

Thrive! Using Psalms to Help You Flourish

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Introduction to the book, and to the Psalms, for the 2018 NECC

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(1) Introduction

- The Psalms, with their focus on the interior life, are personally challenging to me.
- They deal with a lot of raw emotion and negative feelings. 40% of the Psalms concern sadness. In this they mirror life.
- The purpose of this talk: an overview of *Thrive!* (my book), along with tips for studying the Psalms.
- Psalms offer therapy for the soul more than action steps or doctrinal solutions.
- Another reason to study the Psalms is their great influence on the Christian church.
- A more honest (less rosy) outlook on life (which can be hard and is not fair) can protect us from false doctrinal systems (like Health & Wealth, Fear & Fascination, Signs & Wonders, Visions & Dreams, etc.).

(2) Twelve interesting facts about Psalms

1. They are the most quoted book in the NT. (The most cited is Ps 110.)
2. They were the first biblical portion printed in America (1640).
3. They contain longest and shortest chapters in the Bible (Ps 119 and Ps 117).
4. Although he did not write most of them, David is considered the originator of the Psalms. (In the same way, Solomon is credited with the Proverbs, and Moses with the Torah. Solomon wrote 1005 songs (1 Ki 4:32)!
5. The Psalms are songs, and they were sung to musical accompaniment.
 - a. They were not the first biblical songs. Consider:
 - i. The Song of the Sea (Exod 15)
 - ii. The Song of the Ark (Num 10)
 - iii. The Oracles of Balaam (Num 23-24)
 - iv. The Song of Moses (Deut 32)
 - v. Blessing of Moses (Deut 33)
 - vi. The Song of Deborah (Judg 5)
 - vii. The Song of Hannah (1 Sam 1)
 - b. There is even a psalm outside the Psalter (Hab 3).
 - c. They were originally accompanied by stringed instruments. (*Psállō* = pluck [as a harp], in Greek.)
6. They contain a number of unknown words, especially various music terms, as well as the interjection “Selah.” Although not every word in the Bible is understood, that’s okay, since the central message is clear.
7. Psalms for synagogue and church served as hymn book *and* prayer book.
8. The Psalms falls into 5 books, just like (and imitating) the Torah. There is a gradual move from individual to corporate worship, and from somber or serious tones to joyful ones.
 - a. Book I: Ps 1-41 Preferred name for God in earlier Pss is Yahweh (LORD in most English versions [not Lord]).
 - b. Book II: Ps 42-72 Mainly from David and the Sons of Korah.
 - c. Book III: Ps 73-89 Focus on Jerusalem and its temple
 - d. Book IV: Ps 90-106 Praise and thanksgiving
 - e. Book V: Ps 107-150 Praise psalms and psalms of ascent (146-150 being the conclusion to the Psalter)
9. Several Pss are acrostics (the first letter of each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*alef, beth, gimel, daleth, he...*)), most notably Ps 119 (22 stanzas of 8 verses each).
10. There is even an unofficial “Psalm 151.”
11. Pss contains some prayers we should never pray.
12. The whole collection is called the Psalter.

(3) Twelve general study principles for getting the most out of the Psalms

1. *Read* the psalm and then *pray* through it.
2. This will require meditation. (See Ps 1:1; Josh 1:8).
3. Keep in mind these are generally human words to God — somewhat different than most of the rest of the Bible.
4. Don’t get bogged down. Some parts will mean more to you in a different phase of life. Keep moving.
5. Do some memory work (suggested passages at end of *Thrive!*).
6. When the superscription of a Ps refers to a particular OT event, study them together, like 3 Ps 51 + 2 Sam 11-12.
7. Study which Pss are quoted in the NT—and ask why.

8. Strive to see how Christ fulfills the Pss.
9. Take note of Pss that have been (somewhat artificially) divided (9-10, 42-43). Study them as complete works.
10. Pay attention to song and hymn lyrics—many of the which are taken from the Pss. Examples: “A Mighty Fortress,” “Praise Ye the Lord,” and “Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah [Yahweh].”
11. Be careful not to literalize metaphor!
 - a. Beware doctrinal misinterpretations (e.g. 51:5).
 - b. Psalms are poetry, so our study is great practice for learning about Biblical interpretation.
 - i. 30% of the Bible is poetry.
 - ii. E.g. Pss, Proverbs, parts of the prophets, various hymns in the NT, etc.
12. The NT says we should use “Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” as we encourage and instruct one another through our singing (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16).
 - a. Content is important.
 - b. Let’s apply ourselves mentally (Deut 6; Matt 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). All our *mind*—Jesus added this word!

(4) A quick overview of *Thrive!*

1. Thriving or surviving? — Ps 23
 1. Each chapter contains *Heart Questions* and *Prayer Points*, making for good Quiet Times.
 2. Ps 128:3 olive tree bears fruit for centuries. Even if trunk dies still sends up shoots
2. Two paths —Ps 1
 1. Ps 1 not a prayer – but a wisdom Psalm. (A few other examples of wisdom literature: Proverbs, Ecc, Jas).
 2. Ps 2 illustrates rejection of God’s rule (the positive principles of Ps 1), while Ps 25 expands on Ps 1.
 3. Ps 1 is also the intro to the Psalter
3. The Word — Pss 19, 119.
 1. Ps 19 tells us of two messages from God: His book of works (nature) and his book of words (Scripture). Thus science and theology both reveal (complementary) truths about God and his world.
 2. God has exalted above all things his name and his Word (Ps 138:2).
4. Finding God in Pss —Pss 130, 103. Divine qualities we notice include power, sovereignty, solidity, superiority, mercy, praiseworthiness, and availability.
5. Double focus — Pss 40, 117
 1. Inward and outward focuses.
 2. Distractions include electronic devices, (excessive) social media, drugs (illegal or legal), unspiritual friends, peer pressure (directed to sports, fashion, consumerism, etc.), obsessive health & exercise, overly busy schedules, self-pity, ingratitude and blindness to blessings, and TV, novels, music, and other forms of entertainment.
6. Darkness — Pss 12, 46, 88.
 1. The Scriptures are profoundly realistic. They acknowledge that the world is often not a happy place. Our own lives may be riddled with pain, injustice, and the confusion arising from both. Not all is light. Even with sound doctrine, solid faith, and spiritual friends, we may still walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.”
 2. “In original Heb, final word of Ps 88 is “darkness”: a darkness where the writer is *overwhelmed, without strength, grieving, suffering, terrified, engulfed, confused, and lonely*. Pain like this can strangle our hope and stifle our faith.
7. When I’m drifting — Pss 73, 37
 1. Ps 73: We may drift and even consider giving up. Taking an eternal view of things can bring us back to God.
 2. Ps 37: The Lord tells us (3x) not to fret, but to trust him.
8. Create in me a pure heart — Ps 51
 1. Historically this Ps is attributed to David, and this is certainly appropriate.
 2. It’s not just that a few words in Ps 51 are found in another book of the Bible—identity of wording doesn’t necessarily mean identity of subject—but that there is a story in 2 Sam 11-12 with emotions reflected in Ps 51. We need to learn to make *these* sorts of biblical connections.
 3. The theme inspired me to record a series of 31 lessons at my website: “Purity, Cleansing, Leprosy, Exorcism, & Reanimation” (see [Clean](#)).

4. The theme of purity is important, because hidden sin affects the whole church—especially when older Christians, leaders, influencers, ministry staff...—aren't addressing the epidemic of impurity: pornography, gluttony, alcoholism, prescription abuse, overspending, crude or coarse language, etc.
9. Prayers you shouldn't pray—Pss 139, 137, 58, 109
 1. Emulating the prayer of Ps 51 is healthy for relationships, especially for our most vital relationship of all.
 2. Yet although truthfulness is commendable, Psalms contains some prayers that are *sub-Christian* in content and attitude. *They are honest, but not gracious.*
 1. On the one hand, they are part of Scripture, and God wills that we learn from them.
 2. On the other hand, there are aspects we as Christians are bound to reject. Hence our chapter, "Prayers You Shouldn't Pray."
10. Christ in Pss, the Pss in Christ —Ps 110
 1. All three sections of the OT (Law, Prophets, Writings) direct us to Christ.
 2. Although we read the Old Testament *forward*, it is best understood when viewed *backward*— in the light of Calvary.
11. Singing in the shower — "Psalm 151"
 1. Music is powerful. This chapter explores this important dimension....
 2. Also, in this chapter you will find an extra Psalm—one that isn't in your Bible!
12. Open my mouth—Pss 81, 115
 1. We open our mouths in praise, but also open to feast on the Lord's word.
 2. 34:8—Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!
 3. 119:18—*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*
 4. 119:131—*I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments.*

Extra parts of *Thrive!*

- Pss for every occasion—not a complete index, but offers several examples for each of nearly 60 categories.
- More than 100 passages suitable for memorization.
- *Thrive! Using Psalms to Help You Flourish* isn't only an introduction to the Psalter, and also a (12-day) Quiet Time book.
 - 10,000 pages of B study, Q&A and more, at www.douglasjacoby.com
 - Many of my colleagues in the teaching ministry too have written books or recorded audio taking you straight through books of the Bible. This will keep you busy for many years!

(5) Thriving takes work.

- Every book of the B is inspired and useful.
 - It's not just NT + Pss and Prov!
 - Most of us would agree on the inspiration, but not so many demonstrate much conviction that every book of the Bible is useful — because we don't use them!
- It's like cultivating a garden—the garden of the heart.
 - Daily—if you've slipped let's get back to daily meditation on the word.
 - Remove the electronics from the bedroom! Make a plan and stick to it.
- Thriving does not necessarily mean that all is going well.
 - Suffering is the way we change — Rom 8:29.
 - Let's not confuse happy *feelings* with true joy—with true flourishing.
- Don't stop with *Thrive!* Plan on further study:
 - Rolan Monje's excellent book, [Into the Psalms](#). (He is a fellow teacher in Manila, Philippines.)
 - There are [podcasts and articles on the Pss](#) at my website.
 - [Reading, Praying, & Living the Psalms](#) (CD audio lessons — 5 hours + 32pp of notes).
 - If you'd like the notes to this class, they are at my website — search phrase "[Thrive NECC](#)," or just "[NECC](#)."
- Do we want to enjoy fellowship with the Lord?
 - Are we willing to listen to this voice? Let's not look to ourselves, but to God.
 - He has much to say—much to share with us.
 - Ambrose wrote, "As in paradise, god walks in scripture seeking man."