**Bible Studies on the Psalms**

1. **Learning to Meditate with the Psalms**
2. **How Do We Meditate on God’s Word?**
   * Letting it speak to us personally: body, mind, emotions, soul
   * Hearing and seeing what it says
   * Receiving what it says and gives to us
3. **Psalms as Handbook on Meditation**
   * Origin from meditation on God’s word and its application
   * Nature as meditations on God’s word and human experience in its light
   * Aids for meditation on God’s word as it interprets our experience
   * Psalm 1 as the introduction to the Book of Psalms
4. **Explanation of Terms in Psalm 1**
   * Wicked = guilty in God’s court
   * Righteous = innocent in God’s court
   * Seat as the sign of speaking with God’s authority: king, judge or teacher
   * Law as teaching
   * Meditation as muttering, speaking to oneself
   * Ambiguity in verse 3: ‘he prospers in whatever he does’ or ‘Whatever he does prospers.’
   * ‘Watches’ = ‘knows’ in Hebrew
   * Reversal of expectations: the knowledge of the Lord’s way and the destruction of the wicked

1. **Focus on the Pictures/Images in Psalm 1**
   * Two ways: way of wicked v way of righteous
   * Traveller: walking, standing, sitting
   * Student ► committed adherent ►teacher
   * Tree
     + Location: desert
     + Watering: irrigation canal
     + Nature: evergreen fruit tree
     + Seasonal crop
   * Chaff
     + Separation from grain by threshing
     + Removal from grain by winnowing
     + Windblown and useless
   * Court of law
     + God as Judge in the divine service
     + Congregation as witnesses
     + Person on trial: sinner
     + Verdict: guilty
   * The way of the wicked
     + Taught by example and mockery
     + Way that perishes
   * The way of the righteous
     + Invisible way that is known by God
     + Way that God leads the righteous who meditate on his word
2. **Teaching on meditation in Psalm 1**
   * Two kinds of meditation: on the advice of wicked or on Lord’s teaching
   * Right relationship with God: condition for meditation

* Delight: catalyst for meditation on God’s word
* Meditation as a verbal activity
  + Speaking to oneself
  + Assimilating God’s word: ears and mouth ►heart
  + Daily reception of God’s Spirit through the his word (Isa

44:3)

* Times for mediation: morning and evening
  + - Result of meditation
* Picture of irrigated fruit tree
* Watering with God’s Spirit
* Fruitfulness in season
* Evergreen foliage rather than temporary growth
* Prosperity of person and work
* Blessing from God
  + Goal of meditation
    - Reversal of cliché: the righteous know the way of the Lord
    - Picture: secret journey for the righteous through life
    - God as hidden companion and guide
    - Receiving direction from God by listening to him
    - Being known by God

**B. Complaining with the Psalms**

1. **When do we complain, and why?**
2. **How do we feel and act when we have been wronged?**

* Hurt and anger
* Lashing out or bottling up with repeated playback
* Physical, verbal and emotional payback or self-pity and depression
* Hatred for the ‘enemy’
* Shaking of faith in God: failure in duty of care

1. **Laments as commonest psalms**

* **T**wo types
  + Individual laments
  + National laments
    - Three kinds of individual laments
* Description of trouble with appeal to God’s generosity by needy person: sickness
* Confession of sin with appeal to God’s mercy by sinners
* Complaint to God with appeal for help by a victim of abuse or injustice: use of protesting questions ‘why?’ or ‘how long?’

1. **Psalm 13 as a typical complaint**

**1How long, O Lord, will you forget me completely?**

**How long will you hide your face from me?**

**2How long will I have pain in my soul, sorrow in my heart every day?**

**How long will my enemy be high over me?**

**3Look (at me); answer me, O Lord my God!**

**Give light to my eyes,**

**So that I do not sleep the sleep of death,**

**4and my enemy say, “I have defeated him,”**

**and my foes rejoice because I am shaken,**

**5even though I trusted in your steadfast love.**

**My heart will rejoice in your deliverance;**

**6I will sing about the Lord,**

**because he has treated me well.**

**5. The process of complaining to God**

* Four complaints to God
* For forgetting the speaker
* For hiding his face from him
* For unbearable pain and sorrow
* For put down by an enemy
  + Three pleas to God for help
* For attention
* For favourable response
* For light to eyes: revitalisation
  + Three reasons for answering petitions
* Prevention of death
* Prevention of the triumph by the enemy
* Prevention of rejoicing by enemies at shaken trust in God
  + Promise of praise
* Vow of a song of thanksgiving for deliverance
* God’s help as the reason and content of this song
* Fulfilment with song of thanksgiving such as Psalm 30

1. **The value of these laments**
   * How can a psalm like this help us?
   * Why does God welcome our complaints?
   * How do these psalms ‘praise’ God?

**C. Confessing our sins with the Psalms**

1. **What is Confession?**

* Problem of religious escapism and pretence before God
* Facing up to reality: self, others and God
* Confess: acknowledge and accept the truth
* Two kinds of confessional psalms
  + Righteousness for assessment and vindication (eg. 26)
  + Sin for forgiveness and restoration: seven penitential psalms (6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143)
* Effect of guilt
  + Guilty conscience: accusation
  + Self-justification: making excuses
  + Impurity and unworthiness
  + Shame from sense of failure as a person
  + Fear of punishment and rejection
  + Isolation and avoidance of God
  + Loss of joy and confidence

1. **Psalm 51: Prayer on Confession for Sin**

***For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba.***

**1Have mercy on me, O God, in your lovingkindness;**

**in the greatness of your compassion blot out my rebellion.**

**2 Wash me completely from my iniquity**

**and cleanse me from my sin.**

**3For I know my rebellion**

**and my sin is always before me.**

**4Against you, you only, have I sinned**

**and done what is evil in your eyes,**

**so that you are justified when you speak**

**and blameless when you pass judgment.**

**5Surely I was born with iniquity,**

**and my mother conceived me in sin.**

**6Surely you desire truth in the inward being**

**and teach me wisdom in secret.**

**7Purge me with hyssop so that I may be clean,**

**wash me so I may be whiter than snow.**

**8Announce gladness and joy to me;**

**make the bones that you have broken rejoice.**

**9Hide your face from my sin**

**and blot out all my iniquities.**

**10Create in me a clean heart, O God**

**and renew a steady spirit in me.**

**11Do not banish me from your face**

**and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.**

**12Restore to me the joy of your salvation,**

**and uphold me with a willing spirit.**

**13Let me teach rebels your ways,**

**so that sinners may return to you.**

**14Deliver me from blood guilt, O God,**

**the God of my salvation,**

**so that my tongue may sing aloud of your righteousness.**

**15O Lord, open my lips,**

**so that my mouth may declare your praise.**

**16For you do not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;**

**you do not accept a burnt offering.**

**17The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;**

**a broken and crushed heart you do not despise.**

**18Do good in your grace to Zion;**

**rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.**

**19Then you will delight in sacrifices of righteousness,**

**in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;**

**then bulls will be brought up on your altar.**

**3. Questions on Psalm 51**

* Heading
  + What sins had David committed?
  + What was the penalty for these crimes?
  + In what ways is David an example for us?
* Confession of sin with petition for cleansing: 1−9
* What appeal does David make to God in 1, and why?
* What does David admit about himself to God in 3-6?
* What does he ask God to do in 1-2 and 7-9?
  + Petition for change from doomed sinner to praise singer: 10−17
* Why does David ask God to recreate his heart in 10-11, and how?
* Why does David ask God in 12-13 to restore his joy by saving him from his sin?
* Why does David ask God in 14-15 to remove the sentence of death from him?
* What is the only ‘sacrifice’ that God wants from David as a doomed sinner?
  + Intercession for sinful Jerusalem: 18-19
* In what ways was ruined Jerusalem like David?
* What hope was there for ruined Jerusalem?

**D. Facing Depression with God in Psalm 88**

**1O Lord, the God of my salvation,**

**when at night I cry out in your presence,**

**2let my petition come before you;**

**with your ear pay attention to my cry.**

**3For my soul is full of troubles,**

**and my life draws near to the Underworld.**

**4 I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;**

**I am like those who have no help,**

**5like those forsaken among the dead,**

**like the slain that lie in the grave,**

**like those whom you remember no more,**

**for they are cut off from your hand.**

**6You have put me in the depths of the Pit,**

**like the regions dark and deep.**

**7Your wrath lies heavy upon me,**

**and you overwhelm me with all your waves.**

**8You have made my companions shun me;**

**you have made me a thing of horror to them.**

**I am shut in so that I cannot escape;**

**9my eye grows dim with sorrow.**

**All day I call to you, O Lord;**

**I spread out my hands to you:**

**10‘Do you work wonders for the dead?**

**Do the shades rise up to praise you?**

**11Is your mercy declared in the Grave,**

**or your faithfulness in the Place of Destruction?**

**12Are your wonders known in the Darkness,**

**or your saving help in the Forgotten Land?’**

**13But I, O Lord, cry out to you;**

**in the morning my prayer comes before you.**

**14O Lord, why do you cast me off?**

**Why do you hide your face from me?**

**15Wretched and close to death from my youth up,**

**I suffer your terrors; I am in despair.**

**16Your wrath has swept over me;**

**your dread assaults destroy me.**

**17They surround me like a flood all day long;**

**from all sides they close in on me.**

**18You have made friend and neighbor shun me;**

**my companions - darkness.**

* How do severely depressed people feel about themselves and others and God?
* How does this person feel about himself and his plight?
* Nightly descent into the realm of the death and darkness
* Daily complaint about God’s lack of help: mercy, faithfulness, salvation
* Morning complaint at complete abandonment by God and overwhelming experience of His wrath
* How does he feel that God is treating him?
* Forgotten by God
* Forsaken by God
* Imprisoned by God
* Drowned by God
* Turned into something horrible
* Terrorized by God
* Isolated from others by God
* How does he feel that God feels about him?
* Unhearing and uncaring
* Angry
* What is to be gained from this complaint to God?
* Triumph over emotional deadness and complete silence
* Bringing the darkness into the light of God’s face
* Sharing suffering with God: dumping on Him
* How could this psalm help people who are depressed?

**E. Praising with the Psalms**

1. **When do we praise someone or something, and why?**
2. **Why do we praise God?**

* Recognising God’s goodness: hidden and unobtrusive
* Remembering and enjoying God’s goodness
* Telling others about God and his goodness
* Inviting others to receive God’s gifts and to enjoy them
* Sharing enjoyment by praising someone or something good

1. **Psalm 95: Liturgical Song of Praise**

**1Come (in procession), let us shout with joy to the Lord;**

**let us acclaim the rock of our salvation!**

**2Let us approach his presence with thanksgiving;**

**let us acclaim him with musical song!**

**3For the Lord is a great God,**

**and a great King above all gods.**

**4In his hand are the depths of the earth;**

**the heights of the mountains are his also.**

**5The sea is his, for he made it,**

**and the dry land, which his hands have formed.**

**6Come in, let us make prostration and bow down,**

**let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!**

**7For he is our God,**

**and we are the people of his pasture,**

**and the sheep of his hand.**

**O that today you would listen to his voice:**

**8‘Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,**

**as on the day of Massah in the desert,**

**9when your ancestors tested and tried me out,**

**though they had seen my work.**

**10For forty years I was disgusted with that generation**

**and said, “They are a people**

**whose hearts have gone astray,**

**11so that they do not know my ways.”**

**Therefore in my anger I swore,**

**“They shall not enter my rest.”’**

1. **Explanation**

* Setting: congregation’s entry into the temple in a procession led by the temple choir
* Invitation to join procession in 1
* Rock of salvation in 1: large flat rock on which the altar was built
* Great King in 2: emperor as king over other kings
* Gods in 3: pagan gods or angels
* Note two dimensions in 4-5
  + Depths of earth v heights of mountains
  + Sea v dry land
* Prostration in 6: act of homage by falling down before God at the altar in the temple (see 2 Chronicles 29:25-29)
* Picture of God as shepherd caring for his flock in 7a
* Call to listen to God’s voice in 7b
* Hardening of hearts: refusal to listen and to learn
* Ancestors: Israelites on journey from Egypt to Promised Land
* God’s work: deliverance at Red Sea
* Story of Meribah in Exodus 17:1-7
  + Meribah = Place of Challenge
  + Massah = Place of Testing
  + Challenge to Moses: lack of water
  + Testing: proof of God’s presence
  + Reversal: testing of God rather than testing by him
* Forty years: time spent in the desert before entry into the land
* Knowing God’s ways in 11 by listening to God as in 7
* Rest as place of rest that corresponds with the Sabbath as the day of rest
  + Land
  + Temple

1. **Questions**

* What are we invited to do in this psalm?
* What two reasons are given for praising God in this psalm?
* How does praise prepare us for listening to God’s voice in worship?
* How do we enter God’s rest according to this psalm? See Hebrews 4:1-10.