



Learning to pray: The Psalms

The word *psalm* comes from a Greek word for a song. The longest book in the Bible is the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament, a collection of songs and poems written in Hebrew and sung by the people of Israel well over two thousand years ago. The psalms reflect God's relationship with his people in every moment of their lives. Some are hymns of praise, some are songs of lament, some are cries of anger, some are shouts of joy. In all the Psalms we see that our whole lives can be laid bare before God in prayer.

From the earliest days of Christianity, the followers of Jesus Christ have used these hymns and prayers as the basis of their worshipping life. Jesus himself prayed the Psalms even as he looked toward his death on the cross, and in doing so showed us that all of our desires and longings, all our pains and sorrows are offered up to God our Father.

Jesus most famous prayer of the Psalms is probably what we call his 'cry of dereliction' from the cross: 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' (Psalm 22:1). The content of many of the Psalms, such as this one, can be very difficult. But this should only encourage us in our prayer, as they show us that God welcomes even our weaknesses and brokenness into his presence to be renewed in his love. Even Psalm 22 quoted by Christ on the cross does not end in despair, but with the vindication of God's people, just as the death of Christ was not the final word but results in resurrection life.

The Psalms can be prayed in church with others, listened to when sung by a choir, sung as a hymn, or simply meditated upon in silence.

Here are some texts from the Psalms to help us place ourselves before God in prayer:

Psalm 23

¹The Lord is my shepherd; ♦
therefore can I lack nothing.
²He makes me lie down in green
pastures ♦
and leads me beside still waters.
³He shall refresh my soul ♦
and guide me in the paths of
righteousness for his name's sake.
⁴Though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; ♦
for you are with me; your rod and
your staff, they comfort me.
⁵You spread a table before me in the
presence of those who trouble me; ♦
you have anointed my head with oil
and my cup shall be full.
⁶Surely goodness and loving mercy
shall follow me all the days of my
life, ♦
and I will dwell in the house of the
Lord for ever.

Psalm 67

¹God be gracious to us and bless
us ♦
and make his face to shine upon us,
²That your way may be known upon
earth, ♦
your saving power among all
nations.
³Let the peoples praise you, O
God; ♦
let all the peoples praise you.
⁴O let the nations rejoice and be
glad, ♦
for you will judge the peoples
righteously and govern the nations
upon earth.
⁵Let the peoples praise you, O
God; ♦
let all the peoples praise you.
⁶Then shall the earth bring forth her
increase, ♦
and God, our own God, will bless us.
⁷God will bless us, ♦
and all the ends of the earth shall
fear him.

The Psalms can be found towards the middle of the Bible or in the Church of England Psalter¹. Here are a few further suggested psalms for praying at home:

1, 2, 4, 9, 16, 22, 24, 28, 37, 47, 55, 63, 69, 84, 90, 91, 95, 98, 100, 103, 110, 115, 117, 121, 130, 137, 147, 150

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/daily-prayer/psalter>