

Praying the Psalms

Zoom Bible Study | Lesson Six

October 17, 2023

Praying the Psalms of Emotion

As we study the Psalms, we see psalms of great joy, psalms of anger, psalms of despair, psalms of peace and rest. We hear the emotions of the Psalmists coming through loud and clear. As we look at some psalms of emotion, I hope we will learn that:

- God created us as emotional beings and therefore emotions are for our good.
- God understands when our emotions are strong, even overwhelming.
- God invites us to express our emotions to him, even when they are inaccurate.
- We need emotions to be motivated, to be comforted, to be strong.
- We need to learn how to recognize helpful versus harmful emotions.
- We need to learn the secret of allowing God's Spirit to control our emotions and use them for his glory.

Let's look first at a **Psalm of Joy**

Psalm 33

Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous!
Praise befits the upright.

- ² Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre;
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!
- ³ Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.
- ⁴ For the word of the Lord is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
- ⁵ He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.
- ⁶ By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.
- ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.
- ⁸ Let all the earth fear the Lord;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
- ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.
- ¹⁰ The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
- ¹¹ The counsel of the Lord stands forever,

- the plans of his heart to all generations.
- ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!
- ¹³ The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man;
- ¹⁴ from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth,
- ¹⁵ he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.
- ¹⁶ The king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.
- ¹⁷ The war horse is a false hope for salvation,
and by its great might it cannot rescue.
- ¹⁸ Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love,
- ¹⁹ that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.
- ²⁰ Our soul waits for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.
- ²¹ For our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.
- ²² Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,
even as we hope in you.

This Psalmist begins with a challenge to shout for joy to the Lord.

Scientists have learned that when you shout you get a dopamine hit and some endorphins are released. Endorphins make you feel good. Also shouting helps to release the buildup of cortisol, which is the main cause of stress.



When was the last time
you shouted, and what
caused you to shout?



Notice that this Psalm expresses joy in the past:

- ⁶ By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.
- ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.
- ⁸ Let all the earth fear the Lord;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
- ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.

He also rejoices in what God is doing in the present:

- ¹³ The Lord looks down from heaven;
he sees all the children of man;
- ¹⁴ from where he sits enthroned he looks out
on all the inhabitants of the earth,
- ¹⁵ he who fashions the hearts of them all
and observes all their deeds.

- ¹⁸ Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love

Then he rejoices in what God will do in the future:

- Our soul waits for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.
- ²¹ For our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.
- ²² Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us,
even as we hope in you.

Rejoice in your past.

In **Numbers 15:38-39** Moses said to the people, "*Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes.*"



Though we're no longer under the law, I think we need some "tassels" of our own to help us remember. Many times, we get out of God's will and start to live in sin because we don't remember to remember.

What are some "tassels" we could use to remember all God has done?

Let me suggest some "tassels" we can incorporate into our lives to help us remember:

- Put signs around you. Scripture verses on cards, propped up on your desk, posted on your screen saver, taped to your mirror, sitting on the table by your bed or your breakfast table.
- Maybe a butterfly pin that you wear or keep nearby, or a mug, or a flower, or a bird!

Rejoice in your present.

Psalm 118:24: *This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Matthew 6:34: *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*



Choose to live for today.

Rejoice in your future.

Psalm 32:8: *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*

Jeremiah 29:11: *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

Isaiah 30:21: *And your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."*

Thank God for joy. Choose joy.

A Psalm of Anger

Psalm 79:1 – 13

O God, the nations have come into
your inheritance; they have defiled your holy
temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins.
²They have given the bodies of your servants to
the birds of the heavens for food, the flesh of
your faithful to the beasts of the earth.
³They have poured out their blood like water
all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to
bury them.
⁴We have become a taunt to our neighbors,
mocked and derided by those around us.
⁵How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever?
Will your jealousy burn like fire?
⁶Pour out your anger on the nations that do
not know you, and on the kingdoms that do
not call upon your name!
⁷For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste
his habitation.
⁸Do not remember against us our former

iniquities; let your compassion come speedily
to meet us, for we are brought very low.
⁹Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of
your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins,
for your name's sake!
¹⁰Why should the nations say, "Where is their
God?" Let the avenging of the outpoured
blood of your servants be known among the
nations before our eyes!
¹¹Let the groans of the prisoners come before
you; according to your great power, preserve
those doomed to die!
¹²Return sevenfold into the lap of our
neighbors the taunts with which they have
taunted you, O Lord!
¹³But we your people, the sheep of your
pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from
generation to generation we will recount your
praise.

This is an example of an *imprecatory psalm*, where the Psalmist calls down calamity, destruction, and God's anger and judgment on his enemies.

The Psalms would not be a true mirror of the human soul without portraying our anger and rage.

"The Psalms explore the full gamut of human experience from rage to hope. Indeed, it would be very strange if such a robust spirituality lacked such a dimension of vengeance, for we would conclude that just at the crucial point, robustness had turned to cowardice and propriety" (Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms*, 63).

Is it right for us to "imprecate" in prayer today like the psalmists did? When and how?

Here's why we should pray imprecatory psalms:

- Because the Lord's Pattern Prayer teaches us to pray similarly: "*Your kingdom come, your will be on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10). The coming of the Kingdom includes the vanquishing of the King's enemies.
- Since "*we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but...against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*" (Ephesians 6:12) therefore we can pray against Satan and his legions.
- Paul prayed imprecatory prayers:

1 Corinthians 16:22: *If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord!*

Galatians 1:9: *If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!*

2 Thessalonians 1:5–10:

⁵All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. ⁶God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you ⁷and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen

when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

- Praying the imprecatory psalms leaves vengeance up to God. Paul teaches us to *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."* (Romans 12:14) and *"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."* (Romans 12:19)
- Imprecatory psalms are the songs of the oppressed, always prayed from a position of vulnerability and weakness, not dominance or triumphalism.
- We are simply asking God to keep his covenant promises to Abraham and his offspring: *"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* (Genesis 12:3). We are the inheritors of this promise to bless and curse: *"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:29).
- We are following Jesus' example who *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* (1 Peter 2:23).

From Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms*

How to Pray Imprecatory Psalms

1. Pray them first against Satan.
2. Pray them second against the world systems of corruption and oppression.
3. Pray them lastly against enemies, God's then yours.