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## Introduction

The book of Psalms can feel impenetrable at times. They are so full of such strong emotions and come from settings and cultures so far removed from our own. Yet these are God's words to us, written to become our words to him, appropriated by each generation of his people to express and shape our affections as we bring our hearts before him. Even more than just informing our affections and becoming our prayers, the psalms also shape our understanding of God's character and they do this across the breadth of human experience. All this helps us see how our Great God connects with us in the depths and heights of it all.

There are many different ways we could study the book of Psalms. On this occasion we're spending six weeks looking at six different themes of our life circumstances and sampling the psalms that relate most closely to these themes. Over these six weeks we've got five standard questions to help us engage with the psalms that cluster around the theme of the sermon that Sunday. Groups and individuals can work out how they want to use this, but at the very least it will form a great basis for daily readings in the psalms to see how God invites us to approach him during such seasons and circumstances. Each week there is one of the psalms highlighted for group discussion. It will also be really worthwhile for groups to reflect on the other psalms and the sermon content as well.

### Five questions for the psalms:

Use these standard five questions to help build good habits of engaging with the psalms. Some of the questions will be more helpful than others for some psalms, but that's ok – it's about engaging with God's word, not having specific answers for these questions:

1. Name the emotions in this psalm. How do they change or progress through the course of the psalm?
2. What emotions do you find hard to connect with in this Psalm? If it's not quite reflecting where you are at the moment, who else could you pray for in light of this strong emotion or challenging situation?
3. What does this psalm remind us about God's character and his reign?
4. In what sense does this point to Jesus? (e.g. is it describing him, or could have been spoken by him, or find its expectations fulfilled in him etc.)
5. How does seeing God better through this psalm affect the way you live today?

## **Week 1: Psalms for any time**

### **Sermon focus: *Psalms 1 and 150***

Many of the psalms are 'generic' in the way that they relate to life generally rather than a particular season or circumstance. They invite us to see the constant realities of life in relationship with God – qualities, passions and priorities that form a consistent part of life as a child of God.

#### **Five Daily Psalms:**

- Psalm 1
- Psalm 19
- Psalm 95
- Psalm 145
- Psalm 147

1. Name the emotions in this psalm. How do they change or progress through the course of the psalm?
2. What emotions do you find hard to connect with in this Psalm? If it's not quite reflecting where you are at the moment, who else could you pray for in light of this strong emotion or challenging situation?
3. What does this psalm remind us about God's character and his reign?
4. In what sense does this point to Jesus? (e.g. is it describing him, or could have been spoken by him, or find its expectations fulfilled in him etc.)
5. How does seeing God better through this psalm affect the way you live today?

## **Group Focus:**

### *Psalm 1*

This psalm opens the book with a description of the 'blessed' life in contrast with a wicked life. Now 'wicked' is not a word we use much these days, but in a sense it is the ultimate form of antisocial behaviour – and ultimately it is antisocial towards God as well as other people.

- What is the contrast described in verses 1-2?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is the contrast described in verses 3-5?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Verse 6 presents 'two ways to live'. What does it say about them?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How would you summarise the emotions that this psalm is intending to draw out in us? How should we feel about the two ways to live?

- In what sense is Jesus the ultimate example of the 'blessed one'?
- How does this psalm highlight our desperate need for God's mercy to us in Jesus? What is one area of life where you need to ask for God's forgiveness in light of the contrast between the blessed life and the wicked life?
- Given this psalm has been placed as the first in the book, what does it suggest about how we should read the other 149 psalms?
- What is one area of life where you want to become more of a Psalm 1 kind of person?

## Week 2: Psalms for when you're under attack

### Sermon focus: *Psalms 2 and 3*

If Psalm 1 presents the blessed life lived in God's way, Psalm 2 presents the blessed life lived under God's king (see verse 12). But this also introduces a theme of conflict that is expressed in a number of psalms. Many of them teach us about the conflict with God. Others, such as Psalm 3 are about opposition to God's King, so they say much more about Jesus than they do about us. But there are many psalms that present scenarios where God's people are the target of attack, giving voice to strong emotions of fear, distress, anxiety and even despair. Our loving heavenly Father longs for us to know that we can cry out to him from such places with such deep emotions.

### Five Daily Psalms:

- Psalm 2
- Psalm 3
- Psalm 10
- Psalm 22
- Psalm 110

1. Name the emotions in this psalm. How do they change or progress through the course of the psalm?
2. What emotions do you find hard to connect with in this Psalm? If it's not quite reflecting where you are at the moment, who else could you pray for in light of this strong emotion or challenging situation?
3. What does this psalm remind us about God's character and his reign?
4. In what sense does this point to Jesus? (e.g. is it describing him, or could have been spoken by him, or find its expectations fulfilled in him etc.)
5. How does seeing God better through this psalm affect the way you live today?

## **Group Focus:**

### *Psalm 10*

This psalm asks a painful question of God and describes a painful perspective on life. But like so many of the psalms, it shifts from what we feel and see to what we know from God's word. As such it frames our hardship in light of what God has made known, helping us prayerfully to pursue a life of faith in God and his promises.

- What is the core question of verse 1?
- How would you summarise the perspective of verses 2-11?
- How are verses 11 and 13 contrasted with the statements of verse 12 and 14?



- Verse 15 is pretty confronting! If the godless person of verses 2-11 is using power to oppress and harm others, what is verse 15 asking God to do? Why might the psalmist be asking God to do it, rather than just doing it himself?
  
- How would you rephrase the statements of faith in verses 16-18?
  
- Looking back over this psalm, how would you describe the emotions of the psalmist? Does this resonate with you? If not, who might this resonate with and how can you use this psalm to inform your prayers for them?
  
- How does seeing God better through this psalm affect the way you live today?

## **Week 3: Psalms for after I've sinned**

### **Sermon focus: *Psalm 51***

Over and over again Psalms reflects on God's description of himself in Exodus 34:6-7. His character of compassion, grace, mercy and loving faithfulness is the theme of many psalms. As Christians we have seen the ultimate revelation of this in Jesus, yet these Old Testament prayers remain just as helpful to us as they help us grasp in various ways the richness and wonder of God's mercy to sinners like you and me.

### **Five Daily Psalms**

- Psalm 24
- Psalm 32
- Psalm 51
- Psalm 103
- Psalm 130

1. Name the emotions in this psalm. How do they change or progress through the course of the psalm?
2. What emotions do you find hard to connect with in this Psalm? If it's not quite reflecting where you are at the moment, who else could you pray for in light of this strong emotion or challenging situation?
3. What does this psalm remind us about God's character and his reign?
4. In what sense does this point to Jesus? (e.g. is it describing him, or could have been spoken by him, or find its expectations fulfilled in him etc.)
5. How does seeing God better through this psalm affect the way you live today?

## **Group Focus:**

### *Psalm 103*

This psalm is an excellent example of the many psalms that call upon us to praise God while giving us abundant reasons to praise him. At the centre of this particular psalm is the affirmation of God's abundant grace in forgiveness.

- As we read this psalm, verses 1 - 2 get us speaking to ourselves. Why might we need to tell ourselves to praise the Lord? What kind of circumstances might leave us *not* wanting to praise him?
  
- Through verses 3-5 we continue speaking to ourselves. How would you sum up what these verses are saying? What kind of emotions is this expressing or encouraging?
  
- Verses 6-19 are then speaking to others about God. What do we learn about God and how he relates to his people here? What kind of emotions is this expressing or encouraging?

- Verses 20-22 broaden the audience even further and return to the basic command: Praise the LORD! What kind of emotions is this expressing or encouraging at the conclusion of the psalm?
  
- In what sense does this point to Jesus (is it describing him, or could have been spoken by him, or find its expectations fulfilled in him etc.)?
  
- How does seeing God better through this psalm affect the way you live today?

*To help you reflect on this psalm further, you might like to listen to the song "Psalm 103" by Mark Peterson, from the Album "In The Name Of Love", which can be found on Spotify and other platforms.*

## Week 4: Psalms for the good times

### Sermon focus: *Psalms 116 and 128*

The psalms engage with life at its lowest and its highest, helping us give thanks to God for his blessings as well as reframing our perspective on our situation. Australians tend to be fairly understated in expressing our emotions, and it's good for us to be challenged to embrace the passionate language of the psalms and allow them to fire our hearts.

#### Five Daily Psalms:

- Psalm 34
- Psalm 37, perhaps over 2 days
- Psalm 66
- Psalm 84
- Psalm 104

1. Name the emotions in this psalm. How do they change or progress through the course of the psalm?
2. What emotions do you find hard to connect with in this Psalm? If it's not quite reflecting where you are at the moment, who else could you pray for in light of this strong emotion or challenging situation?
3. What does this psalm remind us about God's character and his reign?
4. In what sense does this point to Jesus? (e.g. is it describing him, or could have been spoken by him, or find its expectations fulfilled in him etc.)
5. How does seeing God better through this psalm affect the way you live today?

## **Group Focus:**

### *Psalm 84*

This psalm repeats the theme of the blessed person that we met in Psalms 1 and 2. In many ways this is a reflection on the good life, but it is deliberately reshaping our perspective on what the good life is. In a world so caught up in materialism, this is both a great challenge and a great encouragement.

- What are the emotions described in verses 1-4? How does this give a sense of feeling 'at home'?
  
- Verses 4-7 describes a situation of God's people travelling on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, perhaps for one of the great religious festivals. How does this give a sense of not being at home?
  
- What is the core request of verse 9? What would this have meant in the original Old Testament context? What does it mean for us as Christians?

- How would you sum up the perspective described in verses 10-12?  
How does this redefine what 'the good times' are?
  
- What does it mean to pray this psalm when life is feeling easy and full of fun?
  
- What does it mean to pray this psalm when life is feeling hard and full of grief or anxiety?

## **Week 5: Psalms for when I'm alone and afraid**

### **Sermon Focus: *Psalms 88 and 136***

Just as the psalms challenge us to be more passionate in our thanksgiving and praise, they also challenge us to be real about our pain and frustration, disappointment and despair. But unlike the great Australian whinge, these psalms keep us humble and challenge us to reshape our perspective in light of God.

#### **Five Daily Psalms:**

- Psalm 42
- Psalm 102
- Psalm 123
- Psalm 133
- Psalm 139

1. Name the emotions in this psalm. How do they change or progress through the course of the psalm?
2. What emotions do you find hard to connect with in this Psalm? If it's not quite reflecting where you are at the moment, who else could you pray for in light of this strong emotion or challenging situation?
3. What does this psalm remind us about God's character and his reign?
4. In what sense does this point to Jesus? (e.g. is it describing him, or could have been spoken by him, or find its expectations fulfilled in him etc.)
5. How does seeing God better through this psalm affect the way you live today?



## **Group Focus:**

### *Psalm 123*

This psalm uses some images that we might not easily connect with, but like many of the psalms this forces us to think carefully about what is being said and to engage with the perspective of the psalmist. As brief as this psalm is, it is also helpful to spend time in it for two more reasons: because it finishes with the situation still feeling stressful instead of feeling all resolved, and because it shifts us out of our individualistic mind-set to think more as a community.

- What is the image of verse 2 and how does that help us understand what is meant by verse 1?
  
- What is the basic request of this psalm? What does it mean to 'lift my eyes to you' in this context?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is the significance of moving from 'I' in verse 1, to 'our/us/we' in verses 2-4? What does this mean for us if we find it hard to relate to this psalm as an individual? How might we pray this for our brothers and sisters in Christ – either those we know personally or those we know of globally?

- What is the significance of the way this psalm concludes in verse 4? What comfort does this give us in times of hardship?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- As Christians we know we live between Jesus' first coming and his return. How does this impact the way might pray this psalm?

## **Week 6: Psalms for life “in transit”**

### **Sermon Focus: *Psalms 73 and 27***

As Christians we know that this world is not as it should be and we look forward to Jesus' return. But we can forget that this life is not all that there is to life and get complacent in our longing for the new creation. God is kind to use the psalms to challenge us in this, reminding us that we're not home yet and that in this sense we are all living life 'in transit'.

#### **Five Daily Psalms:**

- Psalm 13
- Psalm 23
- Psalm 27
- Psalm 31
- Psalms 131 and 150

1. Name the emotions in this psalm. How do they change or progress through the course of the psalm?
2. What emotions do you find hard to connect with in this Psalm? If it's not quite reflecting where you are at the moment, who else could you pray for in light of this strong emotion or challenging situation?
3. What does this psalm remind us about God's character and his reign?
4. In what sense does this point to Jesus? (e.g. is it describing him, or could have been spoken by him, or find its expectations fulfilled in him etc.)
5. How does seeing God better through this psalm affect the way you live today?

## **Group Focus:**

### *Psalm 27*

We might find it hard to relate to ideas of people advancing to devour us, or being besieged by an army. Yet we all experience hard times when we need to look to God, aware of our inadequacy. And the New Testament helps to reshape our perspective on our battle to see that when we stand with Jesus we stand against spiritual forces opposed to God and his purposes. With this perspective, even a fairly peaceful life in worldly terms can be the context of great spiritual conflict.

- How would you sum up the emotions of verses 1-3?
- What is the New Testament equivalent of the desire expressed in verse 4 and the confidence of verses 5-6?
- What are the fears expressed in verses 7-14, and the confidence that addresses them?

- What do you think the psalmist meant in verse 14? How does this relate to verses 1-3?
- What does this psalm challenge our perspective when life is feeling stable and comfortable? How does it encourage us when life is feeling chaotic and uncertain?
- How does seeing God better through this psalm affect the way you live today?

