

Understanding the Book of Psalms

The book of Psalms is sometimes referred to as the **songbook** of Israel, and both Jews and Christians have consistently witnessed to the power of the Psalms to give voice to their prayers and their expressions of worship.

The Psalms are lyric poetry and exhibit all of the features of poetry. The 150 Psalms were written by a variety of Hebrew **authors** over the span of several hundred years.

What are the Psalms?

Songs of Worship

- The Psalms tell us that **worship** is deep, intense, and passionate. Worship flows out of the believer's relationship with **God**.
- The Psalms tell us also that prayer is **honest** and fervent.

A Collection of Songs

- Psalms is a collection of songs that were brought together over a period of hundreds of years, beginning with a collection of **David's** psalms, with others added later.

The Five Books of Psalms

- The book of Psalms is divided into **five** divisions, which are called the 'Five Books':
- Thus, these sections end with similar declarations of **praise** to the Lord. These doxologies are like links, holding the book together.

Authorship of the Psalms

- When we think of the book of Psalms, we naturally think of them as the Psalms of **David**, but not all of them were written by David.

Groupings of Psalms

- In addition to the five books within the Psalter, here are several other **groupings** of Psalms. One group is called the Pilgrimage Songs or the Songs of **Ascent**.

Different Types of Psalms

- The book of Psalms is often characterized as a book of **praises** to the Lord. However, the very first psalm does not contain a single word of praise to God.

Creation Psalms

- The Creation Psalms focus on praising God as **creator**.

Royal Psalms

- The Royal Psalms are psalms that celebrate the **rule** of God's chosen Davidic king.

Historical Psalms

- In the Historical Psalms, the psalmist tells a portion of the **history** of Israel.

The Psalms Are Written in Poetic Form

- Poetry may be defined as a verbal composition that intensively expresses feelings and ideas through its choice of **exalted** language and its **patterned** arrangement of words and phrases.

Poetic Figurative Language

- Figurative language is the **symbolic** use of words to convey a meaning that is different from the literal meaning.
- The symbol of the Lord as shepherd communicates that he is **provider**, guide, and protector.
- Sometimes this **emphasis** takes the form of an intentional and obvious exaggeration for the sake of making a point.
- Describing the attributes of God can be difficult, because God is a **spirit**; therefore, the biblical writers sometimes use **human** forms as a means of illustrating God's characteristics.

Poetic Verse Structure

- In the Psalms, a poetic verse may consist of one, two, or three lines, but most often it will be **two** lines, with the second line related in some fashion to the first line. The second line may **restate** the thought of the first line; it may state the antithesis of the first line; or it may complete the thought of the first line.
- Another structural technique is the **acrostic** poem, in which each verse begins with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet (e.g. Psalms 25, 34, 111, 112, 119, and 145).

Experiencing the Psalms

- The full richness of the Psalms can only be appreciated, however, when we move beyond **analysis** to experience.

HANDOUT 1

THE PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF GOD'S WORD: PSALM 1

Setting the Direction

Happiness is a valued but illusive treasure. Everyone wants to be **happy** and content. Everyone is chasing after happiness. Yet, how do we achieve happiness? Where is happiness to be found? True happiness and genuine contentment occur only within the context of our covenant relationship with God.

Introduction

- Psalm 1 encourages us to passionately **pursue** God's Word.

The Righteous are Favored by God

- The Hebrew *asher* refers to those who, because of their relationship to God and their walk with God, are living a **blessed** life.

The Righteous Follow the Right Path

- The 'ungodly' are the *resha'im*, the 'wicked', whose **behavior** is evil.
- According to Ps. 1.1, the righteous person avoids **three** kinds of evil. First, the righteous do not listen to wicked counsel.
- Second, the righteous do not accompany **sinners** in their activities.
- Third, the righteous do not 'sit in the seat of the scorers'. A **scorner** is a person who is a scoffer, who boasts and rebels against God's authority.

The Righteous Love the Word of God

- In this verse, the Hebrew word for law is *Torah*, which means **instruction** or teaching.
- The word 'delight' has reference to the **affections**. It is defined as 'to take joy in,' 'to take pleasure in.'
- Psalm 1 suggests the need for obedience, but it is an obedience that is generated by **love** and that springs from a transformed life.
- The delight of the believer in the Lord and in his **Word** is expressed in many Scriptures.
- To delight in the Torah is to rejoice in it, to **love** it, to long for it, to desire it more than gold, and to enjoy it more than honey.

The Righteous Meditate in the Word of God

- While 'meditate' often denotes a silent activity, the Hebrew *hagah* seems in most cases to signify some sort of **audible**, vocal utterance.
- In the Hebrew, therefore, **meditation** likely denotes a thoughtful, deliberate utterance, which may be spoken or sung softly.
- As shown in the Scriptures above, meditation can signify the utterance of a **song**.
- Perhaps the singing of the Psalms is not the only way of taking **delight** in the Torah, but it is one way.
- If we delight in the Word of God, we will spend much time absorbing its **message**.

The Righteous Flourish like a Fruitful Tree

- By meditating on God's Word, getting into it, reading it, going over it, and studying it, God will **speak** to you.
- The tree that is 'planted' by the rivers of waters is not a tree that springs up spontaneously, but one that is set out in a favorable place and that is **cultivated** with care.
- The idea is that of a tree which, at the proper season of the year, is loaded with **fruit**.

- Furthermore, his leaves do not **wither**.
- This tree is always healthy; it is extending its **roots**, circulating its sap, putting forth fruitbuds, blossoms, leaves, or fruit; all in their proper seasons.
- If we desire to obtain permanent prosperity and happiness, it is to be found only by **pursuing** God and his Word.
- A holy life will be followed by God's blessing, and the **righteous** will 'rejoice' (Phil. 4.4).

The Wicked Live Worthless Lives

- Unlike the righteous, the **wicked** person does not flourish and has no status among God's people.
- The wicked are not like a **tree** in any respect.
- They are like dry and worthless **chaff** driven off by the wind.

The Wicked Are Without Standing

- The idea here seems to be derived from the act of standing up to be **tried**, or to receive a sentence. However, when they come to be **judged**, they will have nothing to plead on their behalf.
- We also learn in Ps.1.5 that the sinners have no place in the **congregation** of the righteous.
- The righteous long for heaven, for no **evil** will dwell there.
- Having no place, it follows that they have no **authority** or power there.

The Wicked are Destroyed in the End

- There is a reason that the righteous are like a **flourishing** tree.
- The Lord knows our pathway, but the way of the **wicked** is for destruction.

Conclusion

Psalm 1 Emphasizes the Value of Teaching

- The first Psalm is a **teaching** psalm, a Psalm of Instruction.
- The Wisdom Psalms suggests the importance of **instruction** as a part of worship.

Psalm 1 Invites Us to Hear God's Word

- Psalm 1 pronounces the Lord's approval of and blessings upon those who are **righteous**.
- In its role as an introduction to the Psalter, Psalm 1 sets the tone for encountering the Psalms, identifying the **attitude** that is necessary to enter the Psalter. Psalm 1 suggests that right worship begins with rightly oriented affections.

Psalm 1 Guarantees Happiness to the Righteous

- Our lives are filled with uncertainties, and our children are faced with competing **viewpoints** of how they should live their lives. They see the lifestyles of the wealthy and the behavior of sports heroes and movie stars, and they question the value of serving God in this world.
- Psalm 1 assures us that God honors our **faithfulness**, that evil will be punished and good will be rewarded. In spite of the apparent randomness in the universe, Psalm 1 guarantees that God's Law governs the destiny of us all. God cares for his people, and God acts on their behalf.

HANDOUT 2

THE PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER: PSALM 13

Setting the Direction

- Immediately after we hear in Psalms 1 and 2 that God blesses the **righteous**, we face Psalm 3.
- Psalms 3 and 13 teach us that the righteous will face **suffering**, trials, and tests.
- The theology of Psalms 1 and 2 is important as a foundation to our **relationship** with God.
- Some would say that we ought to live in Psalm 1; and when suffering comes our way, we need only to speak a **positive** confession and ignore our problem.
- Jesus did not offer a **reason** why the Galilean Jews were made to suffer.

Introduction: The Psalms of Prayer

- The Psalms of Prayer are **passionate** pleas born out of pain.
- The **lament** (what I have called the Psalm of Prayer) is the most common type of Psalm in the Bible.

First, David Speaks Directly to God.

- We are never told in the Bible to **ignore** these bad things; we are told to take them to God in prayer.
- But in everything with prayer and thanksgiving let your **requests** be made known unto God
- Psalm 13 begins like many other psalms of prayer by speaking **directly** to God.

Second, David Expresses the Pain of Feeling Abandoned.

- The psalmist feels **abandoned**, and he pleads with God: ‘Will You forget me forever?’
- Denial of our **pain** is not an option.

Third, David States His Problem.

- David names his problem; he voices his **complaint**.
- It is common in the Psalms for people to **cry out** to God and to voice their complaint.
- In the New Testament, Paul talks about God **comforting** us in our trouble.
- Sorrow and grief are things that are **common** throughout the Bible.
- The Psalms of Lament give voice to our **suffering** and to our pain.
- There must be a place among God’s people where we can **weep** with those that weep.

Fourth, David Pleads for God’s Intervention.

- David is not **whining**, grumbling, or murmuring.
- David’s prayer is different from the **complaining** of the Israelites – he has a legitimate need.

Fifth, David Trusts God.

- Even though David does not know **why** he is suffering, he knows that God is in control.
- The psalmist’s confession of **trust** in God signals a transition from lament to praise.
- The word ‘mercy’ is a **covenant** word that suggests a relationship of mutual loyalty.
- David is **confident** that God will do something. Perhaps David has ‘prayed through’ to victory.

Sixth and Finally, David Promises to Praise God.

- Here, David makes a **commitment** to ‘sing unto the Lord’.
- In biblical times, the Jews had what they called a **thanksgiving** offering.
- These prayer psalms have a kind of **progression** in them.

- If we will take things to God in prayer and not try to **hide** our pain, amazing things will happen.

Conclusion

The Suffering of the Righteous

- We learn in Psalms 1 and 2 that the righteous are **blessed** and the wicked are punished.
- Psalm 13 teaches us that the righteous will face suffering, trials, and **tests**.

Prayer Psalms Simplified

- The most common type of psalm is the **Prayer** Psalm, which Bible scholars call ‘the lament’.
- The Prayer Psalms teach us the importance of being open and **honest** with God.
- Furthermore, the Psalms of Lament teach us that we should make a place for **prayer** in our worship services. The early church prayed together in times of need (Acts 1.14; 2.42; 3.1; 4.31; 6.4, 6; 8.15; 12.5; 13.1-3; 14.23; 16.13, 25; 20.36).

HANDOUT 3

THE PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF GOD'S PRESENCE: PSALM 22

Setting the Direction

Psalm 22 might be called 'Pain, Praises, and the Passion of Christ'. The Psalm is quoted in the New Testament in relation to the **crucifixion** of Jesus. As he hung upon the cross, suspended as a mediator between heaven and earth, he cried out to his heavenly father, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me' (Mt. 27.46; Mk 15.34).

Introduction

- Psalm 22 can be outlined in two parts: the first part is prayer (vv. 1-21a), and the second part is **praise** (vv. 21b-31).

A Psalm of Pain

- Before reaching the place of praise, David expresses his **feeling** of pain that God has not answered him.
- The lamenting cry of David is not a cry of complete **despair** and hopelessness.
- David's lament to God is not uttered in an attitude of **doubt**.
- Because of her **persistence**, Jesus stood still and turned and answered her prayer.
- God had not answered the psalmist, but he continued to **pray** in the daytime and in the nighttime.

A Psalm of Remembrance

- Here in verses 3-5, David looks back to the **testimonies** of his ancestors in the faith.
- David is feeling abandoned, and it seems that his **prayer** has not been heard.
- We remember from Psalm 13 that the psalms of **lament** almost always have a reference to trust.

A Psalm of Opposition

- After his expression of **trust** in the Lord, David restates his problem.
- David's plight reminds us of Job, whose **friends** should have been encouraging him and praying for him, but instead they are accusing him.

A Psalm of Trust

- In the face of **ridicule** and opposition, the psalmist recalls the grace of God in earlier days.

A Psalm of Dangers

- His enemies are so dreadful that they are like **animals**.

A Psalm of Suffering

- We do not know if David was physically ill or if his references to illness are **metaphors** that signify the painful effects of the opposition that he is facing.
- It is as if his **energy**, his life force, is being drained.

A Psalm of Rejection

- The writer of Matthew's Gospel sees this verse fulfilled at the **cross** when the hands and feet of Jesus were pierced by the nails.
- In anticipation of his approaching demise, they begin to divide up his **garments** among themselves.

A Psalm of Prayer

- The psalmist has painted a gruesome **picture** of his critical situation.

- David then makes an **amazing** statement at the end of verse 21, ‘You have answered me.’

A Psalm of Promise

- Not only does David promise to **praise** the Lord, but he also calls upon the people to offer up praise.
- But praying in **faith** is not so simple as it sounds.
- To pray through means that we **wrestle** with God like Jacob.
- Psalm 22 holds together that **tension** between crying out to God in prayer and praising God.
- We read in the Psalms that the psalmists would make a **vow** to offer a sacrifice.

A Psalm of Praise

- David declares that the entire world, the ‘ends of the earth’ will **turn** to the Lord.
- Looking into the **future**, David sees that even after we die, our posterity will serve God.
- The psalmist concludes Psalm 22 with the powerful **affirmation** that the coming generations will know that it is Lord who has been at work in our lives – ‘He has done this’.
- We need to tell our children what God has **done** for us.
- The Lord’s Supper is a way of telling **everyone** that Jesus died on the cross.

Psalm 22 and the Cross of Christ

- Psalm 22 is appropriate for any **believer**, at any time in history from David until now.
- When Jesus says, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’, he is not asking for **information**.
- When Jesus quotes Ps. 22.1, he expresses the awful **reality** of the cross.
- Also, this psalm tells us that the problem on the cross was the **sin** of humanity.
- Jesus even cared about the **thief** that was beside him on the other cross.

HANDOUT 4

THE PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF TRUST IN GOD: PSALM 27

Setting the Direction

How important is our **trust** in God? In light of the uncertainties surrounding us in the contemporary world, Christians must learn to put their complete trust in God and in his grace.

There is a certain kind of faith in the Bible that is exemplified in Psalm 27, it is the faith of constant trust, the **faith** in God that stands fast when we are under attack from the enemy.

Introduction to the Psalms of Trust

- The psalms of urgent **prayer** are the most common type of psalm within the book of Psalms.
- Many psalms of lament include a brief statement of **trust** in the Lord.
- In Psalm 27, the confession of trust is transformed from its role as one small part of the lament psalm to create a new type of psalm, the **psalm of trust**.

Who is God?

- When we attempt to **describe** God, we are expressing our theology.
- The Psalms are deeply theological, but it is a theology expressed in the language of **worship**.

God is the Strength of Those Who Trust Him.

- We all know that God rules as the God of the universe, who is over everyone, but we must lay claim to him as **our** God.
- In verse two, the psalmist proclaims that he is trusting God to be his **strength**.
- Even if we look out and there is an entire army surrounding us, God will **protect** us; he will make a way.
- Sometimes we realize that our **task** is beyond our abilities, and the opposition is too strong.

God is a Shelter for Those Who Worship Him.

- The deepest desire of God's people is to **dwell** in the house of the Lord.
- The one thing that David especially **desires** is to be in the house of God.
- History teaches us that a **passion** for the house of God is a characteristic of revival and spiritual vitality.
- If we are to be always in the presence of God, we must **worship** wherever we may find ourselves.
- The psalmist is trusting in God's ability to **hide** him from all danger.

God is the Savior of Those Who Call upon His Name.

- First, the psalmist implores God for continuing **mercy**.
- When we pray, we may not feel like God is **listening**, but we must trust that he is.

God is a Steadfast Guide for Those Who Rely on Him.

- The psalmist trusts that God will be his **guide**.
- We need to realize that when we trust in the Lord, he will **lead** us in the right way – his way, not our way.
- God does not always **answer** us as quickly as we would like.
- We wait with confidence; we wait with hope; we wait with **trust**; we wait with belief, with faith.
- We may not know what he will do, but we know he will **act**, and he will act powerfully.
- God sees every **sparrow** that falls, and how much more does God care for us than for the sparrows.

HANDOUT 5

THE PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF A FAITHFUL TESTIMONY: PSALM 30

Setting the Direction

The story of the ten lepers teaches the value of giving **thanks** to God. When God does something for us, we should thank him. All of the ten lepers were healed, but only one returned to give thanks. Psalm 30 tells us that we should worship God with our thankful testimony; that is, we should praise God with a testimony of what the Lord has done for us.

Worship through Thankful Testimony

- In our testimonies, God should claim **priority**.

The Title of Psalm 30

- The psalm refers to the palace of **David** which he built near the end of his life.

The Psalmist's Praise

- In the context of **worship**, extol means to exalt, magnify, to lift up God's name.
- The word translated 'cried out' means to **scream** over and over, to cry out loudly and continually.

The Congregation's Praise

- Next, the psalmist speaks to the **congregation**, summoning them to join him in worship.
- He says, make **music** to the Lord, you saints.
- What does it mean when we say that God is **holy**?
- God never gets angry without good reason, and his anger is always **momentary**.
- God's anger is momentary, but 'his **favor** is for life' (v. 5).
- The words, 'endure for a night', mean literally to take lodging **overnight**.

The Psalmist's Testimony

His previous time of distress

- Next, the psalmist goes back and recounts his **trouble**.

His previous cry for help

- In addition to **crying** out, he 'made supplication', which means to seek for God's favor.

His previous deliverance

- God answered David's prayer. The answer is stated here in **figurative** terms.

His promise to continue praising God

- In one final burst of **gratitude**, he proclaims, 'O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever'.

Songs of Praise

- There are two kinds of **praise** psalms.

Genuine Praise and Deep Prayer

- The psalms of thankful praise are related to the psalms of urgent **prayer** that we studied earlier.

The Vow of Praise

- The vow is a promise to offer up a **sacrifice**, a thanksgiving offering, a sacrifice in the Temple.
- When we have sought God diligently and urgently and God has answered our **prayers** and delivered us from the enemy, then praise will come easily from our lips.

The Thanksgiving Sacrifice

- The psalm of thanksgiving is the fulfillment of the promise to **praise** God.
- The giving of thanks is not a **private** matter, it is a public display of testimony and witness.

Outline of the Psalms of Thanksgiving

- These thanksgiving psalms, although they vary in form, will normally have **three** parts.
- In times of pain, we ought to be praying, and in times of **joy**, we ought to be shouting.

Conclusion

- The Song of Testimony teaches us the value of **sharing** our personal experiences with others.

HANDOUT 6

THE PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF PURITY: PSALM 51

Setting the Direction

The Psalms teach us that **prayer** is also an important part of worship. Jesus recognized the necessity of prayer, and he declared, ‘my house shall be called a house of prayer’ (Mt. 21.13, quoting Isa. 56.7).

Confession of sin is not easy for some Pentecostal believers. We have taught rightly that Christians should be sanctified and live in victory over the power of sin. However, the emphasis on victorious living has made us hesitant to admit our failings.

A Psalm of Repentance

- Psalm 51 has been used by Jews and Christians for hundreds of years as a model for **repentance**.

A Plea for Mercy

- David gets right to the point, ‘Have **mercy** upon me, O God’.
- David does not waste words making futile **excuses**.
- David does not **compare** his righteousness with that of others.
- David’s request for God’s **grace** is based upon God’s ‘lovingkindness’ and ‘mercy’.
- The focus here is not upon David’s faithfulness but upon God’s **faithfulness**.
- David uses three different words for **sin**, just to make it clear that he knows what he has done.

The Pain and Depth of Sin

- In his admission he adds a **fourth** word for sin: ‘evil’ (Heb. *ra*’).
- When God judges us, therefore, he is just, he is **righteous** in his judgment.
- This is what theologians call **original** sin or the sin nature.

A Plea for Thorough Cleansing

- Utilizing figurative language, he asks that he be purged with **hyssop**.
- It is not the hyssop that cleanses his sins, rather it is the **blood** that is on the hyssop that cleanses.
- The psalmist then asks, ‘Make me hear joy and gladness’ (v. 9). David’s guilt has robbed him of **joy**.
- We should desire to be **clean** before God, to be pure in heart.

A Plea for Inner Renewal

- The word ‘create’ is used in the Bible only of **God**. Only God can create.
- There is nothing more **tragic** than a person who was once filled with God’s Spirit but now is empty because the Spirit has departed.

A Promise to Testify

- When he is **cleansed**, *then* sinners will be converted.

Brokenness and Sacrifice

- The Old Testament sacrifice was an **outward** symbol of inward faith and repentance.
- Only the Spirit of God can break our **hearts** so that we can turn to God.
- Finally, the psalm closes with a **prayer** that God will strengthen the walls of Jerusalem, the holy city.

- David knows that what God wants more than anything is our repentant **heart**.

Conclusion

- The psalmist is serious about confessing his **sin** because sin is a serious matter.
- Ultimately, we are to blame for the **choices** we make.

HANDOUT 7

THE PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF GOD'S GLORY: PSALM 63

Setting the Direction

God's glory may be manifested **visibly** through fire (Exod. 3.2), smoke (Isa. 6.4), a rainbow (Ezek. 1.28), or a cloud (1 Kgs 8.11).

The clearest and most important manifestation of God's **glory** came to us through God's personal appearance in human form. We read in the Gospel of John, 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth' (Jn 1.14).

Introduction

- Psalm 63 can be divided into four major sections. (1) Longing for God's **Presence** (vv. 1-2), (2) Praise for God's Kindness (vv. 3-5), (3) Remembrance of God's Faithfulness (vv. 6-8), (4) Rejoicing in God's Covenant Protection (vv. 9-11).

Longing for God's Presence

- The entire psalm is grounded upon David's personal **relationship** with God.
- The Hebrew word translated 'early' means 'dawn' and it means 'to seek with one's **whole** heart', to 'seek longingly, wholeheartedly, desperately'.
- The language of **hunger** and thirst creates a mood of intensity in the psalm.
- David longs **deeply** and passionately for God's presence, a presence that he has experienced in the past.
- On the one hand, we know that God is **present** everywhere and that he is always with us.
- The one thing that **David** especially desires is to be in the house of God.
- The example of David and of the early church should encourage us to evaluate our own **priorities**.
- The **seeing** of God and the beholding of God's power and glory refer to an encounter with God.
- The psalmist's experience of 'seeing' God and 'beholding' the **power** and glory of God are signs to Pentecostals that God is open to human encounter.
- Alice Flower, an early Pentecostal leader, writes, 'All I seemed to sense was a deep **craving** for the overflowing of His love in my heart'.
- Zelma E. Argue recalls, 'my whole heart seemed to just one big **vacuum** craving and crying for God'.

Praise for God's Kindness

- The Hebrew *hesed* refers to God's love, **loyalty**, faithfulness, kindness, and mercy that come to the believer because of God's covenant.
- Here, however, God's lovingkindness is greater than **life** itself.
- David promises to bless the Lord in **perpetual** worship.
- We **long** for God, because we want to experience his faithfulness.
- The lovingkindness of God is like a sumptuous **feast** that quenches the thirst and satisfies the hunger.

Remembrance of God's Faithfulness

- This passage recalls the past **benefits** of David's relationship to God.
- The phrase, 'My soul **follows** close behind You', is a loose translation from the Hebrew.
- Some people follow God afar off, but David followed God **closely**.
- As we **seek** after God, we must remember God's works in the past.
- We must become hungry and thirsty for God, desperate for God's **presence**.

Rejoicing in God's Covenant Protection

- This final section of the psalm displays a mood of confident **hope** for the future. The enemies, who seek 'to destroy' the psalmist, will 'go into the lower parts of the earth', and they will become 'a portion for jackals'.
- The psalmist is **confident** that justice will prevail, that evil will be punished, and that God's people 'shall glory' in their covenant relationship with God.
- In this final passage, David acknowledges the ongoing presence of dangerous **enemies** who threaten his safety. Nevertheless, he is convinced that God's people will prevail in the end.
- These final verses of Psalm 63 imply that we must reaffirm our **hope** in the Lord's soon return. This last section points to the future and could even be considered as a reference to the last days.

Conclusion to Psalm 63

- The four sections of Psalm 63 are held together by two parallel threads that span the entire psalm. The first thread consists of David's affirmations **about** God. The second thread consists of statements that describe David's response to God.

Implications of Psalm 63

- First, Pentecostals face the danger of seeking out **experiences** rather than seeking God for God's sake. In the past, Pentecostals called this kind of shallow emotionalism 'wild fire'.
- Second, Pentecostalism must recover the practice of **testimony**. Psalm 63 is directed to God, but it is a song that is meant to be heard by the congregation, and as such, it functions as testimony.
- Third, if the Pentecostal movement is to maintain its vitality from generation to generation, it must periodically reclaim the spiritual **passion** that we find demonstrated in Psalm 63.
- Finally, if we want to encounter God, we must **expect** to be filled. David believed that God would meet his need. He confessed, 'my soul shall be satisfied' (Ps. 63.5).

HANDOUT 8

THE PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION: PSALM 73

Setting the Direction

Psalm 73 is about getting our **heads** on straight. To put it in more theological terms, this psalm presents worship as a pursuit of spiritual perception. That is, worship helps us to see reality as God sees it, not as humans see it.

Psalm 73 demonstrates that when we enter into the presence of God, he changes our perception of reality. In the presence of God the truth is made known, secrets of the heart are unveiled, wickedness is condemned, lies are exposed, and hypocrisy is judged.

The Heading of Psalm 73

- Psalm 73 is a Psalm of Asaph, who is named in the headings of twelve psalms. Asaph is described in 1 Chronicles as a **musician** who worked in the temple as one of David's worship leaders (6.31-39).

The Accepted Truth

- Psalm 73 narrates four steps in a process of growth in the life of the psalmist.
 1. Foundational belief – God is **good** to his people.
 2. Contradictory observation – The wicked prosper.
 3. Reality revisioned – God will set things straight.
 4. Renewed faith – Asaph will trust in God.

The Questioning of Truth

- Asaph believes in God's goodness, but when he sees **wicked** people who appear to be doing well, he is troubled. Therefore, he admits that he 'almost stumbled' and he was 'envious' of the wicked because he saw their prosperity.

Description of the Wicked and Their Prosperity

- Asaph does not stop with his admission of envy toward the wicked. He expands on his description of their abundance, their extravagance, and their **pride**.
- The wicked do not **suffer** at their time of death like many of the good people that he knows. Apparently, he is arguing that they can afford the best doctors, the finest comforts, and the most expensive food and drink.
- Second, they are not in 'trouble' neither are they 'plagued' like other people. Because of their wealth, they have no financial **problems**. They need not worry if the weather will turn bad or if their crops will come up short.
- Third, Asaph speaks of their pride. These wicked people are proud, **boastful**, and violent. They wear their pride unashamedly like a necklace and their violence covers them like a garment.
- Fourth, he observes their **wealth**. He says, 'Their eyes bulge with abundance'. They eat so much that their eyes are popping out.

The Suffering of God's People

- His statement that 'the waters of a full cup are drained by them' appears strange and cryptic to us. He seems to be saying that God's people are so **poor** that they could not spare one drop out of a cup of water.

The Confusion of the psalmist

- The psalmist observes the ungodly, always at ease and increasing riches. He reasons that it is pointless to serve God.
- Despite all his efforts to maintain a clean heart and clean hands (which symbolize actions), he continues to be ‘chastened every morning’ and ‘plagued’ all day long. Even though he is living faithfully, he feels like he is suffering all the time.
- The struggle of the psalmist in Psalm 73 reminds me of Satan’s question to God in Job 1. When Satan speaks to God about Job he says, ‘Does Job serve God for nothing?’

Spiritual Perception in God’s Presence

- Asaph recognizes possible harmful consequences of voicing his doubts publicly. If he were to speak about his skepticism then, then he ‘would have been untrue to the generation’ of God’s children. That is, he does not want to discourage other people.
- Asaph is troubled by his thoughts. He says, ‘When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me’ (v. 16). His mind could not handle the apparent contradiction.
- In his troubled state, Asaph entered the ‘sanctuary’, the house of God. The psalmist comes into the sanctuary of God seeking for light and for answers to his difficult questions.
- There in the sanctuary of God, he received a new view of reality.
- The questions themselves begin to fade into nothingness when we enter into the presence of the Lord. In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John sees the troubles coming upon the world. But he goes to the throne room of God, and from God’s throne room the entire world looks different.
- Many times we entered worship at the point of giving up, but we departed with new strength. We came in sick, but we went out healed. In God’s presence, this renewal can happen in a moment, in an instant.
- Worship is an encounter with God, and we are changed by that encounter.

The End of the Wicked

- The psalmist learned that it is important not how we begin but how we end. The justice God may come slowly, but it will come.

The Psalmist Reflects upon the Experience

- Looking back on his experience, the psalmist grieves over his former attitude. He realizes that he had been ‘foolish and ignorant’.
- At first, he had apparently desired to be prosperous like the wicked people whom he envied. But now, he desires only God. He desires to know God, to walk with God, and to be in the sanctuary of God.

The Truth Appropriated in Life

- Harlotry is a figure of speech that represents the forsaking of God for the worship of other gods, the worship of idols. Those who have forsaken God and have been unfaithful to God will be destroyed.
- The psalmist had earlier refused to speak, because he did not want to discourage other believers with his negative observations.

Conclusion

- In Psalm 73, Asaph moves from confidence in his hopeful theology into a period of doubt and discouragement. He then enters the sanctuary of God, where the Lord restores his faith and hope.
- We learn from Psalm 73 that the truth will be challenged and that we will face serious questions.

HANDOUT 9

THE PASSIONATE PURSUIT OF PRAISE TO GOD: PSALM 150

Setting the Direction

Because we are **created** for God's glory, our pursuit of God must include the pursuit of praise to God. God has called us to praise Him.

Psalm 150 expresses well our passionate pursuit of praise, and it serves as a fitting conclusion to the book of Psalms.

The Songs of Praise

- The Songs of Praise normally begin with an **invitation** to worship, followed by the reason for praise, and conclude with a repeated invitation to worship.

Praise the Lord ...

- Psalm 150 can be divided into five parts:
 1. Invitation to **praise** (v. 1a) (Call to Worship)
 2. Places for praise (v. 1b)
 3. Motivation for praise (v. 2) (Motive for Worship)
 4. Methods of praise (vv. 3-5)
 5. Universal praise (v. 6) (Concluding Call to Worship)

Invitation to Praise

- Psalm 150 begins with an invitation to the **congregation**, 'Praise the LORD!'. The Hebrew word 'praise' is the imperative form of the verb, which suggests a command or an urgent exhortation. No one should be a spectator – everyone should praise him.
- Who are we praising? The Lord! Who is the Lord? The Lord is **Yahweh** (traditionally known as Jehovah). He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Places of Praise

- His 'sanctuary' means his 'holy place'. Here in Psalm 150, the **sanctuary** probably refers to two locations: God's heavenly abode and his dwelling place in the Jerusalem temple.
- Between the clouds and the **earth** is the open sky, which Genesis calls 'the firmament'. The sky separates the earth from the clouds.
- Any time we are under the sky, we are in a place of praise. He **created** the sky with the power of his word, so let us praise him!

Motivation for Praise

- God is very much involved in the **world** and our lives. God is neither detached nor unconcerned. He is powerful and active, and he cares deeply about his people.
- The psalmist then says that we should praise God for his **attributes**: 'Praise Him according to His excellent greatness'.

Methods of Praise

- Unlike humans, who have preferences for certain musical instruments, God loves to hear every musical instrument used in praising him.
- The psalmist lists all three kinds of musical instruments: percussion instruments, wind instruments, and stringed instruments.
- He then goes beyond instruments to include the dance.
- Our worship services are not meant to be entertainment; they are meant to be offerings unto God.

Universal Praise

- Finally, the psalmist tells us that all people should praise God.
- The Hebrew text of Ps. 150.6 says literally, 'Let every breath praise Yahweh'. **God** has given us our breath, and with our breath he gave us the freedom to choose how to use that breath.
- Praise is not an option for us.
- If we read through the Psalms, we will find plenty of reasons for coming to God with absolute praise.

The Message of the Book of Psalms

- The book of Psalms is relevant to every point in our journey of faith.
- The book of Psalms begins by pronouncing blessings upon the righteous person who delights in the 'law of the LORD' and meditates in it 'day and night'.
- We are blessed when we seek the Word of God, the worship of God and the praise of God.
- However, righteous people do not always have it easy. They often encounter opposition in various forms.
- The Psalms show us that during times of testing the psalmist would cry out to God and plead for God's help. We also go through those kinds of experiences.
- In our times of trouble we can go to the Psalms and find examples of how we should seek the face of God. What happens when we pray? God answers.
- In the Psalms of Thanksgiving, the psalmist gives thanks to God his answers to prayer.
- The life of faith is not the same every day. The Christian life is not all sorrow, and it is not all joy.
- The book of Psalms concludes with a series of four hymns of praise. In the hymns of praise, the focus of the attention is no longer on our prayers and how God answered us; but the emphasis is upon God, his nature, his holiness, his power, his majesty, his love, and his grace.

Absolute praise

- Psalm 150 is the greatest example of absolute praise, and its placement at the end of the Psalter points to the fact that our goal as God's people is to worship God completely.

Praise is our goal

- In the New Testament, we are called to absolute praise by the Apostle Paul who writes, 'Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!' (Phil. 4.4).
- There is difference in status or rank among the heavenly multitude in Revelation 7. Every person has equal access to the presence of God. All are standing before the throne of God with palm branches in their hands and the praises of God on their lips.