

# **Psalms For The Soul**

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**Text:** Psalms

### **Introduction:**

- I. “The only way to understand the psalms is on your knees, the whole congregation praying the words of the psalms with all its strength” (Deitrich Bonhoeffer, 11).
  - A. Though the **Psalms** are Old Testament canon, part of us feels exactly as Bonhoeffer did. They are to be prayed, or at least sung.
  - B. Our modern hymnals demonstrate that we feel this way. Many of our songs refer, quote or are based on the **Psalms**.
    1. “Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah!” “Praise the Lord” — **Psalm 148**
    2. “The Lord’s My Shepherd,” The Lord My Shepherd Is,” “The Lord’s My Shepherd, I’ll Not Want” — **Psalm 23**
    3. “How Shall the Young Secure” — **Psalm 119**
    4. “As the Deer” — **Psalm 42**
    5. “This is the Day” — **Psalm 118**
    6. “I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord” — **Psalm 89**
    7. “You Are My Strength,” “I Will Call Upon the Lord” — **Psalm 18**
    8. “Unto Thee O Lord” — **Psalm 25**
    9. “How Majestic Is Your Name” — **Psalm 8**
- II. However, we feel inadequate and we struggle.
  - A. The psalms are so extensive we are overwhelmed at the thought of studying them to learn to pray. I was and still am even after working on this lesson for months.
  - B. The psalmists use language with which we are unfamiliar. They address feelings we would rather keep hidden. Though they enliven our hearts when we hear them, they sound fake and tinny on our tongues. Not to mention some of them sound almost blasphemous.
  - C. Thus, the paradox with which we struggle. We want to pray and sing these psalms, but then again, we don’t.
- III. With this lesson I want to set our minds at ease where we don’t have to pray and sing these psalms and help us learn from the psalmists where we can and should learn from them how to pray. The main objective is to infuse greater passion and power in our praying, improving our relationship with God, providing us confidence in Him and His working in our lives.

### **Body:**

- I. **REASONS WE DON’T HAVE TO PRAY JUST LIKE THE PSALMISTS.**
  - A. Before we look at all we can learn from the psalmists, I want to set our minds at ease. We do not have to pray just like the psalmists. I will provide 4 reasons.
    1. **The Psalms are part of the Old Covenant.**

- a. For all we can learn from **Psalms**, we must remember it is not part of our covenant. **John 10:24** demonstrates the **Psalms** are part of the Old Law. As **Hebrews 7:12** explains, the law has changed. **Psalms** is not our law.
  - b. Jesus was the goal and end of the **Psalms** as He was for the rest of the Law (cf. **Romans 10:4**). We are not striving to measure up to the **Psalms** in our prayer lives so we can be righteous enough to go to heaven.
  - c. Therefore, we must take care. As we can learn from all of the Old Testament (cf. **Romans 15:4**), we can learn from **Psalms**.
    - 1) However, we must distinguish between learning universal lessons of prayer, praise and worship and co-opting aspects of the Old Testament pattern and bringing them into the New.
    - 2) At the same time, we must be careful that we are making the distinction based on biblical principles and not based on our preferences or traditions.
2. **The Psalms were written in culturally appropriate form.**
- a. The **Psalms** were not written as a guidebook for universal prayer for all cultures of all times. Old Covenant Hebrews wrote it for Old Covenant Hebrews.
  - b. As God did with all scripture, He used the men within their culture, with their backgrounds to write out His revelation.
    - 1) To act like we must pray exactly as the psalmists did would be similar to saying we can only preach about judgment the way those who wrote in the apocalyptic style did.
  - c. Claus Westermann and Hermann Gunkel both point out that the genre of **Psalms** is not merely a biblical genre.
    - 1) Rather, the Hebrew psalms are written in the same style and genre as the psalms of Egypt and Babylon.
    - 2) The specific style and genre was not meant to be a mandated style for all prayer. Rather it was God's revelation through man within his culture.
  - d. Therefore, we need to keep in mind cultural differences. In some cases, our sensibilities are bruised by the direct and almost commanding nature of the psalms in their address to God, without so much as a "please."
    - 1) Consider **Psalms 102:1-2**: Hear my prayer, O Lord; / let my cry come to you! / Do not hide your face from me / in the day of my distress / Incline your ear to me; / answer me speedily in the day when I call!\*
    - 2) In our culture, this is rude and demanding. In the ancient near eastern culture, this was clearly an accepted mode of address.
    - 3) Perhaps such statements in our prayers are lawful. At the same time, I suggest we keep the cultural differences in mind.
    - 4) Just as we wouldn't encourage modern Christians to call their mother, "Woman," just because Jesus did in **John 19:26**, we should perhaps be careful encouraging modern Christians to command God to wake up and listen.

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e. We do not have to use the same cultural images and metaphors the psalmists did. We do not have to use the same cultural forms.

1) Though we can learn from their hymns, laments and thanksgivings, we do not have to mirror their form exactly.

3. **When Jesus taught how to pray, He didn't reference Psalms.**

a. As much as I like the **Psalms**, as much as I feel the pull to pray like them, and as much as I will encourage you to pray the **Psalms**, I can't help but notice Jesus was asked by His disciples to teach them to pray (**Luke 11:1**).

b. Jesus provided a model for prayer and gave instruction on prayer (**Luke 11:1-13**), yet did not once refer the disciples to **Psalms**.

c. Having said that, Jesus did use the **Psalms** in His own praying (cf. **Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:46**). Thus, even though Jesus did not refer His apostles to them, His own praying demonstrates the **Psalms** are beneficial to our praying.

4. **The Hebrews didn't pray like the Psalms either.**

a. Just like none of us really believes Job and his friends talked in epic poetry, we should not believe the Hebrews prayed in the form of psalms.

1) The **Psalms** is a collection of stylized poems. They were not records of the way Old Testament saints naturally prayed.

b. Consider the example of Hezekiah in **Isaiah 38:2-3, 9-20**.

1) In **vss. 2-3** we see his prayer. It was very simple, prosaic and straightforward, much like our modern prayers, "Please, O Lord, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight."

2) However in **vss. 10-20** we read a psalm complete with the stylized account of Hezekiah's sickness, lament, plea and praise. Notice **vs. 9**: "A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, after he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness."

3) Hezekiah prayed as we do. Later, he wrote this psalm. Could we examine the actual origins of the individual psalms, I have no doubt we would find this to be the case for many of them. They are stylized accounts of previous prayers using the cultural form of memorializing those prayers.

c. Having said that, I do recognize that, like Jesus on the cross, Old Testament saints would certainly have quoted these psalms and perhaps prayed them in their entirety.

1) Some, like **Psalms 24**, were probably used liturgically for certain ceremonies and therefore recited as prayers. I'm simply pointing out the Jews did not pray in poetry. We don't have to either. Though, I believe the **Psalms** demonstrate we are free to write our own stylized prayers if we wish.

B. Though we can and will learn a great deal to benefit our prayer lives from the **Psalms**, we can relax as we approach them. They are not our law or our standard for prayer. We do not have to feel ashamed if our prayers do not soar to the poetic heights the psalms do.

II. **TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST FIRST BELIEVE IN THE GOD THE PSALMISTS DID.**

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**A. God is.**

1. Perhaps this goes without saying. Yet, the psalmists prayed because they believed God really does exist.
  - a. **Psalm 14:1**: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”
  - b. **Psalm 53:1**: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”
2. The reason I do not take this point for granted is because so many people today face the hardships the psalmists lamented by losing their faith in God.
3. Despite the hardships, trials, tribulations and struggles of the psalmists, they kept praying because they did not lose their faith in God’s existence.
4. For the psalmists, hardship was not a proof for atheism. Rather, hardship was simply a time to go to the God in which they believed and cast their cares upon Him.

**B. God is creator.**

1. **Psalm 8** puts this in perspective. When I view God as creator as the psalmist did, every day is a living reminder of the amazing power of God.
  - a. When I look at the rocks and trees, rivers and seas and especially the moon and stars, I see a constant reminder of God’s power.
  - b. In that scenario, I can’t help but recognize how small and dependent I am on Him. I can’t help but turn to Him for help. He has that power.
2. **Psalm 139:13-16** puts another spin on this. If God is creator of the universe and all that is in it. He is my creator. He put me together. He knows me.
  - a. Nothing of me is secret from Him. That can affect my praying in one of two ways. I’ll either isolate myself from God ashamed to approach Him because He knows me too well. Or I can be set free to be honest with Him because He already knew everything when He asked me to pray.

**C. God is the source.**

1. He is the source of everything. The source of life (**Psalm 36:9**). The source of blessing (**Psalm 24:5**). The source of truth (**Psalm 43:3**). He is the source of every good thing. We accept this because of **James 1:17**.
2. However, for the psalmist, since God is the sovereign ruler of the universe. He is not just the source of the good. He is the source of the bad as well. Illness (**Psalm 102:3-11**), enemies (**Psalm 13:2**), financial ruin (**Psalm 62:9-10**), struggles (**Psalm 88:3-7**); none of it would be there if God acted. Therefore, the psalmist saw God as the source of all these things as well, either out of a sense of retribution (**Psalm 6:1-3**) or simply ignoring what was happening (**Psalm 13:1-2**).
3. In fact, despite the earlier connection we made between the Hebrew psalms and the psalms of the surrounding cultures, this one point stands out in stark contrast.
  - a. Hermann Gunkel notes: “A profound manner of thought stands alongside this immediate and apparently primitive manner of thought. It seeks connection between YHWH and the illness, which is very different from Babylonian prayer where illness and distress are generally traced back to evil demons and magicians. Even at this point one can see how Israelite religions sought to trace everything that happens in the world back to YHWH, and to understand everything in relationship to YHWH.” (*Introduction to Psalms*, 136)

4. Initially, I rebel against this. I have become comfortable letting Satan be the source of the bad things that happen to us because I am afraid people might get mad at God. The psalmists would have none of that. God was the source. If that led to anger at God, then so be it. Take that anger to God and express it in psalms and prayers.
5. There is a very important point behind this. Many of these psalms are complaints, either individually or communally. They lamented everything from illness to attack. But they took it all to God in prayer. Why? Because He's the source, therefore, He's the only one that can actually do anything about it.
6. Perhaps we're making a mistake when we separate God from the bad that happens. I believe the psalmists would have thought so.

#### D. God is judge.

1. **Psalm 96** makes the connection; if God is creator, He is also judge. This makes perfect sense. He made the universe and all that is in it. He made us. Therefore, we are accountable to Him for how we behave.
2. **Psalm 94** demonstrates why the psalmist, so often in dismay because of his enemies, could almost always come around in the end. He viewed God as judge. The psalmist knew, even if he didn't like God's timing, God would judge the wicked and the enemies. God is judge.
3. Not only is God judge, He is the righteous judge who judges with equity (**Psalm 75:2**).

#### E. God is king.

1. **Psalm 95:3** says, "the Lord is the great God, and a great King of all gods." Why pray to other gods? Even if they existed, YHWH is the King. Of course, the psalmist is absolute in his belief that YHWH alone is God (**Psalm 86:10**).
2. If God is king of Gods, then He ought also to be our king (**Psalm 5:2; 84:3; 95:3; 145:1**).

#### F. God is my rock, fortress, mighty tower, etc.

1. **Psalm 18** expresses it this way:
  - a. I love you, O LORD, my strength. / The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, / my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, / my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. / I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, / and I am saved from my enemies / ...For who is God, but the LORD? / And who is a rock, except our God? / ...The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock, / and exalted be the God of my salvation...
2. God is the one on whom we can rely. We cannot rely on kings (**Psalm 48:4-5**). We cannot rely on armies or on personal strength (**Psalm 33:16**). We cannot rely on riches (**Psalm 62:9-10**). We cannot rely on family (**Psalm 27:10**). We cannot rely on friends (**Psalm 41:9**). But we can rely on God.
3. When the psalmist says God is his rock, strength, fortress, tower, shield, salvation, redeemer and any other number of terms, he is talking about how he can trust God to see him through whatever he faces.
  - a. This is amazing considering the number of laments and complaints. Yet, the psalmists prayed because they knew they could trust God to act on their behalf. Therefore, they surrendered to God. They would accept whatever came from His

hand and simply continue to submit to Him. What else could they do? He was the only source of strength.

4. We would do well to preach these psalms in this time of economic uncertainty. People need to hear God is the rock and the mighty tower. He can uphold us no matter what we face and He will deliver us in His time.

#### G. God is shepherd.

1. Obviously, **Psalm 23** comes immediately to mind. But this is also mentioned in **Psalm 28:9** and **Psalm 80:1**.
2. Being shepherd means God is our leader, our feeder, our protector, our comforter, our restorer. He is the provider of blessing. He is our livelihood. He is the reason we can keep going and keep living. Without Him, we die.

#### H. God is near.

1. I know this sounds odd because the psalmists sometimes say God is far away or hiding (e.g. **Psalm 10:1; 13:1**). It appears the psalmists think God is far away.
2. Actually, this is not what the psalmists believe or think. It is rather an expression of how they feel in moments of distress, but it is not what they believe when they think through the situation. Almost all laments end with praise and knowledge that God does hear and will act (**Psalm 10:4; 13:5-6**).
3. In other places, the psalmists directly express God's nearness (**Psalm 34:18; 119:151; 145:18**).
4. However, the greatest testimony to their belief that God was near is that they kept praying. They kept writing psalms. Do we talk to those we know aren't listening and won't listen? Of course not. They knew God did hear, did see. He is near. Consider **Psalm 5:3; 11:14; 53:2; 94:9**.

#### I. God is love.

1. This is perhaps the greatest theme of all the psalms. More than any other aspect of the psalmists' belief in God, God's love kept them praying.
2. God's steadfast love is mentioned 123 times in the psalms.
  - a. God's steadfast love is precious (**Psalm 36:7**).
  - b. We enter His house through His steadfast love (**Psalm 5:7**).
  - c. He delivers us for the sake of His steadfast love (**Psalm 6:4**).
  - d. He is merciful and forgets our sins because of His steadfast love (**Psalm 25:6-7**).
  - e. His steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts Him (**Psalm 32:10**).
  - f. His steadfast love endures all day (**Psalm 52:1**).
  - g. God answers our pleas because of His steadfast love (**Psalm 69:16**).
  - h. His steadfast love holds us up when we think we'll slip (**Psalm 94:18**).
  - i. His steadfast love endures forever (**Psalm 100:5**).
3. **Psalm 136** provides a crescendo about God's steadfast love, declaring it endures forever 26 times. This psalm was likely used as a form of liturgy in which an officiate

among the priests would read the first half of the verse and the congregation would respond with the reminder “for his steadfast love endures forever.”

4. Whether they were angry, sad, distressed, harassed or happy, the psalmists agreed God loved them. Therefore they prayed. If we want to pray like they did, we have to know God loves us and His love endures no matter what is happening to us. He will show His love. We must simply wait on Him.

### III. TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST SEE OURSELVES AS THE PSALMISTS DID.

#### A. We are sheep.

1. We could list numerous statements about how the psalmists viewed themselves and mankind. However, **Psalm 23** encapsulates almost all of them.
2. If God is the shepherd, we are the sheep. The picture of **Psalm 23** is pleasant to our ears. Even when we preach it, we talk about what a wonderful picture this was to David, a shepherd. He thinks of the wonderful relationship between him and his sheep and speaks of it between our God and us. No doubt, that relationship is beautiful.
3. However, the picture of sheep is not a flattering description of us. Sheep are helpless, powerless, hopeless. If left to themselves, they destroy their own feeding grounds and die. They easily become cast down, that is, rolled over and unable to even get back on their own feet. They have no natural defenses. They are easy prey. Even with a shepherd, they constantly wander off and go astray.
4. This is the psalmists’ view of themselves and us. We are helpless (**Psalm 70:5**). We are powerless (**Psalm 88:4**). We are hopeless (**Psalm 33:16-19**). Left to ourselves, we will die (**Psalm 141**). We easily become cast down (**Psalm 42:5-11**). We have no natural defenses (**Psalm 141:8**). We are easy prey (**Psalm 124**). We readily go astray (**Psalm 119:67, 176**).
5. Too often, we want to see ourselves as at least somewhat strong. We only have to rely on God for the really tough things. Not so for the psalmist. The psalmist was a sheep. His only possible hope was to rely on the Shepherd.
6. Therefore, we must come humbly, honestly and sincerely into God’s presence in prayer. Consider **Psalm 5**. You can’t help but see a great contrast repeated in this psalm.
  - a. In **vss. 1-3**, the psalmist prays alongside a sacrifice.
  - b. In **vss. 4-6**, the wicked boast and speak lies.
  - c. In **vss. 7-8**, the psalmist bows down in reverence and fear in the temple.
  - d. In **vss. 9-10**, the wicked have no truth in their mouth. Instead, they have only death. They do not honor; they flatter.
  - e. In **vss. 11-12**, the psalmist rejoices in God.
  - f. Because the psalmist knows his own weakness and helplessness, he comes with honesty, in humble fear and reverence, seeking God’s help and strength. The wicked rely on their own strength, boasting, flattering, lying.

#### B. We are sinners.

1. In **Psalm 38:3, 18** the psalmist confessed his sin and iniquity. But he wasn’t just one who sinned sometimes, the psalmist was covered up with sin (**Psalm 38:3-4**).

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2. Paul certainly learned man is sinful from the psalms. Consider his argument in **Romans 3:10-18**. Five of the six quotes in his list come from the Psalms.
    - a. None is righteous, no, not one; / no one understands; / no one seeks for God. / All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; / no one does good, / not even one (**Psalm 14:1-3**).
    - b. Their throat is an open grave; / they use their tongues to deceive (**Psalm 5:9**).
    - c. The venom of asps is under their lips (**Psalm 140:3**).
    - d. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness (**Psalm 10:7**).
    - e. Their feet are swift to shed blood; / in their paths are ruin and misery, / and the way of peace they have not known (**Isaiah 59:7-8**).
    - f. There is no fear of God before their eyes (**Psalm 36:1**).
  3. At times, our sins are the reason for our suffering (e.g. **Psalm 31:9-10; 32:3-5; 38:3-4, 17-20**). Yet, even when the psalmist knew his sins were the cause of his suffering, he still prayed for mercy. Don't misunderstand; he didn't do this impenitently. Note **Psalm 38:18-20**, he was confessing his sin and turning to follow after good.
  4. The part of the psalms and their understanding of sin at which we are most likely to rebel, is the psalmists' suggestion that apart from God they cannot overcome sin and be righteous. To overcome sin, they need God's guidance and God's strength.
    - a. Consider some statements from a few psalms.
      - 1) **Psalm 5:7-8**: To be righteous, the psalmist must be led by God. God must make His ways straight for the psalmist. And the psalmist can only enter God's house by God's steadfast love.
      - 2) **Psalm 23**: Again, we are the sheep. Left to ourselves, we wander off, go astray, become cast down and die. We are saved by the leadership of the Shepherd who guides in righteous paths, feeds us and protects us from the enemy.
      - 3) **Psalm 25:4-10**: To be righteous, the psalmist must be led by God. He must be instructed by God.
      - 4) **Psalm 26:12**: Despite the psalmist's extravagant claims of personal innocence and walking in integrity, the last line is telling. Why has he been able to do this? Because his foot stands on level ground. Considering **Psalm 143:10** the psalmists walks on level ground because of the Spirit's guidance.
      - 5) **Psalm 39:1-2**: Despite the psalmist's best intention to guard his ways by himself and not sin, his distress grew. Therefore he cried out for God to act so He might be delivered from his transgressions (**Psalm 39:8**).
      - 6) **Psalm 51:5**: So great was the psalmist's sins he presented himself as being conceived in it.
      - 7) **Psalm 141:3-10**: This psalmist is asking God to do whatever it takes to keep him out of sin. Even though his prayer is continually against the evil deeds of others, he sees sin as a trap into which he will inevitably fall unless God does something to keep him out.
    - b. This shocks us; we fear saying this because it smacks of the Calvinistic ideas of total depravity and irresistible grace.
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- 1) The difference, however, is this; in Calvinism, each person wills to repent only if God chose them to and those who don't have a will unto repentance do not because God has not chosen them to.
- 2) The psalmists have chosen to will penitence, they volunteer freely (cf. **Psalm 110:3**). The psalmists' conception of overcoming even though they are unable to is not that God must select them unconditionally to will for salvation. Rather, they must choose to surrender completely to God because only God can save them; they cannot save themselves. They surrender by giving their will up to His, trusting His word, following His lead.
- c. No doubt, this seems to be a paradox. However, it is the same paradox we find in **Romans 7:14-25; Ephesians 3:14-21; and Philippians 2:12-13**. It is summed up by the maxim I've heard attributed to Augustine of Hippo, "Without God, I cannot; without me, God will not."

### C. Sometimes we are innocent.

1. Though our first two points cover the main concepts of the psalmists' idea about self, leading them to pray. There was one very interesting point I found repeated. In some of the laments, the psalmists did not claim guilt and beg for mercy. Rather, like Job, at times they declared their innocence and begged for deliverance and retribution.
2. Consider some examples:
  - a. **Psalm 7:3-5**: "O LORD my God, if I have done this, / if there is wrong in my hands...let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it, / and let him trample my life to the ground / and lay my glory in the dust."
  - b. **Psalm 26:4-7**: "I do not sit with men of falsehood, / nor do I consort with hypocrites. / I hate the assembly of evildoers, / and I will not sit with the wicked. / I wash my hands in innocence / and go around your altar, O LORD..."
  - c. **Psalm 35:7, 12-14**: "For without cause they hid their net for me; / without cause they dug a pit for my life...They repay me evil for good; / my soul is bereft. / But I, when they were sick— / I wore sackcloth; / I afflicted myself with fasting; / I prayed with head bowed on my chest..."
  - d. **Psalm 59:3-4**: "For behold, they lie in wait for my life; / fierce men stir up strife against me. / For no transgression or sin of mine, O LORD, / for no fault of mine, they run and make ready."
  - e. **Psalm 71:6, 17-18**: "Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; / you are he who took me from my mother's womb...O God, from my youth you have taught me, / and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. / So even to old age and gray hairs, / O God, do not forsake me, / until I proclaim your might to another generation..." (contrast this with **Psalm 51:5** above).
  - f. **Psalm 86:2**: "Preserve my life, for I am godly..."
  - g. **Psalm 109:4-5**: "In return for my love they accuse me, / but I give myself to prayer. / So they reward me evil for good, / and hatred for love."
3. There is a time for declaring we don't deserve what is happening to us.
  - a. I recognize some of these statements are in specific contexts. For instance, **Psalm 7:3-5** is not a declaration of absolute innocence, but rather a declaration that he hasn't done what has been said of him.

- b. Also, I recognize we can say along with the psalmist, “If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities / O LORD, who could stand?” (**Psalm 130:3**). Clearly, the psalmists did believe everyone has sinned and God has the right to send punishment and discipline upon everyone.
- c. However, the reason I bring this up is not to say some people are utterly innocent. Rather, there is a place for declaring we don’t deserve something happening to us.
  - 1) Too often, we play the part of Job’s friends when someone is suffering. They declare they haven’t done something worthy of their suffering and we respond, “Oh, we all sin. Really, the question is not whether we’ve done something worthy of suffering, but whether we’ve done anything worthy of having peace and safety.” The psalmists would not necessarily say this.
- d. While they recognized retribution occurred in many cases, they did leave room for saying some turmoil is undeserved. I’m not sure where to draw the lines on this. I simply noticed it was the case.

#### IV. TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST VIEW PRAYER AS THE PSALMISTS DID.

##### A. Prayer is necessary.

1. The sheer volume of prayer in the **Psalms** demonstrates the necessity the psalmists felt in prayer. However, their concept of necessity was not a rule-based necessity.
2. In our sermons, we might answer the question, “Why pray?” by making point #1, “Because God commanded it (cf. **I Thessalonians 5:17**).” That was not the psalmists’ point #1.
  - a. Prayer wasn’t a necessity because God commanded it. Prayer was a necessity because it was the only way to get deliverance. Prayer led to life and salvation.
3. **Psalm 145:17-20** declares the Lord is near those who call on Him. He saves those who cry out to Him. But the wicked He will destroy. In this context, the wicked are those who don’t call out to Him.
  - a. Prayer is necessary to have the Lord near and to have the Lord’s salvation, not because prayer is the rule, but because prayer works.
4. In the final analysis, the psalmists grasped that they did not pray because God needed their prayers, but because they needed to pray and they needed what God offered through prayer (cf. **Psalm 50:12-15**).

##### B. God hears.

1. With the exception of **Psalm 88**, even the laments recognize God hears. Despite the continuing turmoil, the psalmists continually asserted God heard them.
  - a. **Psalm 6:8-9**: “Depart from me, all you workers of evil, / for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. / The LORD has heard my plea; / the LORD accepts my prayer.”
  - b. **Psalm 18:6**: “In my distress I called upon the LORD; / to my God I cried for help. / From his temple he heard my voice, / and my cry to him reached his ears.”
  - c. **Psalm 61:5**: “For you, O God, have heard my vows...”

- d. **Psalm 106:44**: “Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress, / when he heard their cry.”
  - e. **Psalm 116:1-2**: “I love the LORD, because he has heard / my voice and my pleas for mercy. / Because he inclined his ear to me, / therefore I will call on him as long as I live.”
2. If the psalmists thought their words were simply going out into the air, they would have stopped long before 150 of them were compiled.
    - a. The psalmists laments would have ended quickly if the One to whom they were complaining didn’t listen. But they believed He was near and was listening, so they prayed.

### C. Prayer works.

1. I use this heading accommodatively, because actually God is the one who works. Our prayers contain no mystical power that accomplishes anything. Rather, the one to whom we pray has the power and acts based on our prayers.
2. Prayer, as a means to connect with God and seek help and deliverance, works.
  - a. **Psalm 34:4**: “I sought the LORD, and he answered me / and delivered me from all my fears.”
  - b. **Psalm 40:1-3**: “I waited patiently for the LORD; / he inclined to me and heard my cry. / He drew me up from the pit of destruction, / out of the miry bog, / and set my feet upon a rock, / making my steps secure. / He put a new song in my mouth, / a song of praise to our God.”
  - c. **Psalm 81:7**: “In distress you called, and I delivered you; / I answered you in the secret place of thunder...”
  - d. **Psalm 118:5**: “Out of my distress I called on the LORD; / the LORD answered me and set me free.”
3. James could have used many of the psalmists as his basis for saying prayer is effective in **James 5:16**.

### D. Prayer is life.

1. That is especially true regarding praise through prayer. A repeated statement among the **Psalms** is there is no praise in the grave or among the dead.
  - a. **Psalm 6:5**: “For in death there is no remembrance of you; / in Sheol who will give you praise?”
  - b. **Psalm 30:9**: “What profit is there in my death, / if I go down to the pit? / Will the dust praise you? / Will it tell of your faithfulness?”
  - c. **Psalm 88:10**: “Do you work wonders for the dead? / Do the departed rise up to praise you?”
  - d. **Psalm 115:17**: “The dead do not praise the LORD, / nor do any who go down into silence.”
  - e. **Psalm 118:17**: “I shall not die, but I shall live / and recount the deeds of the Lord.”
  - f. **Psalm 119:175**: “Let my soul live and praise you...”

2. Certainly, these psalms speak of physical death, but their repeated statement cannot help but draw the parallel that where life is, there is praise. Where there is no praise, there is no life.
3. Claus Westermann draws this conclusion:
  - a. “All these sentences have the meaning that *only* there, where death is, is there no praise. Where there is life, there is praise. The possibility that there could also be life in which there was no praise, life that did *not* praise God, does not enter the picture here. As death is characterized in that there is no longer any praise there, so praise belongs to life. The conclusion is not expressed in the O.T., but it must still have been drawn. There cannot be such a thing as true life without praise. Praising and no longer praising are related to each other as are living and no longer living...Nowhere is there the possibility of abiding, true life that does not praise God.” (159)
4. The psalmists recognized the connection between praise and life. If we will pray as they did, we must recognize that connection as well. Otherwise, we are dead despite our religious practices.

## V. TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST PREPARE TO PRAY AS THE PSALMISTS DID.

### A. Sacrifice

1. At times, the psalmists linked sacrifice to prayer.
  - a. **Psalm 5:3**: “O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; / in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.” (This is offering a sacrifice to have access in prayer.)
  - b. **Psalm 54:6**: “With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; / I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good.” (This is a promise to sacrifice when God responds to the prayer.)
  - c. **Psalm 66:13-15**: “I will come into your house with burnt offerings; / I will perform my vows to you, / that which my lips uttered / and my mouth promised when I was in trouble. / I will offer to you burnt offerings of fattened animals, / with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; / I will make an offering of bulls and goats.” (This is the fulfillment of sacrifices promised while praying.)
2. This is the extension of what we see elsewhere in the Old Testament. Repeatedly, calling on the Lord is connected with building an altar. It took sacrifice to pray.
  - a. In **Genesis 12:8**, Abraham built an altar and called on the name of the Lord.
  - b. In **Genesis 13:1-4**, Abraham had traveled to Egypt because of the famine. When he returned to Canaan, he went to the altar he had previously built in order to call on the Lord.
  - c. In **Genesis 13:18**, Abraham moved to Mamre and built another altar in order to call on the name of the Lord.
  - d. In **Genesis 26:25**, Isaac followed Abraham’s example and built an altar in Beer-sheba in order to call on the name of the Lord.
  - e. In **Genesis 33:20**, Jacob built an altar in Shechem.

- 1) *Note:* In the **Genesis** context of altars, this was presumably to call on the name of the Lord as his fathers did.
- f. In **I Chronicles 21:26**, David built an altar to call on the name of the Lord to seek relief from the judgment over the unlawful census.
- g. In **Isaiah 56:7**, God said there would be altars and sacrifice at His temple because His house would be a house of prayer. (Crozier, 156-157)
3. If we want to pray, we must sacrifice. After all, as **Isaiah 59:1-2** says, our sins separate us from God so He does not listen. Something must atone for and remove sin.
4. However, as we come into the New Covenant, we do not need to kill an animal in order to pray. God has offered the sacrifice for us. We simply need to enter Christ (**Hebrews 10:19-22**). Christ is our sacrifice allowing us to enter God's presence and pray. If we are not in Christ, we cannot pray.
5. No doubt, we can see a foreshadowing of this even in the **Psalms**, when **Psalms 2:12** says with Messianic overtones, "Kiss the Son, / lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, / for his wrath is quickly kindled. / Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

#### B. Study God's word.

1. **Psalm 1** stands as an introduction or preface to the entire psalter. Before anyone reading the **Psalms** even gets to see a prayer, he learns, "Blessed is the man... whose delight is in the law of the LORD, / and on his law he meditates day and night."
2. In **Psalm 40:8**, the psalmist explains one reason God listened to His praying was because "your law is within my heart."
3. **Psalm 19:7-11** and all of **Psalm 119** stand as huge testimonies regarding the psalmists' relationship to God's word. God's word was more desirable than honey and gold. Given the choice between God's word and money, the psalmist chose God's word.
4. This relationship to God's word laid the foundation for coming to God in prayer.

#### C. Live God's word.

1. The psalmists were not Gnostics believing as long as they knew God's word they could live how they wanted. Rather, they recognized that if they gave themselves over to sin, God would not listen.
  - a. **Psalm 66:18**: "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, / the Lord would not have listened."
  - b. **Psalm 26:1**: "Vindicate me, O LORD, / for I have walked in my integrity, / and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering."
2. Obviously, we have already learned that the psalmists knew everyone sinned. No one could enter the Lord's presence declaring utter holiness (cf. **Psalm 130:3**). We must simply be reminded the psalmists did not take this to mean they could sin with impunity. The psalmists knew they must submit to the Lord's word, which was why confession was part of the psalms.

#### D. A broken and contrite heart.

1. While the psalmists saw the need to live by God's word, they recognized they had failed to do that. While they saw sacrifice as necessary to pray, at the same time they saw that sacrifice by itself accomplished nothing.

2. **Psalm 51:17** declares the insufficiency of a sacrifice. The one offering sacrifice must have a broken and contrite heart.
3. **Psalm 51:1-12** demonstrates the outpouring of such a broken heart, admitting the horrendous nature of its sin and recognizing it can turn nowhere but to the Lord. **Psalm 32** is another demonstration of such brokenness.
4. The proud will not pray. They do not recognize their need for God. They do not recognize their need for prayer.

**E. Surrendering to God.**

1. This ties in to the point about the psalmists' belief that God was their rock, their fortress, their strong and mighty tower (cf. **Psalm 18:1-3**). We do not need to develop that any further.
2. I bring it up because this absolute trust was in place before the psalmists prayed. Because the Lord was their rock, etc., they prayed. They trusted God, so they prayed. More than trusting God, they surrendered to Him. They saw their lives as in His hand.
3. **Psalm 31:5** provides the picture, "Into your hand I commit my spirit." That is, "I trust you. I'm just going to do what you say, follow where you lead, go where you guide. I expect You to protect me by that surrender."
4. If we wish to pray like the psalmists did, we must have this same sense of surrender. I cannot emphasize it enough. Prayer is only useful for those who are willing to give themselves completely and whole-heartedly to the Lord (**Psalm 119:2, 10**).

**VI. TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST HAVE THE SAME GOAL IN OUR PRAYERS.**

- A. No doubt, the laments and complaints sought God's deliverance and protection. The psalmists were clearly striving to move God to act in their favor and accomplish their desires. However, we see the same goal repeatedly expressed in the psalmists' prayers that Paul expressed in **Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14**. That is, that everything be to the praise of God's glory.
- B. We can't help but see this in praise psalms.
  1. **Psalm 8:1**: "Oh LORD, our lord, / how majestic is your name in all the earth! / You have set your glory above the heavens."
  2. **Psalm 115:1**: "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, / for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!"
  3. **Psalm 146:1-2**: "Praise the LORD! / Praise the LORD, O my soul! / I will praise the LORD as long as I live; / I will sing praises to my God while I have my being."
  4. **Psalm 150:1-2**: "Praise the LORD! / Praise God in his sanctuary; / praise him in his mighty heavens! / Praise him for his mighty deeds; / praise him according to his excellent greatness!"
- C. But even in the laments we see this theme highlighted. We saw the statements about life, death and praise (see IV.D.1). In each case, the psalmist was asking to be saved. But why? Not merely that his life be spared, but that God be praised. Read those passages again.
  1. **Psalm 6:5**: "For in death there is no remembrance of you; / in Sheol who will give you praise?"
  2. **Psalm 30:9**: "What profit is there in my death, / if I go down to the pit? / Will the dust praise you? / Will it tell of your faithfulness?"

3. **Psalm 88:10**: “Do you work wonders for the dead? / Do the departed rise up to praise you?”
  4. **Psalm 115:17**: “The dead do not praise the LORD, / no do any who go down into silence.”
  5. **Psalm 118:17**: “I shall not die, but I shall live / and recount the deeds of the Lord.”
  6. **Psalm 119:175**: “Let my soul live and praise you...”
- D. I know we can find exceptions to this. Surprisingly, **Psalm 41:10** asks God to bring deliverance so the psalmist can repay his enemies. It’s especially surprising since it is the last thing said in the first book of the psalms.
1. I will simply respond that this is the exception. It demonstrates that we need to be careful when we try to establish any hard and firm rules of prayer from the psalms. However, the general rule of the psalms, even the laments, is their goal and their concern was for God’s praise.

## VII. TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST BE RIGOROUSLY HONEST AND OPEN.

- A. I have built the points in what I considered foundational importance. That is, how we view God lays the foundation, we build on that by how we view ourselves, how we view prayer, how we prepare for prayer and what our goal is in prayer. However, I must admit this point is the greatest lesson I get from the psalmists about prayer.
- B. Further, I think for many modern Christians this is where we need the most help. This is where we fall shortest in our prayers.
- C. By rigorously honest, I do not mean simply telling the truth. I do not mean simply stating things that are correct as opposed to false. I mean being completely transparent with God.
  1. I mean refusing to hide anything, including our sins and our feelings. This really ought to be easy. After all, God knows it all anyway (cf. **Psalm 139:13-16**). We might as well admit it.
- D. Let me delve into this idea of emotional honesty and transparency by showing exactly what they were honest about. No doubt, we can turn to psalms that show their honesty in joy and happiness. However, that is not surprising to us. Look at some of the other feelings they honestly brought to God.
  1. **Psalm 10:1**: “Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? / Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”
  2. **Psalm 13:1-2**: “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? / How long will you hide your face from me? / How long must I take counsel in my soul / and have sorrow in my heart all the day?”
  3. **Psalm 22:1-2**: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? / Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? / O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, / and by night, but I find no rest.”
  4. **Psalm 42:5, 6, 11**: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, / and why are you in turmoil within me?...My soul is cast down within me...Why are you cast down, O my soul, / and why are you in turmoil within me.”
  5. **Psalm 69:1-3**: “Save me, O God! / For the waters have come up to my neck. / I sink in deep mire, / where there is no foothold; / I have come into deep waters, / and the

flood sweeps over me. / I am weary with my crying out; / my throat is parched. / My eyes grow dim / with waiting for my God.”

6. **Psalm 74:1, 9-11:** “O God, why do you cast us off forever? / Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?...We do not see our signs; / there is no longer any prophet, / and there is none among us who knows how long. / How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? / Is the enemy to revile your name forever? / Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? / Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them.”
  7. **Psalm 77:4-9:** “You hold my eyelids open; / I am so troubled that I cannot speak. / I consider the days of old, / the years long ago. / I said, ‘Let me remember my song in the night; / let me meditate in my heart.’ / Then my spirit made a diligent search: / ‘Will the Lord spurn forever, / and never again be favorable? / Has his steadfast love forever ceased? / Are his promises at an end for all time? / Has God forgotten to be gracious? / Has he in anger shut up his compassion?’”
- E. At times the psalmists felt like God was far away. They felt like God was ignoring them. They felt like God would not listen or answer. They were sad. They were discouraged. They were anxious. They were lonely. They were afraid. They were angry. They felt like God was not keeping His promises. They felt like He no longer loved them.
- F. J. Ellsworth Kalas calls this kind of honesty *candor* and explains no relationship can carry on without it. That is why the psalmists used it.
1. Consider what Kalas says about this in the **Psalms**.
    - a. “I have chosen the words *candor* and *candid* quite deliberately. I might have used the word *honest*, but I have a specific image in mind...
 

“The book of Psalms is full of candid pictures. It seems never to give us a posed shot. Instead, the psalms show us the writer just as he or she felt at a particular moment. This is one of the loveliest gifts of the book of Psalms. The Bible has preserved for us pictures of saints in some of their least saintly moments. If I had written some of the psalms, I would have left behind a request: ‘Please destroy this after I’m gone.’ But the Scriptures have saved these pictures. We are privileged to see the spiritual giants who wrote the psalms, not in portraits of their spiritual finery, but in the rags of their candid struggles.” (18)
- G. Walter Brueggemann also draws this point out and challenges modern pray-ers with it in his book, *Praying the Psalms*:
1. “Note that the Psalms thus propose to speak about human experience in an honest, freeing way. This is in contrast to much human speech and conduct which is in fact a cover-up. In most arenas where people live, we are expected and required to speak the language of safe orientation and equilibrium, either to find it so or to pretend we find it so. For the normal, conventional functioning of public life, the raw edges of disorientation and reorientation must be denied or suppressed for purposes of public equilibrium. As a result, our speech is dulled and mundane. Our passion has been stilled and is without imagination. And mostly the Holy One is not addressed, not because we dare not, but because God is far away and hardly seems important. This means that the agenda and intention of the Psalms is considerably at odds with the normal speech of most people, the normal speech of a stable, functioning, self-deceptive culture in which every thing must be kept running young and smooth.
 

“Against that, the speech of the Psalms is abrasive, revolutionary, and dangerous. It announces that life is not like that, that our common experience is not one of well-be-

ing and equilibrium, but a churning, disruptive experience of dislocation and relocation. Perhaps in our conventional, routinized prayer life (e.g., the daily practice of the office) that is one of the reasons the Psalter does not yield its power—because out of habit or fatigue or numbness, we try to use the Psalms in our equilibrium. And when we do that, we miss the point of the Psalms. Moreover, our own experience may be left untapped and inarticulate and therefore not liberated. Such surface use of the Psalms coincides with the denial of the discontinuities in our own experience. Ernest Becker has written of *The Denial of Death*. But such denial happens not just at the crisis points. It happens daily in the reduction of language to numb conventions.

“Thus I suggest that most of the Psalms can only be appropriately prayed by people who are living at the edge of their lives, sensitive to raw hurts, the primitive passions, and the naïve elations that are at the bottom of our life. For most of us, liturgical or devotional entry into the Psalms requires a real change of pace. It asks us to depart from our closely managed world of public survival, to move into the open, frightening, healing world of speech with the Holy One.” (19-20)

- H. Have you ever felt some of those feelings expressed by the psalmists? I have. The more important question, have you ever prayed those feelings? Before this study, I had not.
1. I was convinced passages like **Romans 5:3-5**; **Philippians 4:6**; and **James 1:2-4** meant having those feelings was wrong. So, instead of simply admitting those feelings to God, I tried to hide them and cover them up with what I thought were appropriate feelings. After all, I didn't want to get God mad at me.
- I. I think the majority of modern Christians feel as I do. How else can we explain the lack of laments in our hymnals? Perhaps you know some I do not, the closest thing to a lament I can recall in our songbooks is “Farther Along,” but then we spend most of our time arguing over whether that song is scriptural.
1. Interestingly, when I went through the hymnals we use at my home congregation, I found 42 songs that referred to, quoted or were based on the **Psalms**. Only one was from a lament. Interestingly, that is “As the Deer.” That may surprise you because that song is not presented as a lament. In fact, it doesn't reference the lamenting portions. It doesn't quote the parts that talk about our cast down soul and how we feel far from God and that is why the psalmist was panting for God.
- J. No doubt there are numerous times we feel all the praises we sing. Yet, to be honest, after studying the psalms and considering my own experience, I fear we sometimes use those good feeling songs to medicate and cover up what is really felt in our hearts instead of having some good psalms that express our sorrow, our distress, our rage so we can work through it.
1. We even specifically state this some times. “Oh, I felt terrible, but now that I've come to church, I feel better.” Sadly, I've known too many that go home and just go back to feeling terribly.
  2. That, I think, is why so many churches keep looking for newer and better highs in their assemblies. They aren't really dealing with those emotions by being honest to God with them. They are just covering them up with conventional phrases.
- K. The psalmists, however, didn't cover up their feelings. They brought them directly to God.
1. They didn't overcome anxiety by trying to shut it off and pray instead. They shut it off by admitting their anxieties to the Lord.

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2. They didn't count their trials all joy by simply deciding to just be happy no matter what bad things happened to them. They attained happiness by sharing their bitterness, sadness and rage with God, working through it in prayer so they could come to joy in the end.
- L. Recognize that throughout this entire point I've talked about their feelings. Throughout these psalms we see a contrast with their feelings and their faith.
1. While they began with saying **God was far away (Psalm 10:1)**, they almost always ended with admitting **God was actually near and listening (Psalm 10:14)**.
  2. While they began by saying they felt **God had forgotten them and hidden His face (Psalm 13:1-2)**, they ended by admitting that **they trusted God and knew they would rejoice in His salvation (Psalm 13:5-6)**.
  3. While they began by saying **God had forsaken them (Psalm 22:1)**, they ended by admitting **God would help them** and they would tell of His help to everyone who would listen (**Psalm 22:19-31**).
  4. While they began by saying **their soul was cast down (Psalm 42:5, 6, 11)**, they ended by **admitting their hope was in God and He would lift them up** and they would again praise Him (**Psalm 42:5, 11**).
  5. While they began by saying **they were parched and tired of praying so much to God (Psalm 69:1-3)**, they ended by admitting **they knew God would hear and respond** and they would praise Him for it (**Psalm 69:30-36**).
  6. While they began by saying **God had cast them off (Psalm 74:1)**, they ended by admitting **God was their king from of old and had delivered them before** and they knew He would again (**Psalm 74:12-17**).
  7. While they began by **asking if God had abandoned His love, forgotten to be gracious and abandoned His compassion (Psalm 77:4-9)**, they end by **admitting all of the past deliverance God had given** and that there is no other God like their God (**Psalm 77:10-19**).
- M. The reason the psalmists were free to express their feelings is because they did not let their feelings negate their faith.
1. Only the fool allowed his feelings that God was not there to watch or listen meant God was not there at all (cf. **Psalm 14:1; 53:1**).
  2. In fact, they expressed their feelings because of their great faith. That is why believing in the same God they did is foundational to praying like they did.
- N. We must note one glaring exception in the psalms. It stands out like a sore thumb to me. **Psalm 88**, attributed to Heman the Ezrahite.
1. The psalmist here is mad at God. He rages at God, accusing God of putting him in the depths of the pit.
    - a. He lays every bad thing that is happening to him at the Lord's feet. He asks why God is casting him away. He says he suffers terrors from God.
    - b. This psalm goes from bad to worse. There is no upswing at the end. There is no turn to praise. We see here the cry of the amazingly oppressed. He can't even seem to get back to his faith in this moment.
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2. However, the reason he expresses this prayer is because it is based on his faith that God was the source of his salvation (**vs. 1**).
    - a. He did not turn his back on God but kept praying despite all these feelings. He was not able to get back to that faith to praise God or proclaim His promises, but this prayer is based on his faith in God.
- O. Honesty and the collection of the psalms.
1. Almost every book and commentary on the psalms works hard to find some order to the **Psalms**. They try to find patterns in the five books. They try to see if there is some construction. Why were the various psalms lumped together as they were?
  2. I think this point about honesty and candor is the basis for its construction. Unlike modern hymnals with categories of songs lumped together (R. J. Stevens' *Hymns for Worship* Table of Contents shows "Praise 0-58," "Prayer 59-96," "Devotion 97-150," "Lord's Supper 151-189," "Heaven 190-262," "Invitation 263-349," "Varied Themes 350-702"), the **Psalms** have no order.
  3. Rather, they reflect the chaotic nature of our lives. One day, we may be flying on such highs we feel like we have ascended to heaven. The next, we may feel like we are making our bed in Sheol (cf. **Psalm 139:8**).
    - a. In fact, it may not take a whole day to go through such a change. A phone call can change a glorious day into a nightmare. We can go crashing from the hymns of praise to the laments in a matter of minutes. At the same time, the reverse can happen as we gain some good news.
    - b. Tremper Longman, III expresses this same thought by saying: "We are not surprised, then, that the Psalter does not present a systematic picture of God and his relationship to the world. The psalms give us theology written in intimate relationship with God and in close touch with life." (53)
  4. With the above in mind, I think another of Longman's statements is quite interesting:
    - a. "A decided shift takes place as we move from the beginning of the book to its end. As we move toward the end, praise overtakes lament until at the very end of the book we have a virtual fireworks of praise. The last seven psalms are not only all hymns of praise but they, for the most part, concentrate on calling the whole world to praise God...  
 "In a real sense, the book of Psalms moves us from mourning to joy. As it says in Psalm 126, 'Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy' (v. 5)." (45)
- P. Having said so much about honesty, what is the take away? What do we learn from the psalmists about honesty and candor?
1. **We are allowed to feel emotions other than joy and happiness.**
  2. **God is big enough to handle our emotions.** We do not have to try to manage His feelings for fear of upsetting Him. We can share our emotions with Him.
  3. **We should not cover up our emotions** even when they put God and our faith in a negative light, but express them. That is the only way to work through them and maintain our faith.
  4. In fact, **God wants us to bring our emotions to Him.**
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5. **While working through our emotions will most often lead to praise, if we can't get there in some particular prayer, we are still alright with God** so long as we are continuing to turn to Him as the God of our salvation.
6. **As we make a habit of bringing all our emotions to God**, even our lament, sadness, distress, anxiety, loneliness, fear and rage, over time, **God will work in our hearts to turn our emotions to joy.**

### VIII. TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST BE CREATIVE.

- A. In the **Psalms**, God is not just our leader who rules or our teacher that instructs. He is our Shepherd (**Psalms 23**), leading us by quiet waters and in paths of righteousness. We are sheep, walking up the dangerous and deadly valleys to the mountaintop tablelands under the eyes of predators.
- B. The psalmists do not simply trust and rely on God. He is their rock, their mighty tower, their fortress, their shield, their deliverer, the horn of their salvation, their stronghold (**Psalm 18:1-2**).
- C. The psalmists did not merely have enemies who were trying to kill them. Their enemies were dogs that come back each evening howling and prowling about the city. They bellow with their mouths and have swords on their lips. They wander about for food and growl if they don't get any (**Psalm 59:6-7, 14-15**).
- D. The sins of the psalmists were not just mistakes that caused them problems. Their sins caused their bones to waste away. Their strength was dried up as if by the summer's heat (**Psalm 32:3-4**).
- E. The psalmists did not merely want to be forgiven of their iniquities. They wanted to be washed thoroughly and cleansed. They wanted to be purged with hyssop so they could be whiter than snow. They wanted a new heart and a new spirit. They wanted the bones God had broken to rejoice (**Psalm 51:2, 7-12**).
- F. The psalmists did not merely fast. Rather, tears became their food day and night (**Psalm 42:3**). They had ashes as bread and tears as drink (**Psalm 102:9**).
- G. The psalmists were creative. J. Ellsworth Kalas again challenges us while commenting on **Psalm 96**, saying:
  1. "You've known the frustration, I'm sure, in the experiences of human friendship and love, of saying to someone, 'I just wish I could find the words to tell you what you mean to me' or 'what our friendship means to me.' So it is that the psalmist wants a 'new song.' And his exuberance is such that he calls on everyone else to join his choir: 'all the earth,' 'all the peoples.'  
 "But our wonderful spiritual ancestor doesn't say, as we might, 'I can't find words to express what I feel.' He would see this, I think, as an unholy cop-out. So he launches into rolling phrases of praise, making us the richer for it." (52)
- H. The challenge is not to cop out with phrases of general vagueness. Rather, if we will pray like the psalmists, we need to learn to be creative.
  1. We need to adopt figures of speech in our prayers — metaphors, similes, symbolisms, hyperboles are the stuff of the psalms. We need not fear them in our prayers.
- I. Keep in mind that the figures used in the **Psalms** come from the ancient near-eastern culture of the Hebrews. We are not limited to their figures.

1. If you are into cars and have a figure that can come from the world of cars, then use it. I know we fear that sounds flippant, but it is the same as the ancients speaking of horses.
  2. I don't see why if the psalmist who wrote **Psalm 20:7** can say, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God," why we can't say, "Some trust in jets and some trust in tanks, but we trust in the Lord." Granted, we should take care in public prayers not to be so creative that others cannot pray with us for shock or surprise from our figures of speech.
- J. If you struggle with this kind of creativity, start by reading the **Psalms**. Adopt some of their language. But you can also read other poetry to learn how language works, to see turns of phrase and figures of speech.
1. Adopt phrases that fit. Don't wait until the moment you are praying to come up with some special point. Think ahead of time and develop phrases, pictures, imagery that will fit your prayers.
  2. Remember, the Hebrews didn't pray like this naturally. They took time to write these things out. You can too.

**IX. TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST MAKE THE SAME COMMITMENTS THEY MADE.**

- A. The psalmists often made commitments to God in their prayers, whether laments or praises they offered God a promise or a vow. There were four overarching commitments made by the psalmists when God heard and responded to their prayers.
- B. The psalmists vowed to **give thanks**.
1. **Psalm 7:17**: "I will give to the LORD the thanks due to His righteousness."
  2. **Psalm 30:12**: "O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!"
  3. **Psalm 57:9**: "I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples..."
  4. **Psalm 108:3**: "I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples..."
  5. **Psalm 118:28**: "You are my God, and I will give thanks to you..."
  6. Interestingly, nowhere in the **Psalms** that I have found does the psalmist actually say, "Thank you." However, he abundantly promises thanks and commits to offer thanksgiving.
    - a. In the Old Testament context, this was likely tied to the thanksgiving offerings. However, we must not be like the nine lepers of **Luke 17:11-19**. When we have prayed to God, we must be committed to thanksgiving when He responds.
- C. The psalmists vowed to **praise God**.
1. **Psalm 9:2**: "I will be glad and exult in you; / I will sing praise to your name, O Most High."
  2. **Psalm 51:15**: "O Lord, open my lips, / and my mouth will declare your praise."
  3. **Psalms 69:30**: "I will praise the name of God with a song..."
  4. **Psalm 145:1-2**: "I will extol you, my God and King, / and bless your name forever and ever. / Every day I will bless you / and praise your name forever and ever."

5. The psalms themselves are filled with numerous praises. The point of these vows and promises seems to be that the psalmist knows he has never praised God enough. There is always need for more praise. We cannot praise God enough. We must commit to continue in our praise.

D. The psalmists vowed **obedience**.

1. **Psalm 23:6**: "...and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."
2. **Psalm 26:11**: "But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity..."
3. **Psalm 101:2**: "I will ponder the way that is blameless. / Oh when will you come to me? / I will walk with integrity of heart / within my house..."
4. **Psalm 116:9**: "I will walk before the Lord / in the land of the living."
5. Why should God **listen to our prayers** if we **won't listen to His word**?

E. The psalmists vowed to **proclaim God to everyone around them**.

1. **Psalm 18:49**: "For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, / and sing to your name."
2. **Psalm 22:22**: "I will tell of your name to my brothers; / in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."
3. **Psalm 40:5**: "You have multiplied, O LORD my God, / your wondrous deeds and your thoughts towards us; / none can compare with you! / I will proclaim and tell of them, / yet they are more than can be told."
4. **Psalm 109:30**: "With my mouth I will give great thanks to the LORD; / I will praise him in the midst of the throng."
5. We must not simply go into our private prayer closets to praise and thank God. We should proclaim what God has done for us to others, teaching them about God and calling them to praise along with us (e.g. **Psalm 96:1-4**).

F. Claus Westermann commented on the vow of praise, but his comment can apply to each of these vows and commitments:

1. "I *know* then that the matter is not finished when I have pled and God has heard, but that something else must still come. I know that I owe something to God. It is totally false to belittle this as a bargain...On the contrary, it is only through the promise that I bind to my petition that the petition gains its weight and value. I know that with the promise that I add to my petition I have entered into a relationship with God." (78)
2. We can also add value to our prayers by adding vows and commitments to our prayers, praises and laments.

X. **TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST PRAY WHEN THEY DID.**

A. The psalmists prayed **in the morning**.

1. **Psalm 5:3**: "O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice."
2. **Psalm 57:8**: "Awake, my glory! / Awake, O harp and lyre! / I will awake the dawn."
3. **Psalm 108:1-3**: "I will sing and make melody with all my being! / Awake, O harp and lyre! / I will awake the dawn! / I will give thanks to you..."

B. The psalmists prayed **in the evening**.

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1. **Psalm 55:17**: “Evening and morning and at noon / I utter my complaint and moan, / and he hears my voice.”
  2. **Psalm 141:2**: “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, / and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”
- C. The psalmists prayed **in the night**.
1. **Psalm 119:62**: “At midnight I rise to praise you.”
  2. **Psalm 119:147**: “I rise before dawn and cry for help...”
- D. The psalmists prayed **multiple times per day**.
1. **Psalm 55:17**: “Evening and morning and at noon / I utter my complaint...”
  2. **Psalm 119:164**: “Seven times a day I praise you / for your righteous rules.”
    - a. (No doubt, this a figure of speech, using “seven” for “completely, fully”).
- E. The psalmist prayed **when things were good**.
1. **Psalm 9:2, 4-5**: “I will be glad and exult in you; / I will sing praise to your name, O Most High... For you have maintained my just cause; / you have sat on the throne, giving righteous judgment. / You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish; / you have blotted out their name forever and ever.”
  2. **Psalm 65: 1-4**: “Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, / and to you shall vows be performed. / O you who hear prayer, / to you shall all flesh come. / When iniquities prevail against me / you atone for our transgressions. / Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, / to dwell in your courts! / We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, / the holiness of your temple!”
- F. The psalmist prayed **when things were bad**.
1. **Psalm 71:4**: “Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, / from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man.”
  2. **Psalm 88:3**: “For my soul is full of troubles, / and my life draws near to Sheol. / I am counted among those who go down to the pit; / I am a man who has no strength, / like one set loose among the dead, / like the slain that lie in the grave, / like those whom you remember no more, / for they are cut off from your hand.”
- G. The conclusion is that **the psalmists prayed at all times and in response to every kind of situation**.
1. They are a great illustration of Paul’s direction in **I Thessalonians 5:16-18**, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
- XI. **TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST LISTEN FOR GOD’S RESPONSE.**
- A. One of the most interesting and confusing aspects of the psalms is the voice changes. In one verse the psalmist is speaking to God. In the next, the psalmist is speaking to someone else. In the next, someone is speaking to the psalmist. And in some places, God speaks to the psalmist.
  - B. Carleen Mandolfo wrote *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament* to further study this phenomenon in the psalms, but admits we cannot do much more than speculate exactly what these shifts mean. Her main conclusion is that these psalms must have had
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some liturgical role with calls and response and scripted performance between speaker, audience and priests (205).

- C. However, her work caused me to notice the changes of voice. In reality, we cannot be absolutely certain what the voice shifts represent.
1. If Mandolfo is correct, then in some liturgical use of the psalms, one may have offered the prayer and then the priest would respond with the more didactic portions as if the voice of God were responding to the plea.
  2. Or it may simply be that the psalmist is shifting from speaking to God to teaching others. In either case, we move from prayer to teaching and we see not only man laying his heart before God, but also God's teaching of man.
- D. Remember that **the Psalms are scripture**. They are not merely man's praying to God, they are also God's revelation to man. *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary* on Psalms said this:
1. "As important as it is to view the psalms as the sacred poetry that was used in ancient Israelite and Judean worship, this conclusion fails to do justice to another crucial dimension of the psalms: it fails to deal with the fact that the psalms were appropriated, preserved, and transmitted not only as records of human response to God but also as God's word to humanity." (642)
- E. Consider some examples of these **voice shifts** taken from Mandolfo's book.
1. **Psalm 4**: A shift occurs between vs. 1 and 2. 1 is clearly the petitioner praying. 2 is either God speaking or the petitioner now turning to others to issue a challenge. 3 changes the voice again, this time seeming to be the petitioner teaching others. Then 4-5 is again didactic. 6-8 are the petitioner turning back to prayer.
  2. **Psalm 7**: 1-7 is the petitioner praying to God. 8 shifts with the statement "The Lord judges the peoples" and then shifts back to the petitioner praying. 11-16 definitely shifts into a didactic voice teaching about God's judgment on sinful man. 17 shifts back to the petitioner praying to God.
  3. **Psalm 30**: 1-3 is the one offering praise praying. 4-5 shifts to the didactic voice calling all the saints to praise. 6-12 shifts back to the one offering praise praying.
  4. **Psalm 32**: This one starts with the didactic voice in 1-2. 3-7 is the confessor praying to God. 8-11 goes back to the didactic voice.
  5. **Psalm 102**: 1-15 is the petitioner praying to God. 16-24 is in the didactic voice. 25-28 returns to the petitioner praying to God.
- F. Again, whatever we make of these voice shifts, whether it is the petitioner moving from prayer to teaching those around him or the psalm shifting from the petitioner praying to God teaching, the point for us is the same. The psalmists did not merely write **prayers**, they wrote **instruction**. The psalms were not just about **speaking to God**; they were also about **listening to God**.
- G. When we pray, we need to **listen to God**.
1. No doubt, we understand there will be no more revelation. We are not listening for a still small voice. We are not waiting for a feeling to guide us in response to our prayers.
  2. Rather, we must be in God's word to find His guidance in response to our prayers.

3. **Psalm 19** and **119** indicate that the psalmists had great respect for God's word. They were not merely people who prayed, but they were people who studied and meditated on God's word in response to their prayers.

## XII. TO PRAY LIKE THE PSALMISTS, WE MUST WAIT ON THE LORD.

- A. The psalmists prayed. They prayed honestly. They prayed creatively. While we know their main goal was to praise and glorify God, they were, especially in the laments or complaints, seeking to move God to act. They wanted something from God.
  1. As Gunkel says, "The goal of the complaint song is to *obtain something from YHWH*. In order to avoid missing this goal, the one praying strives *to move* the heart of God with everything he says" (169).
- B. However, the psalmists had complete understanding that **God worked on His own timetable**. He did not work on the psalmists'. God was not obligated to respond immediately. They may pray those prayers again and again. They were committed to wait on the Lord.
- C. Consider some psalmists statements:
  1. **Psalm 25:3, 5, 21**: "Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame...for you I will wait all the day long...May integrity and uprightness preserve me, / for I wait for you.
  2. **Psalm 27:14**: "Wait for the LORD; / be strong, and let your heart take courage; / wait for the Lord."
  3. **Psalm 31:24**: "Be strong, and let your heart take courage, / all you who wait for the Lord!"
  4. **Psalm 37:7, 9, 34**: "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him...but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land...Wait for the LORD and keep his way."
  5. **Psalm 38:15**: "But for you, O LORD, do I wait; / it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer."
  6. **Psalm 39:7**: "And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? / My hope is in you."
  7. **Psalm 62:5**: "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, / for my hope is from him."
  8. **Psalm 130:5**: "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, / and in his word I hope; / my soul waits for the Lord / more than watchmen for the morning / more than watchmen for the morning."
- D. We must **wait for the Lord**.
  1. That means we do not lose faith just because His assent doesn't come immediately. We do not lose faith just because we have repeated the prayer over and over again.
  2. No matter what happens, we maintain our faith that God is there, God listens, God cares and God will respond in His time. We will wait for His response instead of abandoning God because He doesn't move on our time schedule.

## XIII. A PRAYING MISCELLANY FROM THE PSALMS.

### A. Singing as prayer

1. The psalms, for the most part, are songs (cf. **Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16**). They were sung, possibly chanted.

2. For some reason, I think mostly because of the debate about whether or not we can pray to Jesus, folks somehow want to argue about whether or not singing can also be praying. The psalms, by their very existence and our using them as a guide to prayer and praise answers the question, “Yes.” Singing can be praying.
3. If our songs petition God, praise God, confess to God, then they are prayers which have been sung. I’m not exactly sure how we can turn to **Psalm 42:1-2** as a guide for prayer and praise, but then add a melody to those words and argue it is not praying.
4. When we sing “Great Are You Lord” or “Abide With Me” or “Father, I Adore You,” we are praying.
  - a. If you believe it is unlawful to pray to Jesus or to the Spirit, then please be consistent and do not sing along with the rest of us in those songs.
  - b. Please, don’t make up oddball and unbiblical rules like, “You can’t mix two acts of worship.” That is especially troubling because the New Testament doesn’t say anything about “acts of worship” anyway.
5. To me, the key from this is to recognize how awesome it is that we, like our Bible counterparts, can sing prayers to the Lord. We can, as a congregation, lift up our voice and pray together by praying in song.

#### B. Liturgy, prayer books and reciting written prayers

1. We have a natural aversion to liturgy. Liturgy is Roman Catholic. Therefore, we have a gut reaction to it without considering whether or not there is some Biblical basis for allowing it.
2. We also don’t like it because we tend to believe a prayer can’t come from the heart if it is read from a page, especially if someone else wrote it.
3. First, while some authors seem to have gone overboard trying to find a liturgical and cultic basis for all of the psalms, it seems clear to me that at least some of them were liturgical. That is, they were used in public worship settings.
  - a. **Psalm 136** is almost certainly a liturgical psalm. The priest or officiate of the period of praise and worship would read the first line of each couplet and the congregation would respond with “His steadfast love endures forever.”
  - b. **Psalm 118** was likely used similarly to the psalm above.
  - c. **Psalm 15** and **Psalm 24** would have been used as worshippers entered the temple.
    - 1) **Psalm 24** seemingly would have been used as they opened the gates to the temple.
  - d. The Psalms of Ascent (**Psalm 120-134**), are traditionally considered Ascent Psalms because they were psalms the Jews sang as they ascended to Jerusalem.
    - 1) While this was not worship at the temple, it was clearly something the Jews would have prayed and sung in groups together.
  - e. **Psalm 5** may well have been a psalm that was sung alongside the offering of the morning sacrifice (see **Psalm 5:3**).
4. Interestingly, when Jesus was on the cross, He quoted from the Jewish prayer book in prayer two times (**Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:46**). When the apostles prayed in **Acts**

**4:25-26**, they also quoted the Jewish prayer book. Clearly it is scriptural to read a prayer or part of a prayer.

5. Can a prayer that is read still come from the heart? **Psalm 9** is a prayer that would have been read, and verse 1 says: "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart..." It seems to me that this clearly indicates that although a prayer may be read, it can still be offered with the whole heart.
6. While there is no scriptural precedent for a liturgy for our entire assemblies or liturgical calendars telling us what to pray on certain days of the year, I think we need to be very careful before criticizing liturgical readings, prayers and prayer books when we actually have one as well. We just call it a hymnal. Our liturgies are okay because we sing them instead of speaking them. This gets us back to our previous point.
7. If I understand it correctly, we are free to quote or pray a psalm (or any other written prayer for that matter) if it really does capture what is in our heart. Jesus did it and the apostles did it. So can we.

### C. Quoting God and putting words in His mouth

1. I have heard some criticize quoting God by quoting scripture in prayer. The fact that Jesus and the apostles both quoted the psalms in their prayers should negate that criticism. We are free to quote God by quoting scripture.
2. However, some take it a step further and put words into God's mouth. They claim God said something for which we cannot actually find scripture. Is that lawful?
3. **Psalm 12:5** exemplifies it. The psalmist was expressing how certain he was that God was going to act. He declared that God said, "Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise. I will place him in the safety for which he longs." We cannot find scripture for that. Yet the psalmist claims God said it.
4. **Psalm 50:16** also exemplifies it. The psalmist was expressing how God would deal with the wicked and claimed that God said, "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips?" I cannot find that anywhere else in scripture, yet the psalmist claims God said it.
5. I recognize, of course, we are dealing with a very interesting situation. The **Psalms** differ from our own prayers in that they were divinely inspired and ours are not.
6. Certainly, we need to proceed with caution. However, it seems from **Psalms** if what we are attributing to the Lord is entirely scriptural and accords with everything revealed, we are allowed to attribute a quote to the Lord that is not a direct quote from scripture.
7. Again, I agree with all who suggest we should exercise caution here. We do not want to attribute something to the Lord that is really not scriptural. But at the same time, I think we should be leery of establishing a rule that anyone who claims God says something even though it is not a direct quote is wrong. The psalmists did it.

### D. Ask for relief from discipline

1. **Psalm 39** shocked me a little. The psalmist clearly recognized his struggle was caused by his own sin. He asked to be delivered from his own transgressions (**Psalm 39:8**).
2. Not only was his struggle caused by his sin, it was actually God's discipline of his sin. **Psalm 39:11** says, "When you discipline a man / with rebukes for sin, / you consume like a moth what is dear to him; / surely all mankind is a mere breath!"

3. Even recognizing both these facts, the psalmist asked for relief. He asked God to end his struggle.
  - a. In **Psalm 39:8**, he asked for deliverance. In **Psalm 39:10**, he said, “Remove your stroke from me...”
  - b. In **Psalm 139:13**, he begged, “Look away from me, that I may smile again, / before I depart and am no more.”
4. This psalm contains no statement of assurance that God will grant the request. But the request is made nonetheless. I believe this means even when we recognize what we are suffering is from God as discipline for our own folly and sin, we may ask God to deliver us. He may say, “No.” But then again, as He did with David following the unlawful census, He may say, “Yes.”

#### E. Asking “How long?”

1. The psalmists ask God “how long?” 14 times (**Psalm 6:3; 13:1, 2; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 90:13; 94:3; 119:84**).
2. I admit, to me, this question seems presumptuous. How dare we ask God how long before He does anything? Yet, we have already noted the psalmists had a healthy respect for God working on His own timetable. They had a sure understanding that they were to wait on the Lord no matter how long it took Him to respond.
3. With that faith and commitment in place, the psalmists demonstrate we are allowed to ask God how long. Or we might use another form. “When will you let it stop, God?”
  - a. I know a woman who asked this very question. She had been plagued with health issues, her mother had died, her daughter had been put in jail, her son had a child out of wedlock. She was dealing with all of that stress, when suddenly her husband died of a heart attack. When I walked into the room where she stood holding her husband’s lifeless hand, she cried, “When is God going to make it stop?”
4. As long as we continue to live by our faith that God will care for us, He will respond in His time. The psalmists demonstrate that we are allowed to ask that question. It does not demonstrate a lack of faith. Rather, it demonstrates faith that God can do something about our situation.

#### F. Call others to praise Him

1. The psalmist was not satisfied praising God alone. In the midst of his own praises, he called on others to praise God with him.
  - a. **Psalm 22:22-23**: “I will tell of your name to my brothers; / in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: / You who fear the LORD, praise him! / All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, / and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!”
  - b. **Psalm 66:1-2**: “Shout for joy to God, all the earth; / sing the glory of his name; / give to him glorious praise.” The psalmist turns to his own prayer in **vs. 13**.
  - c. **Psalm 106:1-3**: “Praise the Lord! / Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, / for his steadfast love endures forever! / Who can utter the mighty deeds of the LORD, / or declare all his praise?” The psalmist turns to his own prayer in **vs. 4**.
2. I find two things of interest in this.

- a. First, we should be calling for others to praise, even while we are praying. This may simply mean they lift their hearts up with us while we lead them. Perhaps it would include some kind of response they could give (e.g. “His steadfast love endures forever”). Perhaps it would lead into song for all of us to praise together.
- b. Second, I often cringe when I hear modern pray-ers switch between talking to God in prayer and seeming to talk about God or offering instruction to their audience.
  - 1) However, that is exactly what the psalmists did. Part of me still wants to say when we are praying we keep praying and don’t start addressing the people around us, yet, I cannot deny that is exactly what the psalmists did not do. They prayed and then addressed the people listening and then prayed some more.

### G. Posture

1. The psalmists certainly don’t proscribe a posture with which we must pray. However, we do see that posture was part of their prayers.
2. **Bowing / Kneeling**
  - a. **Psalm 5:7**: “I will bow down toward your holy temple...”
  - b. **Psalm 95:6**: “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; / let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!”
  - c. **Psalm 44:25** makes an interesting statement that points out the bodily position is not nearly so important as the spiritual: “For our soul is bowed down to the dust / our belly clings to the ground.”
    - 1) Obviously the body was bowed down and prostrate for the belly to cling to the dust, but more importantly the spirit was bowed down.
  - d. To demonstrate subservience, humility, obeisance, the psalmists bowed in prayer.
3. **Bowed head**
  - a. **Psalm 35:13** mentions the common posture we use today, “...I prayed with head bowed on my chest.”
  - b. This demonstrates that our common modern posture does have some precedent in scripture. It is not quite the same as kneeling, but it represents similar reverence.
4. **Standing**
  - a. **Psalm 134:2** and **135:2** both speak of giving praise while standing in the house of the Lord.
  - b. Clearly we can pray while standing up.
5. **Uplifted hands**
  - a. **Psalm 134:2** says, “Lift up your hands to the holy place / and bless the Lord!”
  - b. **Psalm 28:2** says, “Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, / when I cry to you for help, / when I lift up my hands / toward your most holy sanctuary.”
  - c. **Psalm 63:4** says, “So I will bless you as long as I live; / in your name I will lift up my hands.”

- d. Is this merely an Old Testament posture or is it lawful under the New Covenant? **I Timothy 2:8** nails it down that lifting hands is a lawful prayer posture even in the New Covenant. No, it is not merely some emotional expression during preaching or singing. However, it is a lawful prayer posture.
  - e. While bowing and kneeling went along with lament, mourning, fear and humility, standing with hands uplifted seems to go along with praise, enthusiasm and exuberance. It goes along with excitement in prayer.
6. The reason I bring up posture is because I don't think we give much credence to issues of posture. While I concede God has no proscribed posture, I can tell you from personal experience that your posture does affect your praying.
- a. I encourage you, especially in your private prayers (experimenting with posture in the public assembly is likely too distracting to be beneficial), experiment with posture.
  - b. Kneel, bow down or even lie prostrate as you express God's greatness and your unworthiness. It will impact how your prayer impacts you. When you are enthusiastically and excitedly declaring and shouting the praises of God, stand up with eyes and hands lifted toward heaven and see if it doesn't impact how your prayer impacts you.

### Conclusion:

- I. Psalms for the soul
  - A. What an amazing school of prayer and praise is the psalms. Its teaching is limitless.
  - B. After studying for months and writing for weeks, I still feel inadequate. We have scratched the surface. I'm sure there is more instruction if we will simply keep mining the **Psalms**.
  - C. Even more than that, I fear it is one thing to say all this in a lecture. It is another to actually have it in the heart and in our praying. I hope this tip of the iceberg has been enough to encourage you to get into the **Psalms** and let them be your tutor for prayer and praise.
- II. A final encouragement in a spiritual exercise.
  - A. I encourage you to do more than simply study the **Psalms** as a tutor for prayer. To help with your prayer life, I encourage you to pray the psalms.
  - B. By that, I don't mean read the **Psalms** as prayers. Rather, study a psalm, understand it, grasp its meaning, then write your own prayer based on that psalm. Make it specific to your situation. Use names and events in your life that correspond with the message of the psalm.
  - C. I've started doing this, recording my written prayers. It has had a tremendous impact on my prayers in general. I encourage you to try it. I guarantee you it will help your prayer life.

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