

A few practical hints for praying the Psalms

Praying the Psalms

1. "The Psalms teach us to pray through imitation and response...Real prayer is always an answer to God's revelation. The Psalms are BOTH prayer and revelations about God the perfect ideal soil for learning prayer.
2. The Psalms take us deep into our own hearts 1000 times faster than we would ever go if left to ourselves...Religious/moral people tend to want to deny the rawness and reality of their own feelings, especially the darkness of them...The secular world has almost made an idol of emotional self-expression...But the Psalmists neither 'stuff' their feelings nor 'ventilate' them. They pray them—they take them into the presence of God until they change or understand them.
3. Most importantly, the Psalms force us to deal with God as He is, not as we wish he was. "Left to ourselves, we will pray to some god who speaks what we like hearing, or to the part of God we manage to understand. But what is critical is that we speak to the God who speaks to us, and to everything He speaks to us...the Psalms train us in that conversation." (quote from Eugene Peterson's Answering God)

Suggestions

1. **Try to understand the whole psalm before praying it.** Read it a couple of times. Consider the whole; where the psalmist begins, where he ends, how he gets there. If there are historical notes given consider the story of redemption to gain context. Write out the questions the psalm provokes in your heart and mind.
2. **Meditate on a part of the psalm.** Is there a particular verse that is particularly relevant to your life right now? Memorize it. Read it aloud, sing it. Why is this word chosen or important here? What difference would this make in my life if I believed this with all my heart? Pray it; for yourself and for others.
3. **Use the Psalms to praise God.** Talk to God about God. The psalms will force us to see our God from the perspective of other believers from other times. We need their help

Based on: http://www.redeemer.com/connect/prayer/praying_psalms.html

Hope devotional reading | Week 1

a help for mediation upon the Psalm and the sermon

From the preface to the 1557 commentary John Calvin authored on the Psalms

I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, "An anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;" for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated. The other parts of Scripture contain the commandments with God enjoined his servants to announce to us. But here the prophets themselves seeing they are exhibited to us as speaking to God, and laying open all their in most thoughts and affections...

Moreover, although The Psalms are replete with all the precepts which serve to frame our life to every part of holiness, piety, and righteousness, yet they will principally teach and train us to bear the cross; and the bearing of the cross is a genuine proof of our obedience, since by doing this, we renounce the guidance of our own affections, and submit ourselves entirely to God, leaving him to govern us, and to dispose of our life according to his will, so that the affections which are the bitterest and most severe to our nature, become sweet to us, because they proceed from him. In one word, not only will we here find general commendations of the goodness of God, which may teach men to repose themselves in him alone, and to seek all their happiness solely in him; and which are intended to teach true believers with their whole hearts confidently to look to him for help in all their necessities; but we will also find that the free remission of sins, which alone reconciles God towards us, and procures for us settled peace with him, is so set forth and magnified, as that here there is nothing wanting which relates to the knowledge of eternal salvation.

Psalm One

Blessed is the man.

The meaning of the Psalmist is that it shall be always well with God's devout servants, whose constant endeavor it is to make progress in the study of his law. He teaches us how impossible it is for anyone to apply his mind to meditation upon God's law, who has not first withdrawn and separated himself from the society of the ungodly. It is necessary to remember that the world is fraught with deadly corruption, and that the first step to living well is to renounce the company of the ungodly, otherwise it is sure to infect us with its own pollution.

Who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers.

Here the Psalmist show how, little by little, men are ordinarily induced to turn aside from the right path. When a person willingly walks after the gratification of his corrupt lusts, the practice of sinning so infatuates him, that, forgetful of himself, he grows hardened in wickedness; and this the prophet terms *standing in the way of sinners*. Then at length follows a desperate obstinacy, which he expresses by the figure of *sitting*.

But his delight is in the law of the LORD.

The psalmist does not simply pronounce those happy who fear God, but designates godliness by the *study of the law*, teaching us that God is only rightly served when his law is obeyed. It is not left to every man to frame a system of religion according to his own judgment, but the standard of godliness is to be taken from the Word of god. From this characterizing the godly as *delighting* in the law of the Lord, we may learn that forced or servile obedience is not at all acceptable to God, and that those only are worthy students of the law who come to it with a cheerful mind, and are so delighted with its instructions, as to account nothing more desirable or delicious than to make progress therein. From this love of the law proceeds constant *meditation* on it.

The Psalmist shows in what respect those who fear God are to be accounted happy, namely, to because they enjoy an evanescent and empty gladness, but because they are in a desirable condition. It is the blessing of God alone which preserves any in a prosperous condition.

He is like a tree planted by streams of living water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

With the figure of the faithful *bringing forth their fruit in season*, the Psalmist meant that the children of God constantly flourish. They are always watered with the secret influences of divine grace, so that whatever may happen to them is conducive to their salvation. On the other hand, the ungodly are carried away by the sudden tempest or consumed by the scorching heat. He expresses the full maturity of the fruit produced, whereas, although the ungodly may present the appearance of precocious fruitfulness, yet they produce nothing that comes to perfection.

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

The Psalmist's mind is seriously pondering on the destruction which awaits the ungodly, and will at length overtake them. The meaning, therefore, is, although the ungodly now live prosperously, yet by and by they shall be like chaff; for when the Lord has brought them low, he shall scatter them with the blast of his wrath.

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

The prophet teaches that a happy life depends on a good conscience. We now see how the Psalmist pronounces the ungodly to be miserable because happiness is the inward blessing of a good conscience. God is the Judge of the world. Granting this, it follows that it cannot but be well with the upright and the just, while, on the other hand, the most terrible destruction must impend over the ungodly. Instead, therefore, of allowing ourselves to be deceived with their imaginary felicity, let us, in circumstances of distress, have ever before our eyes the providence of God, to whom it belongs to settle the affairs of the world, and to bring order of confusion.