

[ Psalmody - Experiencing Christ in the Psalms ]

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**Quotes and Resources**  
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*Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms** must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:44-47, ESV)*

*\*\* And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’*

*And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’*

*Therefore he says also in another Psalm, “You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. (Paul, in Antioch in Pisidia, from Acts 13:32-37)*

*\*\* Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:17-21)*

*\*\* And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:15-17)*

**Kevin Adams, 150 - Finding Your Story in the Psalms:**

One of the main differences between tourists and pilgrims is that pilgrims engage in their journey out of a passion for discovery rather than the hope of an interesting diversion or a nice vacation. Pilgrims travel hard, fully engaged in the moment, expecting that the process will profoundly change them. Ambrose, a fourth-century preacher, once called the Psalms a “gymnasium of the soul”—a vast spiritual fitness center.

In the Psalms God is wilder, more unpredictable, more passionate than we imagine. “God behaves in the Psalms in ways he is not allowed to behave in systematic theology,” said Benedictine Sebastian Moore.

**Patrick Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*:**

We may start by observing that two things happen in the Book of Psalms: First, God is spoken about. This is already the case in the first two psalms, during the course of which He is never directly addressed. God is not invoked at all until Psalm 3. Indeed, many lines of the Psalter are statements about God and the things of God. Second, in many places in the Psalter, God is spoken to. This dominating feature of prayer is what makes the Book of Psalms unique in the Bible's Wisdom literature.

...Pocketbook Bibles, containing only the New Testament and the Psalms, embody an ancient and deep insight of the Christian faith that sees the Psalter almost as part of the New Testament itself.

Christ is the referential center of the Book of Psalms...(Luke 24)

With respect to the Holy Scriptures, it is a matter of historical fact—and should be promoted as a theological principle—that ecclesiology precedes canonicity. Church comes first, then Scriptures. And what joins the Church to ancient Israel? Only Christ. Why, after all, should we be interested in those ancient Hebrew writings? What connection do they have with us? And I answer, those ancient books have no special connection with us except on account of Christ. Christ alone is our link to those writings. That is to say, we don't begin with the Old Testament; we begin with Christ....Christ is the one who fulfills it, and He is the key to its understanding. (see 1 Peter 1:10-12)

On the practice of using the Psalms: "The habit of prayer, this incessant meditation on God's Law, is not supposed to be something immediately useful. Trees do not bear fruit right away."

**St. John Chrysostom (4<sup>th</sup> Century) :**

"If we keep vigil in church, David comes first, last and central. If early in the morning we want songs and hymns, first, last and central is David again. If we are occupied with the funeral solemnities of those who have fallen asleep, or if virgins sit at home and spin, David is first, last and central. O amazing wonder! Many who have made little progress in literature know the Psalter by heart. Nor is it only in cities and churches that David is famous; in the village market, in the desert, and in uninhabitable land, he excites the praise of God. In monasteries, among those holy choirs of angelic armies, David is first, last and central....All other men at night are overcome by sleep. David alone is active, and gathering the servants of God into seraphic bands, he turns earth into heaven, and converts men into angels."

**Martin Luther:**

When read only occasionally, these prayers are too overwhelming in design and power and tend to turn us back to more palatable fare. But whoever has begun to pray the Psalter seriously and regularly will soon give a vacation to other little devotional prayers and say: 'Ah, there is not the juice, the strength, the passion, the fire which I find in the Psalter. It tastes too cold and too hard.'

"It is therefore easy to understand why the Book of Psalms is the favorite book of all the saints. For every man on every occasion can find in it Psalms which fit his needs, which he feels to be as appropriate as if they had been set there just for his sake."

**John Calvin, *Psalter of 1545, Commentaries on the Psalms*:**

In his preface to the edition of 1545 Calvin wrote: "When we sing them (the Psalms), we are as certain that God has put the words in our mouths as if he himself sang within us to exalt his glory!"

"I have been accustomed, to call this book, I think not inappropriately, *The Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul*' ... there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn ... all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes,

cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated. The other parts of Scripture contain the commandments which God enjoined his servants to announce to us. But here the prophets themselves, seeing they are exhibited to us as speaking to God, and laying open all their inmost thoughts and affections, call, or rather draw, each of us to the examination of himself in particular, in order that none of the many infirmities to which we are subject, and of the many vices with which we abound, may remain concealed. It is certainly a rare and singular advantage, when all lurking places are discovered, and the heart is brought into the light, purged from that most baneful infection, hypocrisy.

**Kathleen Norris, *Dakota and Cloister Walk*:**

You come to the Bible's great "book of praises" through all the moods and conditions of life, and while you may feel like the pits, you sing anyway. To your surprise, you find that the Psalms do not deny your true feelings but allow you to reflect on them, right in front of God and everyone.

They remind us that the mundane and the holy are linked. The Psalms make us uncomfortable because they don't let us deny - either the depth of our pain or the possibility of its transformation into praise. We commit ourselves to being changed by the Psalms, allowing the words to work on us, and sometimes to work us over. The Psalms are unrelenting in their realism. They ask us to consider our true situation and to pray over it. They ask us to be honest about ourselves. (p. 104)

In expressing all the complexities and contradictions of human experience, the Psalms act as good psychologists. (Another writer said that the Psalms touch such a range of human experience that you'll think they have been written by your therapist!) They defeat our tendency to try to be holy without being human first.

E.G. Psalm 6 mirrors the way in which our grief and anger are inextricably mixed; the lament that "I am exhausted with my groaning; / every night I drench my pillow with tears" (v. 6) soon leads to rage: "I have grown old surrounded by my foes. / Leave me, you who do evil" (vv. 7-8). Psalm 38 stands on the precipice of depression, as wave after wave of bitter self-accusation crashes against the small voice of hope. The psalm is clinically accurate in its portrayal of extreme melancholia: "the very light has gone from my eyes" (v. 10), "my pain is always before me" (v. 17), and its praise is found only in the possibility of hope: "It is for you, O Lord, that I wait" (v. 15). Psalm 88 is one of the few that ends without even this much praise. It takes us to the heart of pain and leaves us there, saying, "My one companion is darkness" (v. 18). We can only hope that this darkness is a friend, one who provides a place in which our deepest wounds can heal. (Psalm 23, "Though I walk through the dark valley of death.")

The Psalms make us uncomfortable because they don't allow us to deny either the depth of our pain or the possibility of its transformation into praise. As a Benedictine sister in her fifties, having recently come from both the loss of a job and the disintegration of a long-term friendship, put it to me, "I feel as if God is rebuilding me, 'binding up my wounds' " [Ps. 147:3]. "But," she adds, "I'm tired, and little pieces of the psalms are all I can handle. Once you've fallen apart, you take what nourishment you can. The psalms feel like a gentle spring rain: you hardly know that it's sinking in, but something good happens."

**Synecletica (early woman monastic, quoted in Kathleen Norris, *The Quotidian Mysteries*)**

"There is a grief that is useful, and there is a grief that is destructive. The first sort consists in weeping over one's faults and weeping over the weakness of your neighbor....but there is also a grief that comes from the enemy, full of mockery, which some call *acedia* (spiritual depression or apathy; not bearing the thought of going on). This spirit must be cast out, mainly by prayer and psalmody."

There is a healing – making whole - that comes from the power of the Word of God! And when we're weak, it may mean scaling down to a sentence (*Make haste O Lord to deliver me...Lord Jesus, Son of God have mercy on me...Hope in God....*)

**Athanasius of Alexandria (4<sup>th</sup> Century), *Letter to Marcellinus, on the Interpretation of the Psalms:***  
Among all the books, the Psalter has certainly a very special grace, a choiceness of quality well worthy to be pondered; for, besides the characteristics which it shares with others, it has this peculiar marvel of its own, that within it are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. In the Psalter, you learn about yourself. You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you do not merely hear and then pass on, but learn the way to remedy your ill.

It is in the Psalms that we find written and described how afflictions should be borne, and what the afflicted ought to say, both at the time and when his troubles cease: the whole process of his testing is set forth in them and we are shown exactly with what words to voice our hope in God. Or take the commandment, "In everything give thanks." The Psalms not only exhort us to be thankful, they also provide us with fitting words to say. We are told, too, by other writers that all who would live godly in Christ must suffer persecution; and here again the Psalms supply words with which both those who flee persecution and those who suffer under it may suitably address themselves to God, and it does the same for those who have been rescued from it...In fact, under all the circumstances of life, we shall find that these divine songs suit ourselves and meet our own soul's need at every turn.

**Brian Pickett, *Songs For The Journey***

Through the Psalms, the reality of daily life and the reality of God become one!

**Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms:***

In most of life's arenas, we are expected and required to speak the language of safe orientation and equilibrium...As a result, our speech is dulled and mundane. Our passion has been stilled and is without imagination. The Psalms ... propose to speak about human experience in an honest, freeing way. This is in contrast to much of human speech and conduct, which is in fact a cover-up.

For most of us, liturgical or devotional entry into the Psalms requires a real change of pace. It asks us to depart from the closely managed world of public survival, to move into the open, frightening, healing world of speech with the Holy One.

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms - Prayerbook of the Bible (Fortress Press Complete Works ed.):***

Bonhoeffer desired to retrieve the Psalms as the prayerbook of Jesus. He interpreted the Psalms as did Luther - seeing Christ in them; speaking in them, as well as being the source of His own prayers.

He saw (praying the Psalms) as side by side with the Lord's Prayer as Jesus' answer to the plea of the Disciples, "Teach us to pray!" The Lord's Prayer can be seen as the lens through which we read the Psalms. We pray with Jesus in the Psalms.

"Wherever the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian Church. With its recovery will come unsuspected power." Against the background of a Europe at war, a church divided, and a nation engaged in genocide, Bonhoeffer's study of the Psalms was a protest and yet

offered hope. Bonhoeffer was concerned that the German Church had abandoned the Gospel for the sake of survival under the Nazis. He called on the Church to return to faithfulness to Christ in the midst of enemies for the sake of the enemies.

Praying certainly does not mean simply pouring out one's heart. It means, rather, finding the way to speaking with God, whether the heart is full or empty. No one can do that on one's own. For that we need Jesus Christ.

We learn to pray like a child learns to speak – saying the parents' words after them. So prayer is answering God. Reading the Psalms in worship services (something he learned in the Benedictine Monastery experience in England); and having systematic ways of reading the Psalms are a profound help in forming an independent relationship with God and with God's Word.

(One example is a journal entry from his ocean crossing returning from America to involve himself in wartime Germany: "Daily Text: 'It is good for me that I was humbled, so that I might learn your statures' [Ps. 119:71]. One of my favorite sayings from my favorite psalm." He was working on an exposition of Psalm 119 that was never completed. Notes from this work are in Vol. 15 of the Complete Works, *Theological Education Underground*, from which this example is taken.)

### **Thomas Merton, Praying the Psalms; Bread in the Wilderness**

People who walk close to God have always embedded their life in Community worship, in Meditative reading of Scripture, and prayer and reading of the Psalms constantly.

Nowhere can we be more certain that we are praying with the Holy Spirit than when we pray the Psalms.

The revealed content of the Psalter is *poetic*. Let it therefore be clear, that since the inspired writer is an instrument of the Holy Spirit (the true author of the Psalter), then what is revealed in the Psalms is revealed in the *poetry* of the Psalms. It is only fully apprehended in a poetic experience.

Jesus fasting in the wilderness, said the vital words to the tempter, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." The Psalms become Bread in the wilderness - food that nourishes the inner life – they become our own personal prayers and experiences as we pray with them... (Most Christians dabble in the Psalms but) "...a small minority, knows by experience that the Psalms are perfect prayer; that Christ himself prays them in us. They have, in a real sense, lived the meaning of the Psalms in their own lives.

### **C.S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms:**

By a constant reading of the Psalter, he came to know the Psalms almost by heart. He attended morning and evening prayer daily at Cambridge which also taught him the Bible and especially the Psalms.

In *Reflections*, he notes the honesty and realism of the Psalms that mirrors every aspect of our humanity. "No historical readjustment is required. We are in the world we know."

Re: the poetry of the Psalms (and its parallelism form): "It is (according to one's point of view) either a wonderful piece of luck or a wise provision of God's, that poetry which was to be turned into all languages should have as its chief formal characteristic one that does not disappear (as mere metre does) in translation. If we have any taste for poetry we shall enjoy this feature of the Psalms. Even those Christians who cannot enjoy it will respect it; for our Lord, soaked in the poetic tradition of His country, delighted to use it. 'For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' "(Matthew 7:2)

Lewis postures that the Lord who made the world chose to have poetry as part of written revelation. “For poetry too is a little incarnation, giving body to what had been before invisible and inaudible.”

**Eugene Peterson, *Under the Predictable Plant; and Answering God:***

The Psalms are the school for people learning to pray. It’s learning to answer God – learning His language given to us first in His words. Prayer should not be trial and error. God puts the book into our hands, “Here...practice these prayers so that you will learn the full range and depth of your lives in response to God.” (*Under...* 104)

The Psalms actually work as a school/ gymnasium of prayer, gathering our entire lives into prayerfulness. Where we daily stay in shape spiritually. They are virtually indispensable as a spiritual exercise plan for spiritual maturity.

A basic pattern for growing in prayer and maturity – has the 3 utensils for feeding ourselves:

Community Worship-----Daily Praying the Psalms-----Constant, spontaneous prayer.

**Other Resources:**

*Calvin Institute of Christian Worship* - see e.g. <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/psalms-in-worship-god-knows-we-need-help-praying/>

John Witvliet: *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction and Guide to Resources*

John Goldingay: *Psalms, Volumes 1-3* (Baker Commentary on the OT - more technical but wonderful resource)

A modern translation, *The Revised Grail Psalter*, is available online at:  
[http://www.giamusic.com/sacred\\_music/RGP/psalmDisplay.cfm](http://www.giamusic.com/sacred_music/RGP/psalmDisplay.cfm)

A Newer Anglican *Liturgical Psalter* - a new translation seeking to keep the beauty of Coverdale’s long valued English work of the 1600’s - was completed in 1977 and is available online at:  
<http://bible.oremus.org/lp/>