

Lyrics for Life

SELECTED PSALMS

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The Doctrinal Basis of Strong Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

Alex Bauman, editor

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introduction

Lyrics for Life covers select psalms on subjects such as God's nature and provision, confession of sin, and praise to God. Written as poetic songs, the psalms are timeless in their appeal and valuable in their revelation of God and life. We can go to the book of Psalms to find encouragement as well as instruction and challenge.

This course is part of the Strong Adults curriculum. Strong Curriculum builds stronger churches by teaching all Scripture to produce spiritually mature believers who measure up to the stature of Christ. The curriculum addresses 7 BuildUP aims modeled after Jesus' teaching. Each session in this course identifies one of the following aims.

-  **BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.** Jesus taught His students to trust in Him alone for salvation and to share the gospel.
-  **UNDERSTAND BIBLICAL ETHICS.** Jesus instructed His students to live according to moral values.
-  **INTERNALIZE GODLINESS.** Jesus taught His followers to have godly hearts rather than merely acting godly.
-  **LEARN DOCTRINE.** Jesus taught the truth and identified doctrine as essential for spiritual growth.
-  **DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS.** Jesus taught His followers to meet life's challenges in ways that honored and glorified God.
-  **UPLIFT OTHERS.** Jesus taught His followers to serve God by humbly and sacrificially serving others.
-  **PREPARE TO SERVE.** Jesus prepared His followers to serve in the context of local churches.

Psalms as literature

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Various Scripture passages

BUILDUP THEME



LEARN DOCTRINE

God wants us to study Psalms meditatively because of its poetic structure and rich content.

MEMORY VERSE

Psalms 119:148

The book of Psalms is one of the most beloved books of the Bible. It speaks to life. It presents raw emotions and doubt but also gives the heart reasons to rejoice in the Lord and trust Him. It is essential for our lives as believers. We can't be all God wants us to be without it. No wonder it is the most quoted book by the New Testament writers. Jesus quoted it many times, including Psalm 22:1 while dying on the cross (Matt. 27:46).

1. When, if ever, have you been drawn to the book of Psalms for encouragement?

2. What do you appreciate most about the book?

The poetic nature of Psalms demands we take some time to think about how to study the book. This first study has that aim. It introduces the book as lyric poetry and then provides you with instructions on key literary features of psalms. The information will equip you to do some study on your own throughout this course and over the course of your life.

Bible Study

Psalms Is a Collection

Psalms is a collection of individual poems arranged in five books. The books start at Psalm 1, 42, 73, 90, and 107. Each book ends with a doxology that states the Lord God is blessed from everlasting to everlasting (41:13; 72:18, 19; 89:52; 106:48). Book 5 ends with Psalm 150 as a doxology.

3. Read Psalm 72:18, 19; 106:48. What do you learn about God's purpose for Israel through the doxologies that end each book?

The doxologies' emphasis on God's glory is echoed in Ephesians 1, where Paul stated that God saves individuals for the praise of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:3–14). God's glory is the underlying purpose of God's overall plan for humanity. It makes sense that the five book divisions in Psalms end with a focus on God's glory.

Beyond the doxologies, there isn't an obvious reason for the arrangement of the individual psalms into five books. We shouldn't get hung up on trying to come up with an outline or theme for each book. Instead, we should consider each psalm individually, keeping the overall historical setting for the book of Psalms in mind.

Psalms Has a Historical Setting

The themes of Israel's need for Torah and Israel's expectation of the Messiah run throughout the book. That's because the book was mostly written after God gave Israel the law of Moses at Mount Sinai and after God promised the Messiah would come to rule the world through the line of David. The Mosaic Covenant called Israel back to

God's instructions and promises concerning their present life. The Davidic Covenant called Israel to look ahead to deliverance, victory, and the arrival of the Son of God on earth as the Messianic King.

Psalms 1, which we will study for the next session, directs Israel's attention back to the law of Moses as the key for a prosperous life in the Promised Land (1:2). God promised Israel they would stay in their Land and live prosperously if they obeyed the laws in the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:1–14; 2 Chron. 7:14).

4. What might you take away from the book's emphasis on obedience to the law of Moses?

5. What should you not take from the book's emphasis on the law of Moses?

Psalms 2 directs Israel's attention to the future when their King, the Son of God, will reign on the throne of David (2:6–9). We can look forward to Christ's Kingdom too. We will rule with Christ and enjoy all the benefits of His reign. But we aren't telling people to look for the coming of the Messiah. Our focus is on sharing the gospel and teaching believers to be growing and active members in Christ's church (Matt. 28:18–20; Eph. 4:11–16).

The psalms were compiled and arranged sometime after Judah returned from Babylonian captivity during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (450–425 BC). Judah had been in captivity because they abandoned God's law and served other gods. The nation needed to return to God's law and live in light of their coming Messiah. So, it is fitting that Psalms 1 and 2 are placed at the beginning of the collection in that they emphasize what Israel needed to remember as they lived their daily lives in post-captivity Israel.

What a blessing to read the psalms knowing the Messiah came, died for the sins of the world, and promised to return first for His church and then with His church to establish His Kingdom in Zion.

6. How should you respond to God's track record of faithfulness?

Psalms Is Lyric Poetry

God chose to use a wide variety of literature to communicate His message through the Old Testament. When we come to the book of Psalms, we can't read it like a narrative. There is obviously no central plot or story that moves along from beginning to end. But there is structure to lyric poetry. Understanding the structure helps us make sense of each psalm.

All the psalms are lyric poems. As such, they all have common characteristics. First, lyric poems have a theme that unifies them. Sometimes the theme is obvious.

7. Read Psalm 23. What is the theme for this psalm?

Discovering a theme can be difficult, especially if the parts of a psalm seem disjointed. But if we spend time thinking about how the parts relate, we can uncover the unifying, umbrella theme. Most study Bibles include a heading before each psalm. Those can be helpful.

Second, lyric poems tend to be either affective or reflective. Affective lyric poems emphasize emotion and response. The writer might be distraught or overjoyed. Reflective lyric poems tend to focus more on ideas. Those poems are thought provoking and meditative.

8. Read Psalm 1. Would you say this psalm is affective or reflective?

9. Read Psalm 6. What do you feel as you read this psalm of David?

When studying reflective psalms, we should spend time meditating on the writer's points and consider how they fit together and instruct our lives. When studying affective psalms, we should seek to identify with the writer's emotions, keeping in mind that his expressions are descriptive of his feelings but not necessarily prescriptive for our lives. We need to keep the context of each part of an affective

tive psalm in mind. We must connect David's cry in Psalm 6:3–7, for example, to David's conclusion in verses 8–10 to properly understand the psalm's purpose.

Third, lyric poems are structured to help us understand their meaning and flow. The subject is usually stated somewhere near the beginning of the poem. In Psalm 23, verse one tells us the poem's subject is the shepherd's care for his sheep. The rest of the poem expands on the subject, giving us variations and different perspectives. The poem then ends with a concluding statement that resolves the poem. Psalm 23 ends with David's declaration that he will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

How a psalm ends is important. We need to read the end to help us understand the rest of the psalm. That is especially true when studying effective psalms.

Psalms Is Theocentric

God is the main character for each of the various writers of the psalms. He is the focus of their questions, praise, worship, ideas, and declarations. The theocentric nature of the book gives it tremendous value for us. We are living in a very different historical setting than the original authors and readers. And we have a much more informed understanding of God's plan for the ages. Yet Psalms relates truths about God in ways no other Bible book does. The book teaches us to trust, love, praise, and worship God from our hearts.

10. Read Psalm 27:1; 90:2; 91:1, 2. What have the truths in these verses meant to you?

11. What other truths about God has Psalms helped you remember?

Earlier in this study you learned general characteristics of the lyric poetry found in Psalms. The following sections describe some of the literary features the psalmists used to communicate their themes.

Psalms Uses Images

An image is the basic unit to communicate truth in a psalm. There aren't scenes that unfold to reveal a meaningful story. The book of Psalms employs actions (walking, running) and things (sheep, rocks) to convey truth. Psalm 23 uses the image of the shepherd with his sheep. Psalm 104 uses a garment, a curtain, and beams (104:1–6). Psalm 1:1 uses the actions of walking, standing, and sitting.

In interpreting psalms that use images, we need to consider how the image sheds light on the meaning. We shouldn't take the imagery farther than the writer does. For example, in Psalm 23, David connects the image of a shepherd to the Lord in specific ways. We should not take everything we know about a shepherd and find a way for it to relate to the Lord. The psalm tells us what connections to make.

Psalms Uses Figures of Speech

The writers of the psalms used figures of speech to convey truth. They used **similes** frequently. A simile is a comparison, stating that something is "like" or "as" something else.

12. Read Psalm 42:1. What does the simile in this verse reveal?

Metaphors directly compare one thing or person to another, saying something or someone is something.

13. Read Psalm 18:2. How does the string of metaphors in this verse help your understanding of God?

A **merism** lists two opposites to stand for everything in between them. For example, David said God knew his sitting down and rising up and his path and lying down (Ps. 139:2, 3). David meant God knew all about him no matter where he went. When we read a merism, we need to focus on what is between the opposites rather than on each of the opposites.

Personification gives inanimate objects personal qualities. Psalm

98:7 and 8 personifies the sea, rivers, and hills. They are asked to roar, clap, and express joy because the Lord is coming to judge the earth. Personification in the psalms helps communicate God's greatness and worthiness to be praised and worshiped.

Psalms Uses Parallelism

There are six types of parallelism to be aware of in the book of Psalms. In **synonymous** parallelism, the second line restates the thought in the first line. It may even use the same words but in a different order.

14. Read Psalm 3:1. How does the repetition of thought in this couplet affect the reader?

In **synthetic** parallelism, line two further develops the idea of line one. Line two either defines, proves, applies, or adds further information to line one. Synthetic parallelism gives further explanation or information in a striking way. In Psalm 104:5, the second half of the verse reveals the degree to which God laid the foundation of the earth.

In **antithetic** parallelism, the idea in the second line stands in sharp contrast to the idea in the first line.

15. Read Psalm 1:6. Describe the difference between the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked.

In **emblematic** parallelism, the truth in one line is coupled by a supporting figure of speech in the other line. In Psalm 23:1, the figure of speech in the first line, the Lord as a shepherd, explains why David is sure he will not be needy in life. The added figure of speech makes the abstract point clearer.

In **climactic** parallelism, the lines in a stanza begin in nearly the same way with the last line providing a climatic statement or conclusion. Climactic parallelism is seen in Psalm 29:1 and 2 and in Psalm 150. In Psalm 150, the list of instruments isn't as important as the

conclusion that calls on everything that has breath to praise the Lord.

When interpreting figures of speech, we need to stay focused on what the author is trying to communicate without getting bogged down in the details of the comparisons. If we aren't careful, we will read too much into the psalm and miss the point altogether.

Application

The psalms require the reader to spend time thinking and meditating. The writer of Psalm 119 understood that. He stayed up at night to give himself extra time to meditate on God's Word. Psalm 119, one of the greatest portions of Scripture about God's Word, is a result of the author's meditation on God's Word.

16. Pick a psalm to meditate on this week. It can be one covered in this course, one of your favorite psalms, or one you have never studied before. Read the psalm several times, considering its theme. If there are words or statements you don't understand in your psalm, look them up in study resources. You will want to study your psalm over more than one sitting. You will see things and nuances during the second or third look that you didn't see during your initial look. Overall, be patient in your study and in your meditation. Come next week with a thought or two to share about your study process and about the psalm itself.