



Series: Summer of Psalms

The Psalms reflect just about every emotion and mood of our human experience, from shouts of praise to wrestling with the hardest questions about suffering. Their voice is refreshingly spontaneous in conversation with the divine through poetry, prayer, and of course, song. This summer, we will celebrate the rich diversity of the Psalms, exploring major themes and how they can help us draw into closer relationship with an ever-present God. Come, let us join with God’s people throughout the ages in singing praise and heartfelt prayer as we experience a Summer of Psalms.

“Here at the very center of the Bible are songs, rising up like a tune from its heart.
They capture the innermost thoughts and prayers of Old Testament people –
and they still speak directly to our needs”
(*NRSV Student Bible* with notes by Philip Yancey and Tim Stafford)

Message description:

Psalms of lament can show us that in the moments that we feel distant from, or even angry at God, that God’s love is still unfailing. We don’t have to put on a show for God and God does not want us to pretend that everything is fine. God wants our hearts, even when they are filled with sadness and anger.

The theme of Divine vengeance in the psalms shows that the Hebrew Nation held onto a glimpse of hope during times of oppression – they served as a window into the future for the oppressed.

Examples:

Some* Psalms of lament (individual and communal): 3, 6, 12, 13, 22, 25, 28, 31, 44, 56, 57, 60, 71, 74, 77, 79, 80, 85, 86, 90 and 142.

**1/3 of the psalter are psalms of lament*

Some examples of imprecatory psalms: 7, 35, 37, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 88, 94, 109, 137, and 139

Imprecatory (cursing) prayers are common in the psalms in three ways:

1. As an actual prayer to God (Psalm 94:1-2): "O LORD, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay to the proud what they deserve!"
2. As a wish (Psalm 35:4-6): "Let them be put to shame and dishonor who seek after my life! Let them be turned back and disappointed who devise evil against me! Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away! Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them!"
3. In the form of and expectation (Psalm 37:15): "their sword shall enter their own heart, and bows shall be broken."

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus has given us a path to eternal life and canceled the power of sin and death, Amen! Yet...we still suffer, we still lament, and we still pray "Your kingdom come!" Luke Powery, Dean of the Chapel at Duke, reminds us: "Resurrections do not erase crucifixions." Suffering has not been erased. We have glorious hope in the resurrection AND we should still be moved to feelings of anger when faced with the world's injustice.

When we experience the human emotions of anger and desire for vengeance, we have choices to make:

1. We can act upon them (not recommended)
2. We can deny them (also not recommended)
3. We can acknowledge them, share them in safe community, and give them over to God (10/10 would recommend – always)

Prayer for reflection:

God, help us hold these harsh human emotions with compassion. Help us acknowledge them in ourselves and give us the courage and strength to turn them over to you. God, if we are courageous enough to ask, break our hearts for what breaks yours, show us the injustices in this world that you have empowered us to fight, show us how to love this world the way you have loved us. God, we thank you for loving us as we are, even when we are full laments, anger, and cursing. Thank you for loving all parts of us and may we, through your grace and mercy, grow to love the ALL of us. Amen.