



Bible
Together
Series

PSALMS

Praying to God through the seasons

C O N T E N T S
B I B L E T O G E T H E R S E R I E S

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INTRODUCTION

How should we read, apply, and pray the psalms?

The psalms are possibly the most loved and used book in the entire bible. Throughout the centuries, Christians have used the Psalter in both their personal devotions and in the corporate worship of the Church. It is God's songbook to his people for all seasons of our walk. By it, we are given God's words to speak back to him, like how a toddler learns to speak by imitating the words spoken by his or her parents.

And yet, the psalms are much harder to apply than they appear. Think about the instances we are uncomfortable with passages that invoke God's judgment on the psalmist's enemies; or when certain verses appear to be better understood in its original context than to modern ears. Consider how we memorise and use Psalm 23 extensively, but intuitively gloss over "You anoint my head with oil". If we are to avoid the danger of selective application, and yet view the psalms as being relevant to us, how are we, as New Covenant believers, to apply these Old Testament psalms to ourselves?

The answer has to do with Jesus, which is what you might have guessed if you have been in RHC long enough! Being part of the Jewish community, Jesus would have sung and prayed the Psalter weekly in the synagogue. Jesus in his entire ministry, understood the psalms as speaking about him¹. Even up to his final breath, he sang and applied the psalms² to himself! The Spirit of Christ has precisely inspired the words of the Psalter because Christ was going to be the true singer of every psalm. Christ in his humanity, sang the Laments, Hymns, Thanksgiving, Psalms of Confidence etc, so that we, who are in Christ, may also sing and pray these psalms. The prayers, promises and blessings that are true of Christ, become true of us by virtue of our being united with him in faith.

¹For more examples of how and where Jesus used the psalms, look up these verses: Ps 78:2 from Matt. 13:35; Ps. 69:9 from John 2:17; Heb. 2:12 and 10:5-7 from Ps. 22:22 and Ps. 40:6-8 respectively.

²"My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" is taken from Psalm 22:1! Consider his other last sayings on the cross, which include references to Ps. 6:3, 31:5 and 69:21. Throughout his ministry, he frequently acknowledged that he was the true singer of the psalms.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

By implication, praying the psalms through the lens of Christ is less straightforward than we think. What used to be immediately edifying, can now feel frustratingly complex with the 'additional steps' of getting to Christ. Our encouragement to you is this: the psalms are like a gold mine. While a direct application yields much edification, digging deeper by means of reading the psalms in Christ, yields far greater riches.

It is our prayer that everyone who uses this resource would grow in greater adoration of Christ, who is not only the true singer, but the worship leader par excellence who leads us to sing these psalms.

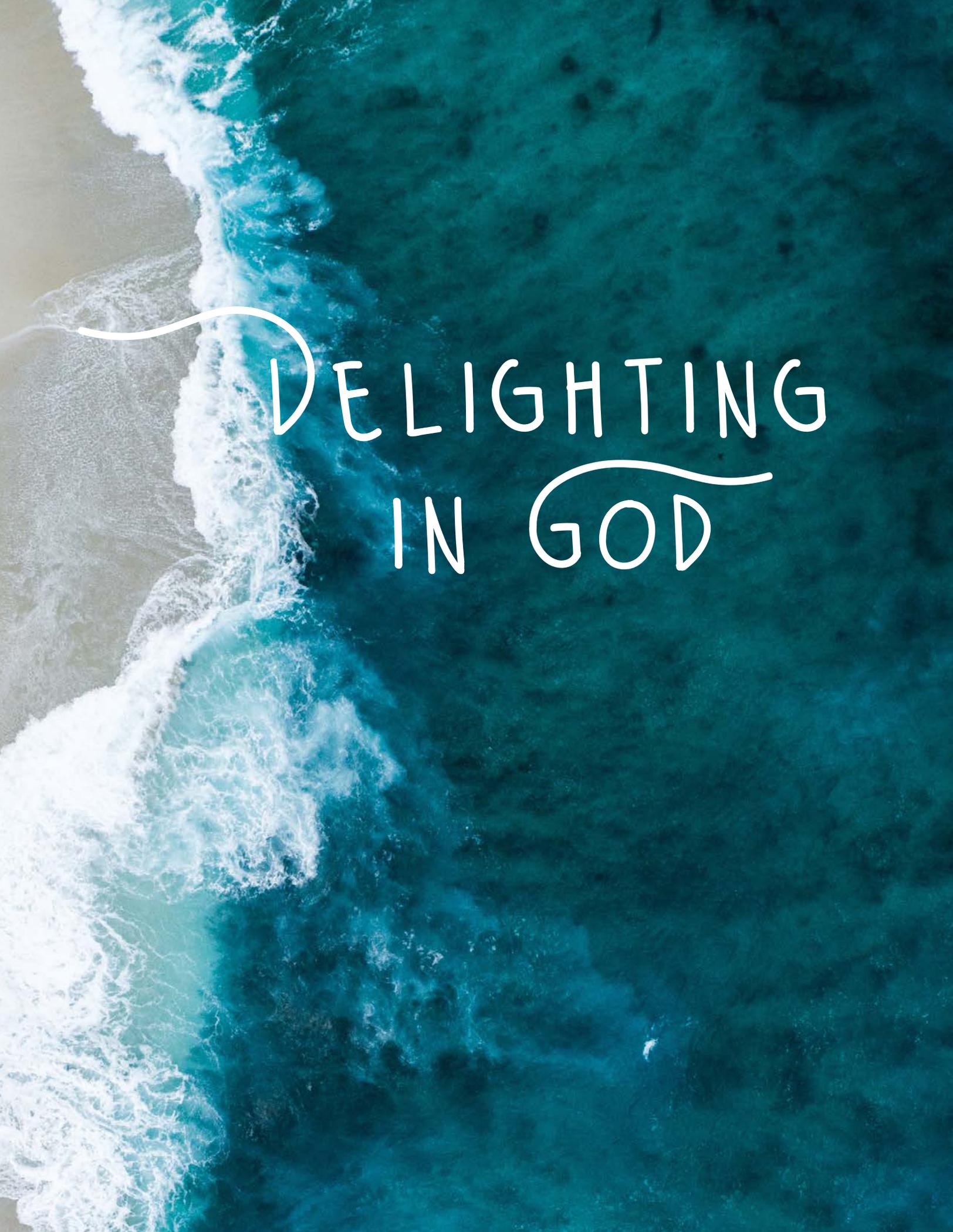
Why this resource?

The reasons for coming up with this resource are twofold. First, it is the overflow of our Grow-in-the-Word workshop on psalms. That means that if you would like to explore the psalms in greater depth, you are welcome to visit the RHC website to [download the teaching videos](#). Second, many in this church have wondered about the kinds of resources that are available for one-to-one bible reading. We hope that this mercifully short resource is able to meet this particular need!

The psalms in this resource are carefully chosen to span four genres, namely: A Hymn, Lament, Penitential Lament and a Psalm of Confidence. The four genres not only represent the different seasons that all Christians would go through, but also follow a certain trajectory that mirrors that of the Psalter, from lament to praise and trust. More importantly, this movement from praise through lament and finally confidence and trust, serves to remind us that we are all living in the already-but-not-yet. While as pilgrims we might find ourselves deep in the miry clay, or trapped in the Valleys of tears, or engulfed with doubts crying "How long O Lord?", we can take heart that the One who has gone before us promises to be for and with us. One day, we too will arrive at the New Jerusalem and be in the house of the LORD forever.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

- 1** This resource comprises FOUR sessions in total. Depending on the depth of your discussion, we recommend that you allocate a minimum of 1.5 hours per session.
- 2** This resource aims at leading you to commune with God. The four sessions are separately titled “Delighting in God”, “Returning to God”, “Crying to God” and “Trusting in God”. While you are free to use this resource at your own time for your own benefit, we highly recommend that you find one or two others to go through the resource together. This is because we believe that the church of Jesus Christ is God’s ordinary means of grace to sustain and grow our faith. Knowing God is a community project.
- 3** Every session follows a particular format:
 - a. **Introducing the genre.** Each session begins by introducing the genre. The term "genre" refers to a group of writings that have characteristics in common with each other. Psalms that fall into a particular genre are listed for your further study should you wish to.
 - b. **Questions to understand the text.** The questions are designed in a way to not only give you a better handle of the text, but also to help you focus on what is important.
 - c. **Mini applications.** These applications are brief and peppered throughout each study both for mental relief from studying the text, and to encourage discussions, reflections and concrete applications.
 - d. **Further reflection.** At the end of each session, the questions in this section are designed to help you go deeper in your application and sharing. Sometimes these questions concern your personal walk. Other times, they are meant to help you think about how you can better serve and love others.
 - e. **Footnotes.** You are free to gloss over the footnotes. They are present to provide further historical or biblical background for your reference.
- 4** The ‘answers’ to the questions are provided at the end of the booklet for your reference. Do resist the temptation to peek at them until you have worked through the questions!

An aerial photograph of a beach with turquoise waves crashing onto the sand. The text 'DELIGHTING IN GOD' is overlaid in a white, hand-drawn font. The word 'DELIGHTING' is on the top line, and 'IN GOD' is on the bottom line. A white decorative flourish starts under the 'D' and curves under the 'G'.

DELIGHTING
IN GOD

HYMNS OF PRAISE

Hymns were composed for times when all is well. They are songs for those trouble-free times in life, times when our lives are well ordered and well oriented. The hymns typically celebrate God as Creator and as Redeemer.

Creation Hymns often praise God for the orderliness of his creation. By celebrating God's good creation, we celebrate the goodness of God that we are currently experiencing. Hymns that extol God as Redeemer typically celebrate what God has done for us in the history of his redemptive work, rather than what God has done for us in our own personal history. Some psalms that are hymns include Ps. 8, 29, 33, 46-48, 93-100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145-150.

Hymns tend to be in three parts:

- Invitation to praise (A)
- Reasons for praise (B)
- Renewed invitation to praise (A')

³For further exploration, check out the GIW workshop videos on "How to Pray the Psalms in Christ".

Psalm 104

¹ Bless the Lord, O my soul!

O Lord my God, you are very great!

You are clothed with splendor and majesty,

² covering yourself with light as with a garment,
stretching out the heavens like a tent.

³ He lays the beams of his chambers on the waters;

he makes the clouds his chariot;

he rides on the wings of the wind;

⁴ he makes his messengers winds,
his ministers a flaming fire.

⁵ He set the earth on its foundations,
so that it should never be moved.

⁶ You covered it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.

⁷ At your rebuke they fled;
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.

⁸ The mountains rose, the valleys sank down
to the place that you appointed for them.

⁹ You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

¹⁰ You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills;

¹¹ they give drink to every beast of the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

¹² Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell;
they sing among the branches.

¹³ From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

¹⁴ You cause the grass to grow for the livestock
and plants for man to cultivate,

that he may bring forth food from the earth

¹⁵ and wine to gladden the heart of man,

D E L I G H T I N G I N G O D

oil to make his face shine
and bread to strengthen man's heart.

¹⁶ The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

¹⁷ In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has her home in the fir trees.

¹⁸ The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the rock badgers.

¹⁹ He made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.

²⁰ You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the beasts of the forest creep about.

²¹ The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.

²² When the sun rises, they steal away
and lie down in their dens.

²³ Man goes out to his work
and to his labor until the evening.

²⁴ O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom have you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵ Here is the sea, great and wide,
which teems with creatures innumerable,
living things both small and great.

²⁶ There go the ships,
and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it.

²⁷ These all look to you,
to give them their food in due season.

²⁸ When you give it to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.

³⁰ When you send forth your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹ May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works,
³² who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke!
³³ I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the Lord.
³⁵ Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more!
Bless the Lord, O my soul!
Praise the Lord!

Adoration and praise are different from thanksgiving. It's connected to delighting in, and enjoying the thing you are praising. Have you ever wondered why, while you enjoy a beautiful sunset you may snap a pic and post it on Instagram? The delight in the sunset is multiplied when it is declared, shared, and praised by others. On one level we know that our deepest joy and satisfaction are found in God, but we struggle with the disconnect between head and heart. Praise and adoration, which is the main theme of Psalm 104, are key to closing that gap.

1. Given that Psalm 104 is a Hymn of Praise, briefly identify the overall structure of the psalm.
2. What are the reasons given to praise God in this psalm? List as many reasons as you can find, by breaking down the psalm into chunks which carry the same idea.

Application:

We are not inclined to notice and praise God. In fact we even need to be taught how and why to praise God. Are your eyes open to the wisdom with which God has created and ordered this world? What is something that you could stop and notice today that calls you to praise God?

3. What kind of imagery is used in vs1-4 to refer to God? What does it tell us about Him?

4. What kind of imagery is used from vs5-9? What does that tell us about the way the earth was created?

5. Identify the theme from vs5-9 which recurs in vs10-13. Where else do we see in this psalm? What does this tell us about God?

Application:

Water in psalms is an important image. It can be an image of life, but can also be one of chaos or even judgement. This psalm reminds us that God is Lord of all those aspects and nothing is out of his control.

Are there things in your life that you think are too big for God to harness and work with in order to achieve his purposes? What steps could you take to exercise trust in the bigness of God?

6. How else does God provide for his creation in vs14-18? Notice the use of 'Parallelism', a Hebrew poetic device, in v15? What effect does this device convey?

Application:

Vs14-18 talks about God's provision for his creation and how he delights to give good things to us. Part of how we enjoy God is by enjoying his creation. Nonetheless, we are often afraid to enjoy his earthly gifts because we know there is also a wrong way to enjoy them and so we often just "play it safe".

Are you prone to be stoic toward the idea of God blessing you here on earth? Is he a Father who just provides what you need and demands you be grateful or is he a lavish and generous Father who delights to find ways to bless you?

Consider how your earthly father may have modelled this, either for good or bad. How do you think this shapes the way you come to God in prayer? Discuss.

7. Identify the words/phrases that are used to describe the concept of time in vs19-23. What is the main idea of these verses?

Application :

V24 shouts out in praise to God about the wisdom in which God has made things. We often forsake God's given rhythms of life by running to the beat of this world, driven by our desires and fears instead of actively trusting in him. We end up tired and burnt out when we forsake God's wisdom regarding time.

Consider the pattern of how you use your time daily, weekly, and annually. Does it reflect God's wisdom? Daily, does God shape the way you spend your hours? Weekly, do you have a sabbath where you actively lay aside work and rest in faith? Annually, are you aware of certain seasons spiritually and how do you prepare for them? Discuss and consider some ways you allow God's wisdom to shape your time.

8. How is the whole of creation dependent on God in vs27-30? What aspects of God can we learn from this?
9. What does the psalmist pray for in vs31-34?
10. Suggest a possible reason why the psalmist introduced the element of judgement in his prayer vs34-35.
11. How does this psalm point us to Christ?
12. How does the jarring nature of v35 help us see and savour the Gospel?

Application:

How does Christ empower us to enjoy God by transforming the way we delight in and enjoy creation?

The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of teal and white. The teal is a rich, slightly dark greenish-blue, while the white is bright and clean. The two colors are blended together in a marbled, painterly style, with visible brushstrokes and organic, flowing patterns. The overall effect is dynamic and textured, reminiscent of a close-up of a marble surface or a piece of abstract art. The text 'RETURNING TO GOD' is centered in the upper half of the image. 'RETURNING' is in a large, white, sans-serif font. A white curved line starts under the 'R' and ends under the 'G', arching over the words 'TO GOD'. 'TO GOD' is in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, positioned directly below the arch.

RETURNING
TO GOD

We do not always experience life as well ordered or well oriented. There are times when we feel perplexed, forsaken, paralysed by fear, overwhelmed with anger, or lost in despair. The Laments were written for times like these. If you like, they are given to us by God to show us how to let the tears flow.

Apart from its dark mood, the lament is primarily characterized by two parts, namely plea and praise. The plea segment comprises elements such as an opening invocation; complaints or confessions; and petitions. The praise segment, on the other hand is made up of a statement of confidence in God and/or a vow to God. The laments can be further divided into individual (e.g. 3-5, 9-10, 13-14, 22, 25, 39, 41-43, 54-57, 69-71, 77, 86, 88 and 140-142) and community laments (e.g. 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, and 85).

The 'plea' section:

- Opening invocation
- Complaints (e.g. regarding enemies, troubles, God's absence)/
Confession (e.g. sin)
- Petitions⁹ (e.g. deliverance, imprecation¹⁰, forgiveness)

The 'praise' section:

- A statement of confidence in God
- Vow or promise to God

⁸ For further exploration, check out the GIW workshop videos on "How to Pray the Psalms in Christ".

⁹ The petitions are usually closely tied to the complaints. If the psalmist is complaining about enemies, he might correspondingly petition God to deliver him from his enemies.

¹⁰ Imprecation is a cry to God for His enemies to be justly judged and removed. Again, refer to the workshop video for an in-depth study.

Psalm 51

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.
⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
⁶Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
⁸Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
⁹Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
¹¹Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.
¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
¹⁴Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
¹⁶For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
¹⁸Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;
¹⁹then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Have you ever had someone say sorry to you, but had the feeling like they were just saying what they should instead of really meaning it? We doubt the “sorry” will produce much change or if they really understand the full weight of the consequences that preceded the apology.

Do we feel the same about ourselves when we sin against God? What is real repentance and how does it produce real change? David models for us what that looks like in this psalm.

R E T U R N I N G T O G O D

1. The historical title of this psalm tells us that the psalm is inspired by a particular event concerning David. Turn to 2 Sam. 11-12:15 to find out what happened to David that led to the writing of this psalm.
2. Psalm 51 is commonly known as a penitential lament. Identify the verses that make up the 'plea' and 'praise' sections.
3. Try to break down the plea and the praise segments into smaller units to make sense of its flow.
4. Referring to vs1-2, what is the basis that the psalmist appeals to for mercy?

Application:

How we view God determines how we respond to him. The psalmist asks for forgiveness by appealing to God's mercy and steadfast love. In Christ we have a surer word. What does your slowness or lack of repentance reveal about your view of God? How does the gospel give you greater freedom and confidence in prayer and repentance?

5. What can we learn about the nature of sin in vs3-6?

Application:

It's hard for us to see how our sins against others is first a sin against God before it impacts our relationships. This is usually because we fail to think deep enough about the real reasons why we commit a particular sin. Think about the ways in which our sins against others (e.g. losing our temper, envy, gossip) is first an affront to God. Discuss some various scenarios.

6. In v7, the psalmist requests God to wash away his sins. What kind of imageries are used in the verse? Refer to Num. 19:6, 18 and Lev. 14:4, 6, 49 to better understand how the hyssop was used in the Old Testament.

Application:

Which areas of your life that are displeasing to God have you not confessed and sought repentance for? What exactly is sin costing you?

7. Apart from the forgiveness of sins, what else does the psalmist ask of God in vs 8-12?

Application:

What drives our repentance? Does it stem from a self-interested desire to get something out of God, or a longing for the joy of being restored to Him? Does your confession and repentance drive you deeper into despair or does it move you towards God in joy?

8. What does the psalmist promise to do in response to God's answering of his prayers? Refer to vs13-17.

9. Where does the psalmist shift his focus to in vs18-19? What is he asking God to do? How do these verses relate to what has gone on before?

10. In one sense, you and I can directly apply this psalm given that like David, we are sinners in constant need of forgiveness and restoration. But there is another sense that David is not only praying this psalm as an individual, but as the king of Israel. His disobedience to God has an impact on his people, hence the verses that hint of the impact of God's dealings with his nation (vs18-19). Christ, who is the greater Davidic King, would have likewise prayed this psalm. How then can we make this psalm our own, given that Christ prayed this psalm himself?

Application:

How does knowing that Christ prayed this psalm on our behalf deepen i) our marvel for his love ii) our hatred for our sin?

*For a more in-depth study on the topic of Repentance, refer to Session 3 of the [Gospel Renewal Resource](#).

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

David had someone like Nathan the prophet who confronted him of his sin. Is there someone in your life whose confrontation you welcome? Conversely, are you your brother's keeper, constantly on the lookout for someone else's soul? Think through how you can practically get into an accountability relationship with someone else if you are not presently in one.



CRYING
TO
GOD

Psalm 88

A Song. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. To the choirmaster: according to Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil of Heman¹¹ the Ezrahite.

¹ O Lord, God of my salvation,
I cry out day and night before you.

² Let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry!

³ For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.

⁴ I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am a man who has no strength,

⁵ 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.

⁶ You have put me in the depths of the pit,
in the regions dark and deep.

⁷ Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves.
Selah

⁸ You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;

⁹ my eye grows dim through sorrow.
Every day I call upon you, O Lord;
I spread out my hands to you.

¹⁰ Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the departed rise up to praise you? *Selah*

¹¹ Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?

¹² Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

¹³ But I, O Lord, cry to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.

¹⁴ O Lord, why do you cast my soul away?
Why do you hide your face from me?

¹⁵ Afflicted and close to death from my youth up,
I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.

¹⁶ Your wrath has swept over me;
your dreadful assaults destroy me.

¹⁷ They surround me like a flood all day long;
they close in on me together.

¹⁸ You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;
my companions have become darkness.

¹¹ Heman is likely to be the leader of the Korahite guild (1 Chr. 6:33, 37) which comprises the sons of Korah, who are in turn responsible for the Korahite psalms (e.g. Ps. 42-49).



C R Y I N G T O G O D

Have you gone through seasons of despair, or know of someone who is presently going through? Maybe it's chronic pain? The loss of a family member? A betrayal? Psalm 88 brings to expression like no other psalm the depths of despair experienced by the believer. Unlike other laments, this psalm contains no affirmation of faith, no expression of confidence and no praise to God. And yet, it gives us words from God to cry back to God, while groping through extreme darkness.

1. As seen in the previous session, the lament is typically marked by characteristic elements (invocation, complaint, petition, praise). Identify the elements that are present and missing in this psalm. How might that affect the way we understand the meaning of the psalm?

Application:

Have you ever felt that your cries to God do not rise beyond the ceiling? Share briefly an experience of such a season and what went through your mind.

2. Identify something that the psalmist repeatedly does in this psalm. What can we learn from it?

3. Read the psalm slowly and identify the different ways in which the psalmist describes his experience. Which aspects of darkness resonate most with you?

Verse references	Aspect of darkness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'soul is full²² of troubles' v3 • 'overwhelmed with waves' v7; 'helpless' v15; 'sweeping wrath', 'surround like flood all day long', v16-17 	Feeling constantly overwhelmed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'shut in.. cannot escape' v8; 'close in on me' v17 	Feeling cornered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'near to Sheol', 'down to the pit', 'among the dead', 'lie in the grave' v3b-5 	Feeling like the living dead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'remember no more', 'cut off from your hand' v5; 'land of forgetfulness' v12; 'cast soul away', 'hide your face' v14 	Feeling abandoned by God
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'companions shun me' v8, 18 	Feeling abandoned by friends
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'why do you' questions v14 	Feeling confused and perplexed

Application:

We may wonder what there is to learn from such a psalm. What purpose is there in writing that doesn't lift one's head, offer hope or at least some reassurance?

This psalm shows us the importance of giving words to our experiences. As long as a struggle remains unspoken, unexpressed and unarticulated it can feel hidden from you, God and others. Articulating our struggles is an important step in moving through the darkness. This psalm offers us vocabulary and calls us to practise giving words to our experiences.

Apart from sharing what resonated most with you, try to articulate your personal experience in your own words to each other.

4. How does the psalmist appeal to God for deliverance in vs10-12?
5. What does the psalmist 'accuse' God of doing in vs6-8 and vs14-18?
6. While this psalm appears to be hopeless at first glance, it is possible to detect faint glimmers of hope. How can the psalmist's responses to God encourage us? What does faith look like in this psalm? (Hint: look at your answers to the previous questions)

Application:

Recount the occasions in which we either avoid God in our pain, or excuse him by over-claiming responsibility for our situation. Why do you think we do that? What might faith look like for you in those circumstances?

7. How does knowing that Christ prayed this psalm, change the way we pray it?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. This psalm has shown us that life has no easy resolutions or quick fixes. Instead of moving too quickly into 'Bible mode', we ought take time to articulate and wrestle with our questions and emotions. What are the dangers when we move too quickly into 'Christianese'?
2. We tend to jump to giving good advice when walking with others who are suffering. How does knowing the dangers of moving too quickly into 'Bible mode' change the way you would walk alongside others?
3. God has used Heman's suffering to strengthen his people throughout the ages, including you. How can God use your suffering today to bless those around you?
4. Take some time to pray through some of the truths that you have learned from Psalm 88. Pray and cry out on behalf of someone whom you know is hurting. Consider wrapping up by singing this hymn to encourage each other.

BE STILL MY SOUL

1 Be still, my soul: the Lord is on your side;
bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
leave to your God to order and provide;
in ev'ry change he faithful will remain.

Be still, my soul: your best, your heav'nly Friend
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

2 Be still, my soul: your God will undertake
to guide the future as he has the past.

Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.

Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.

3 Be still, my soul: when dearest friends depart,
and all is darkened in the vale of tears,
then shall you better know his love, his heart,
who comes to soothe your sorrow and your fears.

Be still, my soul: your Jesus can repay
from his own fullness all he takes away.

4 Be still, my soul: the hour is hast'ning on
when we shall be forever with the Lord,
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.

Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,
all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

-Katherina von Schlegel

A serene sunset over a vast ocean. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of pink, orange, and blue. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a shimmering reflection on the water's surface. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

TRUSTING
IN GOD

Psalms of Confidence

The Psalms of Confidence do not have a unifying structural shape unlike the Hymn or Lament. Unlike the laments, the Psalm of Confidence lack the anguish and the structural elements of laments (c.f. Ps. 51). Unlike the Psalm of Thanksgiving, the psalmist has yet to experience God's salvation at the time of writing. The distinguishing characteristic of such a genre is the psalmist's unwavering trust in God's ability to deliver him from his adverse circumstances. One example of such a genre, is our all-time favourite, Psalm 23! Other examples of this type of psalm include: Ps. 11, 16, 27, 62, 121, 125, 131.

Psalm 91

¹ He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ He will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,

⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

⁸ You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.

⁹ Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—
the Most High, who is my refuge—

¹⁰ no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
no plague come near your tent.

¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.

¹² On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.

¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

¹⁴ "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.

¹⁵ When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;

I will rescue him and honor him.

¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."

T R U S T I N G I N G O D

What is your comfort and security in life? Your bank account? A loving family? A close friend? Entertainment? Where do you turn to, to recharge, or when life spirals out of control? What does it mean for God to be our hiding place? Psalm 91 tells us how God promises to keep watch over his people and therefore how we ought to put our trust and confidence in him.

1. Given that this is a Psalm of Confidence, identify the most repeated imagery.
2. How might you break down the psalm? (Hint: Look out for recurring themes)
3. What are some of the titles used to describe God in this psalm? What do they tell us about his identity? Turn to the following passages to get an idea. C.f. Ps. 47:2, 68:14, 24
4. With reference to vs3-8, and vs10-13, describe how exactly is God a refuge and protection to his people?
5. The blessings promised in this psalm alludes to the covenant that God made with his Israel through Moses. Take some time to look through the passages from Leviticus and Deuteronomy to better familiarize yourself with these covenantal blessings.

Mosaic Covenant	Psalm 91
Not afraid (Lev. 26:6)	v5
Chase thousand/ten thousand (Lev. 26:7-8)	v7
God's dwelling (Lev. 26:11)	v9
Beasts removed (Lev. 26:6, 22 ²⁹)	v13
Pestilence (Lev. 26:5; Deut. 28:21)	v3
Boils, diseases of Egypt (Deut. 28:34, 59)	v10

Application:

What is your understanding of 'God's blessings' in general? Would you claim these 'blessings' in Psalm 91 for yourself as some Christians have? Why or why not?

³⁰These verses in Deuteronomy specific by contrast, the covenant curses that God's people would suffer should they disobey God.

6. In vs14-16, the text switches to a first-person perspective. Who exactly is speaking these words? How do these final verses contribute to what has gone on before?

7. Notice that while the entire psalm is filled with God's promise of blessings, there is an attached condition to the receiving of these blessings (c.f. vs1-2, 9, 14). Unfortunately, Israel's failure to trust in God as her refuge and shelter led her to forfeit these blessings. How can we as sinners who live after the cross, claim the blessings of Psalm 91?

8. Both the New Testament and our personal experiences seem to run contrary to what is promised in this psalm. How then can this psalm be applied to us?

Hint 1: Look up Eph. 1:3-14

Hint 2: Same same, but different—In both covenants God promises to bless and protect those who take refuge in him, but the expression of these blessings look different.

In summary, while the blessings of Psalm 91 cannot be directly applied in our lives, it teaches us to put our confidence in God who still promises to be our refuge and fortress. His care and protection is still comprehensive, round-the-clock, and non-passive. While he may not spare us from earthly trials and dangers, he promises to protect us from anything that might shipwreck our faith or keep us from living for and enjoying him.

Read through Psalm 91 again with this understanding, and meditate particularly on vs14-16. Talk about the kind of fears that you are currently experiencing, and how this psalm can strengthen you right now amidst your fears.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When we view God's blessings too narrowly as mere earthly blessings, we belittle the dangers that actually surround us and likewise downplay the extent of God's protection over us. However, we need protection that goes beyond the physical. How often do we pray the Lord's Prayer, particularly the line that says, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"? Why are we inclined to desire our physical well-being more than our spiritual well-being?

2. Does having the above understanding of Psalm 91 mean we shouldn't pray for God's protection on a road trip, healing when we are sick or for the safety of our children?

How does understanding the spiritual blessings that God wants to offer us, as well as the ultimate dangers that God promises to protect us from, shape the way we pray for physical blessings and receive his answer to our prayers?

3. Paul, in the final moments of his life, expressed a strong confidence in the Lord who protects and delivers. Meditate on these profound words as you close in prayer.

¹⁷But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

(2 Tim. 2:4-17-18)

P S A L M S - B I B L E T O G E T H E R S E R I E S

LEADER'S GUIDE



DELIGHTING IN GOD - PSALM 104

refer to pages 8-10

1. Given that Psalm 104 is a Hymn of Praise, briefly identify the overall structure of the psalm.

- The hymn is bookended by praise (v1, vs31-35).
- The main body (vs2-30) provides us with reasons to praise God.

2. What are the reasons given to praise God in this psalm? List as many reasons as you can find, by breaking down the psalm into chunks which carry the same idea.

- Praise God as the Creator-King vs1-4
- Praise God for the stability of his creation vs5-9
- Praise God for His supply to his creation vs10-30
 - * He provides water for sustenance vs10-13
 - * He provides food and homes vs14-18
 - * He regulates the rhythms of life vs19-23
 - * He delights in the sea creatures vs24-26
 - * He governs all of life vs27-30

3. What kind of imagery is used in vs1-4 to refer to God? What does it tell us about him?

- God is clothed in 'splendor, majesty and light'. vs1-2
- He possesses 'chambers', 'chariots'¹², and 'messengers', vs2-4
- The use of these terms portrays the image of our God as a King. He dresses himself in royal regalia, resides in royal chambers, and is in charge of messengers.
- The one who created is the King of the his creation.

4. What kind of imagery is used from vs5-9? What does that tell us about the way the earth was created?

- The earth is said to rest on immovable foundations. v5
- The water, which typically represent instability and chaotic forces that

¹²When the ancients saw rain clouds, they saw the approach of their divine king coming to provide all that they needed for life. This is particularly significant in the agrarian life of Israel, whose livelihood depended on the rainy seasons after a prolonged dry season. God's rains signify that God reigns.

threaten God's purposes for his creation in ancient thinking¹³, obey God's rebuke v7 and were confined within God's appointed boundaries v9. Vs5-9 allude to the act of God's creation in Genesis 1.

- The image of stability makes God's creation a habitable place for all his creatures.

5. Identify the theme from vs5-9 which recurs in vs10-13. Where else do we see in this psalm? What does this tell us about God?

- The idea of water continues into vs10-13 from vs5-9.
- If waters previously represented a hostile force that God had command over, these same 'waters' are now being harnessed by God to provide for his creation as a source of sustenance.
- All creation, including the beasts, birds and the earth, is described as being satisfied with the water that God provides.
- Furthermore, God uses water to grow trees to provide shelter for the birds v16.
- Even the sea (vs25-26), a symbol of chaos, is surprisingly full of life. Rather than being a threat to God's purposes¹⁴, the Leviathan is nothing more than a pet in God's playground!
- These verses teach us something about God's control over his creation, which include forces that oppose him!

6. How else does God provide for his creation in vs14-18? Notice the use of 'Parallelism', a Hebrew poetic device, in v15? What effect does this device convey?

- God provides food to Man and homes for the creatures vs17-18.
- The parallelism in v15 shows that the food that God provides for Man goes beyond basic sustenance.
- Notice how 'wine to gladden heart' parallels 'oil to make his face shine' and 'bread to strengthen man's heart' to unpack the idea of how God 'brings forth food from the earth'. These three ideas combine to emphasize that food is designed to bring pleasure, an idea that must be warmly welcomed by all Singaporeans!

that he may bring forth food from the earth

¹⁵ and *wine* to *gladden the heart of man*,

oil to make *his face shine*

and *bread* to *strengthen man's heart*.

¹³This is true in other psalms such as Ps 32:6, 93:3-4.

¹⁴The Leviathan is a mythopoeic sea-monster that also represents a threat to God's creation.

7. Identify the words/phrases that are used to describe the concept of time in vs19-23.

What is the main idea of these verses?

- Phrases include: 'mark the seasons', 'time for setting' v19; 'darkness, night' v20; 'when the sun rises' v22; 'until the evening' v23.
- God created the sun and moon to regulate the daily rhythms of life.
- Creatures of both the day and night regulate their rhythm of life based on God's design of the day and night. This includes Man, who is equally dependent on God's design of time.

8. How is the whole of creation dependent on God in vs27-30? What aspects of God can we learn from this?

- God is the primary actor in the way he relates to his creation. He is the one who 'gives food' vs27-28; 'opens his hand' v28; 'hides his face' v29; 'takes away their breath' v29; 'sends forth his spirit' and 'renew the ground' v30. It demonstrates the comprehensiveness of God's involvement with his creation. God is no absent gardener.
- All creations 'look to God' dependently, as God sustains them.
- While v1-9 emphasizes his Kingly transcendence, these verses emphasize his nearness. He is both a majestic and personal God.

9. What does the psalmist pray for in vs31-34?

- There are **three parts** to his prayer:
 - He prays for the glory of the Lord to endure forever v31. Presumably the permanence of God's glory is dependent on the permanence of His creation. V31b suggests that God would continually 'rejoice in his works'. In effect, he desires God's wonderful creation to endure!
 - He sings praise and rejoices in the LORD vs33-34.
 - He prays for God to remove the wicked v35.

10. Suggest a possible reason why the psalmist introduced the element of judgement in his prayer vs34-35.

- The theme of God's judgement on the wicked in v35, stands in stark contrast to the rest of the Psalm. It is a jarring dissonance in the harmony of God's creation.
- God's beautiful and perfect creation, cannot tolerate the presence of wicked sinners.
- Their very existence prevents God from rejoicing in his works, and getting glory from his good creation.

11. How does this psalm point us to Christ?

- That Psalm 104:3 is cited in Hebrews 1:7, tells us that we are to see Christ in his divinity in the psalm. Ultimately, Christ is the Creator-God, who rules over all creation. He is the one in and through whom all things are created (Col 1:15). When we sing this psalm we sing to Christ in his divinity.
- There is another sense that Christ is the one who leads us to sing this psalm with and in him¹⁵. In his humanity, He not only praises God for his wonderful creation and governance, but also rightly desires that the wicked be judged v35 so that 'God's glory would endure forever' v31.

12. How does the jarring nature of v35 help us see and savour the Gospel?

- The jarring nature of v35 throws us off balance a little after reading this beautiful psalm that sings the praises of God's great works and perfect wisdom. It calls us to acknowledge something as we echo the psalmist's prayer—sin wrecks havoc in God's creation and needs to be judged and removed.
- The problem of sin in creation is easy for us to see. Humanity was called to steward and enjoy creation and yet we have abused the earth and end up worshiping created things. Even as we have reflected on and applied the psalm to ourselves we no doubt have come face to face with our own sinfulness. We are riddled with sin and so for God to judge sin we should all perish.
- Christ, the true singer of this psalm can rightly call for judgement on sin and yet as he does, he puts himself in the place of sinners that we may be saved and creation may be restored. All our personal application must find it's rest in the one who was judged on our behalf and through whom all things are being made new.

¹⁵Refer to the Introduction in pages 1-2 which discusses how Christ is the true Singer of the psalms.

RETURNING TO GOD - PSALMS 51

refer to pages 15-16

1. The historical title of this psalm tells us that the psalm is inspired by a particular event concerning David. Turn to 2 Sam. 11-12:15 to find out what happened to David that led to the writing of this psalm.

- 2 Sam. 11-12 details the fall of one of God's greatest servants which reminds us that no one is immune from sinning against God apart from his grace.
- For our sake, the Holy Spirit has inspired this psalm not to memorialize David's failures, but to show us how we, like him, can respond in prayer and repentance after our moral failures.

2. Psalm 51 is commonly known as a penitential lament. Identify the verses that make up the 'plea' and 'praise' sections.

- Plea: vs1-12
- Praise: vs13-19

3. Try to break down the plea and the praise segments into smaller units to make sense of its flow.

- Plea (vs1-12)/Request
 - * Vs1-2 Invocation
 - * Vs3-7 Confession of sin
 - * Vs7-12 Petition for forgiveness and restoration
- Praise (v13-19)/Response
 - * Vs13-17 Promise to God to teach others
 - * Vs18-19 Petition¹⁶

4. Referring to vs1-2, what is the basis that the psalmist appeals to for mercy?

- God's steadfast love and abundant mercy. Both of these attributes make reference to God's gracious revelation of himself (Ex. 34:6).
- There is nothing within David that warrants God's mercy. God's forgiveness has to come from God's own character.
- That God's forgiveness does not turn on our performance but on his person, is good news to sinners!

¹⁶Petitions do not typically feature in the praise section. We must however allow for deviations in the genre.

5. What can we learn about the nature of sin in vs3-6?

- While sin has social consequences (Bathsheba's rape, Uriah's murder), it is ultimately directed against God himself.
 - * V4 'against you, you alone'; 'evil in your sight'.
 - * Sin is always against God first for it is God's will that is being violated when we sin. Sin always affects others, but not before it first grieves and offends God.
- David didn't only sin. He was born a sinner.
 - * V5 'brought forth in iniquity'; 'conceived in sin'.
 - * This problem is aggravated by the fact that God 'delights in truth in the inward being' v6 beyond external law-keeping.
 - * The problem of sin is deeper than we realize. Sin isn't merely a list of isolated mistakes. Rather, we all have sinful natures. We do not just sin, but are in existence, sinners. Sin is not just on us, like the way mud gets onto us. Sin is in and of us.

6. In v7, the psalmist requests God to wash away his sins. What kind of imageries are used in the verse? Refer to Num. 19:6, 18 and Lev. 14:4, 6, 49 to better understand how the hyssop was used in the Old Testament.

- The psalmist's request to be purged by a hyssop (a woody plant) cannot be taken literally for obvious reasons!
- Hyssops are used in rituals that remove ceremonial sin (Num. 19:6, 18) as well as rituals that deal with impurity caused by skin disease and mildew (Lev 14:4, 6, 49, 51, 52). The imagery of the hyssop in this text symbolises the need to be cleanse because sin defiles.
- The imagery of bright white snow indicates just how clean God can render the sinner if he so chooses.

7. Apart from the forgiveness of sins, what else does the psalmist ask of God in vs 8-12?

- Restoration of relationship that leads to joy v8, 12.
- A transformation of his inner being v10.
 - * C.f. 'clean heart' and 'right spirit within'.
 - * After all, David was born a sinner v5 and that God delighted in truth in his inward being v6. A radical problem of sin requires an equally radical inside-out transformation, beyond the forgiveness of sins.
- For God to continue to be present with him¹⁷ v11.

- Notice the number of verbs used in these verses, which assume God to be the primary actor in the Psalmist's transformation.
 - * C.f. 'hide', 'blot', 'create', 'renew', 'cast me not', 'take not', 'restore', 'uphold' are actions done by God.
- The word 'create' is in fact the same word in Genesis 1:1, that speaks of God's direct action. There is a sense that David is asking for more than he understood. In due time, Christ would die to give His people new hearts and to make them new creations (c.f. 2 Cor. 5:17).

8. What does the psalmist promise to do in response to God's answering of his prayers? Refer to vs13-17.

- Help transgressors return to God like David did v13.
- Sing and declare God's praise and righteousness vs14b-15.
- Offer sacrifices if God would accept it¹⁸ vs16-17.
- Just as our sin against God has an impact on others, so does our restoration.

9. Where does the psalmist shift his focus to in vs18-19? What is he asking God to do? How do these verses relate to what has gone on before?

- The Psalmist mentions Zion, i.e. the city of Jerusalem.
- He requests for God to do good to Zion by building up its walls. This may be a reference to the walls that David started building, which were only completed in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 3:1). After the exile, the returning Israelites would have prayed the same psalm, this time asking God to rebuild Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah.
- The restoration of the psalmist from his sin has a direct bearing on the well-being of Zion. When God does good to the psalmist by forgiving and restoring him, he is also doing good to his people. (c.f. v13)

¹⁷V11 presents a parallelism. The removal of God's Spirit has to do with God withdrawing His presence. The Spirit in the Old Testament falls on selected individuals (e.g. prophets, kings, etc) to accomplish God's purposes. Hence this must not be confused as a plea for God to not take away His salvation by withdrawing His spirit. Under the new covenant, God's spirit lives in us and binds us to Christ indissolubly.

¹⁸On the surface, these 2 verses appear to teach that God is disinterested in animal sacrifices which would go against much of the rest of the Old Testament. E.g. c.f. Lev. 1-7. These verses highlight that religious duties such as rituals must reflect a sinner's heartfelt contrition, without which they become external formalism which God despises. E.g. Amos 5:21-24.

10. In one sense, you and I can directly apply this psalm given that like David, we are sinners in constant need of forgiveness and restoration. But there is another sense that David is not only praying this psalm as an individual, but as the king of Israel. His disobedience to God has an impact on his people¹⁹, hence the verses that hint of the impact of God's dealings with his nation (vs18-19). Christ, who is the greater Davidic King, would have likewise prayed this psalm. How then can we make this psalm our own, given that Christ prayed this psalm himself?

- It may shock us to think that Christ can pray this psalm because he was sinless! But we must remember a few things:
 - * It was customary for all Jews to sing through the entire psalter.
 - * The New Testament suggests that Christ sang the psalms in a way that identifies himself with the people²⁰.
- Unlike David, Christ did not sin. This however, does not prevent him from closely identifying with us as our King to such an extent that he can make this psalm his very own prayer. He who knew no sin was made sin (2 Cor. 5:21). As a result, he was denied 'the face of God' v9, and 'cast away' from 'God's presence' v11 at the cross.
- In Christ, we not only receive constant forgiveness when we confess our sins (1 John 1:9), but also possess the permanent indwelling of his spirit in us so that Christ, through his Spirit, would never leave us (Matt. 28:20, Gal. 2:20).
- Given that we are reconciled to God because of Christ, we must like the psalmist, and like Christ who prayed this psalm, invite other sinners to return to God and to know the joy of salvation! (vs13-15).

¹⁹A cursory reading of the historical books like 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles would demonstrate that the character and destiny of God's people is inextricably bound to that of their king.

²⁰For further study, please turn to these passages. E.g. Matt. 27:46, Heb. 2:12.

CRYING TO GOD - PSALMS 88

refer to pages 19-21

1. As seen in the previous session, the lament is typically marked by characteristic elements (invocation, complaint, petition, praise). Identify the elements that are present and missing in this psalm. How might that affect the way we understand the meaning of the Psalm?

- Invocation vs1-2. Crying out to God.
- Complaints that concern:
 - * The trouble that the psalmist is in (e.g. vs3-4, vs6-8, vs15-18)
 - * The seeming absence of God (e.g. v5b, vs6-8, v14)
- The missing elements are:
 - * Petition. Even though he claims to cry out to God, there is no explicit request for deliverance. Contrast this with Psalm 51 which you read in the previous session!
 - * Praise. Rather than ending with a statement of confidence or vow, the final word in this psalm is literally, 'darkness'.
- The absence of direct petitions may suggest that the psalmist feels unheard.
- The lack of any movement towards confidence or praise gives this psalm an appearance of desolate hopelessness.
- And yet God has graciously included this psalm in his song book to show us how we can approach him when we are hurting, without fear of condemnation.

2. Identify something that the psalmist repeatedly does in this psalm. What can we learn from it?

- The psalmist cries to God three times in the psalms (vs1-2, v9, v13)
- The reference to the different times of the day e.g. 'day and night' v1, 'every day' v9b and 'in the morning' (v13), shows that the psalmist has exhausted every possible approach in seeking God.
- That the invocation (i.e. calling out to God) is repeated and strewn across the psalm, rather than simply stated at the outset²¹, suggests likewise.

²¹Typically, the invocation, which is an opening address to God, takes place only at the start of the Lament.

3. Read the psalm slowly and identify the different ways in which the psalmist describes his experience. Which aspects of darkness resonate most with you?

Verse references	Aspect of darkness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘soul is full²² of troubles’ v3 • ‘overwhelmed with waves’ v7; ‘helpless’ v15; ‘sweeping wrath’, ‘surround like flood all day long’, v16-17 	Feeling constantly overwhelmed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘shut in.. cannot escape’ v8; ‘close in on me’ v17 	Feeling cornered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘near to Sheol’, ‘down to the pit’, ‘among the dead’, ‘lie in the grave’ v3b-5 	Feeling like the living dead
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘remember no more’, ‘cut off from your hand’ v5; ‘land of forgetfulness’ v12; ‘cast soul away’, ‘hide your face’ v14 	Feeling abandoned by God
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘companions shun me’ v8, 18 	Feeling abandoned by friends
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘why do you’ questions v14 	Feeling confused and perplexed

4. How does the psalmist appeal to God for deliverance in vs10-12?

- The psalmist longs to praise God for his attributes (v11) and his works (v12) and acknowledges that he is unable to do so if he’s amongst the dead and departed v10.
- These verses do not mean that there is no life after death in the Old Testament²³, or that God has no power in the realm of the dead. Rather, under the Mosaic covenant, the earthly blessings of prosperity and peace demonstrate God’s favour on His people. To be cut off from these blessings feels like being placed under God’s curse²⁴.

²²The word ‘full’ in the original typically refers to one who is satisfied with the good gifts of God. Notice how the same word is now used to mean the opposite.

²³C.f. Even though the concept of life after death is only hinted at and not explicit, it is no less present in other parts of the Old Testament. E.g. Ps 49:15, Amos 9:2.

²⁴The blessings under the Mosaic Covenant will be explored further in session 4 as you read Ps. 91. God hiding his face (e.g. v14) is a sign of Him withholding his blessing (c.f. Num. 6:24-26).

5. What does the psalmist 'accuse' God of doing in vs6-8 and vs14-18?

- The psalmist identifies God not only as a passive spectator, but as the primary actor behind his distress.
- Notice the second person pronouns used in these verses.
 - * 'you have put me', 'your wrath lies heavy', 'you overwhelm me', 'you have caused my companions to shun me', 'you have made me a horror' vs6-8.
 - * 'you cast my soul away', 'you hide your face', 'your terrors', 'your wrath', 'your assaults', 'you have caused my beloved... to shun me' vs14-18.

6. While this psalm appears to be hopeless at first glance, it is possible to detect faint glimmers of hope. How can the psalmist's responses to God encourage us? What does faith look like in this psalm? (Hint: look at your answers to the previous questions)

- He persists in not letting God go even when the darkness does not lift (vs-2, 9, 13)
- Instead of moving away from God by excusing him, he insists, and rightly so, that God is ultimately responsible for his suffering.
- Acknowledging that God is sovereign in the psalmist's hurts is not merely a theological exercise. If God was not primarily behind his suffering, then neither would God be able to help him out of his suffering. Furthermore, if God is not in charge in His suffering, then neither will God be beyond his suffering.
- Faith is moving towards God, instead of moving away from him. Faith clings on to God, even with a faltering grip. Faith does not quit, but pleads.

7. How does knowing that Christ prayed this psalm, change the way we pray it?

- While it is legitimate for every believer to pray Psalm 88, this prayer is ultimately the prayer of Jesus Christ.
- This psalm fits the experience of the one who 'offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears' (Heb. 5:7); the one who struggled with the prospect of the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane. He alone experienced absolute abandonment by those closest to him (vs8, 18), and tasted of the fullness of God's wrath (vs7, vs16), terrors (vs15) and assaults (vs16).
- When we experience darkness, we must remember that someone else has experienced a greater 'dark night of the soul'. He has gone before us into the grave (vs5), was cut off and remembered no more (vs5) on our behalf. As a result, our darkness is temporary, and our abandonment by God, apparent yet unreal.
- In Christ, we do not grieve as those without hope. Because of him, our prayer is not 'my companions have become darkness' but 'What a friend we have in Jesus'.

TRUSTING IN GOD - PSALMS 91

refer to pages 26-27

1. Given that this psalm is a song of confidence, identify the most repeated imagery.

- The most repeated imagery is the idea of God as refuge²⁵.
 - * v1 'shelter', 'shadow'
 - * v4, v9 'refuge'
 - * v2 'fortress'
 - * v9 'dwelling place'
- The dominant theme of this psalm is the idea of confidence and trust in God.

2. How might you break down the psalm? (Hint: Look out for recurring themes)

- The psalm appears to be made up of two recurring themes.
 - * Theme A: The required condition of making God our refuge
 - * Theme B: The promise of deliverance
- (A) Vs1-2 Condition: Abide in God
 - * (B) vs3-8 Promise: deliverance and protection (c.f. 'For')
- (A) V9 Condition: Make the Lord dwelling place
 - * (B) vs10-13 Promise: Protection and victory (c.f. 'For' in v11)
- (A) V9 Condition: Hold fast to God
 - * (B) vs14b-16 Promise: Protection and salvation

3. What are some of the titles used to describe God in this psalm? What do they tell us about his identity? Turn to the following passages to get an idea. C.f. Ps. 47:2, 68:14, 24

- 'Most High' is associated with the Lord's kingship in Ps. 47:2
- In the same way, 'Almighty' is used in Ps. 68:14, 24 to refer to God's divine Kingship.
- The emphasis on God as King strengthens the idea that God is our hiding place!
- Incidentally, these titles of God go back to the patriarchal period (e.g. 'Most High' in Gen. 14:18-20 and 'Almighty' in Gen. 17:1, 28:3), perhaps to remind God's people that the One who was faithful to their Fathers i.e. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is still the same God.

²⁵'God as refuge' is the most frequent imagery used in songs of confidence. C.f. Ps. 16:1, 27:1, 62:1-2.

4. With reference to vs3-8, and 10-13, describe how exactly is God a refuge and protection to his people?

- God's protection is comprehensive.
 - * From enemies: v3 'snare of the fowler'²⁶, v5 "arrow", v7 'ten thousand', v13 'lion and the serpent'²⁷.
 - * From diseases: v3, v6, 'pestilence', v10 'plague'.
 - * From minor injuries: v12 'striking foot against a stone' (stubbing one's toe!)
 - * In sum, the extent of his protection includes both human and non-human agencies, major and minor threats.
- God's protection is round-the-clock.
 - * The ideas of 'night' and 'day', or 'darkness' (intense night) and 'noonday' (fierce day) suggests that God watches over his people 24/7²⁷!
- God's protection is not passive.
 - * v13 'treading on the lion and adder', and 'trampling underfoot' suggests victory for God's people.
 - * v4 The idea of God 'covering his people with his pinions and under his wings' suggests the imagery of a bird driving away potential threats from its young with the rapid beating of its wings²⁸.
 - * Moreover, the Ancient Near East cultures worshipped winged deities. The use of this imagery is God's open challenge to the validity and power of these so-called gods whom Israel's enemies worship.

²⁶The snare of the fowler, or a hunter's trap, is a commonly-used metaphor for the schemes of the human enemies.

²⁷The reference to 'animals' in the Old Testament is a regularly-used symbol for the enemies of God. C.f. Ps. 58:3-6.

²⁸Other biblical examples of God covering His people with His wings include Deut. 32: 10-12 and Matt. 23:37.

5. The blessings promised in this psalm alludes to the covenant that God made with Israel through Moses. Take some time to look through the passages from Leviticus and Deuteronomy to better familiarise yourself with these covenantal blessings.

Mosaic Covenant	Psalm 91
Not afraid (Lev. 26:6)	v5
Chase thousand/ten thousand (Lev. 26:7-8)	v7
God's dwelling (Lev. 26:11)	v9
Beasts removed (Lev. 26:6, 22 ²⁹)	v13
Pestilence (Lev. 26:5; Deut. 28:21)	v3
Boils, diseases of Egypt (Deut. 28:34, 59)	v10

6. In vs14-16, the text switches to a first-person perspective. Who exactly is speaking these words? How do these final verses contribute to what has gone on before?

- As if it wasn't enough for God's promises to be communicated through the psalmist, God personally addresses his people to confirm what was previously said.
- The certainty of his protection is guaranteed by the use of "I will" for a total of 6 times and words such as 'deliver', 'protect' v14, 'rescue' v15b, and 'salvation' v16.

7. Notice that while the entire psalm is filled with God's promise of blessings, there is an attached condition to the receiving of these blessings (c.f. vs1-2, v9, v14). Unfortunately, Israel's failure to trust in God as her refuge and shelter³⁰ led to her forfeit of these blessings. How can we as sinners who live after the cross, claim the blessings of Psalm 91?

- It is interesting that unlike many other psalms, the second personal pronoun 'you' in Psalm 91 is singular. Of course, that could either mean that God's blessings are held out to his people individually, or that only one person who could keep God's condition, was able to enjoy these blessings.
- We know the latter to be true, for only Christ could perfectly abide in God and to make God His dwelling place. Only Christ could perfectly hold fast to God in love.
- In one sense, Christ was not kept from earthly suffering. He was a 'man of sorrows' who had to endure a unique suffering that is unknown to mankind. In another sense, God did answer Christ in the following ways as he prayed through psalm 91:

²⁹These verses in Deuteronomy specific by contrast, the covenant curses that God's people would suffer should they disobey God.

³⁰For further study, read through Lev. 26: 14-46 and Deut. 28: 15- 68 to see how God kept his word in His subsequent judgments of Israel for their unrepentant disobedience.

- * God delivered (v14) and rescued (v15b) Christ by raising him from the dead.
 - * God gave Christ victory over his enemies (v13) at the cross, thereby fulfilling the Word that he made to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15; Eph. 1:20-21; Col. 2:15).
 - * God honored Christ with life everlasting in his glorification. (v16).
- In other words, Christ alone has fully fulfilled the condition of the Mosaic covenant and thus qualifies for the blessings that God promised.
 - When we are united to Christ by faith, we come to share in the same blessings that Christ has obtained.

8. Both the New Testament and our personal experiences seem to run contrary to what is promised in this psalm. How then can this psalm be applied to us?

Hint 1: Look up Eph. 1:3-14

Hint 2: Same same but different—In both covenants God promises to bless and protect those who take refuge in him, but the expression of these blessings look different.

- God desires to bless his people under both the new and old covenant, but the expressions of blessings look different under each covenant.
- While the blessings under the old covenant are more immediately material and physical, those under the new are primarily spiritual.
 - * Eph. 1 tells us that the blessings we received in Christ are *salvation blessings*: e.g. election v4, adoption v5, redemption v7 and future inheritance v14!
 - * We know from elsewhere, that God works ‘all things good for those who love Him’ (Rom. 8:28), and the manner in which he does that is to ‘graciously give us all things’ (Rom. 8:32) in order to protect us from anything that may ‘separate us from the love of Christ’ (Rom. 8:35).
- The New Testament tells us that God’s promise of protection does not exclude his people from suffering (E.g. Rom. 8:35, Phil 1:29, 2 Tim 3:12). He can give us health or illness; He can prosper us or strip away our possessions. In the final analysis, he will protect his people from anything that will draw them away from him, be it prosperity or adversity.
- Since all of God’s protection and blessings can only be found in Christ, let us make God our refuge by abiding in his Son.



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