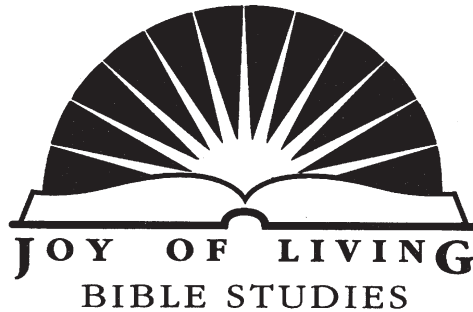


Psalms from the Heart Lesson 1



Introduction to the Psalms¹

For centuries the Psalms have been read and loved by people from many backgrounds and viewpoints, largely because, being poetry, they speak to the heart directly. They laugh, they sing, they weep, they rail, they cry out in pain, fright, derision, joy, and the sheer delight of life. Consequently, many read them solely to find an answering spirit to their own mood.

But the Psalms are much more than poetry (see 2Timothy 3:16). Many of the psalms bear the title *Maskil* or teaching psalm. They are thus intended to instruct the mind as well as to encourage the heart. They are designed not only to reflect a mood, but to show us also how to handle that mood, how to escape from depression, or how to balance exaltation with wisdom. This quality is the mark of their divine character. They are not merely human songs, reflecting the common experience of men, but they relate also the wisdom and release that ensues when a hurt or a joy is laid at the feet of God.

There is no book like the Psalms to meet the need of the heart when it is discouraged and defeated, or when it is elated and encouraged. This book is absolutely without peer in expressing these emotional feelings.

In her classic, *What The Bible Is All About*, Henrietta Mears said Psalms is “the book for all who are in need, the sick and suffering, the poor and needy, the prisoner and exile, the man in danger, the persecuted. It is a book for the sinner, telling him of God’s great mercy and forgiveness. It is a book for the child of God, leading him into new experiences with the Lord. It tells of God’s law in its perfection and pronounces blessings upon the one who will keep it.”

Mears continues, “Hold your Bible in your hand and turn to the middle of the book. Most often you’ll open to the Psalms. Not merely is this true physically. There is a deeper truth. The Psalms are central also in human experience.

“This book is used by Hebrew and Christian alike even in our day. The Psalms were for use in the Temple, for which many were prepared. They were written for the heart to worship God out under the open heavens or in the pit of despair or in a cave of hiding. When you find yourself in deep need you can always find a psalm which expresses

your inmost feeling. Or, if you have an abounding joy, the words are there for you too.”²

Who Was David?³

The psalms we will be studying in this course were all written by David. But who exactly was David and what is his significance? Can his struggles, his joy, his questions, his longing for God compare with ours?

God’s Call and Promise: Genesis 11-35

Although David was born in roughly 1,000 B.C., his story and his relationship with God began over a thousand years earlier with another man, his forefather, in the city of Ur of the Chaldees (located in modern day Iraq). At that time the descendants of Noah had spread out, multiplied and populated the earth; and—like the generations before Noah—they had abandoned the God who created them.

Yet God had not abandoned humanity. He called one man, Abram, and told him that if he would leave his country and go to a land God would show him, He would make of Abram a great nation, give him that land and through him all the world would be blessed. (It would be through Abram’s descendents that the Savior of the world would come.) In faith Abram—later called Abraham—obeyed God. Abraham had a son, Isaac, to whom the promise was given and he in turn had a son, Jacob, to whom the promise was given.

From Family to Nation: Genesis 46—Exodus 18

Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, had 12 sons. When Jacob was an old man he, his sons and their families (70 people in all) went into Egypt to escape starvation during a great famine. One of the sons, Joseph, was already there and in great power. He was second only to the Pharaoh and because of this Jacob’s family was well cared for.

However generations passed and the children of Israel grew in number. A new pharaoh arose and was fearful of this great number of people living within the borders of his land. To protect himself and his country he placed the Israelites in bondage, where they remained for nearly 400 years.

As always God was faithful and in His time raised up a man named Moses. With great and mighty miracles God delivered the Isra-

1. Except where noted, this section, “Introduction to the Psalms,” is by Ray Steadman.

2. Henrietta C. Mears. *What the Bible Is All About*. Ventura: Regal, 1997. p194.
3. The remainder of the commentary for Lesson 1 is by Nancy Collins.

elites from the Egyptians and led them to the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The Covenant: Exodus 19—1 Samuel 7

Prior to entering the Promised Land, the general area of Israel today, God made a covenant with the Israelites. At Mount Sinai they agreed to serve the Lord and obey His commands. He gave them His Law and promised to bless them as long as they served Him. But even as God gave them His glorious Law they were rebelling against Him and worshipping other gods. And so began the cycle of God's blessing, Israel's rebellion, God's disciplining, their repentance, and God's deliverance and blessing again.

The Israelites were told to drive the heathen nations from the land. They were to make no covenants with them, but they disobeyed and were led into idolatry by them.

The Kingdom: 1 Samuel 8—2 Chronicles 36

Israel had the perfect government with the Lord Himself as King, and the Law of the Lord as the law of the land, yet they weren't satisfied. They wanted to be like the nations round about them. They wanted a man as their king. God granted their desire.

Saul, their first king, didn't fully obey the Lord, so God gave the kingdom to David [our psalmist], a shepherd who loved the Lord. God promised David that one of his descendants would have a kingdom without end. He was referring to Jesus Christ, the coming Savior, who would pay the price for the sins of the world and redeem mankind.

How can the life experience of the great King David compare with ours? Although a key figure in the Bible and known as a mighty man of God, David was a human, just like us and experienced those emotions common to mankind.

During his youth David was a nobody, a shepherd, caring for his father's sheep. As the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse of Bethlehem, his brothers looked down on him and mocked him (see 1 Samuel 17:28). Although David was anointed by Samuel to be the next king after God rejected Saul (see 1 Samuel 16:13), this was done secretly—no one but his family knew of it.

Because of David's skill with the harp, King Saul frequently requested that David play for him to relieve his tormented mind. Then, while still a teenager, David—by faith—single-handedly fought with a giant of a man, Goliath of Gath, and spearheaded a great victory for the Israelites over the Philistines. This brought David into the limelight. Saul gave him a high rank in the army, and David was successful in every assignment.

Because of the adulation of the people of Israel for David, Saul became jealous of him and attempted to kill him several times. Although God had promised him the kingdom, David had to flee for his life. Men from various parts of Israel eventually joined him, but for many years David and his men lived "on the run" from Saul. He was misunderstood. He was lied about. He had to wait for years for the fulfillment of God's promise to him. He made huge mistakes. He had marital problems. He fell into great sin and received great grace and

forgiveness. He eventually reigned over a great kingdom but couldn't rule over his own family—even his own son tried to kill him.

Yet, in spite of it all God said of him, "I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22). David experienced the joys and sorrows of this life and discovered that knowing the Lord was what truly mattered. To the Lord he said, "I cry to you, Lord; I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living'" (Psalm 142:5).

The three Psalms covered in this study were written at various times in David's life, and each expresses the cry of David's heart. Psalm 23, known as the Shepherd's Psalm, ministers to our deepest spiritual needs. Psalm 34 is written for those who are riddled with fear and are facing seemingly insurmountable difficulties. And Psalm 139 addresses what some might perceive as our insignificance. Throughout all three we revel with David in God's magnificence and the awesome revelation that God truly loves and cares for us as individuals.

Preparing For This Study

As you prepare for this study, consider how very important it is to study your Bible and make time to develop a relationship with God. John 17:3 tells us, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." How can we truly know Him if we don't listen to what He has to say in His Word?

Second Peter 1:3 tells us that that God has "given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." How can we live an abundant, godly life if we don't take heed of His Word?

If you are serious about knowing and walking with God, make a daily appointment with God. Find a quiet spot. Take your Bible and your Bible study material with you. Remember how very important your appointment with God is and make time to be with Him daily. Ask yourself the following things:

1. *How much time will I spend alone with the Lord each day?* Set a specific amount of time and write it on your calendar to set that time aside.

2. *What will I put aside in order to spend this time with the Lord?* Some examples might be watching television, casual telephone conversations, surfing the internet, or reading for entertainment. Each person will have to decide what his or her priorities are and what can be changed in their daily schedule to make time to spend with God.
5. *Do I really want to spend time with God?* If your answer is “yes,” God will bless you as you work out the details of how and when to do it. If your answer is “no,” pray that God will give you a desire, a hunger to spend time with Him. He will do this for you!

3. *What is the best time for my appointment with God?* Consider whether you are a “morning” person or an “evening” person, and when you are least likely to be interrupted.

We hope you will be blessed as you journey with us through these psalms and that you complete this course with a new confidence in God's eternal, intimate love for you!

4. *Where is the quietest place for me to pray and study?* Look for both physical quiet, and visual quiet—a place that won't constantly remind you of all the other things urgently awaiting your attention.

Study Questions

Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the Introduction to Psalms.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the introduction to Psalms, or from your teacher's lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, or post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read Psalm 23, concentrating on verse 1.

1. Who is the author of this psalm? (This information may be listed in your Bible as a subtitle below the psalm number and above the verses.)

2. a. What does David say the Lord is to him? (Psalm 23:1a)

 b. What result does this bring? (Psalm 23:1b)

3. a. To protect and provide for his sheep, the shepherd must keep them with the flock. Read Luke 15:3-7. How does the shepherd in this parable show his care for the sheep? (verses 3-6)

 b. What might happen to a lost sheep if the shepherd didn't find it and return it to the flock?

 c. What spiritual truth do you learn from Luke 15:7?

4. a. Read Isaiah 53:6a. How does the Lord describe each of us?

 b. Personal: Have you ever thought of yourself in this manner—like a sheep, going your own way, doing your own thing apart from God and His way?

5. Challenge: Read Luke 19:10 and John 10:10-11. What do these verses tell us about the Lord Jesus?

6. a. Personal: The Bible tells us that all people are sinners in need of repentance (see Romans 3:23). Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, gave His life so that our sins might be forgiven and we might not die spiritually but have eternal life with Him (see Romans 6:23). Have you turned from going your own way and turned to God, putting your faith in Jesus Christ to take away your sin? If you haven't, now is the time. If you have turned to Jesus in faith, write Psalm 95:7a, inserting your name.

- b. Personal: Perhaps you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, but you have strayed from His path. Remember how the shepherd in the parable rejoiced when he found his lost sheep? God loves you. What promise does he give you in 1 John 1:9?

Third Day: Review Psalm 23, concentrating on verses 2-3a.

1. The basic needs of sheep are for food and water. Put in your own words what you think of when you read Psalm 23:2-3a.

2. Review John 10:10. Describe the type of life the Lord would like to provide for you.

3. Too often when people think of life "to the full" they focus mainly on the outward person and attaining the fleeting pleasures of this world, which leaves them empty, lonely, frustrated and in despair. From the following verses, what are some ways God provides for and satisfies His people?
Psalm 16:11

Psalm 103:2-5

Matthew 11:28-29

2 Corinthians 4:16

Philippians 4:6-7

Philippians 4:19

4. Personal: Have you experienced these things as you walk with the Lord? Or have you strayed from His path and suffered want? What need are you experiencing today? Why not pray now and ask Jesus to return you to His path and meet your need?

Fourth Day: Review Psalm 23, concentrating on verse 3b.

1. The Lord knows the way we should go, the paths we should take to be fulfilled. But the question arises—how are we to know His will and way? According to Psalm 23:3b, on what type of paths does the Shepherd lead us?
2. Challenge: Will the Good Shepherd ever lead us on unrighteous paths? How could you use this principle to give you direction in your life? Proverbs 4:14-15 will help you answer this question.
3. Read Psalm 119:105. What is one of the primary ways the Lord leads us?
4. From the following verses, what are some additional steps we need to take to know God's will?

Mark 4:23-25

John 7:17

Romans 12:1-2

5. Personal: Are you truly seeking to know God's will for your life, so that you can be obedient to His will and walk in His paths? Is there a particular area mentioned in the above verses that you need to work on? What specifically will you do about it?

Fifth Day: Review Psalm 23, concentrating on verse 4.

1. a. Where does the shepherd's path take the sheep in Psalm 23:4a?

b. God has promised to lead and guide us. Many people expect life to be easy for the Christian. What does John 16:33 say regarding this?

2. a. What action are we to take in both Psalm 23:4 and John 16:33?

b. Why can we take heart and not fear according to these verses?

3. Challenge: What instruction and promises about this has God given us in the following verses?

Romans 8:28

Matthew 6:34

Philippians 4:6-7

4. a. From Psalm 23:4, how is David comforted?

b. The rod was a club that was never used on the sheep but was used to protect the sheep from marauding predators. The staff was a slender pole with a crook on the end. It was used to aid the sheep. It could be hooked around the leg of a sheep to pull him from harm. It could also be used as an instrument to direct and occasionally to discipline the sheep. How do the following verses explain God's personal loving care for us?

Psalm 139:1-6

Hebrews 12:6-10

5. Personal: God is not a distant, uninterested creator! He loves us and is involved on a very personal level with our lives. Which of the verses in the previous question brought the most comfort to you, and why?

Sixth Day: Review Psalm 23, concentrating on verses 5-6.

1. In Psalm 23:5, the psalmist changes the metaphor from the good shepherd to the gracious host. How does verse 5 describe the abundance of God's provision for us?
2. Read Philippians 4:19. How thorough is God's provision for you?
3. Read Psalm 23:6 carefully. How long will you experience God's goodness and love?
4. Those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ are given the sure promise of dwelling with the Lord forever. From the following verses, describe what eternity with Him will be like.

Psalm 16:11

Revelation 21:1-5

5. Personal: Are you certain about where you will spend eternity? Perhaps you're not sure, but you hope it's with the Lord? Well, you can know! Have you received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? If you have, write down John 1:12 and 1 John 5:11-13, inserting your own name.