- <sup>2</sup> O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?  
How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? *Selah*
- <sup>3</sup> But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself;  
the Lord hears when I call to him.
- <sup>4</sup> Be angry, and do not sin;  
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. *Selah*
- <sup>5</sup> Offer right sacrifices,  
and put your trust in the Lord.
- <sup>6</sup> There are many who say, "Who will show us some good?  
Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!"
- <sup>7</sup> You have put more joy in my heart  
than they have when their grain and wine abound.
- <sup>8</sup> In peace I will both lie down and sleep;  
For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

### **Observe**

What does the psalmist seem to be troubled by? What is his main complaint?

How does the psalmist ground himself again in verse 3-4?

According to verse 5-8, what are the results of trust placed rightfully in God's hands?

## **Meditate**

Look at the previous two sections (“Read” and “Observe”) and answer the following questions:

**Adore** – What did you learn about God for which you could praise or thank him?

**Admit** – What did you learn about yourself for which you could repent?

**Aspire** – What did you learn about your life that you could aspire to, ask for, and act on?

Be prepared to share your meditations with your small group.

## **Discover**

How can we have peaceful sleep at night (verse 8) and joy—even when others are prospering and we are not (verse 7)? Consider whether you have a divided heart—making success or relationships into idols—and repent (verse 2). Consider whether you have a bitter heart—and forgive (verse 4). Finally, in prayer, seek God’s face, a sense of his presence and his love on your heart (verse 6). Then we can know we are safe in God, come what may.

## **Pray**

Lord, other “gods” compete with you for the allegiance of my heart. I nurse resentment toward people who have wronged me, and sometimes toward you. It is these things that keep me from knowing the joy of your presence and the peace of your protection. Help me remove them and fill my heart with your joy. Amen.

## **SESSION 3: Psalm 95 – Rise up and Kneel Down**

### **Introduction**

Psalm 95 is a PRAISE psalm. Praise psalms are easily recognized by their exuberant praise of the Lord. The psalmist pulls out all the stops in his rejoicing in God's goodness. His praise is exuberant because the psalmist is very conscious of God's presence.

One key feature of most praise psalms is that they will include the reasons for praise. These *reasons for praise* form the most significant part of the psalm. God is not praised for abstract qualities, but rather for the way in which he has entered into the individual and corporate lives of his people.

### **Read**

- <sup>1</sup> Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- <sup>2</sup> Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
- <sup>3</sup> For the Lord is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.
- <sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth;  
the heights of the mountains are his also.
- <sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.
- <sup>6</sup> Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
- <sup>7</sup> For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.

### **Observe**

How are worship and adoration described in verses 1-3? Does this characterize your worship?

How does the imagery verses 4-5 help you see the magnitude and enormity of God? How does that evoke praise in your life?

What does verse 7 say about God's intimacy with us?

According to verses 4, 5 and 7, God's hands hold both the vast oceans/mountains and tiny people. Why is that truth so stunning? Are you amazed by this truth?

## **Meditate**

Look at the previous two sections ("Read" and "Observe") and answer the following questions:

**Adore** – What did you learn about God for which you could praise or thank him?

**Admit** – What did you learn about yourself for which you could repent?

**Aspire** – What did you learn about your life that you could aspire to, ask for, and act on?

Be prepared to share your meditations with your small group.

## **Discover**

V1-4: This psalm and the next give us almost a liturgy for a service of gathered worship. The first stage is adoration. Let us rise up in joy to God the Creator (verses 1–5). Let us praise him for being the maker and sustainer of the world. Worshipping is not always quiet and decorous. It can entail shouting, praising, leaping to our feet, singing our hearts out. When the love of the immeasurably great and transcendent God of the universe becomes real to us, the joy should be uncontainable.

V5-7: The next element of worship is confession of our sin and need. Let us bow down in humility to God the Redeemer (verses 6–7). In contrast to the exuberance of the first five verses, which fits with the postures of standing or even dancing, each of the three verbs in verse 6 have to do with getting low before God, since the Hebrew word for "worship" here literally means to prostrate oneself. We are to bow reverently, to kneel humbly before God, admitting our sinfulness and dependence. While adoration comes from seeing a God of glory, submission comes from seeing a God of grace, one who is our covenant God, who redeemed us and brought us as sheep into his fold (verse 7).

## **Pray**

V1-4: Lord, you are eternal, ever present, perfect in knowledge and wisdom, absolute in power, spotless in your purity, completely just and righteous, beautiful in your glory. You are all this, yet my praise falls so short of your reality that I am ashamed. Accept my praise through the merits of Jesus, my Savior. Amen.

V5-7: Lord, I confess the blindness of my understanding, the stubbornness of my will, the foolishness of my thought life, and the addiction of my heart to things of this world. "False and full of sin I am; Thou art full of truth and grace."<sup>91</sup> Without that grace I am lost. I praise you that in Christ your grace abounds to me. Amen.