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CREATING A CULTURE OF SCRIPTURE INTAKE AND  
PRAYER USING THE PSALMS AT UNITED BAPTIST  
CHURCH IN CARSON, CALIFORNIA

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
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by  
James Karel Garcia Go  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

CREATING A CULTURE OF SCRIPTURE INTAKE AND  
PRAYER USING THE PSALMS AT UNITED BAPTIST  
CHURCH IN CARSON, CALIFORNIA

James Karel Garcia Go

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Joseph C. Harrod

Second Reader: Dustin B. Bruce

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To my loving wife Mary, who has been a faithful helpmeet for these forty years,  
and to our two children, Toni and Andrew, who stood by us in our journey,  
and to my Lord Jesus, who has called me to the sacred privilege  
of serving Him and His people.

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## PREFACE

It did not take long for me to realize that one of the greatest needs in the church is prayer. I thought that I knew much about this spiritual discipline only to discover that, like so many, I am a fellow sojourner learning and traveling with the rest on our way to the Celestial city. By God's providence, He led me to the field of biblical spirituality where the classroom lectures, fellowship, and research contributed to my spiritual growth that I will pass on to my family and the church I shepherd. I will be forever grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Joseph C. Harrod, for his mentorship both inside and outside the classroom. His love for his students is seen in his grace, patience, and encouragement, beyond his extensive knowledge in my field of study.

I must thank my wife, Mary, for her patience in giving me the space and time to accomplish this task on top of other pastoral duties. Because of her support, I have become a better pastor and teacher. On June 2 of this year my mother, Lilia, entered the presence of the Lord after months of declining health. I thank God for a godly mom who prayed for all six of us siblings and was one of my supporters as I embarked on getting this degree.

Above all, I thank the Lord Jesus who has been my unseen but faithful companion who graces me each day and called me to serve His church. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

James Go

Carson, California

December 2022

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The mission statement of United Baptist Church is “to glorify God in all that we do. Through the faithful preaching and teaching of God’s Word, we believe it will result in God-centered worship, kindred fellowship and biblical mission and evangelism. This is the basis of everything we do and the basis of our ministry.” Unfortunately, the church has not fully lived up to this statement. Christians who consistently apply God’s Word in their lives experience spiritual growth that attracts unbelievers to the gospel. God is glorified when His Word is lived out. Therefore, this project designed an approach to equip the congregation to become God-centered believers not just in name but in principle and practice, which can only be accomplished by dependence upon the Lord through the means of biblical prayer.

#### **Context**

This project took place within the context of United Baptist Church (UBC) in Carson, California, Los Angeles County, a Southern Baptist church affiliated with the Long Beach Harbor Association and the California Southern Baptist Convention. UBC started out as a Filipino mission church in 1987, planted by Keystone Baptist Church, a predominantly Anglo church. With the demographics changing in the early 1980s, whites moved out of the neighborhood gradually decimating the congregation’s average attendance from over 500 members to an average of thirty on Sundays. Decline in membership and attendance led to a decision by the pastor to invite the Filipino congregation to merge with Keystone Baptist Church. The names Keystone Baptist and



First Filipino Baptist were dropped in favor of the name United Baptist to reflect the union, a united purpose and concept of being a church for all people.

However, a few years after the union, conflict forced out the American pastor, resulting in many members leaving. During this time attendance dropped significantly from hundreds to an average of fifty every Sunday and a period of decline and stagnation followed. Conflicts among the leadership, a lack of vision, and no outreach to the community led a church consultant from the state convention to call UBC a “dying church.”

In April 1991, the church called a new pastor. There was a steady increase through the years and UBC grew to more than 300 members. However, in 2011, the congregation forced the pastor to retire because of his son’s, a fellow pastor, moral failure. This change led to some members leaving. An intentional interim pastor from the association was called to shepherd the church until a pastor was formally selected.

The church called me as pastor in November 2011, and I began pastoral duties the following year. Through the exposition of God’s Word and teaching a membership class, there was renewed interest in ministry, resulting in new members, baptisms, and additional classes.

UBC is composed mostly of first-generation Filipinos who migrated to America to seek a better life. Two services are held each Sunday with a Tagalog (native dialect) service and an English service that follows. Attendance on a Sunday averages slightly over a hundred.

### **Current Practices at UBC**

Missions are an important part of UBC. Every year, several members go to the Philippines for two weeks to do mission work in unreached and sometimes dangerous areas. Since heading the mission work every year, two days have been set apart to equip local pastors and workers to become more effective in terms of follow-up and discipleship. This mission trip is a major focus of congregational prayer each year.

The ongoing discipleship practice at UBC are small groups that gather every week for study and fellowship. Beyond the Sunday school that takes place after service, small groups provide the opportunity to address crucial questions and issues in the Christian life. These gatherings are often done in homes where participants rotate in hosting each meeting. A place is made available for every age group from the seniors to young adults and professionals, to college students, and youth. While UBC has always used Lifeway materials for Sunday school, those leading small groups have flexibility to use other resources that are doctrinally and theologically sound.

Since called to UBC as the pastor, I continue to invest a lot of time in observing, listening, meeting, and teaching the lay leaders. Out of these times, expository preaching from the Old and New Testaments is proclaimed, the office of elders and deacons were formed, and a mission and vision statement were adopted. The constitution was also revised to make it biblically sound, the latest *Baptist Faith and Message* adopted, a new church covenant recited every first Sunday of the month, and I began teaching an eight-week membership class to new members twice a year. The rationale being that members should know what to expect from leadership and what leadership expects from them. Though these developments have taken place since 2012, resulting in new members, baptisms, and ministries, some concerns indicate a lack of biblical spirituality that impedes spiritual growth.

Members seem to fail at applying Bible truths to their lives. A lack of application affects many areas, such as lack of control in speech, broken congregational relationships, poor financial stewardship, and fear of confronting fellow members involved in open sin. In sum, the membership lacks a culture of biblical spirituality.

Creating a culture of biblical spirituality among its people, primarily beginning with the leaders, would enable UBC to fully live out its mission statement as a church for all people. Communicating these concerns began in a less formal setting beginning with the core leadership who agreed to address these concerns for the church to be “salt and

light” to the community and beyond. A shift in the church’s thinking and approach regarding biblical spirituality needed to be embraced by those under their charge and ultimately saturate the congregation.

### **Rationale**

As the senior pastor of UBC for almost seven years, I saw a great opportunity with God’s enabling to help the church grow spiritually beyond its current condition. Leaders had to first understand that the church does not need to hit the critical level before it addresses the concerns mentioned, and leaders must first be growing as disciples themselves before effectively discipling others. Unless church members integrated truth and practice, biblical spirituality will be missing. Such spirituality is grounded upon engagement with God’s Word and prayer.

First, growing disciples must apply Scripture to their lives. At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus issues a stern warning that to not apply His words will be to the hearers’ peril (Matt 7:26-27). The book of James exhorts readers to prove themselves as doers of the Word and not merely hearers and so delude themselves (1:22). The power of God’s Word is most effective when it goes beyond words or information.

Second, from the standpoint of experience, spiritually healthy churches are churches where most of their members are intentional in going beyond information to application. Such application must be accompanied by prayer. Prayer is the Spirit-given heart cry of each believer and is part of the rhythm of ongoing communion between the believer and God. Prayerless Christians and prayerless churches fail to experience relational nearness with the Father.

Although all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for spiritual growth (2 Tim 3:16-17), the church has long recognized the special place of the Psalms in the daily rhythm of hearing from and talking to God. The Psalms cover the diversity of human

emotion and the range of spiritual conditions and provide Christians an especially deep resource for learning to pour out both their laments and praises to God.<sup>1</sup>

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to train members of United Baptist Church in the disciplines of Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms.

### **Goals**

Four goals had to be achieved for spiritual transformation to take place among the members of the prayer fellowship at UBC.

1. The first goal was to assess the current practices, confidence, and ability of UBC members in Bible reading and praying the Psalms.
2. The second goal was to prepare a curriculum to teach participants to read the Psalms and use the Psalms in prayer.
3. The third goal was for participants to begin a systematic reading of the Psalms using a guided reading plan.
4. The fourth goal was to increase participants' practices, confidence, and ability to use the Psalms in prayer.

### **Research Methodology**

The first goal was to assess current practices, confidence, and ability of UBC members in Bible reading and praying the Psalms. Sixteen members were invited, but only ten completed the survey.<sup>2</sup> Before distributing the survey, it was made clear that

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin offers a specific reason why the Psalms is an important guide for reading and prayer:

The Psalms, it follows, that in proportion to the proficiency which a man shall have attained in understanding them, will be his knowledge of the most important part of celestial doctrine. Genuine and earnest prayer proceeds first from a sense of our need, and next, from faith in the promises of God. It is by perusing these inspired compositions, that men will be most effectively awakened to a sense of their maladies, and, at the same time, instructed in seeking remedies for their cure. In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book. (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949], xxxvii)

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 1, "Pre-Course Survey." All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

their names would remain anonymous and instead their identities were determined by using a Personal Identification Number (PIN). This goal was measured by administering the survey to a minimum of eight members. This goal was considered successfully met when at least eight members completed the survey and the answers had been analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the current Bible reading and prayer practices among UBC members.

The second goal of this project was to develop a curriculum to teach participants to read the Psalms and use the Psalms in prayer. To ensure that the curriculum was appropriate, two experts in the field of biblical spirituality and an Old Testament scholar reviewed the curriculum. This goal was measured by the expert, who utilized a rubric to evaluate the faithfulness and applicability of the curriculum.<sup>3</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when 90 percent of the criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was for participants to begin a systematic reading of the Psalms using a guided reading plan.<sup>4</sup> To facilitate this goal, I developed a systematic reading plan for the Psalms. This plan broke the Psalter into structured daily readings of typically no more than five Psalms per day, which allowed participants to read the entire Psalter in one month. The guide was formatted after the *Psalms of the Day* chart.<sup>5</sup> The guide included prayer prompts and brief teaching sections to connect the Psalms to the class curriculum. The guide included a checklist to allow readers to indicate which Psalms they had read. This goal was considered successful when each participant returned the checklists

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 2, “Curriculum Review Rubric.”

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 3, “Psalms Reading Plan.”

<sup>5</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 91.

indicating that they had read at least 80 percent of the daily readings each month over a two-month period.

The fourth goal was to increase participants' confidence and ability to use the Psalms in prayer. This goal was measured by administering a post-teaching survey that gauged participants' confidence and ability to use Scripture, specifically the Psalms, in their prayer life.<sup>6</sup> I utilized a t-test for dependent samples, which should indicate a positive statistical change in participants' confidence and ability to use the Psalms in prayer for this goal to be considered successful. Additionally, I interviewed eight participants using an interview protocol to gain more detailed information on how their confidence and ability changed during the project. This part of the goal was considered successful when all interviews had been completed and the respondents' answers had been analyzed, yielding a clearer understanding of the training's impact.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

*Biblical spirituality.* Andreas J. Köstenberger explains that biblical spirituality is “spirituality [that] involves the presence, activity, and work of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life, beginning at conversion and regeneration, and continuing throughout the entire process of sanctification.”<sup>7</sup>

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-series surveys were dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their knowledge and understanding of Scripture intake and prayer. To mitigate this limitation, respondents were promised that their answers would remain nameless. Second, the effectiveness of the training was limited by the constancy of attendance and responses

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>7</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Excellence: The Character of God and the Pursuit of Scholarly Virtue* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 71.

to the curriculum. If the participants did not participate in all the sessions, then it would be difficult to measure how beneficial the training had been. To mitigate this limitation, each week of the teaching sessions was arranged around their schedules.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, the project was implemented using only a select group of eight to twelve individuals and not the entire membership. Second, this was an eight-week curriculum. This period gave ample time to prepare, teach, and implement all that was required of the project and analyze the results after.

### **Conclusion**

The members of United Baptist Church desire to grow spiritually through the spiritual disciplines of Scripture intake and prayer. Members know this is vital to their spiritual growth but lack guidance, especially in the area of these two spiritual disciplines mentioned. Learning to apply the truths God has taught in His Word leads to spiritual transformation.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR SCRIPTURE INTAKE AND PRAYER

For Christians to mature spiritually, Scripture intake and prayer are disciplines believers must cultivate. There is a direct connection between knowledge of the Bible and godly wisdom, and one's ability to live in the way God desires. While Scripture generally deals with God's relationship to his people, the Psalms particularly exemplify a variety of responses to God's ways and words, which is why Jews and Christians have long used it as their hymnal and prayer book. Christians have realized that the Psalms are especially helpful in shaping the heart of believers. They provide readers with the thoughts and feelings recorded in their experiences. Allen Ross comments on this connection: "The book of Psalms most vividly represents the faith of individuals in the Lord . . . Saints of all ages have appropriated this collection of prayers and praises in their public worship and private meditations."<sup>1</sup> Through this chapter, exegesis of selected Psalms is provided to motivate Christians to read and pray the Psalms as Jesus did. N. T. Wright explains, "The Psalms, which make up the great hymnbook of the heart of the Bible, have been the daily lifeblood of Christians, and of course the Jewish people, from the earliest times."<sup>2</sup> To understand the Psalms, some information is given about the author and its context.

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<sup>1</sup> Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 779.

<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Case for the Psalms: Why They Are Essential* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013), 1.



## Authorship and Structure

While not all chapters mention the author, the following information is provided: David's name appears in at least seventy-three Psalms that mostly occupy the first two books of the Psalter (Pss 1-72). Asaph wrote twelve (Pss 50; 73-83). Ten chapters mention Korah's descendants (Pss 42; 44-49; 84; 87-88). Two chapters are by Solomon (Pss 72; 127). One each from Herman the Ezrahite (Ps 88), Ethan the Ezrahite (Ps 89), and Moses (Ps 90).<sup>3</sup> Other chapters have superscriptions without an author but contain a variety of information such as dedication, historical background, and liturgical and technical instructions to a worship director, which may suggest how ancient Israel understood the Psalms to function in different areas of life.

Two major literary characteristics of the Psalms are identified in Hebrew poetry. First, there are the parallel patterns where there is repetition of the parts, and second, anthropomorphism describes God and his character in human terms. Tremper Longman explains that the Psalms are able to address the heart is because

poetry appeals more directly to the whole person than prose does. It stimulates our imaginations, arouses our emotions, feeds our intellects and addresses our wills. Perhaps this is why poetry is the preferred mode of communication of the prophets, whose purpose depends on capturing the attention of their listeners and persuading them their message is urgent. More than that poetry is pleasurable. It is attractive to read and even more so to read aloud (or sing).<sup>4</sup>

The Psalms are organized into five divisions, or "books." Jewish tradition views them as comparable to the five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, or the books of Moses. As there are these five books, also known as the Torah or Law, so there are five "books" of Psalms, corresponding perhaps to the Law. Book I covers Psalms 1-41; Book II, Psalms 42-72; Book III, Psalms 73-89; Book IV, Psalms 90-106; and Book V,

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth G. Hannah, *From Moses to Malachi: Exploring the Old Testament* (Nashville: CrossBooks, 2013), 277.

<sup>4</sup> Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 92.

Psalms 107-50.<sup>5</sup> W. H. Bellinger comments that each book ends with a doxology “giving praise and thanksgiving to God, especially for the psalms just completed.”<sup>6</sup> While there is no organized theme of this five-book arrangement, Psalm 1 and Psalm 150 serve as “bookends,” with the first psalm as an introduction to righteous living and the final psalm as a conclusion to praise Yahweh.

### Categories of Psalms

Interpretation of the Psalms in the last century has been largely influenced by an interpretive approach known as form criticism. The pioneer of this form-critical work was the German Old Testament scholar Herman Gunkel (1862-1932) who popularized the view that approached the Psalms not by looking at the literary context of the Psalter, but by analyzing the form in which the writer composed it. Herman Gunkel writes, “We may dare to presume that [the Psalms] arose in the cult of Israel originally.”<sup>7</sup> Nancy deClaisse-Walford expands on his words by explaining, “For Gunkel, a genre or ‘form’ implies a specific life setting out of which it evolved and from which it could not be abstracted.”<sup>8</sup> Gunkel suggests that a psalm has to have a particular life setting (*Sitz im Leben*) to better understand and interpret the text as well as the cultic life setting that brought it about. While Gunkel’s original work emphasized four major types of Psalms (hymns, individual and community laments, and thanksgiving), Joachim Begrich expanded Gunkel’s work by identifying six types, and adding “enthronement” and “royal” Psalms

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<sup>5</sup> The ordering of this project follows the Masoretic Text.

<sup>6</sup> W. H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalms: A Guide to Studying the Psalter*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Herman Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, completed by Joachim Begrich, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy deClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 15.

with subcategories.<sup>9</sup> Distinct categorization is not possible for every psalm, nor does every psalm meet a particular category. To summarize Gunkel's work, Old Testament theologian John Goldingay says, "He identified three main ways of speaking to God in the Psalms: praise, thanksgiving, and prayer."<sup>10</sup>

Not everyone agrees with Gunkel's approach. For Claus Westermann, "the observation that the life situation of the Psalms as the cult cannot really be right. For that which really, in the last analysis occurs in the Psalms is prayer."<sup>11</sup> In other words, the worship of God cannot be separated from his covenant people and attribute it to other cultures outside of Israel. Evangelical scholar Bruce Waltke's critique of Gunkel's work is that by the use of form-criticism that gives more weight to the cultic setting of Israel's neighbors, this approach robs the book of God's dealings with his people and how they respond and therefore paves the way for sociological bias because of its subjectivity.<sup>12</sup>

To read the Psalms is to interpret it through the psalmists' experience of the God of Israel whose uniqueness is celebrated individually and corporately in worship. The reason the Psalms hold such a powerful place in Jewish and Christian worship is because they address life experiences. In the words of Gordon Wenham, "we should use them for our prayers whatever our situation may be because there is a psalm that suits our every need."<sup>13</sup> In his preface to his commentary on the Psalms, the Genevan Reformer John Calvin said,

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<sup>9</sup> Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary in the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalm (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 1:45.

<sup>11</sup> Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 77.

<sup>13</sup> Gordon Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 39.

I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;” for there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life 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.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout history, God’s people have loved and benefited from the Psalter. Because it is a collection of prayers that arise out of experiences men can identify with. It is difficult to find any situation in life that does not find expression in some psalm or another. One should be able to turn every situation into an occasion for worship that the Lord is God.

### **An Exegesis of Select Categories of the Psalms**

Old Testament scholar and author Gordon Wenham, in his book titled *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms*, writes, “I fear that in many Protestant churches the Psalms have been displaced by hymns and songs. Indeed at a seminary at which I was examiner I was shocked that there was no study of the Psalms in their BD (MDiv) program!”<sup>15</sup> This unfortunate assessment is shared by the former bishop of Durham, N. T. Wright:

In many circles today, the Psalms are simply not used. And in many places where they are still used, whether said or sung, they are often reduced to a few verses to be recited as “filler” between other parts of the liturgy or worship services. In the latter case, people often don’t seem to realize what they’re singing. In the former case, they don’t seem to realize what they’re missing.<sup>16</sup>

These scholars’ words bear testimony as to why there is a spiritual impoverishment in many evangelical churches. Eugene Peterson explains, “If we wish to develop in the life of faith, to mature in our humanity, and to glorify God with our entire heart, mind, soul, and strength, the Psalms are necessary. We cannot bypass the Psalms.

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<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:xxxvi-xxxvii.

<sup>15</sup> Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *The Case for the Psalms*, 1.

They are God’s gift to train us in prayer.”<sup>17</sup> This is not to suggest that the rest of the books in Scripture are not helpful, for “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).<sup>18</sup> However, the Psalms differ in that their goal is to address God by using them as prayers and in singing them as the worshipper’s expression of their faith in God.

Throughout history, the Psalms prominently shaped the spiritual lives of God’s people. Professor Gordon Wenham writes, “Most, if not all, of the Psalms were originally composed to be sung in temple worship, and through the centuries they have continued to be sung in church and synagogue.”<sup>19</sup>

An exegesis of select categories of the Psalms are presented to help guide Christians in how to pray to God, whatever their circumstances, which will shape their spiritual lives. Though not exhaustive to cover every chapter and every category, this section looks at five selected categories that are foundational and the means God uses for growing the believer’s relationship to him. This section includes the exegesis of Psalm 1:1-6 (Wisdom); 12:1-8 (Lament); 22:1-31 (Messianic); 51:1-19 (Penitential); and 109:1-31 (Imprecatory).

## **Psalm 1**

The first psalm is the gateway that introduces the reader and sets the tone for the rest of the Psalter. The author is anonymous but appears to be part of God’s covenant people because he honors God’s Law and trusts God to keep his covenant.<sup>20</sup> In view of its content, it is a wisdom psalm along with Psalms 32, 37, 49, 73, 78, 112, 119, 127, 128, and

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<sup>17</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (New York: HarperOne, 1989), 3.

<sup>18</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>19</sup> Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 130.

133 because “these psalms provide wise instruction for daily living, guidance for living a full life.”<sup>21</sup> It also shares similar features with the book of Proverbs because of its clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Scripture as a whole, especially the Wisdom literature, separates mankind into these two categories and leaves no room for a middle way.

The first psalm contrasts the righteous with the wicked and portrays the present fortunes and future destinies of both. The psalmist presents two alternatives that will either result in blessing that comes to the godly, or the condemnation of the wicked—common themes that seem to be built around the concept of two kinds of people and the consequences of their response (Deut 28; Jer 17:5-8). Jesus himself was to teach that people are either on the wide road that leads to destruction or on the narrow way that leads to life (Matt 7:13, 14).

Psalm 1 indicates the choices where the righteous who delight in God’s law are blessed. The English translation “blessed” in the Hebrew can either be *baruk/barak* or *asre*, which are not synonymous. Jonathan Pennington makes this distinction when he states, “By means of *brk* God actively gives and enables his word to go forth, resulting in benefits such as fertility, authority, peace and rest.”<sup>22</sup> However, *asre*, which is the word used in this psalm “describes the happy state of the one who lives wisely. In this sense it is closely related to *salom* . . . [it] is an exclamatory description of the state of happiness, privilege, or fortune that is upon someone as observed by someone else, a bystander, not the one providing or initiating the blessing.”<sup>23</sup>

A trilogy of expressions describes the man who is blessed. The blessed one “does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the

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<sup>21</sup> Bellinger, *Psalms*, 21.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 48.

<sup>23</sup> Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 44, 49.

seat of scoffers!” “Walk, stand, sit,” “counsel, path, seat,” and “wicked, sinners, mockers” are expressions in a triple set of parallels that indicate some form of association that the godly must avoid. Old Testament scholar Derek Kidner writes of the downward progression:

The three complete phrases, show three aspects, indeed three degrees, of departure from God, by portraying conformity to this world at three different levels: accepting its advice, being party to its ways, and adopting the most fatal of its attitudes—for the *scoffers*, if not the most scandalous of sinners, are the farthest from repentance (Prov 3:34).<sup>24</sup>

The godly are blessed in that they do not model their behavior on the counsel of the ungodly. Additionally, the godly do not linger among sinners who persist in their evil and scoffers who openly mock God’s laws and ridicule what is sacred. This is seen in their behavior and heard in their speech.

From describing what the godly person does not do, the psalmist, by contrast points out what he does. As professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages Willem VanGemeran explains, that the godly “delight (*hepso*) expresses all that makes the godly happy. The law is more than their delight—it is their chief desire,”<sup>25</sup> which causes him to meditate on God’s *Torah* to shape his conduct.

Key to the psalmist’s blessedness is his meditating on God’s law “day and night.” While there are three Hebrew words used for the word “meditate,” the particular word used in verse 2 is translated as *hagah* and conveys the idea of to “moan, utter, speak, muse,” which is the same word used in Joshua 1:8; Psalm 63:6; 77:12; and 143:5.<sup>26</sup> VanGemeran expresses it best when he writes,

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<sup>24</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, Kidner Classic Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 64.

<sup>25</sup> Willem A. VanGemeran, *Psalms*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 80.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 211.

Meditation is not the setting apart of a special time for personal devotions, whether morning or evening, but is reflection on the word of God in the course of daily activities (Jos 1:8). Regardless of the time or day or the context, the godly respond to life in accordance with God's word. Even where the word is explicit, the godly have trained their hearts to speak and act with wisdom (Pr 1:1-7).<sup>27</sup>

The psalmist compares life rooted in God's Torah to a tree full of health and vigor. Roots, like foundations, are invisible to the naked eye. The Middle Eastern climate is known for its long dry season and fruit trees need water to bring the fruit to maturity. Goldingay writes, "It therefore needs to be planted near a water supply toward which its roots can reach."<sup>28</sup> This image is a portrayal in the agrarian parable of the life of the godly who study and reflect on God's law. Through daily meditation in the law of the Lord, the righteous refresh and replenish their soul in God. It does not mean that the godly never face the prospect of hardships; rather, they will be preserved. Like the fruitful tree, the godly are firmly planted and, like Joshua, will prosper in whatever they do (Josh 1:8).

In comparing to the enduring tree, the condition of the wicked and their future destiny is in direct contrast to the godly. Instead of being like a fruitful tree that maintains its health through the summer, it is like dry and useless chaff driven by the wind. Franz Delitzsch writes, "Without root below, without fruit above, devoid of all the vigor and freshness of life, lying loose upon the threshing-floor and a prey of the slightest breeze—thus utterly worthless and unstable"<sup>29</sup> is the life of the ungodly.

The metaphor is a familiar picture of agricultural life during the harvest season in the Ancient Near East. The threshing floor was a hard, level surface located on a hill, exposed to the wind. The wheat was lifted by winnowing implements and tossed into the air so that the grain would drop to the floor, while the empty chaff would be blown away

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<sup>27</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:84.

<sup>29</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms*, trans. James Martin, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 5 (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 87.



and scattered by the winds.<sup>30</sup> The wicked are likened to a chaff that in their desiccated, withered condition they are unprofitable in themselves and are easily blown away by God's judgment. The wicked (*reshaim*) are those who are "guilty of sin, against either God or man."<sup>31</sup> In contrast to the righteous that is like a tree planted firmly, the wicked like the chaff is unstable because they do not have the inner strength to overcome difficulties and so give way to their natural impulses.

When God begins the sifting process, which is his activity of judgment, and specifically when the final day of judgment comes (v. 5), the wicked will be excluded in the congregation of the righteous, for they do not belong to the remnant of God's people by the rejection of his teachings. If one desires to be among "the assembly of the righteous," then he must take refuge in God's Word that will steer clear of the company of the wicked.

In conclusion, the outcome is already determined with certainty—"For the LORD knows." The verb "knows" is the word *yada* in Hebrew and is often translated as "watch over," to convey God's providential care. But "know," which is the more literal word used here, means to "convey a more intimate and internal care."<sup>32</sup> The distinguishing mark between the righteous and the wicked is that the righteous in his dependence on the Torah of the Lord will be the object of God's care, whereas the wicked who lives independently of the Lord and has chosen to live on his own bring God's judgment. James Mays states, "Their advice and path and position are their own. . . . In their very autonomy they are wrong."<sup>33</sup> To choose one's own road apart from God's teaching leads to destruction. Man's natural inclination is to be autonomous from his Creator to his own

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<sup>30</sup> Paul D. Wegner, "Chaff," in *New International Directory of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1997), 2:1061.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 957.

<sup>32</sup> DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 63.

<sup>33</sup> James L. Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 42-43.

hurt. However, God in his grace has given his Word that believers may be instructed and in applying it find true freedom.

The righteous are like transplanted trees nourished “by streams of water”—the stream of God’s Torah—read, meditated on and applied that leads to prayer. The invisible root system is the most important part of the tree because it draws up water and nutrients that feed the tree. Apart from a healthy root system, the tree will die. So also, the believer will fail to flourish apart from a healthy “root system.” In biblical imagery, fruit is what is seen by people, and that fruit benefits them because of the nourishment it brings (cf. John 15:1-11). Peterson writes,

Torah-meditation is the action that moves us away from distracting words that push us this way and that; these words pull us into attentiveness. The transplanted tree is the image that focuses our distracted will, the will that is ever restlessly looking for and trying out the “right” conditions for prayer. The tree claims our attention and says, “Put your roots down *here*.”<sup>34</sup>

If the believer desires to thrive and flourish, then he must cultivate a lifestyle by meditating on God’s Word to gain wisdom that he may not be seduced in the ways of the world. Like a tree that can only be nourished by water, so a believer can only be sustained by his consistent immersion in God’s Word, receiving it as life-giving, which gradually ripens and brings blessings to those around them. A consistent life of obedience comes through the power of the Holy Spirit who inspires God’s people as a testimony to his Word, like water that brings life to a powerless tree.

## **Psalm 12**

Psalm 12 is a psalm of lament that can either be expressed individually or corporately.<sup>35</sup> Another word for lament is “grieve” or “mourn,” where the individual pours out his heart to God because of the troubled situation in which he finds himself and knows

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<sup>34</sup> Peterson, *Answering God*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> David M. Fleming and Russel Fuller, *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 1314.

that only God can deliver him. While the psalm's superscription ascribes Davidic authorship, it does not give the specific reason as to why this particular psalm was written other than for God to intervene in the life of the nation as evil was prevailing over righteousness.

Psalm 12 opens with a prayer and petition to God with the words, "Help, LORD," and then gives the reason for the psalmist's appeal—the disappearance of the "godly man" and the "faithful"<sup>36</sup>—resulting in the increase of deceptive speech to one another. Such "falsehood" is heard from lips of the flatterer and reveals a disingenuous heart.<sup>37</sup> Flattery is to compliment a person to his face but to say the opposite in the person's absence. Unknown to the flatterer, it will result in his ruin (Prov 26:28; 29:5). As such, it reveals the person as a hypocrite because there is a discord between what comes out of his mouth and what he harbors within, violating the ninth commandment to "not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exod 20:16).

Feeling helpless, the psalmist calls on the LORD that he would put an end to the flattery and arrogant claims of those who oppress the godly. Requesting that God "cut off" the flatterer is the only way to silence them. As Goldingay explains, if he does not act, then "there is the magnitude of what they think they can achieve through those smooth words of theirs. They think they can walk their way to success."<sup>38</sup> The psalmist invokes an imprecation for God to reverse the process against the self-assured boasters thinking that they will succeed by dominating the helpless, even so far as to say there is no one to lord it over them; thus, opposing God as though he is absent.

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<sup>36</sup> The parallelism of "faithful" (*munim*) in the plural with "godly" (*hasid*) in the singular requires both nouns to be regarded as description of God-fearers in contrast to deceptive people. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 165.

<sup>37</sup> In the Hebrew phrase, it is translated as "duplicitous heart," which literally reads, "with a heart and a heart," as opposed to one heart, which is united and in conformity to God's will. DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 154.

<sup>38</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:198.

A distinct and sudden change of mood is reflected in verses 5 and 6. The Lord will help the afflicted and faithful. Yahweh will arise<sup>39</sup> and deliver them from the wicked because they look to him in dependence and at the same time express confidence in his word. God moving to act on their behalf is not because of the intercessor's righteousness but is consistent within God's character to deliver "the powerless state that comes from lack of resources."<sup>40</sup>

While there are no specific requests on the part of the psalmist what kind of deliverance he longs for, he leaves his fate to God. David knows God is his protector and will either shield him from the wicked or, as the literal translation suggests, "he blows at them" taking it to mean as a sign of hope.<sup>41</sup> His cry to God for help and deliverance against his enemies shows David's total dependence on the Lord.

Comparing the psalmist's cry of helplessness to the wicked who use their lips to flatter and boast of "great things," Yahweh's pure words, which will bring about the security for which the faithful groans and therefore can be trusted to bring about deliverance. In the words of Derek Kidner, "Here is solid wealth as against the flattery, equivocation and bombast of verses 2b-4."<sup>42</sup> Because God himself is pure, the words he communicates to his creatures are trustworthy and will equal whatever threats his people.

Had the psalmist ended in verse 7 because of his confidence in God, the final passage would conclude in a victorious finality. However, the last verse portrays the wicked as ever-present and the threat they pose giving the final words to the enemy as

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<sup>39</sup> "I will arise" in v. 5 is language commonly found in many of the psalm of laments when the psalter cries out for God to arise (3:7; 7:6; 9:19; 10:12; 17:13; 74:22). Longman, *How to Read the Psalms*, 94.

<sup>40</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1-72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 83.

<sup>41</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Psalms*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 94.

<sup>42</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 93.

they seemingly overrun society by the vileness of their tongue. They see themselves as triumphalist as they exult in their wrongdoing and their influence is everywhere. While there is no resolve to the problem of evil, God is the sovereign Lord to whom the suppliant calls for help. Michael Grisante writes, “Yahweh affirms that he will protect his own regardless of what the wicked might do or say (12:5-6).”<sup>43</sup>

If the threat is constant, it is because there is a denial of the Lord’s reign as the fool does in Psalm 14. Nowhere in this particular psalm is the psalmist praying that God destroy the wicked. His faith rests on the fact that God is just and will carry out his judgment to vindicate his people without being asked. In the words of James Sire, “One of the most awesome and even frightening aspects of God—his hatred of wickedness, his absolute refusal to abide its presence. The *boastful* and *those who speak lies* must not, who cannot, stand before him, for he hates them and destroys them. Again there is the focus on evil speech—prideful boasts and lying deceit.”<sup>44</sup>

When people pursue lives of vanity and wicked conduct, verbal deception flourishes, but God will preserve the godly. “The sons of men” in verse 8 and a repeat from verse 1 form “bookends” and stress the mortality of the wicked (cf. Ps 144:4). David did not answer the problem of evil, but his cry to God for help is a recognition that evil is under the full sovereignty of Yahweh who will vindicate his covenant people.

The psalmist prays to God against the enemies’ abuse of words, should be a comfort when believers feel that godly living is useless. God will preserve his own who live in environments corrupted by deceit and falsehood. Though no one else’s speech may be reliable, God’s Word promises help in the face of evil.

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<sup>43</sup> Michael A. Grisante, “Vileness,” in VanGemenen, *New International Directory of the Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 1:1110.

<sup>44</sup> James W. Sire, *Learning to Pray through the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 73, emphasis original.

Because God is hidden and does not always immediately respond, a common phrase found in some laments is the question put to Yahweh, “how long?” Ancient Israel persisted in addressing God even when he seemed absent or inactive because God had initiated a relationship with his covenant people. J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom explain,

The phrase “How long?” appears in the psalms nearly twenty times. It is almost a technical phrase expressing this kind of complaint. The psalmist is saying in so many words, “Lord, I’m looking to you to do something about a situation that is beyond my control. Lord, how long?” He is asking: How long will I have to wait? How soon will you act?<sup>45</sup>

Laments are not to be taken as a sign of resignation because of the imminent difficulty. Rather, they are a petition for God to do something because of the divine relationship he initiated with his people. In their expression of grief or sorrow, the faithful seek to hold God to the agreement. Believers complain expecting God will act.

In the laments one finds an honest spirituality since pain is an inevitable part of life. The godly seek to put that actuality in the context of faith in God. In this psalm, the admission of the psalmist’s pain is expressed openly in public. Whether corporate or individual, laments were used in public worship. Thousands of years prior to the advent of modern psychology, the Psalms recognize that the faithful deal with pain by acknowledging it and advancing through it, which becomes a powerful resource for whatever the encounter.<sup>46</sup> The laments therefore do not ignore life’s pains but cry out of the depths for God’s help and believe that God responds.

Exegesis of Psalm 12 demonstrates how reflective reading and praying this psalm will produce comfort and enrich worship as God is present in his people’s suffering and brings assurance that his word is more powerful than deceptive speech. God sustains

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<sup>45</sup> J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way Through Duty to Delight* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 181.

<sup>46</sup> Bellinger, *Psalms*, 77.

his people as they trust him to be their help. Mourning over societal corruption will help believers into the lament of others that “participate in the healing that the wounded find at the feet of the compassionate Father. There we lay them; there we cry out with them; there we together long for healing and hope.”<sup>47</sup>

## **Psalm 22**

Psalm 22 is messianic in its character given certain features of Christ’s crucifixion in all four gospels and Hebrews 2:12 directly quotes from verse 22 qualifying it as a Messianic prophecy.<sup>48</sup> In his introduction to this psalm, Kidner writes, “No Christian can read this without being vividly confronted with the crucifixion. It is not only a matter of prophecy minutely fulfilled, but of the sufferer’s humility—there is no plea for vengeance—and his vision for a world-wide ingathering of the Gentiles.”<sup>49</sup>

This psalm’s superscript claims Davidic authorship and dedicated “for the choir director; upon Aijeleth Hashshahar,” which may refer to a particular musical tune or style to be used by the worshiping community who may, like their king, be experiencing God’s abandonment in the face of evil. No specific historical context nor incident is recorded other than the individual’s cry to God for help.

In the first ten verses, the mood of the psalmist fluctuates between complaint and confidence. “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (v. 1). The use of the word “my” indicates a personal intimacy with covenant-keeping God. While he suffers from the vicious attacks of his enemies resulting in physical and emotional pain, his greatest suffering is his sense of God-forsakenness as he asks “why?” Far from seeking

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<sup>47</sup> Kelly M. Kapic, *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 38.

<sup>48</sup> Matt 27:39-44, 46; Mark 15:31-32, 34; Luke 23:35; John 19:23, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 122. Others view this as an individual lament and thanksgiving psalm, but given the psalmist’s agony, one thinks of the horrors of the crucifixion and its messianic aspect. See VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 235.

an answer to his questions, Goldingay writes, “What the suppliant actually wants is action, not explanation”<sup>50</sup> in the face of God’s silence as he sees his situation as far from deliverance causing him to groan (v. 2).<sup>51</sup> But in light of his suffering is his unwavering faith in God calling to him three times as “my God,” even though God appears far from saving him.

Three recollections from history strengthen his faith. First, he looks back at history in the experience of his ancestors (vv. 3-5). In addressing God as “holy, enthroned upon the praises of Israel” is the psalmist’s confession that God is separate from and exalted in his lofty position above all his creatures in whom his forebears trusted and found deliverance that did not disappoint. In David’s relationship to God is his persevering faith in God to preserve him and fulfill his covenant promises.<sup>52</sup> In the words of Charles Spurgeon, “We are taught that he who is ‘holy’ God is also the God who has made a covenant with his chosen. It would be impossible for an Israelite to think of God’s holiness without thinking also of that covenant relationship.”<sup>53</sup> Second, he pours out his soul to God in his present situation because his enemies mock him for trusting in God who they believe has abandoned him (vv. 6-8). His sense of shame made him less human, like “a worm,” and not in the same category as his ancestors. Vertically, He felt abandoned by God; horizontally, he was rejected by men. The word pictures are intensified in verse 7: “sneer,” “separate with lip,” and “wag their head” all signify contemptuous ridicule. Goldingay explains, “If Yhwh does delight in the suppliant, then deliverance will

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<sup>50</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:325.

<sup>51</sup> The exact translation in the Hebrew is “roaring words . . . expressed in the raspy scream of one in deep distress.” DeClaisse-Walfoord, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 233.

<sup>52</sup> Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 399.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, condensed by David Otis Fuller, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 1:339.



follow.”<sup>54</sup> Kidner writes of a false premise of his enemies arguments “that God is there for our convenience, if he is there at all (cf. ‘command these stones’; ‘throw yourself down’; ‘come down from the cross’). The very gestures of verses 7 and 8 were reproduced at Calvary (Matt. 27:39, 43).”<sup>55</sup> Third, David drew strength as he recalls his experience with God who had sustained him all his life since his birth (vv. 9-10). Verse 9 opens with the emphatic pronoun “yet You,”<sup>56</sup> as a way of refuting the mockers’ accusations that put into question his relationship with God. Therefore, when the sufferer prays that from his birth and onward Yhwh was his God, he is reminding God that he is aware of his care for him throughout his life and has learned to trust in the Lord who has preserved him to the present day.

Strengthened by the faith of his ancestors and God’s preservation of him since birth, verses 11-21 are David persevering in prayer as he senses that danger is near with no one to save him but God (v. 11). The intensity of his complaint is made worse not only because there was none to help but also by his enemies making their way to him, which he pictures like wild animals attempting to pounce on their victims (“bulls” [v. 12] and “roaring lions [v. 13]).

The looming threat results in the physical and psychological fears of the psalmist. Using graphic word pictures, David describes how he feels because of his distress on account of the outward terror. Like water poured out of the ground, he could not gather himself to resist the enemy. His pain is comparable to dislocated bones. Rather than having his heart firm, it had melted away like wax.<sup>57</sup> Devoid of any physical

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<sup>54</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, 1:330.

<sup>55</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 124.

<sup>56</sup> It could also be taken emphatically as “indeed.” Cf. Bruce Waltke and Michael O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 665.

<sup>57</sup> Waltke writes, “The simile of melting wax, which has a low melting point, is chosen because it is familiar to everyone. As wax melts and its form disappears, so the beat of his heart fades until felt no longer; the loss of pulse signals death.” Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian*

strength,<sup>58</sup> he was in need of refreshment as a thirsty person craves water when his mouth is parched (cf. Ps 42:1).<sup>59</sup> The psalmist holds God responsible for his abandoning him: “And You lay me in the dust of death” (v. 15).

His anguish is made worse as he compares his enemies to wild dogs that surround him and are waiting for the right moment to put an end to his life.<sup>60</sup> Retaining the dog imagery, he felt as though they had pierced his hands and feet (v. 16). Centuries later, Jesus’ enemies did pierce his hands and feet by crucifixion (cf. Isa 53:5; Zech 12:10).<sup>61</sup>

By means of images using wild animals to describe his enemies (bulls, wild lions, dogs), verses 17-18 are a description of his agony. His bones showing prominently under his skin is due to loss of weight brought about by his distress, leaving him weak and emaciated. His enemies were so confident that David would perish that they gambled for his garments and divided it among themselves. Waltke writes, “They are as heartless as Joseph’s brothers, who coldly ate their lunch while he cried out for salvation from the

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*Worship*, 405.

<sup>58</sup> Josh 2:11 and 1 Kgs 10:5 are identical figures used when Rahab described her people’s “hearts melted” and the queen of Sheba as having “no more spirit in her” as a loss of total control.

<sup>59</sup> Waltke tells of his experience when lecturing at Parthian Hatra on a day in July when the heat was so great that he could not talk for more than a minute because his tongue stuck to his gums and palate. Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 405.

<sup>60</sup> Longman puts the verse in context that “in ancient Israel, the dog was not considered ‘man’s best friend’, but a beast who runs around scavenging what it can, even corpses if they are available (1 Kgs 14:11; 16:4; 21:23-24; 2 Kgs 9:10, 36). The dog are a pack of villains who encircle the psalmist like a pack of dogs might encircle a potential target of attack, waiting for the right moment to spring into action.” Longman, *Psalms*, 131.

<sup>61</sup> Some view this description as sickness. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 198-200. However, Kidner writes, “While verses 14, 15, taken alone, could describe merely a desperate illness, the context is of collective animosity and the symptoms could be those of Christ’s scourging and crucifixion; in fact verses 16-18 had to wait for that event to unfold their meaning with any clarity.” Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 125. See also Conrad R. Gren, “Piercing the Ambiguities of Psalm 22:16 and the Messiah’s Mission,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 2 (June 2005): 283-99.

pit (Gen 37:24f.; 42:21).”<sup>62</sup>

For the third time (vv. 1-2, 11) David petitions God to “be not far off” and hasten to his assistance (v. 19). Twice he refers to God “but You,” as he looks away from his enemies and knows that no human helper can save him from the brink of death but God alone. Because he has only one life (“my soul, my only life”), he cries out for God’s intervention from the “sword,” a metaphor for death and by the similar animal imagery in verses 12-16 ready to devour his remains.

Even in the face of death, the psalmist perseveres in faith as he calls out to God to answer him. What gave David confidence was his remembrance of the faith of his ancestors who trusted in Yahweh and found deliverance (v. 4) and God’s preservation of him from birth. As a covenant child, God granted him the faith to believe.

If the first 21 verses are a cry for help, and the tone of the concluding verses dramatically changes from prayer to praise and from suffering to triumph. This radical change, also seen in psalms like Psalm 6:8-10 and 85:9, is not explained. Of these sudden changes R. W. L. Moberly writes,

In their present form these psalms are probably to be seen as expressing a theological paradox that lament and praise, sorrow and joy, belong together. Although pain and puzzlement must be expressed in worship, they are not incompatible with praise; but praise rather makes explicit the context of faith and hope within which the lament is sounded, the confidence that under God ultimately all will be well.<sup>63</sup>

No explanation is given of the psalmist’s deliverance other than his acknowledging God as the only one who can rescue him and “concludes with a declaration of praise and confidence that God will hear and act on his prayer.”<sup>64</sup> He begins his praise with God’s saving act and calls on the “descendants of Jacob” to join in praise as they glorify God. These praises are an indication that God has not forsaken his chosen ones

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<sup>62</sup> Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 406-7.

<sup>63</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, “Laments,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 879-80.

<sup>64</sup> Longman, *How to Read the Psalms*, 132.

unlike his enemies who saw him as God-forsaken, but God heard his cry as he trusted in God alone. As his soul is lifted in adoration, the psalmist is led to invite others in praising God for his faithfulness, which included not only his fellow Israelites but others like him who are afflicted, so they too can say, “O taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps 34:8). His summons to worship God expands beyond Jacob’s seed and godly sufferers, beyond space and time to the visions of all nations worshiping Yahweh, which includes those yet to be born.

The gospel and other New Testament writers view Psalm 22 together with Isaiah 53 as a literal fulfillment of Christ’s first advent. To read and pray this psalm brings comfort and assurance to the believer. God-forsakenness is an experience Christians go through whether brought about by a painful past or a present reality. Such experiences can tempt one to view God in a distorted way and make him appear as an angry Father and drive faithful from fellowship with him.

However, despite the psalmist’s anguish of being forsaken by God, he drew encouragement by remembering God’s faithfulness in the past. Despite the sufferings he encountered at the hands of sinful men, he poured out his soul to God in prayer and God responded by delivering him. While David and Jesus demonstrated persevering faith in the face of death, God’s answer to Jesus’ cry quoted from Psalm 22:1 took an unexpected response: instead of being delivered, he died but was later resurrected, giving hope to those who trust him, which will result in a resurrected life in the new birth and in the life to come. Believers may not always get the answer they desire in response to their suffering, but their sorrows will be swallowed up like the final triumph of the Crucified.

God’s people in every generation can learn from this psalm. Though it may appear that the Lord has forgotten and forsaken his own because of enemies or an overwhelming trial, he can be trusted to deliver from death in answer to prayers, either through prolongation of their lives as he did for David, or through resurrection, as in the Lord’s case. Because deliverance is sure, believers can praise God and encourage others

to trust and worship him as well.

## **Psalm 51**

Book Two of the Psalms begins with Psalm 51 and is the fourth of the seven penitential psalms that include Psalms 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, and 143.<sup>65</sup> The superscript attributes it to Davidic authorship and the historical context prompting its composition is “when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”<sup>66</sup> To cover up his adultery with Bathsheba after learning that she had conceived, the king succeeded in orchestrating her husband’s murder. In committing both the sins of adultery and murder, it carried the death penalty for the guilty (Lev 20:10; Num 35:30-31; Deut 22:22) and no restitution could be made to neither restore Bathsheba’s purity nor her husband’s life. After being confronted by the prophet Nathan that his sin “despised the word of the Lord by doing evil” (2 Sam 12:9), he submitted himself to the prophetic word, enabling him to repent and experience God’s forgiveness and restoration.

In the opening address and introductory petition found in verses 1-2, David appeals to God by his generic title Elohim and not the common personal name “the LORD” (YHWH) for an unknown reason.<sup>67</sup> David petitions God on the basis of his character. To “be gracious” (*hanan*), show “lovingkindness” (*hesed*) and “compassion” (*raham*) to the helpless are attributes that manifest God’s glory. Divine pardon comes to sinners by his grace alone.

Like Psalm 32, three separate Hebrew words describe David’s offense: “transgression” (*pesa*, crossing a boundary), “sin” (*hatta*, missing the mark), and “iniquity”

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<sup>65</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), 7.

<sup>66</sup> See 2 Sam 11-12:23.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce Waltke, *The Dance between God and Humanity: Reading the Bible Today as the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013), 206.

(*awon*, guilt brought by natural depravity).<sup>68</sup> Recognizing that the essence of sin as rebellion against God, David employs three verbs in his petition that are figurative. Ross explains,

Blot out implies a comparison with human records that can be erased; wash away (*kabas*) compares forgiving with washing clothing (often viewed as an extension of a person), and cleanse is drawn from the liturgical ceremonial law in which one might be purified for temple participation. These requests (cf. vv. 7, 9) stressed David's desire for God's total forgiveness of his transgressions, iniquity and sin.<sup>69</sup>

After his appeal because of God's character to forgive, David offers the reason for his petitions ("for I know") in recognizing and confessing his sin. Nowhere does he recall his past achievements or Bathsheba's complicity to lessen the weight of his guilt, thus making him a true penitent. In the words of Calvin, "His eyes and his whole soul were directed to God, regardless of what man might think or say concerning him. . . . This will be the exercise of every true penitent."<sup>70</sup>

Because all sin is an affront against God, David confesses, "Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge" (v. 4). It is true that David sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, his family and the nation, but primarily, he had violated God's standard. He had committed murder, adultery, stolen, and coveted, breaking four of the last five commandments and brought himself under God's just sentence. To sin against people is to sin against God. An important part of genuine confession is to take personal responsibility for sin.

If all sin is an affront against God, then its origin is in man's fallen nature inherited from Adam and Eve's rebellion. Concerning his original sin, David laments, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (v. 5). He

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<sup>68</sup> Waltke, *The Dance between God and Humanity*, 208.

<sup>69</sup> Ross, "Psalms," 833.

<sup>70</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 2:286.

was not excusing himself but traces the roots of his depravity from its first beginnings infected with self-centeredness and confesses his moral impotence in not being able to overcome it. His sinful passions of lust, envy, deception, and greed overcame and overthrew him. The psalmist knew that he needed to come clean before the LORD because, as Waltke explains, what he desires “is moral ‘truth’ (‘emet, i.e., faithfulness) and ‘wisdom’ (*hokma*), i.e., ‘spiritual discernment or the actualizing principle of right conduct, which is to be equated with the fear of Yahweh (Ps cxi.10; Prov ix 10; Job xxvii.28).”<sup>71</sup>

God’s mercy expresses itself in meeting the sinner’s need, extending both forgiveness and purity. In praying for pardon, two vivid metaphors are used that he repeats from his introductory petitions for forensic forgiveness and for ceremonial cleansing. First, he asks God to “blot out” all his iniquities (vv. 1, 9). The verb indicates the removal of written records from a book (as in Exod 32:32). He sees his sins as a catalogue of offenses of which he is accused or a list of debts he cannot pay. Knowing that God keeps a record of offenses, whether against men or God, he pleads for the entry to be erased.

Second, he confesses that his sins have stained him and prays for God to “cleanse” (i.e., ‘de-sin’) him with hyssop<sup>72</sup> until his dark stains are removed, and to “wash” (*kabas*, i.e., ‘launder’) him that he “shall be whiter than snow” (v. 7). Ceremonial washings were practiced as part of the Levitical law because it indicated the inner and external holiness God required of his covenant people to serve him.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Waltke, *The Dance between God and Humanity*, 209.

<sup>72</sup> Hebrew professor Robert Alter explains, “Hyssop was used in a ritual of purification. The priest dipped the hyssop in the blood of a sacrificial animal, then sprinkle it on an impure object or person to expunge the impurity.” (see Lev 14:4, 7). Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), 182.

<sup>73</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 927.

Many of the terms David employs reference the sacrificial system (“wash, cleanse, purify, blot”) as he earnestly appeals for cleansing and forensic forgiveness that he may find absolution. Longman writes, “What frightens the psalmist more than anything is that God might abandon him because of his sin.”<sup>74</sup> He knows that only by God’s creative power will he be made into a new person, so he prays for a renewed spirit (v. 10), the Holy Spirit (v. 11), and a willing spirit (v. 12). David understood that external and ceremonial washings can only be effective when the Holy Spirit applies it, restoring to him the joy of God’s salvation (v. 12).

The last part of this Psalm (vv. 13-19) are the results that follow God’s cleansing and recreating power. David resolves that his sentiments to the people he sinned against and to God will be different. First and foremost, he accepts his responsibility to those whom he has sinned against. While he cannot undo the consequences of his sin, he will serve them in a new way, learning from his own transgressions that have been forgiven, and teaching transgressors God’s ways so that they too may experience salvation (v. 13). He petitions God that he be delivered from “bloodguiltiness” (v. 14), acknowledging that he is indeed guilty of the blood of Uriah, but prays that God shall not require it at his hand. More than just warning others of their sin that they may return to God and that he would not be held accountable (Ezek 3:16-27; 33:1-20), he too would instruct sinners of God’s grace.

His second responsibility is to God where he will use his tongue as an instrument of worship to declare God’s praise (v. 15). This is what God desires, not “sacrifice” or “burnt offerings” (v. 16). If such requirements were sufficient, David would give it. This does not mean that no sacrifice at all is pleasing to God, but the kind of sacrifice he primarily desires from a transgressor like David is “a broken and contrite heart” (v. 17). Waltke and Houston are helpful here when they write,

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<sup>74</sup> Longman, *Psalms*, 221.



David does not disappoint the expectation of a festive sacrifice but surprises us with its substance. Instead of burning and feasting on a sacrificial bull, he offers the offended covenant community his broken and contrite spirit to feed upon. Neither God nor the nation, shocked and grieving over their king's defiling a loyal soldier's wife and his killing her famous war-hero husband, could stomach such a feast (v. 17 [19]).<sup>75</sup>

A humble spirit is to acknowledge that, apart from God's grace, men are helpless. Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman define what repentance is and what it is not: "A brokenhearted person is the opposite of the self-made, hardhearted person. The fundamental difference between these two types is most evident is their reactions to being confronted with their own sin (e.g., David and Saul). The contrite person repents and is humbled."<sup>76</sup>

The final two verses (vv. 18, 19) seem to some commentators as a later addition because they do not relate to this psalm's overall theme and later written "by the generations between the Captivity and Rebuilding made David's penitence their own, adding these verses to make their prayer specific."<sup>77</sup> However, "righteous sacrifices" (v. 19) can only be pleasing and acceptable to God when they express "a broken and a contrite heart" (v. 17) not just for the present but "in the future, when God's good hand of blessing again rests on the nation and builds the wall of Zion, perhaps under Solomon."<sup>78</sup> In the words of Sigmund Mowinckel: "All that concerned the king and his cause also concerned the people; nothing which happened to him was a purely private affair."<sup>79</sup>

This psalm should be read prayerfully by every believer to reflect on their own unfaithfulness toward God. He was "a man after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22) not because he did not fail morally, but because he approached God in genuine

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<sup>75</sup> Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 480.

<sup>76</sup> Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 163.

<sup>77</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 212.

<sup>78</sup> Waltke, *The Dance between God and Humanity*, 210.

<sup>79</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, quoted in Waltke, *The Dance between God and Humanity*, 188.

repentance and asked for forgiveness and restoration. Some sins may not be as blatant as David's, but all sin. What makes the Christian's sin worse than the unbeliever's is though believers know the right thing to do, they choose otherwise. This psalm is a model prayer because God's people need his forgiveness and restoration constantly, and a reminder that the kind of confession God seeks is one that comes from a "broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart." The church that reads and prays Psalms 51 is mindful that it is not one's sacrifices offered, but Jesus' sacrificial death as the basis of one's forgiveness.

### **Psalm 109**

Psalm 109 is classified as an imprecatory psalm and the superscription attributes it to David as the author. Though there are verses where the language places it within the category of individual lament, the majority of the verses (vv. 6-20; 29) are imprecatory in its tone. The word "imprecatory" comes from the Latin word *imprecari*, meaning "to invoke."<sup>80</sup> Sometimes referred to or called as "curses" against enemies of the faithful, readers find it difficult to reconcile such statements with Jesus's radical teaching to love and pray for one's enemies and so reflect the character of Jesus's heavenly Father (Matt 5:44-48; Luke 6:28; Rom 12:14). Others question how parts of this psalm can be considered canonical because of its imprecatory language desiring the destruction of his enemies.<sup>81</sup> As a result, "Christians," writes Professor William Holladay, "have had the tendency to exclude specific, or specific verses of psalms, from their worship."<sup>82</sup>

How then are these imprecations to be understood? Because the psalm reflects human emotions that includes prayer expressing anger and disappointment, especially when wronged, "it would be both fruitless (God reads our hearts) and dangerous to

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<sup>80</sup> DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 827.

<sup>81</sup> Longman, *How to Read the Psalms*, 139.

<sup>82</sup> William L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 304.

suppress those emotions rather than turning them over to God.”<sup>83</sup> In the words of Peterson, “In prayer, all is not sweetness and light. The way of prayer is not to cover our unlovely emotions so that they will appear respectable, but expose them so that they can be enlisted in the work of the kingdom.”<sup>84</sup> Because this prayer is addressed to God, the faithful leave any and all decision in the matter to God.

This psalm does not say to whom particularly this prayer was directed, other than it was written by David. In the first five verses, the psalmist felt betrayed as they repaid him evil and hatred for his good (vv. 2-5). Instead of responding to him in kindness for his love, they responded with false accusations filled with hatred. In response to their betrayal, David does not take matters into his hands, but appeals to God to “not be silent” (v. 1) and seeks refuge “in prayer” (v. 4).<sup>85</sup> The psalmist’s life was so full of prayer that his immediate response was to seek God’s face.

Words of imprecation are leveled by David against his enemies (vv. 6-20). While the previous verses speak of enemies in the plural (“they”), these verses are directed to a nameless individual; the ringleader of a group.<sup>86</sup> In any case, he prayed for God to do specific things to vindicate him. Knowing what his enemy desired against him, David asked God to return his evil request back on himself; a taste of his own medicine. The

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<sup>83</sup> Longman, *Psalms*, 52.

<sup>84</sup> Peterson, *Answering God*, 100.

<sup>85</sup> Derek Kidner explains, “The Heb. has simply ‘but as for me—prayer.’” Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, Kidner Classic Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975), 423n6.

<sup>86</sup> The NRSV adds “they say” in v. 6 making this passage the words of the enemy. However, Longman explains, “The most natural reading of these verses is that they are the words of the psalmist directed against his enemies, not the quoted words of the enemy.” Longman, *Psalms*, 379. Kidner writes, “To make the enemy the speaker of this appalling curse is to rid the psalm of its chief affront to our sensibilities, while accounting quite naturally for the long passage in the singular.” Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 423.

psalmist's specific requests are: he wanted a wicked man to oppose and accuse him<sup>87</sup>; for God to render a guilty verdict, and his prayer as sin; his days on earth shortened with a ready substitute over the office he vacates.

The psalmist also petitions for God to punish his enemy's wife and posterity so as to have no memory of them by future generations. Having a family name blotted out is considered a great tragedy in the ancient Near East.<sup>88</sup>

In verses 16-20, David gives his reasons for his previous requests in verses 6-15. Instead of showing mercy to the downtrodden, this wicked man persecuted the afflicted, needy, and despondent, even so far as taking their life. Therefore, the psalmist prayed that God would clothe him with cursing as with a garment and with a belt that holds and fastens all his wardrobe together. Taking the image further that the accuser's curse may overwhelm him, the coat "is not a piece of clothing that one takes on and off but one that stays there all the time, and it has become something that consumes him. It is not the means of his acting but the means of his being acted on."<sup>89</sup>

In the face of such hostility from his enemies, the psalmist's mood changes (vv. 21-29) as he opens his prayer with the emphatic "but You." Though in despair, David's confidence rested on three of God's character: His reputation; that God rescues those who rely on him in faith; and God who is just and will by no means allow the guilty to go unpunished (cf. Exod 34:7). First is God's reputation based on his "lovingkindness" (*hesed*; v. 21). D. A. Baer and R. P. Gordon explain that "the concept of faithfulness, steadfastness love, or more generally kindness, represented by *hesed*, has a strong

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<sup>87</sup> Kidner states, "The word *accuser*, or adversary (*satan*), is prominent in the psalm, coming again in verses 20 and 29." Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 424. This is not to suggest that every accuser is Satan, but it is possible that he influences them.

<sup>88</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Theology of the Psalms," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 280n35.

<sup>89</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, 284.

relational aspect that is essential to any proper definition of the term.”<sup>90</sup>

Second, in confessing that he is “afflicted and needy” and his “heart is wounded within” him (v. 22), the psalmist is reminding the Lord of his total dependence on him in faith and unless God comes to rescue him, his life will be “passing like a shadow”—a reference to “the ephemeral nature of life”<sup>91</sup>—and feels as though he is “shaken off like a locust” (v. 23).

Third, knowing that God is mindful of his helplessness against those who seek his downfall as “they wag their heads” (v. 25), the psalmist pleads for God’s justice to save him based on his *hesed* and asks for retribution toward David’s enemies. The psalmist is not just content for God to deliver him and punish his enemies, he wants his accusers to know that the judgment is of God (v. 27). More than that, as Kidner writes, “when the enemy calls down the worst on David, God will, instead rain down the best,”<sup>92</sup> by changing the curse of the enemy to a blessing (v. 28) and so bring dishonor and shame to his enemies.

As with most Psalms of lament, the psalmist ends in praise and adoration (22:25-31; 32:11; 51:18-19 to name a few), believing that God will not remain silent but will act against those who do injustice, and protect his people because of his *hesed* and thus cause him to worship God. David concludes on the same note in which he began—the praise of God (vs. 1, 30).

Psalm 109 is a prayer that seeks God’s judgment against those who unjustly mistreat God’s people. While many recoil at the psalmist’s words as offensive and contrary to Jesus’ teaching on love and forgiveness, it misses an important part of the Hebrew Scripture. These passages seek justice for a worshiper who has been treated improperly.

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<sup>90</sup> D. A. Baer and R. P. Gordon, “Loyalty, faithfulness, goodness,” in *New International Dictionary of the Old Testament and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids), 1997), 211.

<sup>91</sup> Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 780.

<sup>92</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 425.

Given the circumstance of Psalm 109, the psalmist displays a strong sense of justice and an awareness of what it means to be a part of God’s covenant people. These texts, then, are part of the violent struggle against injustice and against the enemies of God and those of the faith community. Additionally, these Psalms are prayers addressed to God, not curses as they are sometimes referred to, and therefore they leave any and all decision in the matter to God. The prayer seeks God’s vindication rather than invokes a curse. In David’s prayer against his accusers, he does not put an end to their lives, but in faith places the matter with God, the supreme Judge. In Abraham’s words, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” (Gen 18:25). God will decide, and the psalmist pleads for God to judge his enemies. David’s faith exhibited in this prayer includes a remarkable honesty. A godly man could certainly not pray for the success of his enemies.

### **Conclusion**

The selected categories of the Psalms in which chapter teach how ancient worshipers address God in prayer. For centuries, believers have learned from these texts how to pray. The Psalms presents a broad array of emotions—from joyful praise to despair, from triumphs to trouble, and from anger and disappointment to expressions of love. Reading the Psalms, pilgrims of faith across generations find themselves in the place of the writer echoing their prayers. Luther wrote, “This explains, moreover, why the Psalter is the favorite book of all the saints, and why each one of them, whatever his circumstances may be, find in it psalms and words which are appropriate to the circumstances in which he finds himself and meets his needs as adequately as if they were composed exclusively for his sake.”<sup>93</sup>

In the Gospels and in the New Testament churches, Christians discover how the Psalms of Ancient Israel significantly contributed to their history and theology (Mark

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<sup>93</sup> Martin Luther, quoted in Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1962), 20.

14:26; Luke 24:44; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). The Psalms have also influenced the worship of the church as the people of God are called to live in worship on the Person they address and depend on in prayer. In summary of its relationship to the spiritual discipline of prayer, Psalm 1 is a wisdom Psalm that encourages the believer to pursue a life of godliness by reading and meditating on the Word of the Lord. Psalm 12 is a Psalm of lament where the psalmist, in his distress, pours out his heart to God because evil seems to have prevailed. Believers find themselves in the same situation but can rest in God's unshakeable covenant and His promise to preserve his people. Psalm 22 is a Messianic psalm and Jesus himself prayed many of its phrases as he was dying on the cross. It captures Jesus' sense of abandonment as he experienced physical pain and mockery. Believers experience various hardships and may feel God-forsaken, but like the psalmist they appeal to God and end in praise and victory because God hears the cries of his people. Psalm 51 is a penitential psalm considered a classic passage on what genuine repentance looks like, resulting in God's grace and forgiveness. Along with Psalm 32, it was written by David after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11; 12). This psalm teaches believers not just how horrendous sin is, but that God's grace is greater than all sin. Psalm 109 is an imprecatory psalm. Why the godly would seek revenge and wish ill-will toward their enemies is difficult to understand given the fact that it goes against Christ's command to love and pray for one's enemies (Matt 5:44), yet this psalm encourages believers not to take matters into their hands and instead pray through their anger, disappointments, and injustice by submitting to God's will. These Psalms serve as an example for Christians to read and pray the Psalms to help in their spiritual growth with the help of the Holy Spirit. The next chapter will explain how Christian leaders in history were shaped by the Psalms and how they used the Psalms in the lives of God's people.

CHAPTER 3  
HISTORICAL, THEORETICAL, AND PRACTICAL ISSUES  
RELATED TO THE USE OF THE PSALMS IN PRAYER

Christian history provides important guidance in using the Psalms in prayer. This chapter will illustrate how Christians have used the Psalms in the spiritual discipline of prayer. An awareness of the historical practices of prayer using the Psalms serves as the background for the theoretical and practical issues of biblical prayer. The chapter will examine two periods from church history. First, the ancient church and its use and recommendation of the Psalms and their necessity to shape the prayer life of its followers are examined. Then two key figures from the period of the Reformation—Martin Luther and John Calvin—and how their works in the Psalms played a large part in the spiritual discipline of prayer resulting in spiritual transformation, are observed.

This chapter will be divided into three subsections of church history: an overview of the ancient church, up to the fifth century, and the Reformation period under two key figures—Martin Luther (1483-1546), and John Calvin (1509-1564).

**The Ancient Church**

For the church fathers, prayer and theology were interwoven, and their writings emphasized this interconnection of right theology motivating passionate prayer. As patristic scholar Christopher Hall summarizes, “Theology is reflection on, worship of, and prayer to the Holy Trinity, the personal, wondrous loving, inseparable, unmixed union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> To pray to God intelligibly, the Christian must know his attributes as revealed in his Word, for one cannot approach an unknown God

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 86.



who is himself the source of all things. Eastern Orthodox theologian Olivier Clement writes, “Prayer and theology are inseparable. True theology is the adoration offered by the intellect. The intellect clarifies the movement of prayer, but only prayer can give the fervor of the Spirit. Theology is light, prayer is fire.”<sup>2</sup>

Most Christians learn prayer modeled from others and through time develop patterns of speech assimilated without much thought. Pastor Timothy Keller observes that the contemporary church has not been helpful in the area of prayer since all the congregation hears are “spontaneous” expressions of worship leaders, or the closing prayer by the pastor at the end of the service: “Time-tested and carefully considered prayers are not provided as they were in times past. This means that many Christians today will have to search out such prayers,”<sup>3</sup> and that is where the church fathers can be helpful. Hall explains,

The church fathers believed that our dispositions—our deeply habituated thoughts, words and actions—are shaped by those we listen to and imitate. There are, for instance, some people who really know how to pray. King David comes to mind. A principal reason that the ancient church prayed the psalms again and again—early monastic communities would pray all 150 psalms in one day—was a firm belief that the repetition of the psalms nurtured the dispositions that fostered prayer. Through repetition, the dispositions and words of the psalmist, the fathers believe, become those of the one who continually pray the psalms. Early monastic communities offered this model to the church as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Because early Christians prayed the Psalms consistently, they progressively recognized that praying the Psalms, contributed to their spiritual growth as David’s experiences would become their own.<sup>5</sup> The African theologian from the East, Athanasius (295-373), in his letter to a bishop named Marcellinus, emphasized that the Psalms

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<sup>2</sup> Oliver Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts from the Patristic Era with Commentary* (London: New City, 1993), 183.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 246-47.

<sup>4</sup> Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers*, 89-90.

<sup>5</sup> Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers*, 90.

should be used as a guide for prayer because there is a psalm that meets every need whatever the situation. Writes Athanasius: “In the Book of Psalms, the one who hears, in addition to learning these things, also comprehends and is taught in it the emotions of the soul, and, consequently, on the basis of that which affects him and by which he is constrained.”<sup>6</sup>

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), at the beginning of his *Confessions*, wanted to address God intelligibly, or speak of God correctly. Augustine found in the Psalms the right way to address God.<sup>7</sup> Particularly, Psalm 4 had a special place in Augustine’s life. As an example, “he lived liturgically with the psalms, beginning with their appeal before his conversion. . . . In particular he quotes Psalm 4 as expressive of the stages of his life experienced.”<sup>8</sup> Prior to his conversion he attempted to find peace with God through the methods taught by the Platonist, only to discover that when it had passed away “he found himself as fiercely consumed by pride and lust as ever.”<sup>9</sup> Augustine identifies himself in reading Psalm 4 as seeing God kindle his love for him, and in that moment of discovery he called on God who gave him the enthusiasm to recite it if possible to the whole world as a protest against human pride. Psalm 4:2 in particular mirrored his experience: “When I

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<sup>6</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1980), 108-9. Saint Benedict in about AD 600 set up monasteries and prescribed the reciting of the psalms eight times a day based on Athanasius advice. Gordon Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 40.

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), xxii. Henry Chadwick writes, “He used quotations from the Psalter, which was evidently in daily use in the quasi-monastic communities in which he lived from 388 onwards.” Henry Chadwick, translator’s introduction to Augustine, *Confessions*, xxii.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 213.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, xxi. Chadwick writes, “Plotinus mysticism was grounded in his belief that the purified soul, purged of all physical contact and all images of material things, is capable of achieving a union with God which is an experience of identity. . . . For Plotinus too the experience came rarely and was frustratingly short-lived and transient.” Chadwick, translator’s introduction to Augustine, *Confessions*, xxi.

called upon you, you heard me, God of my righteousness; in tribulation, you gave me enlargement. Have mercy on me, Lord, and hear my prayer.”<sup>10</sup> Identifying his despair with that of David’s, Augustine echoes the next verse to say: “‘Sons of men how long will you be dull at heart? And why do you love vanity and seek after a lie?’ (Ps. 4:3). For I have loved vanity and sought after a lie. And you Lord had already ‘magnified your holy one’ (Ps. 4:4) raising him from the dead and setting him at your right hand (Eph. 1:20).”<sup>11</sup> For Augustine, the Psalms are an example to be prayerfully recited, for they “describe the way God enlarges our hearts, by his entering into our lives to converse with us.”<sup>12</sup> David finds his strength and dependence upon God, so those who pray with him admit their own inadequacy and find their strength in God thereby exulting and give thanks to God.

By reciting the Psalms, the Christian identifies with the psalmist as though they are his own words, for the situation of the psalmist is something he experiences stirring up his soul, and thus influenced, recites them. Whether the psalmist praises and gives thanks, needs wisdom, laments out of grief and trouble, faces pressures because of opposition or some trial he has no answer for, is overwhelmed with sin and is reading of God’s grace available to him, these experiences permeate his soul as he prays the Psalms repeatedly.

John Cassian (360-435), deacon of the church of Constantinople and one who started two monasteries in Marseilles,<sup>13</sup> echoes Athanasius’s point and Augustine’s

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<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 160.

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 161.

<sup>12</sup> Waltke and Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 214. Augustine’s assertion of the Psalms’s uniqueness among others books of the Bible is seen in the six-volume work by Saint Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 295. Cassian wrote *Institutes* and the *Conferences* as

experience: “Penetrated by the same feelings in which the psalm was composed, it is as if we become authors of it. . . . The sacred words reawaken our experience, reminding us of the assaults we have undergone and still undergo, every day.”<sup>14</sup> What makes the Psalms possible as a reflection of the experiences of those who prayerfully recite the Psalms after the psalmist is because of the Holy Spirit’s illuminating work. According to Professor Roy Zuck, “Illumination occurs in conjunction with and not apart from a believer’s diligent study and devoted prayer . . . rather than giving new truths, He guides into truth already revealed.”<sup>15</sup> In writing to Marcellinus, who Athanasius knew was going through severe trials and had an ongoing illness, he advised him to habitually read the book of Psalms and endeavor to comprehend the meaning within each because “each psalm is spoken and composed by the Spirit so that in these same words, the stirrings of our souls might be grasped, and all of them be said as concerning us, and the same issue from us as our own words.”<sup>16</sup>

One might be tempted to think that reciting the Psalms could lead to vain or “meaningless repetition” that Jesus warned against in teaching his disciples to pray (Matt 6:7). However, it is not, for it leads to the forming and molding of one’s character. Clement suggests that by consistently praying the Psalms, the “Psalmody gives its rhythm to the life of a monk and each of the faithful ought to practice it to some extent.”<sup>17</sup> Hall, in emphasizing the Spirit’s role in praying, writes, “The Holy Spirit desires for us to hear these words, to meditate on them, to speak them with our tongues and hide them in our

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instructions for the monastic life.

<sup>14</sup> The monastic movement used the Psalter and offered this model to the church as a whole. See Cassian, *Conferences* 10.11 (SC 54:92), quoted in Hall, *Worshipping with the Church Fathers*, 90.

<sup>15</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching: The Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 45-46.

<sup>16</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, 111.

<sup>17</sup> Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 200.

hearts.”<sup>18</sup> A. Jean Courtney asks, “Is it surprising that the place where God is most praised should be where we read most about penitence? I suggest it is just what we might expect. The more we think of God’s gifts, the smaller our own gifts to Him appear. No one suffers from self-righteousness who spends much in prayer.”<sup>19</sup>

In every generation the church needs a sure guide and Hall is helpful in explaining the important role of the Spirit in our prayers. He writes, “The Holy Spirit knows that we need help learning how to pray; the Spirit knows we are apt to stumble and perhaps lose our way if we exclusively rely on our own words and thoughts in prayer. . . . We need mentors in prayer, and the psalmist is one of the best.”<sup>20</sup>

One final point that needs to be said of the church fathers in their appreciation of the Psalms: the presence of the living Christ inhabited the entire Psalter. According to Waltke, two basic features of early Christianity were that the “Psalms were and are of key importance in the daily life of the Christian and in Christian community worship . . . since it was believed by the early Christians that Jesus Christ himself lived within the psalms.”<sup>21</sup> Taking the post-resurrection incident of the Emmaus road experience (Luke 24:13-49), Waltke explains that the early fathers rightly believed in the hermeneutical principle that “Scripture interprets Scripture,” and that all Scriptures, including the Psalms, speak of Christ as a basis for the early church thinkers in interpreting that the whole of Scriptures is about the Christ, and therefore “the radical power of “the Spirit” over “the letter” introduced the centrality of Christ into apostolic exegesis of the Old Testament—especially in the Psalms—in a totally new way.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers*, 91.

<sup>19</sup> A. Jean Courtney, “Prayer and the Prism,” *Joyful News*, February 21, 1935, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> Waltke and Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Waltke and Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 2

It should not surprise the Christian then, as it did not surprise the Ancient Church, that the Spirit of Christ inspired the psalmists to pray. Clement, in quoting Augustine's personal experience, writes, "When we listen to the psalms . . . we must pay attention to seeing Christ, to discerning him. . . . Yes, he will show himself to those who seek him, he who appeared to people who were not seeking him. He who saved those who scorned him will not shun those who desire him."<sup>23</sup>

Jesus specifically identified the Psalms as central to the explanation of his life and work. Prior to his ascension into heaven, while giving final directions to the disciples, he gave a key role to the Psalter in their instruction: "Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled'" (Luke 24:44). It is no surprise, then, that Christians have been exhorted through the centuries to see the Psalter not only as the church's prayer book, but as Christ's prayer book as well. As the written Word of God, the Psalms are not only words *about* Jesus but words *from* Jesus. When believers pray the Psalms, it is the Lord Himself who prays with them.

It is to the Christian's spiritual benefit to depend on the Psalter in private prayer. For in praying the Psalms, Christians pray the prayer of "one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5), who lives to intercede for his own. When Christians pray the Psalms, they pray the very words of God. They pray as they are taught to pray and speak as they are spoken to. The Lord opens their lips, and their mouths respond in praise. The prayers believers pray in the Psalms are acceptable to God, for they are the prayers of the one in whom God delights, his Son. Therefore, the Psalms are fundamentally the prayers Jesus himself prays incessantly through his church back to the Father. The enrichment of the Psalter provides for personal prayer. For the

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<sup>23</sup> Clement, *Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 201.

Psalms are actually Christ's prayer. In praying his words after him, there is peace and solace the Father longs to give.

### **The Reformation**

On October 31, 1517, the eve of All Saint's Day, a young Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany as a reaction to Pope Leo X's efforts to raise money for Rome's unfinished cathedral St. Peter's through the sale of indulgencies. As the Pope's representative in Germany, the Dominican John Tetzel came to Luther's parish to sell indulgences. For Luther, the question was: How can a person gain salvation and acceptance with God? The answer, he was convinced, was through a free gift of God's grace received only through faith. With his conviction consuming him, Luther spoke out against the blatant violation in the sale of indulgences—a manmade means of purchasing eternal life. Little did he realize that his protest on the eve of All Saint's Day would have a worldwide and historical significance.<sup>24</sup> Reformation scholar William Stevenson states,

In these Theses Luther insisted on the need of real penitence and contrition. He further maintained that there can be no human mediation between a man's soul and God. No indulgence can absolve guilt: Forgiveness rests not with the pope but only with God. In the Theses themselves there was nothing antipapal, but the condition of Germany was such that a spark was required to set it ablaze. The Ninety-five Theses struck the spark: The Reformation had begun!<sup>25</sup>

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was above all else to rescue the church from spiritual and moral disintegration. As church historian Roland Bainton testifies, "The Protestant movement appears as the great disintegrator of medieval Catholicism."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The standard biography on Luther is Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950), and a more comprehensive one is the three-volume work by Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985-93).

<sup>25</sup> William Stevenson, *The Story of the Reformation* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1959), 34.

<sup>26</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the 16th Century* (Boston: Beacon, 1952), 4.

## **Martin Luther**

Martin Luther's (1483-1546) earliest acquaintance with the Psalter was in the elementary schools where, as a child, students were trained to sing the Psalms and hymns by heart.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, his familiarity with the Psalms took place several years prior to his faculty appointment as professor of the Bible at the University of Wittenberg in 1512, having just received his doctor of theology degree on October 9 of the same year.<sup>28</sup>

Whether because it was a requirement at the University of Erfurt where he studied in 1502, or, in Professor Brian German's assessment "part of the solemn rituals of the Augustinian monastery, Luther had been reciting the psalms fervently. By this stage in his life, he had them all memorized."<sup>29</sup> It therefore does not come as surprise that his first lecture would be "on the one book of the Bible he undoubtedly knew better than any other: the Psalter."<sup>30</sup>

However, given his profound knowledge of the Scriptures in general and to the book of Psalms in particular, Lutheran scholar Heiko Oberman states that Luther's approach to "The Psalms are no more than the hollow letter if they are regarded as a liturgical task . . . that merely renders one insensitive and locks the heart. Only by pressing forward to the spirit, the spirit of Christ, will the person at prayer be released and revived, for the Book of Psalms is the book which prophesies Christ."<sup>31</sup> So continually, Luther expounded each Psalm faithfully in the order of their chapter that by the time he reaches Psalm 119 he applies himself to three daily rules for his study of the Psalms: prayer

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<sup>27</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Brian T. German, *Psalms of the Faithful: Luther's Early Reading of the Psalter in Canonical Context* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 2-3.

<sup>29</sup> German, *Psalms of the Faithful*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> German, *Psalms of the Faithful*, 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 250-51.



(*oratio*), meditation (*meditatio*) and “the experience of spiritual absorption”<sup>32</sup> or trial (*tentatio*). Because he believed in the sufficiency of Scripture and distrust in man’s faulty reasoning and understanding, that in Waltke’s words, “sought to provide an interpretation of the Psalter that was edifying for both student and teacher . . . by depicting the Psalter as proceeding from the mouth of Jesus.”<sup>33</sup>

In 1519-1521, Luther continues with lectures on the Psalter and affirms that there is no book in the Bible to which he has given so much attention. Describing Luther’s devotion to the Psalms, Waltke writes, “For he now seeks not only to exegete each psalm, but to make each one personally “his own”; he has experienced each one. This becomes for him ‘the art of faith,’ to relate the text to personal experiences with the Word.”<sup>34</sup>

Like Athanasius and Augustine before him making the psalmist’s experience their own, Luther recommends, “Practice on reading one psalm, even one little verse of the psalm. You will progress enough if you learn to make only one verse a day, or even one a week, live and breathe on your heart. After this beginning is made, everything else will follow, and you will have a rich treasury of understanding and affection.”<sup>35</sup>

The Psalms, which occupied Luther’s life and thought and he recommended as a spiritual discipline to be read and prayed as one’s own, is evident in his letter to Peter Beskendorf, who was Luther’s personal barber and known throughout Wittenberg for his trade.<sup>36</sup> In his letter to Beskendorf, in response to a request that “Luther teach him a simple way to pray that an ordinary man could use . . . Luther wrote a thirty-four-page

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<sup>32</sup> Waltke and Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 426.

<sup>33</sup> German, *Psalms of the Faithful*, 3, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Waltke and Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 426.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), 12:148.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray: The Wisdom of Martin Luther on Prayer*, ed. Archie Parrish, 5th ed. (Marietta, GA: Serve International, 2009), 29.

book dedicated to ‘a good friend . . . Peter, the Master Barber’<sup>37</sup> describing his own method of prayer as *a simple way*. For Luther, the book of Psalms provides indispensable guidance for prayer offering comfort and strength in the trials and conflicts of life, and taught that the Psalms equip and strengthen Christians in their battle against sin and the devil. Luther wrote, “From the Psalms you may learn not the work of the saints only, but the words, utterances, the groans, the colloquies, which they used in the presence of God in temptation and in consolation; so that though they are dead, in the Psalms they live and speak. The Psalms exhibit the mind of the saints.”<sup>38</sup>

Luther does not settle for anything less than urging believers to pray the Psalms, saying: “Whoever begins to pray the Psalter earnestly and regularly will soon take leave of those other light and personal little devotional prayers and say: Ah, there is not the juice, the strength, the passion, the fire which I find in the Psalter.”<sup>39</sup> Besides the Psalms, Luther’s *The Way to Pray* also included the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles’ Creed. On the relationship of the Lord’s Prayer and the Psalter, Luther said, “It [the Psalter] runs through the Lord’s Prayer and the Lord’s Prayer runs through it so that it is possible to understand one on the basis of the other and to bring them into joyful harmony.”<sup>40</sup>

So passionate was Luther in praying the Psalter that his first counsel to Peter Beskendorf was when he felt a sense of coldness and joylessness in his prayers because some work occupies his thoughts that impede his prayer, he takes his “little Psalter, hurry to my room, or, if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is

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<sup>37</sup> Luther, *A Simple Way to Pray*, 30-31.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Luther, foreword to *The Neuburg Edition of the Psalms* (n.p., 1545).

<sup>39</sup> Luther, foreword to *The Neuburg Edition of the Psalms*.

<sup>40</sup> Luther, foreword to *The Neuburg Edition of the Psalms*.

assembled and as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word . . . some psalms, just a child might do.”<sup>41</sup>

Luther’s son-in-law, Erhart von Kunheim, had a copy of his father-in-law’s 1528 Psalter filled with the Reformer’s notations and marginal notes and “reported that Luther had this Psalter with him at all times, day and night, even on his journeys outside Wittenberg.”<sup>42</sup> Reformation scholar Timothy George, analyzing Luther’s love for the Psalms, writes, “As the prayer book of the Bible, the Psalms confronted every reader with the demand and promise of God. It was a present address that required a personal response. Every Christian should take the Psalms to heart, memorize them, and ponder their meaning”<sup>43</sup> because the Psalms give life to words.

Though Luther considered Paul’s letter to the Romans “truly the purest Gospel,” the Psalms beyond any other book held a special affection for him. In his own words, Martin Luther testifies, “The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ’s death and resurrection so clearly—and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—that it might be called a little Bible.”<sup>44</sup>

In Luther’s experience with the Scriptures, the gulf between generations made no difference as the timeless Word of God bounded the ancient people of God and the present-day believer. As it was faithful for its claims in the past, so it was in every period of history. Writes Timothy George, “Luther once said that the very words of the psalmist

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<sup>41</sup> Parrish, *A Simple Way to Pray*, 37-38.

<sup>42</sup> Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 188. These notations are taken from *D. Martin Luther Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols. (Weimar, Germany: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1906-1961).

<sup>43</sup> George, *Reading Scriptures with the Reformers*, 188.

<sup>44</sup> Martin Luther, quoted by Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 186 in *Luther’s Works*, American ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986), 35:365.

present us not with ‘silent saints’ but with a living communion across the centuries.”<sup>45</sup> In the words of Luther biographer H. G. Haile, “how they talked and prayed to God, how they are still speaking and praying, so that other legends and examples present us, as compared with the Psalter, with silent saints. The Psalter creates in our minds good sturdy living saints”<sup>46</sup> that every generation of believers can learn and practice from.

What wonder then, that out of his deepest depression, he turned to a psalm and on one occasion composed his most famous hymn, “*Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott*” (“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”), taken from the Psalm 46. The lyrics of the song reflect Luther’s awareness of his struggle with Satan. In difficulty and in danger he would resort to this song.<sup>47</sup>

On February 18, 1546, Martin Luther died in the city of Eisleben, the place of his birth. Hours before his death, his longtime confidant Justus Jonas was hurriedly summoned to his bedside and he shook the dying man by the arm to awaken his spirit. “Reverend father, will you die steadfast in Christ and the doctrines you have preached? ‘Yes,’ replied the clear voice for the last time.”<sup>48</sup> Luther taught, preached, and prayed the Psalms because there was no situation or emotion, he had experienced that is not reflected in the Psalter.

### **John Calvin**

Calvin, the Reformer whose name is associated with a system of theology, studied law at the University of Orleans but after his father’s death, he abandoned it and studied theology at the Sorbonne where he accepted Reformation doctrine in Paris in

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<sup>45</sup> George, *Reading Scriptures with the Reformers*, 189.

<sup>46</sup> H. G. Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 61.

<sup>47</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 370.

<sup>48</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 3.

1533, three years before he wrote the first edition of *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In 1536 he arrived at Geneva where he began his reforms with his colleague Guillaume Farel. After two years both men were expelled, only to be called back in 1541. Calvin spent the remaining years of his life in Geneva until his death in 1564.<sup>49</sup>

In Geneva, the Psalms occupied much of Calvin's lectures, and between 1552 and 1556, it was used in many of his sermons. In the analysis of Calvin scholar T. H. L. Parker, part of the Psalms commentary, then, was written from about 1553 until 1557 and had exceeded Calvin's expectations, after which he attempted to work on other Psalms.<sup>50</sup> However, observes Calvin biographer Bernard Cottret, "The complete translation of the psalms . . . was not accomplished until 1562, two years before Calvin's death."<sup>51</sup>

Calvin regarded the Old and New Testaments as united in the unfolding drama of God's redemption in history, yet in the Psalms alone are "the mirror of the soul" where Calvin identified himself in the every life situation of the psalmist.<sup>52</sup> In the preface of his *Commentary on the Psalms*, he discloses much of his experiences autobiographically.<sup>53</sup> A general summary of the preface gives an indication why he considered the Psalter is "An Anatomy of all Parts of the Soul." Calvin, having undergone trials and conflicts that challenged his faith, found a similar experience of his own life with that of David. From tending sheep in the pastures, God called David unexpectedly and made him king over Israel. Like David, Calvin saw his own life similarly changed and ordered by God's

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<sup>49</sup> For Calvin's biography, see Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006); and F. Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1986), 31.

<sup>51</sup> Cottret, *Calvin*, 172-73.

<sup>52</sup> Waltke and Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 64.

<sup>53</sup> Parker, *John Calvin*, 40.

providence from obscurity to being a minister of the gospel. Calvin reflected on his spiritual life of the past as “superstitions, religion not God-given but arbitrarily devised by men.”<sup>54</sup> Like David, Calvin had been “brought up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay” (Ps 40:2), whereby it drew him to God by a knowledge of his blessings.

Seeing David’s experience as his, he was aware that in the natural order of things, history is not always evident that God is in control of the world judging the wicked and rewarding the good. Addressing these concerns that Calvin knew were the natural reasoning of men, he took on the burden of showing that despite a universe that does not make sense, providence is real. His arguments for God’s providence are found in his commentary on the Psalms and the 1559 *Institutes* that, in the words of Professor Susan Schreiner, “give evidence that the doctrine of providence gained increasing importance in his thought. All of his arguments show the same overriding concern: the attempt to find an indisputable foundation upon which to affirm that a reliable God controls an irrational universe.”<sup>55</sup>

His argument for the unchangeable nature of God’s attributes, writes Schreiner, “recurs throughout the commentary on the Psalms in which Calvin emphasized that God ‘cannot deny himself,’ that is, God cannot contradict his nature or act other than he is.”<sup>56</sup> Regardless of the chaos one sees in the universe, God has not ceased to care for his creatures. Calvin’s commentary on Psalm 25:6 explains,

The consideration, that although God, who from his very nature is merciful, may withdraw himself, and cease for a time to manifest his power, yet he cannot deny himself; that is to say, he cannot divest himself of the feeling of mercy which is natural to him, and which can no more cease than his eternal existence. But we must firmly maintain this doctrine that God has been merciful even from the beginning, so that if at any time he seem to act with severity towards us, and to reject our

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<sup>54</sup> Parker, *John Calvin*, 40-41.

<sup>55</sup> Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theatre of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 33.

<sup>56</sup> Schreiner, *The Theatre of His Glory*, 33.

prayers, we must not imagine that he acts contrary to his real character, or that he has changed his purpose.<sup>57</sup>

Calvin states that God cannot renounce his throne for he both governs and judges the world he created and therefore it is within his nature to be providential regardless of the disorders taking place in the world. In a comment on Psalm 7:8, he writes, “And as often as we seem to be forsaken and oppressed, we should recall this truth to our remembrance, that as God is the governor of the world, it is as utterly impossible for him to abdicate his office as to deny himself.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, when praying, writes Calvin, “the Christian can believe that God is actively governing the world. . . . God’s mercy and power guarantee that God cannot withdraw from nor abandon his creation, leaving human beings to the forces of disorder ‘without derogating from his honor.’”<sup>59</sup> These arguments show the same concern: in praying the Psalms one finds an indisputable foundation upon which to confidently declare that God controls the universe.

In Calvin’s section on prayer in the *Institutes*, he recommends that no Christian should expect anything from God unless he is first reconciled to him by the confession of sins, and “accordingly, it is no wonder if believers open for themselves the door to prayer with this key, as we learn from numerous passages of the Psalms.”<sup>60</sup> Similarly, he finds in the Psalms God’s promises and commands as a motivation to pray. Psalm 65:1-2 and 50:15 are texts he refers to of God’s invitation to everyone that God opens the door to all who call upon him that the promise given by God to the suppliant might be obtained because God will fulfill his will to those who fear him. Calvin writes, “Indeed, we may note this in The Psalms: that if the thread of prayer were broken, transition is sometimes

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<sup>57</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:419.

<sup>58</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:83

<sup>59</sup> Schreiner, *The Theatre of His Glory*, 33-34.

<sup>60</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk 3 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 860.

made to God's power, sometimes to his goodness, sometimes to the faithfulness of his promises."<sup>61</sup> Calvin knew from experience that there would be occasions where believers may grow weary in prayer. Christians can fall into despair when at the first attempt their prayers are not heard and may think of God as being angry or hostile at them, abandoning all hope of being heard and cease in their prayers. To this Calvin writes,

Let us follow hard upon that perseverance which Scripture strongly commends to us. For in The Psalms we can often see that David and other believers, when they are almost worn out with praying and seem to have beaten the air with their prayers as if pouring forth words to a deaf God, still do not cease to pray [Ps. 22:2]. For, unless the faith placed in it is superior to all events, the authority of God's Word does not prevail.<sup>62</sup>

Though some prayers will not be granted to the exact form of the request, the Lord promises to care for believers in their trials. And so will God cause his people to prosper in poverty and give comfort in affliction as manifested in many parts of the Psalter.

As early as 1543, Calvin described the Psalter's purpose: "It would be merely juggling to amuse the people with symbols whose significance is not revealed to them."<sup>63</sup> In his acquaintance with the Psalms, Calvin had an intimate awareness of the power of music. For Calvin, the only way for songs to be sung spiritually in worship was for it to be prayerfully sung well in the heart that the Psalms does for believers.

To advance in the Christian life, Calvin sees the Psalms as an indispensable guide. For in the Psalms we see ourselves (personal biography) and come to know "the being of God" (theology).<sup>64</sup> Central to Calvin's understanding of the Christian's growth

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<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 867.

<sup>62</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 919.

<sup>63</sup> John Calvin, quoted in Cottret, *Calvin*, 173.

<sup>64</sup> Waltke and Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 430.



in sanctification, the primary means that God uses is informed worship because it raises the heart and mind of the believer to the heavens.<sup>65</sup>

In his preface to the Psalms, Calvin reminds us that “genuine and earnest prayer proceeds first from a sense of our need, and next, from faith in the promises of God. It is by perusing these inspired compositions, that men will be most effectually awakened to a sense of their maladies, and, at the same time, instructed in seeking remedies for their cure.”<sup>66</sup> Calvin explains that it is within the Psalms that the believer is instructed. Therefore, for Calvin, the Psalms are the answer against dealing with life’s pains and uncertainties, and putting God consistently at the center of one’s life. Quoting Calvin, Cottret writes, “This book [of Psalms] brings us a good which is desirable above all others; it is that we not only have familiar access to God, but we are also permitted freely to reveal our infirmities to God, which we are ashamed to declare before men.”<sup>67</sup>

### **Conclusion**

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble,” writes the psalmist (Ps 46:1). From the time of God’s covenant people who used the Psalms in worship, to the ancient church which used the Psalms as a guide to pray in their monasteries, and during the Reformation period that anchored their faith in God by using the Psalms, Christians across many centuries have found the Psalms invaluable as a guide to help in prayer and grow in faith. Because God’s people will always be engaged in an irreconcilable war with the world, the flesh, and the devil (Matt 4:1-10; Eph 2:2-3a; 1 John 2:15-17), success is guaranteed to the Christian who, like the psalmist, intertwines his confession of faith in the sovereign God that transforms his life.

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<sup>65</sup> Herman J. Selderhuis, *Calvin’s Theology of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 202-4.

<sup>66</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:xxxvii.

<sup>67</sup> John Calvin, quoted in Cottret, *Calvin*, 311.

Those reading the Psalms prayerfully recognize God's presence in their praise, confession, thanksgiving, and intercession. Though approaches to using the Psalms vary slightly through history, they all welcome God's scrutinizing their hearts that they may not be afraid to approach him because of his *hesed* love, and therefore can submit to him despite the turmoil within and without and with assurance from his words: "Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (Ps 46:10).

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the project implementation and then follows with a detailed account of the four project goals and their results. The purpose of this project was to train the adult members of United Baptist Church in Carson, California in the spiritual discipline of Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms. The project had four goals: (1) assess the current practices, confidence, and ability of UBC members to read the Psalms and use them in prayer, (2) prepare a curriculum to teach participants to read the Psalms and use the Psalms in prayer, (3) train participants to begin a systematic reading and praying of the Psalms using a guided reading plan, and (4) increase participants' practices, confidence, and ability to read the Psalms and use them in prayer. Implementation of this project began on January 11, 2022, and continued through May 24, 2022.

#### **Project Promotion**

Promotion and recruitment for the project began January 11, 2022. Through the weekly church bulletin announcements, e-mail, a group messaging phone app, and ongoing weekly Bible study and prayer fellowship, twelve adult members of UBC expressed their desire to participate in the discipline of Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms. For participation to be successful, a minimum of ten was required. After recruitment for the training, twelve adults responded with a commitment in their willingness to participate in the biblical spirituality training.<sup>1</sup> By January 18, 2022, ten out of the original twelve adult participants met with me after a Bible study class and

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<sup>1</sup> Responses were through e-mail, a group messaging app, and after the weekly Bible study.

expressed their commitment to participate in the training. More would have participated but expressed that due to COVID-19 concerns, did not want to put themselves at risk, especially after some members in the congregation got infected.

### **Summary of Project Goals**

This ministry project was structured around four goals. The first goal was to assess the current practices, confidence, and ability of UBC members to read the Psalms and use them in prayer. This goal was considered successful because it exceeded more than the eight members required where ten participants completed the survey and their answers analyzed, resulting in a clearer picture of the current practices in the area of Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms.

The second goal of the project was to develop a curriculum to teach participants to read the Psalms and how to use the Psalms in prayer. This goal was successfully accomplished by developing an eight-session training curriculum for participants and was approved by three experts that earned at least a “sufficient” to “exemplary” rating.

The third goal of this project was for participants to begin a systematic reading of the Psalms using a guided reading plan. This plan broke the Psalms into structured daily readings of typically no more than five Psalms per day, which allowed participants to read the entire Psalter in one month. The guide included prayer prompts and a checklist<sup>2</sup> to allow participants to indicate which Psalms they had read. This goal was considered successfully met when each participant returned the checklist, indicating that they had read more than 80 percent of the daily readings each month over a two-month period.

The fourth goal of this project was to increase participants’ confidence and ability to use the Psalms in prayer. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test showed a positive, increase in participants’ knowledge and change in their practice of biblical spirituality.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 4.

## Goal 1 Results

The first goal of this project was to assess current practices, confidence, and ability of UBC members to read Psalms and use them in prayer. This goal was achieved in the first session as pre-training survey on Scripture intake and prayer was distributed and data gathered about current spiritual discipline practices. Prior to distributing the pre-training items, it was made clear to the participants that there were no correct or wrong answer as the survey was meant to analyze current practices, confidence, and ability in the area of Scripture intake and prayer. The results of the pre-training questions were used to develop an eight-session training course on the Psalms and prayer to improve the biblical spirituality of the adult members of UBC.

The main emphasis of the training was to improve the practices and spiritual discipline of Scripture intake and prayer and how the Psalms can help the adult members of UBC. The pre- survey revealed that 90 percent (9/10) at least agreed that they follow an intentional plan of reading the Bible. This response was important because it revealed that reading the Bible and praying played a significant role in their decision-making and consciousness of how it changes their thinking. Table 1 shows the adult participants' responses, which reveal their desire to know God's will based on His Word.

Table 1. UBC Scripture intake practices

Survey Item	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. I follow an intentional plan of reading the Bible	1	0	0	5	3	1
2. I frequently consult God's Word and pray in my decision making	0	0	0	2	5	3
3. I regularly pray as part of my decision making	0	0	0	3	3	4
4. I am conscious of how God's Word changes my thinking	1	0	0	2	3	4

In the area of prayer, the survey was encouraging in that 90 percent of participants believed that Scripture intake and reflection led them to pray. This data is helpful in that they see a correlation in the two spiritual disciplines of Scripture intake and prayer and that they are not mutually exclusive (see table 2).

Table 2. UBC prayer practices

Survey Item	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5. I am conscious of how God’s Word leads me to pray.	0	0	1	2	4	3
6. I reflect on God’s Word in my prayer life.	0	0	1	2	5	2

A challenging area in the survey of prayer revealed that many participants (9/10) felt that they were distracted when they prayed, and all participants (10/10) at least agreed and felt like their prayers were repetitive. For the use of a journal, 80 percent of the respondents did not use one to record their insights. Time also was a concern where 90 percent (9/10) agreed that other commitments made it difficult for them to spend time in God’s Word and pray (see table 3). Based on the data provided, spending time using the Psalms as a guide to prayer helps to avoid distraction and repetitiveness as well as emphasizes the importance of using a journal and the discipline of time in Scripture intake.

Table 3. UBC prayer challenges

Survey Item	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I feel distracted when I pray	0	2	0	6	2	0
15. I sometimes feel like my prayers are repetitive.	0	0	0	4	5	1
18. I maintain a journal to record God’s answer to prayers.	2	4	2	1	1	0
20. Other commitments make it difficult to make time for Scripture intake and prayer.	0	1	1	1	4	3

The final area of the survey was the participants’ perception of the Psalms and how it shapes their prayer leading to spiritual growth. While 80 percent of the adult participants read the Psalms on a regular basis, all agreed in some measure that the Psalms are helpful as a prayer guide (see table 4).

Table 4 UBC perception of the Psalms

Survey Item	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. I read the Psalms regularly.	0	1	1	5	1	2
24. The Psalms have been used as a prayer guide in Christian history	0	0	0	2	6	2

The spiritual disciplines of Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms were presented from a biblical perspective for the adult participants to make application in their lives. Enhancing these practices and identifying participant weaknesses was the point of this project.

## **Goal 2 Results**

The second goal of the project was to prepare an eight-session curriculum to teach participants to read the Psalms and use the Psalms in prayer. Development of the curriculum began November 8, 2021, before promotion and implementation of the project on January 11, 2022. The curriculum included eight sessions that covered Scripture intake, prayer, a background on the Psalms and its categories, how the Psalms were used in church history, and a reading plan and method of prayer. Sessions occurred weekly and lasted for an hour, with an added thirty minutes for questions. The curriculum was reviewed by a panel of three experts: (1) an active pastor for twenty-seven years who had recently completed his Doctor of Education in Ministry degree; (2) a Director of Missions for a Southern Baptist Association with a master's degree level, and former pastor for ten years; and (3) a retired pastor with forty years' experience who holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree in theology.

On February 7, 2022, the reviewers completed the evaluation rubric to assess the feasible lesson plans.<sup>3</sup> Five specific areas were evaluated to ensure that the project would be successful: biblical and theological competency, historical competency, practical competency, lesson elements and a devotional workbook. The evaluation rubric contained twenty-three evaluation criteria for a total of sixty-nine responses. All three expert panel members found that the lesson plans were mostly “exemplary” in most categories with one “sufficient” (see table 5) goal.

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 2.

Table 5. Curriculum evaluation rubric

1 = Insufficient	2 = Requires Attention	3 = Sufficient		4 = Exemplary	
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Biblical and Theological Competencies</b>					
Curriculum is Scripture-based.					3
Curriculum demonstrates sound exegesis of Scripture.					3
Curriculum examines a diversity of Psalm types.					3
Curriculum is theologically self-consistent.					3
Curriculum focuses on the project's purpose.					3
<b>Historical Competencies:</b>					
Curriculum includes diverse historical sources.					3
Historical sources cited accurately.					3
Curriculum evaluates historical practices fairly and critically.					3
Curriculum identifies applicable insights from historical practices.					3
<b>Practical Competencies:</b>					
Curriculum balances information with application appropriately.					3
Curriculum connects biblical and theological data to contemporary practice.					3
Curriculum consistently urges disciplined Bible reading.					3
Curriculum consistently urges disciplined prayer.					3
Curriculum provides clear examples of how to pray Scripture.					3
<b>Lesson Elements:</b>					
Each lesson includes specific time allotments.					3
Lessons are appropriate length for allotted times.					3
<b>Devotional Workbook:</b>					
Workbook covers a sixty-day period.					3
Workbook includes a sixty-day reading plan for the Psalms.					3
Workbook includes a checklist for daily readings.					3
Workbook includes sixty "devotional" explanations.					3
Devotional explanations demonstrate sound exegesis of Scripture.					3
Devotionals cover at least five Psalm types.					3
Each day's reading has suggested prayer prompts.				1	2



### Goal 3 Results

The third goal of the project was for adult participants to begin a systematic reading of the Psalms using a guided reading plan.<sup>4</sup> To facilitate this goal, a systematic reading plan was developed for the Psalms. This plan broke the Psalter into structured daily readings of typically no more than five Psalms per day, which allowed participants to read the entire Psalter in one month and to be repeated in the second month. The guide included prayer prompts and a devotional book—Dane Ortlund’s *In the Lord I Take Refuge: 150 Daily Devotions through the Psalms*<sup>5</sup>—for the participants to read to connect one of the Psalms of the day to the devotional material. The guide included a checklist to allow participants to indicate which Psalms they had read. A journal sheet was provided to write down their observations, description, and application of a particular psalm for those who wanted to go deeper in their reading and praying the Psalms.

Class sessions were held every Tuesday from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. The first session was on January 18, 2022, at the beginning of week 2, and the lectures concluded on March 8, 2022. The adult participants were consistently present in all the sessions except when one or two missed a class due to health concerns or an engagement they needed to attend to. Absences were followed up with a meeting to address what was missed and they were provided the material. The reading and praying of the Psalm (five Psalms a day) started on March 9, 2022, and concluded on May 7, 2022. On May 9, 2022, a post-course survey identical to the pre-course survey was administered and the results of both surveys were compared through a *t*-test for dependent samples, which provided a statistical assessment of the course effectiveness. A summary of the pre- and post-course survey results and the *t*-test for dependent samples are shown in tables 6 and 7.

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix 3.

<sup>5</sup> Dane C. Ortlund, *In the Lord I Take Refuge: 150 Daily Devotions through the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

The weekly sessions provided sufficient information of the course that consisted of study notes, in-class exercises, weekly assignments and assigned readings to complete before coming to the next session. In this first session the pre-course survey was distributed to the adult participants to gauge their practices of Scripture intake and prayer. They were also asked to take notes and raise questions of subject matters discussed and read that they needed clarity on.

Session 2 is an introduction to the Psalms. The session focused on the purpose of the book, the many authors, the period in which it was written and most importantly why God preserved the words of the writers as they expressed the heights and depths, joy and despair in their relationship to God. The underlying lesson was that the Psalms were preserved so that God's people throughout the centuries would be guided in how to approach him regardless of their experiences. Participants identified with the experiences of the psalmists because some situations in their life are represented in the book. Participants were also taught that the Psalms were meant to be read and prayed as expressions of our delight in him. Like God's covenant people in the past, Christians in every generation will find the Psalms helpful because every situation in life is represented in this book.

Session 2 and 3 provided participants with a basic understanding of the different categories of the Psalms and the context in which it was written (superscription). These sessions were the most challenging as I had to explain in the vernacular language (participants are all Filipinos) for some categories. For example, some did not understand what "lament" or "imprecatory" Psalms are and I had to use a Tagalog Bible to translate it in the native tongue. At the conclusion of session 2, participants were given homework to pick five Psalms and identify their category in preparation for session 3. Overall, participants learned that categorizations addressed different life situations and provide great examples in how to pray.

Session 4 focused on how the early church used the Psalms. Most of the participants knew little of church history. Participants were introduced to the early church fathers and how they taught their students to pray all 150 Psalms in a day. Participants also learned that this discipline resulted in the courage of the early church to stand against persecution and how others built monasteries to train their students to read and pray the Psalms. While it is impossible to pray through the entire book of Psalms in a day, to pray them repeatedly “is a performative, typically a commissive act: saying these solemn words to God alters one’s relationship in a new way that mere listening does not.”<sup>6</sup> Participants raised an important question: does reading and praying the Psalms result in Jesus’s words of warning to “not use meaningless repetition” (Matt 6:7)? This was addressed: it would not, for it leads to the forming and molding of one’s character, and by consistently praying the Psalms it gives rhythm to the one praying (see chap. 3), making the psalmist one of the best mentors in prayer.

In session 5, participants were introduced to some of the early church fathers, such as Augustine, Athanasius, and John Cassian, and how reading and praying the Psalms contributed to their spiritual growth, which offered an example to help others in their ministry.

Sessions 6 introduced participants to the Reformation and why the Reformers’ (particularly Martin Luther and John Calvin) use of the Psalms can serve as a model to help Christians grow in their prayers. Luther in his exposition of the Psalms taught and applied to himself three daily rules: prayer, meditation, and trial. For Luther the book of Psalms provides indispensable guidance for prayer, offering comfort and strength in the trials and conflicts of life, and prayer strengthens believers in their battle against sin and the devil. Participants were taught to follow Luther’s recommendation of practicing

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 34.

reading a psalm a day or even a single verse of a psalm, for it will progress in the Christian's spiritual life even if it is only a verse a day.

In session 7, many participants struggled with the doctrine of God's sovereignty over evil as well as trials and conflicts that challenge their faith. Participants were introduced to the teaching of Calvin on the Psalms where, other than considering the Psalter "an anatomy of all parts of the soul," he is also the God who cares for his creatures regardless of the chaos in the universe. In praying the Psalms one finds an indisputable foundation upon which to confidently declare that God controls the universe.

In the final session participants were taught the process and method of praying the Psalms developed by Donald Whitney.<sup>7</sup> Participants acknowledged that they were easily distracted in their prayers and find them repetitive (see table 3). The solution is praying the Psalms: the words are provided for us. Participants were given a guided reading plan using five Psalms a day that covered all 150 Psalms in a month, and to be repeated for another month.<sup>8</sup> They were given prayer prompts, and to accompany their reading were required to read a devotion from Ortlund's *In the Lord I Take Refuge*, related to one of the psalm for that day.

The implementation of this ministry project exposed participants to a proper overview of the Psalms and how the Psalms were used by God's people in the Bible and in church history to strengthen prayers and contribute to spiritual growth.

#### **Goal 4 Results**

The fourth goal was to increase the participants' confidence and ability to use the Psalms in prayer. The goal was measured by administering a post-survey to gauge participants' confidence and ability to use Scripture, specifically the Psalms, in their

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<sup>7</sup> See appendix 6.

<sup>8</sup> See appendix 3.

prayer life. The fourth goal was measured by inputting the results of the pre- and post-course scores for both surveys (see table 6).

Table 6. Summary of pre- and post-course survey results

Survey	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	Avg
Pre	97	110	121	130	120	120	99	116	117	122	115.2
Post	112	119	138	137	123	130	115	137	123	114	124.8

After determining the pre- and post-average score results, they were put into a *t*-test for dependent samples formula. The goal was considered successful when the *t*-test showed an increase in the participants' knowledge leading to a change in their practice (see table 7). The goal was met when the results of the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-test scores:  $t(9)=2.295, p=0.023$ .

Table 7. Results of t-test for dependent samples

	Pre-Test Total	Post-Test Total
Mean	115.2	124.2
Variance	107.7333333	169.9555556
Observations	10	10
Pearson Correlation	0.457865082	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	9	
t Stat	-2.295068853	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.023690063	
t Critical one-tail	1.833112933	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.047380125	
t Critical two-tail	2.262157163	

A post-questionnaire form was also distributed to participants based on chapter 8 of Donald Whitney's book *Praying the Bible* with the title "Evaluating the Experience."<sup>9</sup> Prior to the teaching seminar, two problems that were true of every participant were distraction and repetitiveness when praying. In the post interview after praying through the Psalms, participants' minds did not wander and go into mindless repetition. The fourth goal was successfully accomplished.

### **Conclusion**

The implementation of the project was successful and exceeded the expectations established. Based on the *t*-test results for dependent samples and the evaluation questionnaire, the participants found the course instruction for Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms very helpful and it positively influenced their spiritual discipline in the area of Bible reading and prayer. The number of participants would have been more, but due to the changing COVID-19 restrictions in Los Angeles County, some hesitant to participate in the sessions. The positive results suggest that this project can become an effective instrument in the ongoing spiritual discipline of Bible reading and prayer using the Psalms of United Baptist Church.

As an added insight, four out of the ten participants are retired and have been Christians for at least two decades. The common observation gathered was that the practice of reading and praying the Psalms at the beginning was a challenge, but after a week began to develop into a positive habit of consistent personal reading and prayer. Even though participants already followed a Bible reading calendar, none of them had been instructed on this level.

Because of the positive outcome, the common question among most of the participants was if this concept could be taught from the pulpit on the subject of prayer and using the Psalms as a means to encourage the congregation in this area of spiritual

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<sup>9</sup> See appendix 4.

discipline. This project encouraged participants in their desire for others to learn because of the instruction from which they received and benefited.

## CHAPTER 5

### MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

Many Christians will admit that Bible reading and prayer are foundational spiritual disciplines necessary to spiritual maturity. However, while many churches are well-attended on a Sunday, only a handful attend prayer meetings. Likewise, the Bible is touted as God’s infallible and inerrant Word, yet few seem to take the time to read it. Despite the many Bible translations in a variety of formats, and at least a Bible in each household, it seems that there is hardly any spiritual growth seen in many Christians’ response and decisions, which are based more on culture than what Scripture teaches. As a result, actions betray profession, and United Baptist Church, Carson, California is in the same predicament as little or nothing was done toward training members to grow spiritually. This project addressed the spiritual weakness in the adult members of UBC.

This chapter evaluates the effectiveness of this project, its goals, assesses its strength and weaknesses, and what necessary steps are needed to improve (if any) areas that are frail. The last sections of this chapter provide theological and personal reflections learned throughout the project and implementation process.

#### **Evaluation of Project’s Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to train members of United Baptist Church in the disciplines of Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms. This project is consistent with the words of the psalmist in Psalm 55:17: “Evening, and morning, and at noon, I will pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice.” Having seen Jesus pray many times, the disciples knew of his love for prayer, prompting them to ask, “Lord, teach us to



pray just as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1-4). Likewise, the apostle Paul commanded the Thessalonian Christians to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:1).

Therefore, the aim of this project was to equip the congregation to become God-centered believers not just in name but in principle and practice. To fulfill that aim, it was imperative to create a culture of biblical spirituality among the members of UBC, of which the spiritual discipline of Scripture intake and prayer is foundational.

### **Evaluation of the Project’s Goal**

The arrangement of the project purpose and goals ensured that the adult members of UBC were effectively trained and equipped in the spiritual disciplines of Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms that they may become maturing disciples of Jesus Christ. Four goals guided this project and are evaluated in this section.

#### **Goal 1: Current Adult Practices**

The first goal of this project was to assess the current practices, confidence, and ability of UBC members in Bible reading and praying the Scriptures. This goal was measured by a pre-test survey that gathered data about current practices of the participants with regard to Scripture intake and prayer. The return of a minimum of eight surveys was considered successful. The goal exceeded the minimum required because of the twelve surveys distributed, ten were received and committed to complete the sessions. More would have participated in the sessions had it not been for the COVID-19 restrictions and safety health protocols. While the desire was to have twelve participants, ten participated in the survey.

The first area of assessment in the pre-test survey was to get a clear picture of where participants were in their discipline of Scripture intake. It was encouraging that 9 of the 10 participants at least “agreed somewhat” that “they follow an intentional plan of reading the Bible.” This was important in that they maintained a steady diet of Scripture intake and convinced me that they took God’s Word seriously and saw it as foundational

in helping them mature as disciples of Jesus Christ. Another positive is that the participants saw a correlation in Bible reading and prayer and that they are not mutually exclusive. Ten out of 10 at least “agreed somewhat” that God’s Word and prayer played a role in their decision making, and 9 out of 10 at least “agreed somewhat” were “conscious of how God’s Word changes my thinking.”

An area that concerned me was the large percentage of participants (9 out of 10) that “feel distracted” when praying. A similar and somewhat related concern is possibly an offshoot that distraction leads to repetitiveness. Ten out of 10 at least “agreed somewhat” that their “prayers are repetitive.” This information motivated me to strongly emphasize why praying the Psalms is an important tool in shaping prayers as it mostly does away with distractions and helps in the content of prayer.

A final area of the survey was the participants’ perception of the Psalms. Nine out of 10 participants “follow an intentional plan of reading the Bible,” which means that they are familiar with and are exposed to the Psalms. This information was useful in helping me analyze between familiarity and devotedness so I could prepare in the sessions that covered reading and praying the Psalms.

## **Goal 2: Curriculum Development**

The second goal of the project was to prepare a curriculum to teach participants to read the Psalms and use the Psalms in prayer. The course structure content was an outline of chapters 2 and 3 with each session leading to the participants reading and using the Psalms in prayer. The expert panel that evaluated the curriculum consist of a pastor with a PhD in theology and forty years ministry experience, another with a doctorate degree that currently serves as the president of a mission’s organization and has twenty-seven years of pastoral experience, and a Director of Missions in an association affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention with a master’s degree level and ten years in pastoral ministry. Each panelist used a rubric to assess the effectiveness of the lesson plans.

The rubric covered five specific criteria to ensure that the project would be successful: biblical and theological competencies, historical competencies, practical competencies, lesson elements, and devotional workbook. A minimum of “3” (sufficient) on a four-point scale was required for each part of the curriculum. Should any area not meet the minimum score, it would be revised and resubmitted for review until it attained the level of “3” or “4” (exemplary). All three expert panel members found that the curriculum was exemplary in every category except one that received a “3.” One panel member suggested using this material in an annual conference to help churches grow in the spiritual discipline of prayer.

### **Goal 3: Implementing the Course**

The third goal was for participants to begin a systematic reading of the Psalms using a guided reading plan. An eight-week session introduced the background of the book, its authorship, categories of the Psalms, and how the book was used by the church fathers and the Reformers, resulting in God-centered, biblical prayer that transformed their spirituality.

As their pastor since 2012, I know the participants’ level of spiritual maturity, theological level of understanding, and their application of Scripture to life. Much of the curriculum content came from chapters 2 and 3 of the project, but I designed the curriculum in such a way to not be too technical, but not rob it of theological substance. While most participants maintain a daily “quiet time” in the Scripture and prayer, and even an average understanding of the Psalms, praying the Psalms was something very new to them. In the final session many questions were asked because they had not had experience reading five Psalms a day and praying through each one of them.

After going through Donald Whitney’s *Praying the Bible* material that addressed the problem, solution, and method, and giving participants a copy of a guided reading plan that divides the 150 Psalms into five Psalms for each of the thirty days in a month, and to be repeated in the second month, participants were taught that this method gives

direction in prayer and overcomes aimlessness. A list of prayer prompts were also added for them to browse through each day to prepare what needed to be prayed for.<sup>1</sup> To go deeper into their understanding of each psalm, participants were required to read a devotional book from one out of the five Psalms of the day from Orlund's *In the Lord I Take Refuge*.<sup>2</sup>

A group messaging app was utilized for the participants to be reminded of the five Psalms each day to read and pray through. A common question was, "what if I miss a day because of a difficult situation?" The answer was not to add the missed portion to the next day, requiring ten Psalms in one day, but to proceed with the designated psalm for the day. After sixty days of reading and praying through the book of Psalms twice, seven participants completed 100 percent with two missing on three days and one missing a total of five days.

#### **Goal 4: Increased Practice and Confidence**

The fourth goal of the project was to increase participants' practices, confidence, and ability to use the Psalms in prayer. The goal measurement required each member to complete an eight-week session. Participants were not allowed to miss more than two sessions. The week after the eighth and final session, participants completed a post-survey to determine if there was a positive impact gained from the sessions. Results from the pre-and post-surveys were measured using a *t*-test for dependent samples. The fourth goal was considered successful when a *t*-test showed a positive, significant increase in the participants' practice, confidence, and ability to use the Psalms in prayer. The *t*-test for dependent samples showed a positive, statistically difference between pre-survey and post-survey scores:  $t(9)=2.295, p=0.023$ .

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 7.

<sup>2</sup> Dane C. Orlund, *In the Lord I Take Refuge: 150 Daily Devotions through the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

Based on the *t*-test, there is significant areas of improvement in this ministry project. Based on the post-survey results, except for item 11 (“I learned to pray by listening how others pray; through seminars, or books.”) and item 20 (“Other commitments make it difficult to make time for Scripture intake and prayer”), twenty-three items show an increase. I am not certain why these two items did not result in an increase in the post-survey. However, it does not affect the overall results. Table 8 is a comparative analysis of the pre-test survey results and the post-test survey results of Scripture intake and prayer.

Table 8. Pre-test and post-test survey change

Survey Items	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	Change
1. I follow an intentional plan of reading the Bible	4.2	5.2	+1
2. I frequently consult God’s Word and pray in my decision-making.	5.1	5.2	+1
3. I regularly pray as part of my decision-making	5.1	5.4	+3
4. I am conscious of how God’s Word changes my thinking	4.8	5.8	+1
5. I am conscious of how God’s Word leads me to pray	4.9	5.3	+4
6. I reflect on God’s Word in my prayer life	4.8	5.3	+5
7. I am frequently convicted of my sin when reading the Bible	5.2	5.6	+4
8. I apply what I read in the Bible to my daily life	4.7	4.7	0
9. I am often aware of the Holy Spirit’s work in my life	5.3	5.4	+1
10. I am open to using other methods in my approach to reading the Bible	4.7	5.2	+5
11. I learned to pray by listening how others pray; through seminars, or books	5.3	5.2	-.1
12. I have been taught to pray the Bible	4.6	5.3	+7
13. I read the Bible when I feel like it	2.4	3.1	+7
14. I feel distracted when I pray	4.2	4.3	+1
15. I sometimes feel like my prayers are repetitive	4.7	4.8	+1
16. I use a devotional book, <i>e.g., Our Daily Bread My Utmost for His Highest</i> etc. to accompany my Bible reading	4.1	4.3	+2
17. I am able to teach others how to pray and read	4.9	5.0	+1
18. I maintain a journal to record God’s answer	2.5	3.0	+5
19. Accountability helps me to stay faithful to a time of daily devotions	4.8	5.2	+4
20. Other commitments make it difficult to make time for Scripture intake and prayer	4.7	4.6	.1
21. I read the Psalms regularly	4.2	4.9	+7
22. The Psalms are important for my spiritual growth	5.2	5.5	+3
23. Reading the Psalms shape the way I pray	5.1	5.3	+2
24. The Psalms have been used as a prayer guide in Christian history	5.0	5.9	+9
25. I can identify myself with the experiences of the psalmist	4.7	5.4	+7

## **Strengths of the Project**

Foundational to the believer's spiritual maturity is the discipline of Scripture intake and prayer. For Christians to grow spiritually, they must submit to the Holy Spirit that dwells within from the time of their conversion and regeneration, to a life of sanctification. An exegesis of Psalm 1:1-6 reveals the practice of wisdom that believers must pray by choosing God's law lest he will find himself in the counsel and company of the wicked. An exegesis of Psalm 12:1-8 can either be an individual or communal prayer asking God in humble dependence to preserve his integrity against those who use flattery to undermine the few godly men. Psalm 22:1-31 reveals the psalmist's feeling of abandonment. Though he feels forsaken because God did not answer his cries, he knows that God is sovereign and will in the end give praise and thanks to him. Believers can find comfort in praying this psalm when they are at the throes of death. An exegesis of Psalm 51:1-19 teaches Christians what genuine repentance looks like when confessing sins before God. Finally, Psalm 109:1-31 is an imprecatory prayer not to wish evil against the believer's enemies, but to resign oneself to God who alone can dispense true justice. These Psalms are pictures of varying situations that Christians may find themselves in and are a helpful guide in their prayer. The first strength of this project is giving participants an overview of the Psalms that will grow them spiritually in prayer.

Another strength of this project is that it gave insight into the Bible reading and prayer practices of adults in the congregation. It revealed that while many maintain a steady discipline of Scripture intake, they also needed to be freed from distractions and meaningless repetition in their prayers. This may be why participation in many prayer gatherings are decreasing—because they have no impact on the participants, leaving them bored. This problem of distractions and repetitiveness was confirmed by the pre-survey that a high percentage of participants agree somewhat (9 out of 10 and 10 out of 10 respectively). Surveys are helpful to address the problem and provide clear direction for future training on the importance of Scripture intake and prayer.

A final strength of this project are the spiritual gains made by the participants in using the Psalms in prayer. The last five items pertaining to the participants' perception of the Psalms indicated an increase in understanding and usage seen in the post-training survey. The participants at the conclusion of the project expressed their enthusiasm and hoped that other members would participate in the future, which indicated the value of the course.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

One weakness of this project was its promotion. Despite the announcements made in the church bulletin, e-mails, and social media, few responded to the invitation to participate. Because I did not emphasize the project as much, the congregation took it as one among the many activities of the church. This shortfall could have been avoided by emphasizing how an eight-week session could improve their prayer life. More than that, I could have developed a sermon series on the Psalms and how it helps in the spiritual discipline of prayer leading up to the project, thereby sparking interest.

Another weakness of this ministry project was due to COVID-19, which may have caused some to be fearful to participate. Instead of resignation I should have used Zoom or other similar tools that were readily available for others to participate. Also, by recording the sessions I could have watched and listened to myself to view any areas that I need to improve on to be more effective in future sessions with new participants.

A final weakness, and one that stands out, is my personal failure to practice, pray, and apply the Psalms more consistently. While I have been steady in my daily devotions, I discovered during this process that I was rushed between this project and other pastoral and family duties to the point of being overwhelmed, which caused me to not reflect deeper in reading the Psalms and failing to see that the pains I was going through would have been more effective had I implemented or tied my experience to the Psalter. A rushed reading of the Word brings no spiritual benefit, for the Holy Spirit wants us to engage with God's Word. Nonetheless, I am thankful that by the grace of

God my failure is something I can learn from and not make the same mistake in the future.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

I would like to undertake this project again in this very area of Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms. Based on the weaknesses mentioned, it goes without saying that I would incorporate some changes. The weaknesses of the project would be a starting place to build on and implement meaningful change to make the most out of the project.

The first change would be to do a sermon series on selected Psalms and why they are a contributing factor in shaping the way we pray. After the sermon series, I would vigorously promote for a month a seminar on prayer, beyond e-mail, church bulletin, and social media, by approaching members by personal invitation. Much of the promotion would be to describe the spiritual benefit it will have in the participant's life. More than just Bible intake and prayer, I will perhaps add meditation, and increase the sessions from eight to ten meetings. The future success of these sessions would not take away from the project due to these additions but would increase the project's effectiveness.

Another area that I would do differently is to record the sessions and make it available to both members and those who visit the church website, and to leave space for any response or questions. When there are responses and questions raised, it is because people desire to know the subject discussed, and shows an interest in the subject.

Another change I would consider would be to disciple an individual who desires to learn to read and pray through the Psalms. One disadvantage of a group session is that it stops others from opening up to some of their personal struggles. A one-on-one study unearths personal struggles and the teacher can also learn from the student's experience that he may not only be speaking for himself or herself but also for some of the participants. It is a rare occurrence in a group setting for participants to share their challenges, but if there is something to be learned from the prayers in Scripture, they



turned their pain into prayer and praise. In the near future, I would use these sessions to disciple others in a group setting or individually.

In my excitement to start the sessions, I missed distributing the Curriculum Evaluation Rubric to the three experts who would assess the prepared material. Although it was reviewed later and earned “exemplary” marks, with one “sufficient,” it does not excuse me from having the expert panel review it before starting the training. What I would do differently is prepare a calendar and mark it with schedules and deadlines in order to meet the goals.

Lastly, the most important thing I would do differently in this ministry project would be to personally apply to myself what I taught the participants. The temptation for me is that once this project has passed, I might set it aside, having earned a degree. Personally, I would set aside ample time and engage myself deeper into reading and praying the Psalms and not wait for another missed opportunity to happen. That way I am like the psalmist who turned his lament to praise, thankfulness, and rejoicing, knowing that God is sovereign.

### **Theological Reflections**

After twenty plus years in pastoral ministry I thought I knew all there was to know about the Psalms. I knew then that the Psalms were used by the Hebrews as their hymnbook in the Temple and that there are some popular Psalms to be recited for one’s comfort, and nothing more. However, after going through books, commentaries, and articles recommended by my supervisor, I have every cause to be grateful, as my knowledge increased. The Psalms together with the books and commentaries, revealed two things: God is holy and sovereign, and men by nature are sinful more than what we think. Even with the gulf between us and him, he speaks to us through his creation that reminds us how patient he is and how we need to approach him each day as we read his Word and pray. There are areas of the Psalms that I must admit are difficult to understand

and find myself reaching for a book or commentary, but it was an added benefit that increased my understanding of the Psalms.

I never had the opportunity to pastor a church with more than a hundred members and was limited to an ethnic church, so there is the temptation to attend seminars that promote and promise an increase in church attendance and membership without tackling serious discipleship that leads to spiritual growth. But I am convinced that the Lord is more concerned about Christians' spiritual maturity than he is about the number of people who attend. Through the recommended resources I saw myself as a student again, learning and gaining insight from commentators, which helped me gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the Psalms so that in turn I could teach others.

Chapter 3 of this project provided me with helpful information and insight on how the early church fathers and Reformers used the Psalms in their ministry in the wake of theological controversy and challenges. For example, one of the main reasons the ancient church prayed and recommended the Psalms to be prayed repeatedly (all 150 Psalms in a day)<sup>3</sup> was to promote the effectiveness of praying through each psalm.. As a result, monasteries were built, which became schools of prayer.

Martin Luther and John Calvin's acquaintance with the Psalms became their means of refuge against a corrupt Rome that left many parts of Europe in spiritual darkness. These men mastered the Psalms and wrote books on the Psalms to help and enhance the prayers of their followers. Calvin called the Psalms "an anatomy of all parts of the soul"<sup>4</sup> because it covers a wide range of human experience and emotion, as well as the highs and lows of life and life's mysteries. Luther had the same thought, and called

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher A. Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 89.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 4:xxxvii.

the Psalter “a little Bible” because everything that is in the Bible is found in the Psalms.<sup>5</sup> Studying the Psalms deeper and learning from historical figures strengthened me spiritually and provided me with a resolve to persevere no matter the cost, and to use the spiritual gifts God blessed me with to disciple the adults in the area of prayer and Bible intake as paramount to their spiritual growth.

Because of the success I saw in the post-training survey, and how many of the participants were encouraged, I am motivated to meet with young couples and use this curriculum to teach them how to pray that they may be a mini-church with their families teaching their children. This is a good starting point because many young couples in UBC need to be encouraged to become better disciples in this area of the spiritual disciplines because they were not disciples and only attended Sunday service. As a result, while they hear the Word of God preached on Sunday, and passages quoted in Sunday school, they end up as “doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (Jas 1:22). Therefore, I will present this project to every member of UBC because it will create a culture of Scripture intake and prayer.

### **Personal Reflections**

Since 1998, I have with God’s help worked to faithfully preach and teach the Word of God, beginning in Houston for the first thirteen years, and currently at UBC since 2012. Having heard the gospel since a young boy, it was not until I was in my early twenties in the Philippines that I fully understood it through the faithful preaching of my pastor that resulted in my conversion. As a young Christian, I recalled that spiritual disciplines like discipleship, reading the Bible, and prayer were disciplines that a majority of Christians practiced but were hardly taught. I was content to go on Sunday worship, looked forward to the sermon and again the mid-week prayer meetings, which many

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther, quoted by Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 186 in *Luther’s Works*, American ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986), 35:365.

believed would grow us spiritually. Much of my prayers were learned from my pastor and I did not know where to begin as far as having a method of reading the Bible. It is wrong for pastors to assume that every Christian knows how to practice the spiritual disciplines. Someone must develop discipleship training in these two basic areas that every Christian “may be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29). Furthermore, every member of a local church must desire to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). Apart from Scripture intake and prayer I do not know how one can be a disciple.

When I sensed God’s call to full-time gospel ministry, the Lord was gracious to open an opportunity for me to study in this country. However, excitement turned to frustration because as those requirements started to pour in, I was completely overwhelmed with where to begin. In hindsight, my classmates who testified that they were mentored by their pastors were the ones who made the most of their time at seminary. This is not to suggest that I have not learned anything, but that mentoring those under our care bring untold spiritual blessings to the church.

I started this ministry project with the title “Creating a Culture of Prayer for United Baptist Church.” My supervisor, however, thought that prayer is too broad a subject and so he suggested for it to be more specific and thus the title became “Creating a Culture of Scripture Intake and Prayer Using the Psalms at United Baptist Church.” The suggested books, articles, and commentaries to be read and the times of learning in the classroom stretched my mind to better understand the Psalms and how it would benefit me spiritually, which extended into this project. I thank the Lord that the outcome of the post-survey proves that praying the Psalms anchors our souls to our Creator who grows us in our relationship to Him.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to train members of United Baptist Church, in Carson, California, in the disciplines of Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms. This

project accomplished the stated goals. Through the painstaking process of research and prayer, I designed and implemented a biblical curriculum to promote meaningful change in the lives of UBC adults. Participants not only learned from me, but I had the opportunity to know them based on their questions and comments during the sessions, and responses to the surveys. The improvements based on the post-test results of the project will always be a constant source of encouragement to me.

Prior to launching this project, UBC had an ongoing Tuesday night Bible study for adults and a prayer fellowship that met on Wednesdays. Both groups agreed to be a part of this project and persevere through it until the final session. While both teacher and participants learned a great deal from the project and from each other's experience, it also brought us closer to one another as we worship the God of the Psalms. May this project continue to be spiritually beneficial not only to the present generation of UBC members, but also to the future generations that will enter its doors. "One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts" (Pss 145:4).

## APPENDIX 1

### PRE- AND POST COURSE SCRIPTURE INTAKE AND PRAYER SURVEY

The following survey was distributed to a select group of members for the purpose of focusing on their practice of Scripture intake and prayer prior to formal instruction and guided practice. The survey is almost identical to post-survey except for the inclusion of several questions related to overall spiritual disciplines practice.

## SCRIPTURE INTAKE AND PRAYER SURVEY

### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to explain the current practices and perceptions of Bible reading and prayer in your spiritual discipline practice. This research is being conducted by James Go for the purpose of a research project pertaining to biblical spirituality. In this research, you will be asked several questions regarding your personal and individual perceptions of current and future bible reading and prayer practices. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, or checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate       I do not agree to participate

### Demographic Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

PIN \_ \_ \_ \_

How long have you been a member of United Baptist Church, Carson, California?  
(Provide your answer in years, unless it has been less than a year) \_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_  
Months

Directions: Respond to the following statements by circling or by placing a mark by your agreement. The answer should align with your current practice and not with what you assume to be the ideal response. The scale is as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree,      D = Disagree,      DS = Disagree Somewhat,  
AS = Agree Somewhat,      A = Agree,      SA = Strongly Agree.

### Perception of Scripture Intake and Prayer:

- |  |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I follow an intentional plan of reading the Bible.              | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I frequently consult God's Word and pray in my decision making. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I regularly pray as part of my decision making.                 | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I am conscious of how God's Word changes my thinking.           | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

- |     |   |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|-----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 5.  | I am conscious of how God's Word leads me to pray.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6.  | I reflect on God's Word in my prayer life.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7.  | I am frequently convicted of my sin when reading the Bible.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8.  | I apply what I read in the Bible to my daily life.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9.  | I am often aware of the Holy Spirit's work in my life as I read God's Word.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. | I am open to using other methods in my approach to reading the Bible.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. | I learned to pray by listening how others pray; through seminars, or books.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. | I have been taught to pray the Bible.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. | I read the Bible when I feel like it.   | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. | I feel distracted when I pray.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. | I sometimes feel like my prayers are repetitive.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. | I use a devotional book, <i>e.g., Our Daily Bread, My Utmost for His Highest</i> etc., to accompany my Bible reading. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. | I am able to teach others how to pray and read their Bibles.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. | I maintain a journal to record God's answer to my prayers.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. | Accountability helps me to stay faithful to a time of daily devotions.  | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. | Other commitments make it difficult to make time for Scripture intake and prayer.                                     | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

**Perception of the Psalms**

- |     |   |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|-----|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 21. | I read the Psalms regularly.                      | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 22. | The Psalms are important for my spiritual growth. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |



- |   |    |   |    |    |   |    |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 23. Reading the Psalms shapes the way I pray.                         | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 24. The Psalms have been used as a prayer guide in Christian history. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 25. I can identify myself with the experiences of the psalmist.       | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 2  
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The Curriculum Evaluation Rubric was distributed to expert professionals who assessed the Scripture intake and prayer curriculum and devotional guide. The rubric critiqued theological competency, historical competency (not for the devotional), practical application methods of Scripture intake, prayer, and overall clarity.

<b>Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
1 = Insufficient	2 = Requires Attention	3 = Sufficient	4 = Exemplary		
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Biblical and Theological Competencies</b>					
Curriculum is Scripture-based.					
Curriculum demonstrates sound exegesis of Scripture.					
Curriculum examines a diversity of Psalm types.					
Curriculum is theologically self-consistent.					
Curriculum focuses on the project's purpose.					
<b>Historical Competencies:</b>					
Curriculum includes diverse historical sources.					
Historical sources cited accurately.					
Curriculum evaluates historical practices fairly and critically.					
Curriculum identifies applicable insights from historical practices.					
<b>Practical Competencies:</b>					
Curriculum balances information with application appropriately.					
Curriculum connects biblical and theological data to contemporary practice.					
Curriculum consistently urges disciplined Bible reading.					
Curriculum consistently urges disciplined prayer.					
Curriculum provides clear examples of how to pray Scripture.					
<b>Lesson Elements:</b>					
Each lesson includes specific time allotments.					
Lessons are appropriate length for allotted times.					
<b>Devotional Workbook:</b>					
Workbook covers a sixty-day period.					
Workbook includes a sixty-day reading plan for the Psalms.					
Workbook includes a checklist for daily readings.					
Workbook includes sixty "devotional" explanations.					
Devotional explanations demonstrate sound exegesis of Scripture.					
Devotionals cover at least five Psalm types.					
Each day's reading has suggested prayer prompts.					

### APPENDIX 3

#### PSALM READING PLAN, BY DONALD S. WHITNEY

This appendix contains a Psalm reading plan to be used by the participants reading five Psalms a day developed by Donald S. Whitney<sup>1</sup> and referenced in chapters 1 and 4 of this project.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 91-92.

“Psalm of the Day” Chart	
When the day of the month is...	The Psalms of the Day are...
1	1; 31; 61; 91; 121
2	2; 32; 62; 92; 122
3	3; 33; 63; 93; 123
4	4; 34; 64; 94; 124
5	5; 35; 65; 95; 125
6	6; 36; 66; 96; 126
7	7; 37; 67; 97; 127
8	8; 38; 68; 98; 128
9	9; 39; 69; 99; 129
10	10; 40; 70; 100; 130
11	11; 41; 71; 101; 131
12	12; 42; 72; 102; 132
13	13; 43; 73; 103; 133
14	14; 44; 74; 104; 134
15	15; 45; 75; 105; 135
16	16; 46; 76; 106; 136
17	17; 47; 77; 107; 137
18	18; 48; 78; 108; 138
19	19; 49; 79; 109; 139
20	20; 50; 80; 110; 140
21	21; 51; 81; 111; 141
22	22; 52; 82; 112; 142
23	23; 53; 83; 113; 143
24	24; 54; 84; 114; 144
25	25; 55; 85; 115; 145
26	26; 56; 86; 116; 146
27	27; 57; 87; 117; 147
28	28; 58; 88; 118; 148
29	29; 59; 89; 119; 149
30	30; 60; 90; 120; 150
31	119

APPENDIX 4  
PSALM CHECKLIST

The checklist was used by participants at the beginning of their reading five Psalms a day. Because they were required to go through the entire Psalms in thirty days, and repeat in the next 30 days, participants were granted permission to make extra copies.

## Psalm Checklist

- |                                   |                                   |                                    |                                    |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 1  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 41 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 81  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 121 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 2  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 42 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 82  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 122 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 3  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 43 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 83  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 123 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 4  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 44 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 84  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 124 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 5  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 45 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 85  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 125 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 6  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 46 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 86  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 126 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 7  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 47 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 87  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 127 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 8  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 48 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 88  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 128 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 9  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 49 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 89  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 129 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 90  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 130 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 11 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 51 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 91  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 131 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 52 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 92  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 132 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 13 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 53 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 93  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 133 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 14 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 54 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 94  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 134 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 55 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 95  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 135 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 56 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 96  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 136 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 17 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 57 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 97  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 137 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 58 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 98  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 138 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 19 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 59 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 99  | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 139 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 60 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 140 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 21 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 61 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 101 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 141 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 22 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 62 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 102 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 142 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 23 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 63 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 103 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 143 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 24 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 64 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 104 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 144 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 65 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 105 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 145 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 26 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 66 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 106 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 146 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 27 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 67 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 107 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 147 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 28 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 68 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 108 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 148 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 29 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 69 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 109 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 149 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 30 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 70 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 110 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 150 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 31 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 71 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 111 |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 32 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 72 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 112 |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 33 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 73 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 113 |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 74 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 114 |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 75 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 115 |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 36 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 76 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 116 |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 37 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 77 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 117 |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 38 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 78 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 118 |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 39 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 79 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 119 |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 40 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 80 | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalm 120 |                                    |

## APPENDIX 5

### PRAYING THE BIBLE, BY DONALD S. WHITNEY

This appendix contains a detailed summary method of the concept of praying the Bible as developed by Donald S. Whitney and referenced in chapter 4 of this project.



## PRAYING THE BIBLE

### Selected Texts

Many Christians feel defeated in their prayer lives. To pray even five-to-seven minutes seems like an eternity, and their minds wander much of that time. “I guess it’s me,” many conclude. “I’m just a second-rate Christian.” No, if you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and generally seeking to live in obedience to God’s Word, then the problem likely isn’t you, but your method. Of course, there is no method that will enliven prayer for those who do not have the Holy Spirit. But those who are indwelt by the Spirit have received from God “the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Those who have been given the Holy Spirit have by that Spirit a new Fatherward orientation, a new Heavenward orientation. In other words, those indwelt by the Holy Spirit really want to pray. And yet, while they believe in prayer and want to pray and can’t imagine ever totally abandoning prayer, when they do pray it’s frustrating. Their hearts are often cold, their minds can’t stay focused on prayer, and frankly, prayer is often boring. Thus many conclude, “I’m a second-rate Christian.”

### I. THE PROBLEM

Our problem in prayer is . . . we say the same old things about the same old things.

Praying that way is often boring. When prayer is boring, we don’t feel like praying. And when we don’t feel like praying, it’s hard to concentrate in prayer and to pray for very long.

Our problem is not that we pray *about* the same old things. To pray about your . . .

- Family
- Future
- Finances
- Work or schoolwork
- Church or ministry
- And the “current crisis” is normal. If you’re going to pray about your life, these things *are* your life.

So our problem in prayer is not that we pray *about* the same old things, but that we *say* the same old things about the same old things. That’s boring. When prayer is boring we don’t feel like praying. And when we don’t feel like praying, it’s hard to pray for any length of time or with much consistency.

### II. THE SOLUTION

What’s the solution? Whatever it is, it must be fundamentally simple. For God has children of all ages, IQs, educational levels, etc. If He expects (and invites) all His children to pray, then consistent, meaningful prayer must be doable by all kinds of people. And if it were not possible for you—with all your Christian advantages (such as proximity to good churches, accessibility to Christian books, recordings, and other media, etc.)—to have a meaningful prayer life, then what of the tens of millions of Christians without these things?

Here's the solution: when you pray, pray through a passage of Scripture, especially a Psalm.

### III. THE METHOD

Let the words of Scripture become the words of your prayers. For example, if you pray through Psalm 23, read "The Lord is my shepherd," and thank Him for being your shepherd. Ask Him to shepherd your family that day, to guide, protect, and provide for them. Pray that He will make your family members His sheep; that they will look to Him as their shepherd. Ask Him to shepherd you through the decision you must make about your future. Pray for Him to bless the undershepherd at your church, shepherding him as he shepherds the church, etc. When nothing else comes to mind, go to the next line—"I shall not want"—and continue to pray.

Simply go through the passage, line-by-line, praying what you find in the text or what it brings to mind. If nothing comes to mind, or if you don't understand the verse, go to the next. You might choose to linger long on one verse. Conversely, there may be only a handful of matters that prompt prayer as you go through many verses. Nothing says you have to pray over every verse.

Continue in this way until (1) you run out of time, or (2) you run out of Psalm.

One approach to choosing a Psalm to pray through is the "Psalms of the Day" approach. This divides the 150 Psalms into 5 Psalms for each of 30 days in a month. Take the day of month as your first Psalm. Then keep adding 30 to that number until you get 5 Psalms. So on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, your first Psalm is Psalm 15. To Psalm 15, add 30 to get the next one, Psalm 45. These would be followed by Psalm 75, then 105, and 135. (On the 31<sup>st</sup>, use Psalm 119.) Take 30 seconds to scan these five Psalms, then choose one to pray through. One advantage of this method is that gives you direction when it's time to pray and defeats aimlessness.

*The Psalms* are the best place in Scripture from which to pray Scripture. This is because of the original purpose and usage of the Psalms. The Psalms were songs inspired by God for the purpose of being reflected in song back to God. Moreover, there's a Psalm for every sigh of the heart. The entire range of human emotion is recorded in the 150 Psalms.

Perhaps the second-best place in Scripture from which to pray Scripture is *the New Testament letters*. These are so densely packed with truth that virtually every verse suggests something to pray about.

It is also edifying to pray through *the narrative passages of Scripture*. Unlike praying through the Psalms or New Testament letters, however, a different approach must often be used with the narrative passages. Instead of looking at each verse almost microscopically, in a narrative passage it's usually easier to consider it paragraph-by-paragraph, looking for the "big ideas" of the story.

Once you actually experience praying through a passage of Scripture, you'll likely be able to turn to any part of the Bible and pray through it. You won't need these notes to remember how to do it the second time. Like riding a bicycle, you never forget.

By praying through a passage of Scripture, you'll find yourself praying about most of "the same old things," but in brand new ways. You'll also find yourself praying about things you would never think to pray about.

Do not try to lead a *group* in praying through Scripture until most of the members of the group are familiar with praying through Scripture as *individuals*. When praying through Scripture with a group—whether the group is a family, a class, or a church prayer meeting—consider these suggestions:

- Good—Assign a verse to each person and have each pray through that particular verse.
- Better—Read the Psalm aloud (or have each read it silently), then ask each to pray based upon a verse that particularly impressed them.
- Best—Read the Psalm, then (you as the prayer leader) call out—one at a time as needed—the phrases or verses you think are the most conducive to prayer. Those willing to pray would pray as inclined to do so after one or more of the phrases or verses you call out.

The testimony of George Mueller.

The observation of Charles Spurgeon.

The examples of Jesus in Matthew 27:46 and Luke 23:46, and the church in Acts 4:23-26.

#### **IV. THE CONCLUSION**

Jesus prayed the Psalms. The early church prayed the Psalms. Great Christians like George Mueller prayed the Psalms. Why not you?

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APPENDIX 6  
EVALUATING THE EXPERIENCE,  
BY DONALD S. WHITNEY

This appendix contains a summary from chapter 8 of Donald S. Whitney's book, *Praying the Bible* to evaluate the experience by participants after praying the Psalms.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 65-78.

EVALUATING THE EXPERIENCE  
BY DONALD S. WHITNEY

Which best describes your experience after reading and praying the Psalms?

You can have more than one answer.

1. My mind did not wander.
2. My prayer was more about God and less about me.
3. The time was too short.
4. It seemed like a real conversation with a real person.
5. The Psalm spoke directly to the life situation I am in right now.
6. I thought more deeply about what the Bible says.
7. I had greater assurance that I was praying God's will.
8. I prayed about things I normally do not pray about.
9. I prayed about the things I normally do pray about but in new and different ways.
10. I did not say the same old things about the same old things.

APPENDIX 7  
PRAYER PROMPTS

This appendix contains prayer prompts to assist participants as they read and pray through the Psalms.

## Prayer Prompts

1. Is there a loved one whom you want God to save?
2. Is there an illness you want God to heal?
3. Is there a bad habit you want God to break?
4. Is there a spiritual discipline or disciplines you want God to cultivate?
5. Is there a person with whom you have a broken relationship you want God to restore?
6. Is there an area of ministry you want God to bless?
7. Is there a financial bondage you want God to get you out of?
8. Is there a missionary family that you want God to help and encourage?
9. Is there a war you would like God to stop?
10. Is there an injustice or racial tension you want God to overcome?
11. Do you want God to end all forms of abortion, same-sex marriage, and homosexuality?
12. Do you want God to be glorified in your suffering, persecution, and all hardships?
13. Do you want God to intervene in marriages that are in trouble?
14. Is there a situation you want God to intervene in and give you wisdom?
15. Is there pride in you or others that God needs to humble?
16. Are there Christians who are depressed you want God to strengthen?
17. Do you want God to bring revival to your church and end all disunity?
18. Do you want God to give you courage to share the gospel?
19. Do you want God to break habits of worldliness?
20. Do you want God to make you love reading His Word and prayer?

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## ABSTRACT

### CREATING A CULTURE OF SCRIPTURE INTAKE AND PRAYER USING THE PSALMS AT UNITED BAPTIST CHURCH IN CARSON, CALIFORNIA

James Karel Garcia Go, DEdMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Joseph C. Harrod

This ministry project was designed to teach Scripture intake and prayer using the Psalms at United Baptist Church in Carson, California. This instruction increased knowledge and enhanced the practice of basic spiritual disciplines among the members of this church. Chapter 1 explains UBC's ministry context, rationale, purpose, goals, research methodology, definitions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 describes the biblical and theological understanding and basis for instruction of the practice of Scripture intake and prayer through the exegesis of selected Psalms: Psalms 1, Psalm 12, Psalm 22, Psalm 51, and Psalm 109. Chapter 3 explains the church's historical understanding and instruction by using the Psalms in the practice of Scripture intake and prayer by briefly analyzing Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, Puritan, and Modern era thought on the subject. Chapter 4 details the production, implementation, and an analysis of the results for the ministry project. Chapter 5 offers an overall evaluation of the project's success, with suggestions for improvement and further development.

## VITA

James Karel Garcia Go

### EDUCATION

BA, Central Philippine University, 1990  
ThM, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1998

### MINISTERIAL

Senior Pastor, Philippine Trinity Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, 1998-2009  
Senior Pastor, Calvary Fellowship Church, Houston, Texas, 2009-2011  
Adjunct Professor, Houston Baptist University, Houston, Texas, 2006-2011  
Senior Pastor, United Baptist Church, Carson, California, 2012-