



An Introduction to Psalms

Cries from the Heart – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

There is quite a lot for the leader to read out loud in this study. This is because psalms are often poetry and therefore not necessarily easy to read and understand if your literacy or language ability is not high.

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

***1. STICKERS** What is a psalm?

Read out the answers, and then give an accurate explanation:

The Psalms are a collection of songs and prayers that were written over 3000 years ago. They are the human heart's cry to God, revealing many different emotions in many different circumstances. This was a common style of writing in OT times, and not just amongst the Jews. Some of the Psalms are 'Messianic' i.e. refer to Jesus e.g. Psalm 22, some are laments i.e. are sad, mourning about something, some are full of praise etc.

What does the passage say and mean?

60 minutes

Questions 2-4 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

***2. SDL** Are there any emotions that you would not be willing to express to God in private prayer? Be honest!

***3. SDL** Look up the following verses. How do you think the psalmist was feeling?

(If the group is big enough, split up the verses, so each pair only has a few verses to work on. Everyone will hear all the verses as you download as a group).

Psalm	Emotion
Psalm 4:8	<i>Feeling secure in God</i>
Psalm 5:2	<i>In need of help</i>
Psalm 6:1-2, 6	<i>Suffering because of sin, begging for mercy</i>
Psalm 8:3-4	<i>Amazed</i>
Psalm 13:1-2	<i>Feeling distant from God</i>
Psalm 13:5-6	<i>Assured of God's love and his salvation, singing praises to God</i>
Psalm 18:2	<i>Confident that God will save him</i>
Psalm 22:6-7	<i>Being mocked and feeling unworthy</i>
Psalm 22:15	<i>Exhausted</i>
Psalm 25:16	<i>Lonely</i>
Psalm 32:3-5	<i>Guilt and then knowledge of forgiveness</i>
Psalm 88:15-18	<i>Angry – shouting at God, depressed</i>
Psalm 109:11-13	<i>Angry at someone else, asking God to punish them</i>

*4. **SDL** Does it surprise you that it's OK to express any of these things to God? Why?

*5. Read Psalm 103 slowly to the group

What mood do you think the writer of this psalm (King David) was in when he wrote it?

It sounds like a good / positive mood. This is a prayer with no requests!

*6. **SHOUT-OUT** Read Psalm 103:8-13. From this passage, what is God like?

God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, rich in love, he does get angry, but his anger does not become permanent or result in bitterness, he does not treat us as our sins deserve, his love is immeasurable and he removes our sins from us to infinity and has compassion on us i.e. loves and cares for us.

*7. **SHOUT-OUT** Read Psalm 103:14-16. From this passage, what are people like?

How we are formed, that we are just dust (dust with the breath of life from God!), we are not immortal – we will die and be forgotten by future generations.

*8. Although we will all die, what promise do we find in v17-18?

That God will always love those who fear (not afraid, but recognise, love, treat with reverence etc) and obey him.

*9. Read Psalm 103:19-22. Who is told to praise God and why?

Everyone! Angels (heavenly creatures who are God's messengers), heavenly hosts (probably means angels)

again), his servants (us?), all of creation and finally the psalmist tells himself to praise God! We are told to praise God because he is worthy of it. We have learnt earlier in the psalm about some of the characteristics of God that make him worthy of our praise.

Read Psalm 18:1-3 to the group slowly

10. How does the psalmist describe God and can you associate with this?

Read Psalm 18:4-6 to the group

11. What do you think the psalmist might have been through to make him write this and what happened as a result?

Some sort of life-threatening situation. God heard the psalmist's cry. (Psalm 18 is almost repeated in entirety in 2 Samuel 22, immediately after David almost died in battle against the Philistines (2 Samuel 21:15-22) and referring to David's victories in 2 Samuel 8:13-18).

Read Psalm 18:7-15 to the group slowly

12. Psalms are often poetry, using word-pictures, rather than eye-witness accounts of something that happened. What is this passage telling us about God's response to the psalmist's cry for help?

The literal description seems to be an earthquake, a terrible storm and a tsunami! We don't read of any of this happening in David's time, so we take it that this is a poetic description of God's response. God is responding in majesty and his anger at the suffering of his child is made clear. God deals with the threat to his child.

Read Psalm 18:16-19 to the group slowly

13. What did God do for the psalmist?

Again, poetry is not meant to be taken literally. Think about the meaning behind the words, don't get caught up in over analysing.

14. The psalms are not just records of other people's prayers. They teach us about God and they give us promises to hold onto in every situation. What promises can you hold onto from Psalm 18:16-19?

Encourage the group to think about whether they recognise that God has already worked in this way in their lives. Think about what a spacious place may be – it's not necessarily the other side of the prison walls. There can be a spacious place in our hearts and our minds as we know the freedom of forgiveness with Christ and peace with God.

15. What do you think the ultimate 'spacious place' (v19) is?

The ultimate 'spacious place' of rescue is found at the foot of the cross, where all our sins are forgiven, when we repent and trust Jesus. Another answer would be heaven, but since we'll only get there if we come to the foot of the cross, please focus on the cross!

*16. Psalm 119 is the longest psalm. Every single verse mentions God's law (law = precepts, word, statutes, commands etc). Read Psalm 119:9-16. How can we know what God's word is in order to follow it? (esp v15-16)

We need to study it, and engage with it. Not just know it, but live it. Use this as an opportunity to challenge the group about how much they engage with Scripture, and how much difference it is really making in their lives.

How can I live according to these truths in my life?

20 minutes

*1. In what ways has studying the psalms today made you think about the content of your own prayers, and in what way might your prayer life develop in the future?

*2. **CHALLENGE** for during this week – see if you can write your own 'psalm' – just get what is inside you down on paper, and basically, if you've written it to God, you have a psalm!

3. MEMORY VERSE

'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.' Psalm 119:105

As a group, learn this memory verse (it is important to learn the reference as well as the verse). Encourage the group to remember it for next week. You may like to provide cards with it printed on for them.

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.



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Cries from the Heart

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What does the passage say and mean?

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3. **SDL** Look up the following verses. What emotions is the psalmist expressing?

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4. **SDL** Does it surprise you that it's OK to express any of these things to God? Why?

5. Psalm 103

What mood do you think the writer of this psalm (King David) was in when he wrote it?

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7. **SHOUT-OUT** Read Psalm 103:14-16. From this passage, what are people like?

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