

# A STUDY IN THE PSALMS

meditation, prayer, and spiritual renewal

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>p.3</b>
<b>Gospel Renewal</b>	<b>p.7</b>
<b>Understanding the Psalms</b>	<b>p.15</b>
<b>Psalms and Renewal</b>	<b>p.19</b>
<b>Learning to Meditate</b>	<b>p.23</b>
<b>Psalm 1</b>	<b>p.25</b>
<b>Psalm 27</b>	<b>p.27</b>
<b>Psalm 31</b>	<b>p.29</b>
<b>Psalm 84</b>	<b>p.31</b>
<b>Psalm 103</b>	<b>p.33</b>



# INTRODUCTION

our experience of christianity

## **New Year's Resolutions**

January is always a good time to reflect back on the previous year and look forward in anticipation of what is to come in the new year. We can look back on the year and see “signs of grace,” areas of our lives where we’ve experienced growth and change, where we’ve learned to respond better to the trials of life, and where we’ve seen more of God’s grace to us Christ. We’ve pressed in with our community, shared deep struggles, and learned to rejoice with one another. Many of us have taken steps of faith and experienced God in new and surprising ways.

For many of us, though, we’ll look back on 2010 with regret – we didn’t love, lead, pray, serve, or share like we would have liked. We ate more than we wanted to, we worked out less than we had hoped, and we continued to struggle with the same circumstances, people, and sins. We’ve seen small signs of grace, but we haven’t been transformed. We are still – largely – the same people we were this time last year.

And if you’re honest, that creates tension in your mind and heart. We know that God promises to transform us, to make us into new kind of people, to make us gracious, loving, serving, and honoring people. We see his promises in Scripture: “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion,” and “work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” God is at work in me, the Bible promises, so why am I so, well, *not* changed?

## **Biblical Christianity**

And if we’re really honest, I think we’ll see that the situation is actually more dire than we’d like to admit. When we place our experience of Christianity alongside what we see in Scripture, it’s hard to miss the fact that the early Christians seem to have enjoyed an experience of God in Christ that most of us know little about. Consider these descriptions of Biblical faith:

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1.8-9)

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom. 5.5)

And we all... beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3.18)

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction... for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit... (1 Thess 1.4-6)

Does that describe your Christianity? Are you rejoicing with joy inexpressible? Beholding the glory of the Lord? Experiencing the power and joy of the Holy Spirit and deep conviction?

In addition, the saints throughout the centuries seem to have enjoyed a deeply transforming experience of God that is too often foreign to us:

Jonathan Edwards: In reading [the Scriptures] I seemed often to see so much light, that I could not get along in reading - almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders....I...found, from time to time, an inward sweetness, that used, as it were, to carry me away in my contemplations. I felt alone... sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapped and swallowed up in God. The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden as it were, kindle up a sweet burning in my heart; an ardor of my soul, that I know not how to express...

Moody: "I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand.

Charles Finney: “As I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire, I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. Without any expectation of it ... the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy...”

The question that we are going to wrestle with this January, as we launch into 2011, is simply this: Are we fully alive to the love of God as shown to us in the gospel? Are we living in the fullness of what God offers us in Christ? Or have we settled for less than what he wants for us to know and experience?

As we compare our Christian experience to that of the Bible and History’s witness, we should be stirred – there is more that God wants to do!

But what, exactly, is that?



# GOspel RENEWAL

the gospel changes everything

## **The Centrality of the Gospel**

Tim Keller writes, "The Christian life is a process of renewing every dimension of our life by thinking, hoping, and living out the lines or ramifications of the gospel." The gospel is the good news that God has stepped into his world, perfectly fulfilled the requirements of his own law, but then took the judgment we sinners deserve, thereby securing our full pardon and restoring us to right relationship with him forever. Jesus lived the life I should have lived, he died the death I deserved, and he rose again to conquer the power of Satan, sin, and death; therefore, though my sin has earned me death and separation from God, God has rescued me and restored me to himself, and asks only that I love, trust, and rejoice in him with all that I am as a response. This is incredibly good news!

We begin the Christian life through repentance – turning from sin and unbelief – and rejoicing – finding our identity, worth, and purpose in Jesus' life lived in our place. This is basic Christian life, and it includes our minds (thinking), our hearts (hoping), and our actions (living out). When we become Christians, everything about us changes, and we begin the process of learning to live as one who has been rescued and restored to God. But the key to continued growth and learning to live is simply this: don't ever "move on" from the gospel. Growth in the Christian life is the process of continually rediscovering and re-applying the truth of the gospel, working it in to every nook and cranny of our lives. The basic trajectory of the Christian life is a deeper, more profound, more gripping knowledge and experience of the gospel which continuously changes how we live, moving us to be the kind of people who love our neighbors well, joyfully giving all we have received to the building of God's kingdom.

According to the New Testament, this should be the normal experience of every Christian – this is what it means to be a Christian! Paul communicated this to the church in Colossae:

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth...”

According to Paul, the gospel has gone into the world and is bearing this kind of fruit everywhere. This simple but profound message – God saves sinners – has the power to transform your life, your neighborhood, our city, and our world. Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” This gospel is the power that saves us, not simply securing eternity for us (though it does that!) but also transforming us in the here and now, making us more in the image of Christ, and shaping our actual lives to be more joyfully obedient.

While this sounds spectacular, the Biblical writers assume this is the normal experience of every Christian. From a natural perspective, this is almost unbelievable; from the Bible’s perspective, this is a very “ordinary” process! When God saves sinners, he saves them completely, drawing them into a process of transforming every aspect of their minds, hearts, and actions. This is normative Christianity!

### **Renewal and Revival**

But: there are often times and season where God sees fit to stir a whole community of believers in a very particular way. Sometimes called “revival,” this time is historically a time of great spiritual fervor and growth, better described by the term “renewal.” Consider Keller again: “Renewal is a work of God in which the church is beautified and empowered because the normal operations of the Holy Spirit are intensified. These [normal operations] are: a conviction of sin, enjoyment/assurance of grace and the Father’s love, and access to the presence of God. It is an outpouring of the Spirit on and within the congregation, so that the presence of God among his people is becomes evident and palpable.”

While normative Christianity includes regular experiences of all three of these “normal operations” of the Holy Spirit, true Biblical renewal is when the Spirit of God chooses to bring these operations home with a strength and intensity that can only be described as supernatural. Martin Lloyd Jones, in his series of lectures on revival, describes how these seasons bring the truth of the gospel home with new power and excitement:

“They had believed it, yes, they were honestly trusting to it, but they had never felt its power, they had never known what it was to be melted by it, to be broken by it. They had never known what it was to weep with a sense of unworthiness and then of love and joy as they realized that ‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ Suddenly it all becomes real to them and they are given to know that the Son of God has loved them and has given himself for them. It becomes an individual and a personal matter: ‘He died for me, even my sins are forgiven,’ and peace comes into their hearts; joy enters into them and they are lost in love and in a sense of praise of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.” (102)

Renewal like this is always a sovereign work of God’s Spirit. When we’re not experiencing a season of renewal, we must go on with the “normal operations” of the Holy Spirit, trusting in Christ alone, hoping and praying, and doing the work of mission. No one can predict or conjure up genuine renewal. However, there are ways we can prepare to receive such a work of God.

### **Build the Altar**

Tim Keller says 2 things are necessary for a genuine season of renewal: “To experience renewal, we first need to know the truth and power of the gospel, but in such a way as to energize and electrify us from within. We also need continuous, disciplined prayer, where we seek to know and see God more, not just list our petitions.”

Imagine the whole process as the preparing of a sacrifice. We can build the altar, laying a solid foundation of gospel-centered thinking, believing, and living. And we can put ourselves on the altar by taking some radical steps of prayer

and intercession. And while these are profitable in themselves – regardless of what happens as a result – they also put us in a place to receive the fire of God. If God sovereignly chooses, he may set that altar ablaze with the fire of renewal!

## **Rediscover the Gospel**

First, we need to rediscover the basic truth of the gospel, and that truth needs to “come home” in a fresh and powerful way. Richard Lovelace, in his book “Dynamics of Spiritual Renewal,” argues that most Christians “base their justification on their sanctification,” and that this is the root cause of much of our spiritual deadness. But what does he mean?

Lovelace saw that the natural default mode of operation for Christians is religion: we obey God in order to get something from him. We serve God for basically selfish reasons, using him to get what we really want: control, power, comfort, or approval. Though the gospel says we are free, we act like slaves, and find ourselves busy and overworked, slavishly trying to earn something from God and others. While this way of living makes us look spiritual – we go to church, we read our Bibles, we pray, we obey – it is actually cultivating pride or fear deep in our hearts. If we are performing well, we’re prideful and self-righteous, finding our identity in our good performance and in competition with others. This is often why Christians are so judgmental and critical of one another and of those outside the church. On the other hand, if we aren’t keeping up with our list of duties (or the lists others have given us), we become fearful and hesitant, uncertain about our standing with God and self-conscious in the presence of those who seem to be performing better. Ironically, though we seem to be trying hard to obey God, we are actually cultivating in our hearts the very things that keep us far from God – fear and pride!

“Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives. Many have so light an apprehension of God’s holiness and of the extent and guilt of their sin that consciously they see little need for justification, although below the surface of their lives they are deeply guilt-ridden and insecure. Many others have a theoretical commitment to this doctrine, but in their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for their justification... drawing

their assurance of acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance or the relative infrequency of their conscious, willful disobedience. Few know enough to start each day with a thoroughgoing stand upon Luther's platform: you are accepted, looking outward in faith and claiming the wholly alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground for acceptance, relaxing in that quality of trust which will produce increasing sanctification as faith is active in love and gratitude. In order for a pure and lasting work of spiritual renewal to take place within the church, multitudes within it must be led to build their lives on this foundation. This means they must be conducted into the light of a full conscious awareness of God's holiness, the depth of their sin and the sufficiency of the atoning work of Christ for their acceptance with God, not just at the outset of their Christian lives but every succeeding day. A conscience which is not fully enlightened both to the seriousness of its condition before God, and to the grandeur of God's merciful provision of redemption, will inevitably fall prey to anxiety, pride, sensuality and all the other expressions of that unconscious despair which Kierkegaard called 'the sickness unto death.'

Lovelace argues that we must re-learn the core truth of the gospel, that is that we are more deeply sinful than we would ever dare admit, and at the same time more deeply loved and accepted than we would ever dare imagine. This is the "wholly alien righteousness" on which we must stand, trusting solely in the work of Christ on our behalf as our only standing before God and man, the sole source of our boasting and rejoicing. We must come to know ourselves as simultaneously sinful yet justified: deserving of God's just wrath yet receiving only his embrace and kiss. Only then will we find ourselves "relaxing in that quality of trust" which leads to "love and gratitude."

### **Revival Prayer**

Second, we need to pray, and pray with desperation and zeal. This kind of prayer cannot be manufactured; rather, as we are rediscovering the gospel, we'll begin to experience an increase in our desire to pray. Our job is to respond to that work of God by taking some radical steps to devote ourselves to prayer together. Martin Lloyd Jones in his lectures on Revival uses the picture

of Moses interceding for Israel, pleading with God to go with Israel in all their travels:

Moses here takes this action of setting up a place of prayer and intercession. He was glad that the people had repented, but, oh, that was not enough. The presence of God had gone. The cloudy pillar had disappeared, and God had made this statement that he was not going to accompany them. Of course, we must repent, but as we have seen we do not stop at repentance. Moses was anxious that the presence of God should return. So he set up this place of prayer... And in exactly the same way you find this in the history of all these revivals. They felt this call to prayer. (165)

Moses was not simply praying that God would bless their endeavors, or that he'd supply their needs, or that he'd help Israel be successful in mission. All of that would be nice, of course, but Moses wanted more: he wanted God himself. He wanted the presence of God among the people. He wanted the world to know that God was with Israel, and that required that God show himself in a specific and powerful way among his people. So Moses began to pray, and others began to join him, and they asked specifically for the presence of God.

And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

This is the prayer for renewal. It is not a list of prayer requests but a deep desire to know and experience more of God, to have the grace to see and repent of sin more deeply, and to know the presence of God in our midst. Every great season of renewal and revival in the history of the church can be traced back to a few people who are moved by God to take a faith-filled step to intercede for the church, asking God to make his presence known.

## **The Church Renewed**

The result of all this, of course, is just what Keller said above: "the church is beautified and empowered." There is nothing that the church of Jesus needs more than this. We don't need more programs, more services, more outreach events, more Bible reading, or more missional innovation. We need the presence of God among us in a way that beautifies and empowers the church, waking up sleepy Christians, convicting them and leading them to deep repen-

tance, and drawing in non-Christians to see and know the God who is among us.

Do you long to know, experience, and live a faith that is truly alive? Is your experience of Christianity like an unlit fire – you've got the logs (all the right Bible knowledge) but there is no fire (the truth is clear, but it isn't very electrifying)? Have you lived most of your life knowing the basic truths of the gospel, but not being affected deeply by them, and therefore not really being transformed?

That's what this study is all about.



# UNDERSTANDING PSALMS

the prayer book of God's people

## **Duty and Delight**

In order to fuel the fires of renewal, we're spending the month of January studying the Psalms. In the Psalms we see the prayers and songs of people who are spiritually renewed, whose faith is active and alive. For the Psalmist, the attributes of God, his character and actions in history, his glory and grace, are not simply theological categories or helpful biblical information; they are fuel for soul-level affection for God. These are the songs and hymns of people experiencing renewal, people who have tasted the goodness and beauty of God, and who are longing for more.

Psalms are theology alive – theology as it is meant to be. Not dry doctrinal truths to catalogue somewhere in our brain, in hopes of being able to share our great insights with others. Rather, the Psalms show what happens when we get a true vision and real knowledge of God – we stop talking and begin singing, praying, rejoicing. The Psalter represents theology in its most vibrant form... written in intimate relationship with God and in close touch with life.” (Longman)

The Psalms bring together two things we usually hold in opposition: duty and delight. Some people are “duty” people – they do what they ought to do. Some people are “delight” people – they do what they want to do. For the Psalmist – indeed, for anyone truly alive to the love of God – duty and delight have melted into one. The Psalmist wants to do what he ought to do; he delights in his duty. Because the Psalmist has tasted the goodness of God, drinking deeply from the wells of salvation, he desires to love and serve God with all that is within him.

At the same time, the Psalmists are often lamenting, crying out to God to forgive their failures or rescue them from their enemies. The Psalmist recognizes an important truth: the biggest obstacles to worship and delight in God are always a combination of inner personal sin and external pressures. The Psalms are “earthy,” written in the real world for people who live in the real world. These are songs borne in the midst of pressures, hardships, and trials.

These are songs written in exile, while being pursued and taunted, in the midst of personal turmoil. The Psalmist wrestles with the fact that what he knows to be true about God does not always seem to show up in the real world, where sinners prosper and saints often find themselves very alone. So the Psalms show the whole range of emotion and experience of anyone who desires to worship God:

“There is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn ... all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated. The other parts of Scripture contain the commandments which God enjoined his servants to announce to us. But here the prophets themselves, seeing they are exhibited to us as speaking to God, and laying open all their inmost thoughts and affections, call, or rather draw, each of us to the examination of himself in particular, in order that none of the many infirmities to which we are subject, and of the many vices with which we abound, may remain concealed. It is certainly a rare and singular advantage, when all lurking places are discovered, and the heart is brought into the light, purged from that most baneful infection, hypocrisy.” (John Calvin)

“The Psalms appeal to the whole person; they demand a total response. The Psalms inform our intellect, arouse our emotions, direct our wills, and stimulate our imaginations. Reading the Psalms touches the very core of our being.” (Longman)

### **Founded on God's Love**

Tremper Longman, in his book How to Read the Psalms, has an extended section on the importance of the covenant relationship that God has made with his people as the basis for the Psalms. For those of us who have just finished a study in Deuteronomy, we remember that God has graciously rescued Israel from slavery and made a covenant with them, promising to be their God, and inviting them to trust and obey as His people. The Psalms must be placed in

that context – these are the songs of God’s covenant people, a rebellious and stiff-necked people who have nevertheless been chosen to be God’s vehicle of redemption to the world. The word that most often describes this and reminds us of the covenant that forms the basis of the Psalmist’s relationship with God is *hesed*. Often translated “steadfast love,” *hesed* is God’s covenant faithfulness, his loving-kindness, and his patient devotion to his often rebellious people. The Psalmist loves to sing of God’s *hesed*.

The Covenant also reminds us that God is King over Israel and the whole world. He is a God of justice, a God who hates sin and wickedness, and a God who is fully intent on eradicating the evil that is destroying his world. The Psalmist often joins God in his hatred of sin and wickedness, even while he recognizes that God has graciously not given him what he deserves. There is tension here, as the Psalmists enjoy God’s grace and fellowship but also decry the evil in the world, often pleading with God to act on his behalf.

As King, God has given Israel his Law or “*torah*.” This is God’s revelation of what it looks like for humans to love and serve Him as God. Many of the Psalms are meditations on the Torah, as the Psalmist remembers and rejoices in the beauty and power of God’s word. The Torah, as the law of the Creator God, teaches God’s people how life was meant to be lived and what kind of life is most blessed and full. The Torah reminds God’s people that God has been gracious in his rescue of them, and that they in response have been entrusted with the opportunity to live in God’s ways.

The Covenant reminds us that the psalmist can address God as “my God” only because God has first addressed Israel as “my people.” The foundation of the relationship is God’s grace, not primarily the psalmist’s obedience or righteousness. He enjoys God’s presence and nearness because God has graciously come near, not because the psalmist somehow in his worship or service deserved it.

### **Fulfilled in Jesus**

Because of this covenant relationship, the Psalms ultimately find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Because they rest on the foundation of God’s covenant with his people, his promise to Abraham, we must read the Psalms in light of their eventual fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Psalms “work” only when we see that we can have relationship with God that is real and vulnerable because Je-

us the Righteous lived the life we couldn't, died the death we deserved, and rose again on the 3rd day to reconcile sinners to God. We can enter in to God's presence to praise and pray, to lament, to vent our frustrations, and to enjoy genuine dialogue with God only because of Jesus. We join in the singing and praising, rejoicing and lamenting, crying and remembering, only because we've been included in God's people because Jesus was excluded. He took what we deserved, that we might enjoy fellowship with God and God's redeemed people forever. This is what Jesus meant in Luke 24 when he said that the Law, the Psalms, and the prophets proclaimed that it was "necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory... that everything written about [Him] must be fulfilled" (cf, Luke 24.25-27, 44-49). Each Psalm, in its own unique way, ultimately points us to our need for a Rescuer and points us forward to the Rescuer that God provides in Jesus.

But how does reading the Psalms lead us to spiritual renewal?

# PSALMS AND RENEWAL

lighting the fire

## Wood Without Fire

For most Christians, the sad reality is that we know the truth about God and the gospel, but it isn't electrifying, energizing, and motivating. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" has become a verse to memorize or a t-shirt to wear, rather than the heart-arresting, sin-destroying, joy-producing dynamic. Again, it is a lot like a bunch of logs in a fireplace with no fire! So how do we get the fire?

Contemplate these words from John Calvin: "The psalms can stimulate us to raise our hearts to God and arouse us to an ardor in invoking as well as in exalting with praises the glory of His name." In other words, the psalms provoke us by showing us what faith alive looks and sounds like. Our hard hearts are like steel rods that can be bent and forced back toward God through great effort and discipline, but which either spring back to their original shape or break in two. The psalms invite us to savor the truth of God until it begins to melt our steel hearts and reshape what they love. This is what the psalmist invites us to experience.

Psalm 1 acts as a doorway into the psalms, telling us how we are to read and understand them. Psalm 1 is a meditation on meditation, showing us what we are about to embark on in the rest of the book. Psalm 1 tells us that the psalmist is meditating on the word of God, reflecting and chewing on the truth, turning it over in his mind, until it begins to come home, until his heart begins to rejoice in the truth. He knows the truth in his head, but he's taking that truth into his heart through meditation.

Meditation is "the process of taking Bible truths and praying them into your soul until they catch fire" (Studies in Prayer, Redeemer Presbyterian). The biblical word translated "meditate" in Psalm 1 means "muttering" or "mumbling." It is a perfect picture, as meditate means to dwell on the text, slowly repeating the words and phrases, pondering their deep meaning. Meditation is when the word stops being an interesting subject and begins to make all sorts of personal connections. In meditation we take the truth we know and turn it over in

our minds, chewing on it and reflecting on it, until it begins to shape your motivations, feelings, and your actions. It is like the act of reading a love letter, where you don't dismiss what is said flippantly ("Oh, I already knew that") but read intently, trying to get the letter into you. Meditation is taking truth and getting it worked in personally and deeply.

The Psalms we're looking at during this season are meditations on the truth of God, his word, often called the "torah." (Torah is the word translated "Law," though it includes all of God's redemptive work recording in the Old Testament. We tend to read "Law" as all the instructions and commands. Torah includes that but means much more.) The Psalmist is not simply telling us truth about God – it is not a mere intellectual pursuit. The Psalmist writes about personal experience and knowledge of the truth. What pours out of him in poem and song are reflections and wrestlings with truth he knows. He lives between knowledge and experience, and is reminding himself – and us – of what is true.

You see, our experience of God's grace to us in Christ is always a mixture of actual experience and taking it on faith. We walk by faith, not by sight: even when everything looks the contrary, we trust in grace given. Yet we also pray for greater sight – that we'd know and experience gospel grace more deeply. So we motivate ourselves by "faith-reminders" of what Jesus has done and who we are now (Redeemer Church Planting Manual).

But the sad reality is that so many of us have experienced so little of God and know him as an idea, statement. Few of us have had deep, humbling experiences of the grace of God, where our theology comes alive. And we've instead settled for a Christianity that is largely about growing in intellectual concepts. And if we've had experiences, they've been largely emotional and surface-level, like dynamite on the face of a rock – it may have been explosive, but it did little other than shave off a layer, rather than the truth of the gospel exploding deep within, and actually rewiring my heart and life.

So, the Psalms are a way for us to motivate ourselves through "faith-reminders." We see the Psalmist taking truth, and meditating on it until it rejoices the heart. And we can learn with them as they do it, working in a new way of knowing and delighting in God.

## George Mueller's Testimony

Consider the testimony of George Mueller, the great missionary and man of faith:

Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing to give myself to prayer, after having dressed myself in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord... The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished.

The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: Formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. But what was the result ? I often spent a quarter of an hour; or half an hour, or even an hour, on my knees, before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, or even half an hour; I only then began really to pray.

I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it) about the things that he has brought before me in his precious word.

And yet now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything, that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is, to obtain food for his inner man. As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man. We should take food for that, as every one must allow. Now what is the food

for the inner man? Not prayer, but the word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.

Now, prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking a measure of strength or godly desire, and the season, therefore, when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed is after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the word of God, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove us. We may therefore profitably meditate, with God's blessing, though we are ever so weak spiritually; nay, the weaker we are, the more we need meditation for the strengthening of our inner man. There is thus far less to be feared from wandering of mind than if we give ourselves to prayer without having had previously time for meditation.

Psalm 1 teaches what Mueller discovered through practice. It begins "blessed is the man" (literally, "Oh, the happinesses," plural!) who meditates on the law of God day and night. The man who meditates is the man who is blessed, happy, and satisfied with good. He is the man who draws deeply from the streams of life, finds his soul regularly nourished, and who flourishes in season, never withers from the heat of life, and prospers through it all. This does not mean that he never faces hardship and trial, or that he is always wealthy. Rather, it means that he is mentally, emotionally, and spiritually stable. He weathers the storm, and is better for the wear, because his roots go down deep. He finds the joy of knowing God in every situation, and has learned the secret to deep contentment regardless of what comes his way.

# LEARNING TO MEDITATE

a basic outline

## Just the Beginning

Learning to meditate with the psalmist is a life-long process of learning. My hope for this study is not that you'll get it all figured out but that you'll begin to learn what it is like to experience renewal on a daily basis. I want this study to raise your hopes that you can know God more intimately and experience him more regularly. Without a doubt you'll have seasons of life with Christ that are just dry – you don't feel much of anything. In these seasons, we are reminded that we walk by faith and not by sight. But my hope is that you'll begin to have more seasons of deep refreshment and renewal. This is promised to us in the word: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3.19-20).

Here is the basic process you'll go through each day. Below are the specific psalms we'll be studying, and the daily steps spelled out in greater detail. The whole process can be done in less than 30 minutes, but can be done in 5 minutes or 5 hours if you like!

**Step One – Prepare (2 minutes):** You'll want to begin by collecting your thoughts and directing your attention to the word. Pray for spiritual eyes to see, a humble heart to learn, and the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and guide.

**Step Two – Read (10 minutes):** Spend a few minutes reading the whole Psalm through, just reminding yourself of the whole context of the psalm. In addition, each day will have a shorter piece, just a few verses, to really focus in on. Read through the shorter section for the day a few times, slowly, paying close attention to each word, the repeated phrases, the interesting word pictures. Jot a few notes regarding what is written:

What is the author experiencing? How do you know?

What is the author communicating about who God is & what He's done?

How does he communicate it, and why does he communicate it that way?

**Step Three – Meditate (10 minutes):** This is where you begin to real “chew” on the truth that is revealed in the Scriptures. You want to move beyond Bible study to personal reflection and engagement. Pay attention to what you are seeing and discovering, and write stuff down. Here is a basic order to follow, but it doesn’t need to be extremely rigid. You may find yourself spending more time on one area than the other.

Adoration: What do I see that I can praise God for? Why should I love him?

Repentance: What wrong behavior & emotions result when I forget this?

Gospel Thanks: How does Jesus show this or give this blessing perfectly?

Aspiration: How would I be different if this truth were powerfully real to me?

**Step Four – Pray (8 minutes or more):** As you meditate, begin to turn your thoughts and reflections directly to Him. Adore him, praise him, repent before him, give thanks to him, and ask that he’d make this truth more real. This is meditation fueling your prayer life, where you are taking the truth and beauty that you see in the word and experience through the Holy Spirit and allowing it to motivate and move you to prayer, love, and good deeds. Just go with it!

At anytime you may enjoy a real sense of God’s presence on the heart – enjoy Him! This is his gift to you of himself, it is God drawing near and revealing himself to you. Relish in the gift of his presence, ask that others would know more of his presence, and commit yourself to walking throughout the day in his presence!

For each week, by Friday you’ll be ready to compose a short prayer that you can write out and carry with you. The goal is that you are not only taking time to meditate, regularly working the truth of these Psalms deep into your soul, but that you are also armed for the battle moment by moment. The daily study will help you tune your heart to God’s grace, and the short prayer will help you keep in tune throughout the day. As you think about what to write, try to summarize the theme of the Psalm in a few short sentences.

# PSALM 1

a meditation on meditation

**Step One – Prepare (2 minutes):** You'll want to begin by collecting your thoughts and directing your attention to the word. Pray for spiritual eyes to see, a humble heart to learn, and the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and guide.

**Step Two – Read (10 minutes):** Spend a few minutes reading the whole Psalm through, just reminding yourself of the whole context of the psalm. In addition, each day will have a shorter piece, just a few verses, to really focus in on. Read through the shorter section for the day a few times, slowly, paying close attention to each word, the repeated phrases, the interesting word pictures. Jot a few notes regarding what is written:

What is the author experiencing? How do you know?

What is the author communicating about who God is & what He's done?

How does he communicate it, and why does he communicate it that way?

**Step Three – Meditate (10 minutes):** This is where you begin to real “chew” on the truth that is revealed in the Scriptures. You want to move beyond Bible study to personal reflection and engagement. Pay attention to what you are seeing and discovering, and write stuff down. Here is a basic order to follow, but it doesn't need to be extremely rigid. You may find yourself spending more time on one area than the other.

Adoration: What do I see that I can praise God for? Why should I love him?

Repentance: What wrong behavior & emotions result when I forget this?

Gospel Thanks: How does Jesus show this or give this blessing perfectly?

Aspiration: How would I be different if this truth were powerfully real to me?

**Step Four – Pray (8 minutes or more):** As you meditate, begin to turn your thoughts and reflections directly to Him. Adore him, praise him, repent before him, give thanks to him, and ask that he'd make this truth more real.

**Daily Text:**

Day One: v.1-2, on why the man is blessed, particularly v.2

Day Two: v.1-2, on what the blessed man avoids, particularly v.1

Day Three: v.3, on the metaphor of the tree planted by the stream

Day Four: v.4-5, on what happens to those not planted by the stream

Day Five: v.6, on the Lord's "knowing" of the way of the righteous

**Summary Prayer:**

What is true about God in this Psalm?

What happens when I forget this and don't sense the reality of this?

How does Jesus show me fully and truly this aspect of God?

How does this truth about God lead me to joyful obedience?

# PSALM 27

God is great, so I don't have to be in control

**Step One – Prepare (2 minutes):** You'll want to begin by collecting your thoughts and directing your attention to the word. Pray for spiritual eyes to see, a humble heart to learn, and the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and guide.

**Step Two – Read (10 minutes):** Spend a few minutes reading the whole Psalm through, just reminding yourself of the whole context of the psalm. In addition, each day will have a shorter piece, just a few verses, to really focus in on. Read through the shorter section for the day a few times, slowly, paying close attention to each word, the repeated phrases, the interesting word pictures. Jot a few notes regarding what is written:

What is the author experiencing? How do you know?

What is the author communicating about who God is & what He's done?

How does he communicate it, and why does he communicate it that way?

**Step Three – Meditate (10 minutes):** This is where you begin to real “chew” on the truth that is revealed in the Scriptures. You want to move beyond Bible study to personal reflection and engagement. Pay attention to what you are seeing and discovering, and write stuff down. Here is a basic order to follow, but it doesn't need to be extremely rigid. You may find yourself spending more time on one area than the other.

Adoration: What do I see that I can praise God for? Why should I love him?

Repentance: What wrong behavior & emotions result when I forget this?

Gospel Thanks: How does Jesus show this or give this blessing perfectly?

Aspiration: How would I be different if this truth were powerfully real to me?

**Step Four – Pray (8 minutes or more):** As you meditate, begin to turn your thoughts and reflections directly to Him. Adore him, praise him, repent before him, give thanks to him, and ask that he'd make this truth more real.

## **Daily Text:**

Day One: v.1-3, on the Lord being light, salvation, & a stronghold in chaos

Day Two: v.4, on what the David has set his heart and spiritual eyes on

Day Three: v.5-6, on the result of seeking the “one thing” of v.4

Day Four: v.7-10, on the hope David has in chaos b/c God is his “one thing”

Day Five: v.11-14, on the encouragement to wait for the Lord in chaos, especially v.13-14

## **Summary Prayer:**

What is true about God in this Psalm?

What happens when I forget this and don't sense the reality of this?

How does Jesus show me fully and truly this aspect of God?

How does this truth about God lead me to joyful obedience?

# PSALM 31

God is glorious, so I don't have to fear others

**Step One – Prepare (2 minutes):** You'll want to begin by collecting your thoughts and directing your attention to the word. Pray for spiritual eyes to see, a humble heart to learn, and the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and guide.

**Step Two – Read (10 minutes):** Spend a few minutes reading the whole Psalm through, just reminding yourself of the whole context of the psalm. In addition, each day will have a shorter piece, just a few verses, to really focus in on. Read through the shorter section for the day a few times, slowly, paying close attention to each word, the repeated phrases, the interesting word pictures. Jot a few notes regarding what is written:

What is the author experiencing? How do you know?

What is the author communicating about who God is & what He's done?

How does he communicate it, and why does he communicate it that way?

**Step Three – Meditate (10 minutes):** This is where you begin to real “chew” on the truth that is revealed in the Scriptures. You want to move beyond Bible study to personal reflection and engagement. Pay attention to what you are seeing and discovering, and write stuff down. Here is a basic order to follow, but it doesn't need to be extremely rigid. You may find yourself spending more time on one area than the other.

Adoration: What do I see that I can praise God for? Why should I love him?

Repentance: What wrong behavior & emotions result when I forget this?

Gospel Thanks: How does Jesus show this or give this blessing perfectly?

Aspiration: How would I be different if this truth were powerfully real to me?

**Step Four – Pray (8 minutes or more):** As you meditate, begin to turn your thoughts and reflections directly to Him. Adore him, praise him, repent before him, give thanks to him, and ask that he'd make this truth more real.

**Daily Text:**

Day One: v.1-5, on the confidence of the Psalmist of God's commitment

Day Two: v.6-8, on the Lord setting our feet in broad places

Day Three: v.9-13, on what happens when we forget God is our refuge

Day Four: v.14-18, on the plea of the Psalmist for God's presence

Day Five: v.19-24, on the benefits of God being the one whose approval we have

**Summary Prayer:**

What is true about God in this Psalm?

What happens when I forget this and don't sense the reality of this?

How does Jesus show me fully and truly this aspect of God?

How does this truth about God lead me to joyful obedience?

# PSALM 84

God is good, so I don't have to look elsewhere

**Step One – Prepare (2 minutes):** You'll want to begin by collecting your thoughts and directing your attention to the word. Pray for spiritual eyes to see, a humble heart to learn, and the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and guide.

**Step Two – Read (10 minutes):** Spend a few minutes reading the whole Psalm through, just reminding yourself of the whole context of the psalm. In addition, each day will have a shorter piece, just a few verses, to really focus in on. Read through the shorter section for the day a few times, slowly, paying close attention to each word, the repeated phrases, the interesting word pictures. Jot a few notes regarding what is written:

What is the author experiencing? How do you know?

What is the author communicating about who God is & what He's done?

How does he communicate it, and why does he communicate it that way?

**Step Three – Meditate (10 minutes):** This is where you begin to real “chew” on the truth that is revealed in the Scriptures. You want to move beyond Bible study to personal reflection and engagement. Pay attention to what you are seeing and discovering, and write stuff down. Here is a basic order to follow, but it doesn't need to be extremely rigid. You may find yourself spending more time on one area than the other.

Adoration: What do I see that I can praise God for? Why should I love him?

Repentance: What wrong behavior & emotions result when I forget this?

Gospel Thanks: How does Jesus show this or give this blessing perfectly?

Aspiration: How would I be different if this truth were powerfully real to me?

**Step Four – Pray (8 minutes or more):** As you meditate, begin to turn your thoughts and reflections directly to Him. Adore him, praise him, repent before him, give thanks to him, and ask that he'd make this truth more real.

**Daily Text:**

Day One: v.1-2, on the longing of the Psalmist for God's comfort/presence

Day Two: v.3-4, on the abundant blessedness of he who dwells with God

Day Three: v.5-7, on the renewing strength of those who pursue God

Day Four: v.8-9, on the prayer of the Psalmist for God to be his comfort

Day Five: v.10-12, on the comforts and joys of dwelling with God

**Summary Prayer:**

What is true about God in this Psalm?

What happens when I forget this and don't sense the reality of this?

How does Jesus show me fully and truly this aspect of God?

How does this truth about God lead me to joyful obedience?

# PSALM 103

God is gracious, so I don't have to prove myself

**Step One – Prepare (2 minutes):** You'll want to begin by collecting your thoughts and directing your attention to the word. Pray for spiritual eyes to see, a humble heart to learn, and the Holy Spirit to be your teacher and guide.

**Step Two – Read (10 minutes):** Spend a few minutes reading the whole Psalm through, just reminding yourself of the whole context of the psalm. In addition, each day will have a shorter piece, just a few verses, to really focus in on. Read through the shorter section for the day a few times, slowly, paying close attention to each word, the repeated phrases, the interesting word pictures. Jot a few notes regarding what is written:

What is the author experiencing? How do you know?

What is the author communicating about who God is & what He's done?

How does he communicate it, and why does he communicate it that way?

**Step Three – Meditate (10 minutes):** This is where you begin to real “chew” on the truth that is revealed in the Scriptures. You want to move beyond Bible study to personal reflection and engagement. Pay attention to what you are seeing and discovering, and write stuff down. Here is a basic order to follow, but it doesn't need to be extremely rigid. You may find yourself spending more time on one area than the other.

Adoration: What do I see that I can praise God for? Why should I love him?

Repentance: What wrong behavior & emotions result when I forget this?

Gospel Thanks: How does Jesus show this or give this blessing perfectly?

Aspiration: How would I be different if this truth were powerfully real to me?

**Step Four – Pray (8 minutes or more):** As you meditate, begin to turn your thoughts and reflections directly to Him. Adore him, praise him, repent before him, give thanks to him, and ask that he'd make this truth more real.

**Daily Text:**

Day One: v.1-5, on the reasons to bless God's name

Day Two: v.6-10, on God's patience and mercy with sinners

Day Three: v.11-14, on God's compassion toward his children

Day Four: v.15-19, on the contrast between God's love & man's frailty

Day Five: v.20-22, on the call to bless God along with all of creation

**Summary Prayer:**

What is true about God in this Psalm?

What happens when I forget this and don't sense the reality of this?

How does Jesus show me fully and truly this aspect of God?

How does this truth about God lead me to joyful obedience?