

The Psalms—Finding God, Finding Yourself!

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Someone has observed that the prophets are God speaking to man; the Psalms are man speaking to God. The psalms are honest, vivid, emotional, penetrating. They are filled with spiritual passion and praise. They are not easy answers—no suggestion of simple formulas or ritual relationship with God. Their message? Trust God, regardless!

The Psalms are not to be read casually, quickly, or as duty. They provide historical orientation, but should not be read only historically. They must be read personally, carefully, thoughtfully. In the Psalms you can find God—but only when you are willing to find yourself. You must bring to the Psalms your history, feelings, emotions, struggles, doubts, fears, praise, and honor.

Five Ideas for Reading the Psalms

Read slowly, repeatedly; meditate.

- Read a translation you can understand.
- Use different translations to glean new insights.
- Be aware of the different kinds of psalms.
- Develop an outline of the psalm.
- Look at the psalm from God's perspective—what is he saying, what does he want?
- Look at the psalm from a human perspective—what is heard, what changes, what challenges appear?

Be aware of figurative language and word pictures.

- Read the psalms as poetry.
- Understand figurative language against the background of the time when the psalm was written.
- Read imaginatively, enjoying and relishing the word pictures, the language, the parallel thoughts, and the creativity of poetry.

Notice emotions and attitudes, doubts and fears.

- Try to remember times when you have experienced those same feelings or problems.
- Try to understand how the author was feeling and why he wrote.
- Ask yourself how the psalm deals with those feelings.

Look for special emphases or themes.

- Do you see words, phrases, or ideas repeated? Do you see parallel structures?
- Do you see repeated use of a certain term, or a synonym?
- What does the psalm say about God, about the wicked, about the righteous?

Read the psalms on four levels

- What was the author saying?
- What does it say to the original audience?
- What does it say in light of the New Testament, especially in light of the Christ-event?
- What does it say to you today?

Here is a MAP for reading the psalms—meditate, apply, praise!