



A Bible Reading Plan for Psalms

June 12 - August 6, 2017

Mountain Brook Baptist Church
www.mbbc.org



Psalms

ABOUT PROJECT 119

Project 119 is a Bible reading initiative of Mountain Brook Baptist Church. Our hope is that every member of our church family would be encouraged in his or her relationship with Jesus Christ through the regular reading of God's Word.

This reading plan will guide you through various Psalms during the summer. Each week, we will cover a different form or type of psalm with an overview devotional written by Amy Jackson, followed by assigned psalms to read throughout the week. The weekends are set aside as times to catch up with any missed reading and to revisit psalms from that past week.

To receive email updates when devotionals are added to the blog, go to www.mbbc.org/blog, click on "Subscribe to Mountain Brook Blog by Email" and follow the instructions. To learn more about Project 119 and to access previous plans, visit www.mbbc.org/project119.

INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther once called the book of Psalms "a Bible in miniature." Perhaps he was giving a nod to its length - at 150 chapters, the book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible. But it's more likely that Martin Luther was actually pointing out the all-encompassing nature of the psalms.

What are the Psalms? Very simply, the book of Psalms is the hymnbook of the early church. But these aren't just songs of praises. What makes the book of Psalms so rich and deep is that it covers the span of human emotion in relationship to the character of God. Some psalms are indeed songs praising the majesty of God; others have mournful tones, lamenting over the brokenness of the world. We see psalms written for specific occasions by familiar authors; Psalm 51 is a psalm of confession written by David after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah, murdered while in battle. Other psalms seem generic; we may not know the circumstance or author, but regardless, the book of Psalms captures something in us as humans: a capacity to experience a range of emotions as we walk through joys and sorrows.

But the Psalms aren't just about feelings; the beauty of the book of Psalms is that it is a signpost pointing us to God and to His goodness and faithfulness. Every joy and praise comes because of God's faithfulness and majesty. Even in the midst of sorrow, the psalmists remind us of the unchanging nature of God. We see God's goodness and steadfast character revealed; we also see our own freedom to ask hard questions and to mourn over the brokenness of the world. Together, the Psalms tell us the story of a majestic and powerful God who mercifully loves His people, despite their brokenness. They tell us the story of His grace and kindness. And they point us forward to the day when He will make all things right.



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WEEK ONE: LAMENT PSALMS JUNE 12-18

Recently I checked Facebook and discovered that a classmate of mine from elementary school had passed away early that morning. In early 2016, she discovered that she had Stage 3 triple negative breast cancer. Three days later, she learned she was pregnant. I've been following her story over the last year. My heart breaks thinking about a thirty-year-old mom and fellow classmate suffering such tremendous pain and the loss that her family experienced when she died that day. It was a reminder to me that things are not as they should be.

We all have stories like this - people we know who are affected by horrendous tragedy. And sadness touches each of our lives too, in myriads of ways. It might seem odd to begin our Psalms study by looking at the lament psalms, but over a third of the psalms are lament psalms - psalms where God's people cry out to Him because things are not as they should be. The fallen nature of the world is a testimony to the havoc that sin has wreaked on everything in its path - from nature to chromosomes to relationships to the ways that cells replicate in our bodies. Everything is tainted because sin entered into our world. We no longer live in the Garden of Eden.

The lament psalms are a beautiful picture of what it means to be honest before the Lord in our grief and suffering - to come to Him broken, knowing that what breaks our hearts also breaks His heart. The lament psalms model for us what it means to be transparent before the Lord, and the psalmists use strong and vivid language to make their points known. Later this week, you'll read Psalm 88, where the psalmist ends by declaring "darkness is my closest friend" (Psalm 88:18, NIV).

Yet within the lament psalms, we also see elements of God's people reminding themselves of His faithfulness. Things are not as they should be, this is true; but the Israelites continue to preach back to themselves the faithfulness of God, looking back at His past works, reassuring themselves that He will be faithful to His children. Sometimes God's faithfulness doesn't look the way we'd picture it - or, to be honest, the way we would prefer it. Things don't always turn out the way we hoped or anticipated or prayed. So the lament psalms hold these things in tension, as the psalmists cry out for God's kingdom to come now and for Him to make all broken things right, even as they recognize that He is good, even when life is not good. He is faithful, even in the midst of great uncertainty.

Read and pray through these lament psalms this week. As you hear the cries of the psalmists, consider the cries of your heart - where have you experienced the brokenness of the world this week? Come before the Lord with honesty and openness in your grief and suffering. Like the psalmists, meditate on the truths of God's character - be encouraged that, even in a topsy-turvy world fraught with suffering, He never changes.

Monday, June 12: Psalm 77

Tuesday, June 13: Psalm 22

Wednesday, June 14: Psalm 88

Thursday, June 15: Psalm 137

Friday, June 16: Psalm 74



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WEEK TWO: PENITENTIAL PSALMS JUNE 19-25

There are two things we can probably all admit: that we're all sinners, and that we don't like to talk about our sin. In fact, often, instead of calling it "sin," we might talk about making mistakes. Sure, they are mistakes - but our sins against God and others are on a different level than making a mistake and taking the wrong exit on a road trip. What, after all, is sin? Sin is willful disobedience against God, and humanity has struggled with sin since that fateful day in the garden when Adam and Eve chose to trust in the serpent's words and to eat the forbidden fruit. They were already like God, made in His very image, but they bought into the lie that there was more - that God was holding out on them. In the Bible, sin is described as willful treason against God, departing from His standard and missing the mark He has set for us. When we sin, we defiantly declare to God, "You don't have my best interest at heart. I choose to find my joy in something other than You."

And, we sin against God in specific ways. Often I find myself asking God for forgiveness of my sin in a generic kind of way. In Paul Miller's *A Praying Life*, Miller encourages believers to make confession a regular part of their prayer life and says that we ought to confess specifically the ways that we have rebelled against God. For me, this has been humbling - to put words to my sins and areas of struggle. In many ways, the "fruit" of my actions and rebellion toward God are "root" issues. After all, I'm not just struggling with envy - my envy reveals that I measure my self-worth based on my possessions or relationships or physical image rather than on what God has to say about me (that though I am a sinner, I am His beloved child).

The beauty of the psalms is that many of them feature confession. As God's children, He calls us to come to Him and confess our sins. Though God knows all, part of the role of confession is acknowledging our brokenness and need for Him. We can't meet His standards on our own. And while it's scary and takes courage and honesty to come before Him, we do so with the reassurance that He is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9); Jesus' blood makes us whole.

I've also found it really helpful to have a few close friends I can share with in confession - friends who point me to my need for Christ, rather than trying to make me feel better or explain away my sin. Confession opens the door for grace and freedom. When we stay in the darkness, alone in our brokenness, our sin breeds shame. Confession can be painful, but shedding light on sin brings healing, accountability, and the opportunity for us to show grace to one another.

As you read and pray through these psalms this week, ask God to reveal ways that you have missed His mark. Confess your sins before Him, trusting that He is faithful to forgive. Consider sharing your struggles with a fellow brother or sister in Christ who might be able to encourage you.

Monday, June 19: Psalm 51

Tuesday, June 20: Psalm 32

Wednesday, June 21: Psalm 38

Thursday, June 22: Psalm 130

Friday, June 23: Psalm 143



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WEEK THREE: DECLARATIVE PRAISE PSALMS JUNE 26-JULY 2

We praise things we love. Have you gone to a great restaurant recently and had an unforgettable meal? Chances are, you may have shared about it on social media by posting a picture of the dish (if you got a chance to snap a photo before scarfing it down!) or perhaps you gave glowing recommendations to your coworkers.

But praise goes further than just praising a chef's cuisine choices or the freshness of vegetables at a restaurant. Our praise shows where our hearts and affections are centered. They reveal to us what matters to us, what we are enamored by, and what has made an impact on us. Certainly there's nothing wrong with raving about a restaurant, cheering on your football team (go Gamecocks!), or admiring certain qualities you see in your spouse, but nothing should move our hearts to worship and adoration like reflecting on God's character and deeds. God is the One most worthy of our worship and praise because of His faithful character and His perfect works.

What does it mean to praise God? Praise is sharing a testimony of what the Lord has done and why He is worthy of our worship. It is coming before Him and acknowledging His goodness and kindness. And praising God is a biblical mandate! In the Old Testament, all Israelites - from kings and priests to the lowest in society - were commanded to come before God offering a sacrifice of praise. Their praise demonstrated a "public expression of loyalty to the covenant and the Lord of the covenant" (Allen Ross, *Psalms*).

But praise didn't end with the Old Testament saints. We too are called to offer praise to God and to worship Him. And we see from the Israelites that our praise ought to be specific! When you love a meal at a restaurant and someone asks how your dinner was, you don't normally say, "Oh, it was good!" You reply with specifics regarding what you liked about the dish. It's a silly example, but the declarative praise psalms declare specific works of the Lord in the lives of the Old Testament saints - their dilemmas and His deliverance! In the same ways, we are called to praise God for how He is also at work in our lives. What has God done for you? How has he shown Himself to be faithful to you? How has He delivered you? And, how has He revealed His character to you, demonstrating that He is a God "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6).

As you read through these psalms this week, notice how the psalmists declare God's works. Reflect on how God has worked in your own life and praise Him! Remember the perfect, righteous, and merciful character of God, and declare how you have seen Him work, for His glory and for your good!

Monday, June 26: Psalm 18

Tuesday, June 27: Psalm 30

Wednesday, June 28: Psalm 34

Thursday, June 29: Psalm 40

Friday, June 30: Psalm 106



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WEEK FOUR: DESCRIPTIVE PRAISE PSALMS JULY 3-9

I've always loved a good story. In third grade, I got my chance to flex my writing muscles when we took the North Carolina State Writing Exam. It was terrifying for a third grade student! We spent weeks learning about the importance of choosing just the right adjective to describe something. We were coached on writing clear, vivid paragraphs to paint an inviting picture for our readers. I remember that I wrote about spending a weekend at my grandmother's house; I also remember that I embellished how delicious the food was that weekend (my grandmother was many things, but she wasn't a great cook). Nonetheless, I went over the top with how I described the meals we had - including perfectly flaky biscuits for breakfast and hot apple pie for dinner.

But sometimes it's hard to find the just the right word to describe something though, isn't it? If you're standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon, you might find that the view has taken your words (and your breath!) away. Can you find the words you'd use to describe the day when you became a parent and welcomed your first child into the world, or the way you felt when you saw your spouse for the first time at your wedding? Often it's hard to describe the beauty of creation or the richness of certain moments in life. There simply are no words.

We might feel like this when it comes to describing God. Of course, we can never fully measure His majesty or goodness through our human descriptions. And yet, part of our call to praise God is to describe His character, and the descriptive praise psalms give us a model for what this looks like. The psalmists use an array of adjectives (and other parts of speech!) to describe God and to remind us that He is worthy of our worship. They point to how He has intervened in the lives of His people and shown Himself to be faithful to them. It's clear from the descriptions of God the Father that there is truly no one who is like Him (Psalm 113:5)! Delicious dishes, indescribable moments, and even the majesties of His creation pale in comparison to His splendor and glory.

This week, as you read these descriptive praise psalms, note how God is described in each psalm and meditate on these truths in your heart. Allow these psalms, the praise hymns of the church, to lead you to worship. As you think on these descriptions of God in your prayer time, offer up your own hymn of descriptive praise to the Lord!

Monday, July 3: Psalm 36

Tuesday, July 4: Psalm 105

Wednesday, July 5: Psalm 111

Thursday, July 6: Psalm 135

Friday, July 7: Psalm 146



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WEEK FIVE: SONGS OF ZION & PILGRIM PSALMS JULY 10-16

As I write this, I'm preparing to leave town for the weekend and journey six hours east to the Carolinas, or as I like to fondly refer to them, "The Promised Land." Now, obviously the Carolinas aren't literally the Promised Land, but home always holds a special place in your heart. I love living in Birmingham and wouldn't have it any other way - but from time to time, it does my soul good to go back to where my story began.

In some ways, these particular psalms are psalms about home. But they aren't songs about Birmingham, Alabama, or Ellenboro, North Carolina - rather, they are songs about Jerusalem, God's holy city. They are songs about the true Promised Land! Zion refers to God's dwelling place and the mountain where the temple was built: "It represents the city and all its important institutions; it therefore played a central role in the political, cultural, and religious life of Israel" (Allen Ross, *Psalms*).

The pilgrim psalms (Psalms 120-134) were psalms that would have been sung while the Israelites made pilgrimages to Jerusalem to celebrate certain holy days. They are also called the Song of Ascents because the journey to Jerusalem was an uphill climb! As they traveled, the Israelites would have sang these songs to each other to remind them of God's faithful presence and on their journey; they were commanded in the law to make the trek to the holy city three times each year for holiday observances: in spring (for Passover), summer (for the Feast of Weeks), and fall (for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the Festival of Booths).

As you read these psalms this week, you'll notice that they aren't certain literary types - the songs of Zion and pilgrim psalms range from praises and hymns of thanksgiving to laments! Rather, you will see that each psalm focuses on God and His dwelling place. After all, places are important in God's story. He delivered the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh to bring them into a land first promised to Abraham. He instructed that the temple be built in Jerusalem, which served as the gathering place for all Israelites. Can you imagine the devastation the Israelites experienced when their home was lost in the exile? The rest of Scripture following the prophets is about the Israelites coming home. They returned after the exile to rebuild the temple, but we still see this longing for home and for all things to be made right as they live under the oppression of foreign rulers.

But the hope of Christ changes our perspective on home. As I make my journey home this weekend, I am reminded yet again that really, home isn't the place I've left behind to move to Birmingham - it's the place I'm going. In Christ, we are at home with God, and we trust that one day, God will bring us home to Him. We will dwell in the house of Zion, in the new heaven and the new earth, in the presence of God.

Monday, July 10: Psalm 46 (Song of Zion)

Tuesday, July 11: Psalm 113 (Song of Zion)

Wednesday, July 12: Psalm 121 (Pilgrim Psalm)

Thursday, July 13: Psalm 127 (Pilgrim Psalm)

Friday, July 14: Psalm 134 (Pilgrim Psalm)



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WEEK SIX: HALLEL PSALMS JULY 17-23

While we're still in the middle of the summer, I have to admit that it's easy for me to start thinking about the holidays, especially Christmas traditions I've developed while living in Birmingham (including the Living Nativity, the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, and Christmas Day breakfast before heading back to the Carolinas). These have been sweet additions to my holiday traditions while living in Birmingham and have made my time here during the holidays meaningful and rich, even when I've been away from home and from my biological family.

The Hallel psalms were a sort of holiday tradition too for the Israelites; these are praise hymns associated with the great Jewish festivals. These psalms are especially connected with the celebration of Passover. Now, the Passover was first instituted in the book of Exodus as a part of God delivering His people (see Exodus 12). The first Passover was celebrated in the darkness of night in Egypt, under the harsh hand of Pharaoh; for the Israelites, every future Passover would remind them how God delivered them from slavery in a foreign nation where they were oppressed by their enemies. And, these six psalms highlight these exact themes! God's mighty hand delivers His people from oppression in Egypt. Later in the Old Testament, God once again delivers His people from exile and brings them back home.

But these psalms don't just point back to an event in the past: they also point us to the future, to the One who would come to defeat our very worst enemy: sin. You see, the Israelites didn't just deal with issues of foreign oppressors; their greatest foe wasn't Assyria or Egypt or Babylon - it was their own sin. We have a lot in common with the Israelites - our hearts are also prone to wander.

So it's especially fitting that these were the songs sang at Passover. And on the night that Christ was betrayed, He celebrated Passover with His disciples. They would have sung Psalm 118 at the conclusion of the meal, praising God for His loyal and steadfast love. Did the disciples realize that the fullest picture of this covenantal love was sitting before them and had just offered them the bread and wine of the Passover meal? At the end of Psalm 118, the psalmist declares "Bind the festal sacrifices with cords, up to the horn of the altar" (Psalm 118:27). As they went out to the garden to pray, they saw this command fulfilled before their eyes: Christ, the true Passover lamb and the final sacrifice, was arrested and bound. Every past Passover had pointed forward to this Passover and to this Lamb - the final and forever sacrifice for sin.

In many ways, these psalms look back and also look forward. The Israelites would have sang them remembering God's mighty works in the past. We also sing them, remembering what God has done for us in Christ. And we look ahead, trusting that He is faithful and that He will bring His work in us to completion (Philippians 1:6).

Monday, July 17: Psalm 113

Tuesday, July 18: Psalm 114

Wednesday, July 19: Psalm 115

Thursday, July 20: Psalm 116 & Psalm 117

Friday, July 21: Psalm 118



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WEEK SEVEN: ENTHRONEMENT & ROYAL PSALMS JULY 24-30

I've always been a bit fascinated by the British monarchy. As a child, I remember being enamored with Prince Harry and Prince William. I remember watching Diana's funeral on television (even though it aired in the middle of the night here in the States). So, when Netflix debuted *The Crown*, a show about the life of Queen Elizabeth II, I was an instant fan.

This week, we'll be reading enthronement and royal psalms. As I read about these types of psalms, I had images from *The Crown* and my own monarchy fascination in my head: coronations and crowns and royal weddings and the like! While many might argue that the British monarch is now more of a symbolic and diplomatic role, in the past, kings and queens were often the sole political rulers of their countries. In the Ancient Near East, monarchs served as their nation's representative. This is true for Israel - we see the story of the kings woven throughout Scripture, kings who were anointed and ordained by God to lead their country and to serve them well.

The royal psalms center on the importance of kings, covering everything from coronations to royal weddings to military victories. And, they are psalms about the lineage of David. It becomes evident in 2 Samuel 7 that God elected David and his line to serve as kings. They were to be servants of the Lord, God's agents on earth. But the kingdom is divided after Solomon. Kings persist in wickedness and serve false gods rather than holding fast to their heritage of faith in the Lord, the one true God. Israel and Judah fall to enemies and are exiled into foreign nations. When we put all of our hope in earthly kings, disappointment is inevitable.

But the good news is that God's plan hasn't been thwarted. God reigns over all the earth. This is the theme of the enthronement psalms we'll read this week. Even in sin, wickedness, and brokenness, God is working to redeem. The enthronement psalms give us hope and encourage us to trust in the Lord's control. They also call us to submit our lives to Him, recognizing that He alone is worthy of our worship.

And in both the enthronement psalms and royal psalms, we discover inklings of a future king - a king who will also be a priest (Psalm 110). These prophecies are fulfilled in Christ, the true son of David and our perfect High Priest. He is the rider on the white horse who will come and conquer evil forever, "the King of kings and Lord of Lords" (see Revelation 19:11-16). As you read and pray through these psalms this week, meditate on the reminder that God reigns over all the earth - and one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Pray that these reminders would lead you to worship Him and to trust in His rule - today, tomorrow, and forever.

Monday, July 24: Psalm 47 (Enthronement Psalm)

Tuesday, July 25: Psalm 97 (Enthronement Psalm)

Wednesday, July 26: Psalm 98 (Enthronement Psalm)

Thursday, July 27: Psalm 2 (Royal Psalm)

Friday, July 28: Psalm 110 (Royal Psalm)



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WEEK EIGHT: WISDOM PSALMS JULY 31-AUGUST 6

Have you ever met someone who embodies wisdom? The first person who comes to mind for me is a woman named Jane Poster. Jane was the campus minister at the University of South Carolina's Baptist Collegiate Ministry during my first two years of college. I was introduced to Jane at the start of my freshman year and immediately knew that I had met a wise woman. After she retired in 2007, she continued to be my mentor as I served as BCM president and considered seminary options. Jane is also a dear friend to me. Anytime I drive through Columbia, I stop in to say hello and catch up on life. She's given me wise advice over the years when it comes to ministry, friendship, and relationships. (Jane's secret to a happy marriage is having separate bathrooms, in case you wondered.) But Jane's wisdom isn't just focused on how to live a better life now - she is a wise woman because her life has been molded by her love for God and His word.

Wisdom begins when we fear the Lord and seek Him in His word. The Bible is filled with wisdom literature, including Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. We also have several psalms that are classified as wisdom psalms. These psalms emphasize the significance of fearing the Lord and following His law, highlight the contrasting lifestyles of the righteous versus the wicked, and remind us that evil does not win.

Psalms 73 is one of my favorite wisdom psalms. The psalmist shares his struggle to trust in God's word and to do good when he sees evildoers succeeding. Yet the psalmist is reminded that God is good to those who are pure in heart and who follow after Him (Psalm 73:1). This psalm shows us what it means to trust that God is in control and to trust in Him. We are called to live by His rules and standards while we wait for Him to bring judgment on sin. Evil does not have the final word.

The wisdom psalms remind us what it means to live as God's people, in light of God's covenant with us. A few weeks ago, Wayne preached in the contemporary service on John 14:15-24. He reminded us that our love for God is evident in how we respond to His commands. If we love God, we will keep His word. In many ways, the wisdom psalms call us to the same truth. Now, we don't keep the law in order to earn God's love or approval; rather, because God loves us and delights in us as His children, as we meditate on His love for us, the Holy Spirit helps us to worship God, moving our hearts to obedience because of His grace. Psalm 119 is a wisdom psalm based on the torah, or law. This week, you'll read this psalm which encourages readers to delight in God's word and hide His truth in their hearts.

As you study these wisdom psalms, pray that God would also move in your heart to give you a deeper love for His word. Ask that He would give you wisdom - which begins with fearing the Lord! Confess the moments when you are tempted to stray away from His law and trust in the world's success. Pray that He will hold you fast as you wait for Him, and that He would remind you of His faithfulness even in the waiting.

Monday, July 31: Psalm 1

Tuesday, August 1: Psalm 73

Wednesday, August 2: Psalm 119:1-56

Thursday, August 3: Psalm 119:57-112

Friday, August 4: Psalm 119:113-176