

Summer in the Psalms

Psalm 8

Introduction to the Psalms:

1. Worldwide glory (1-2)

- Exodus 3:13-15; Philippians 2:9-11

2. Revealed through humans (4-8)

- Matthew 19:14, 18:2-4; Genesis 1:26-27

3. Worldwide glory (again) (9)

- John 13:17

How to pray this prayer:

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com



West Valley Church
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Psalm 8

Today we are beginning our sermon series for this summer called "Summer in the Psalms." I love the artwork and the design of the platform for this series, don't you? I have to thank Pastor Jason for the artwork of the post cards – in English and in Spanish! And I have to thank Pastor Roger's Creative Team for coming up with the ideas of the trees and then creating the design for "Summer in the Psalms". I think these images and the platform set up is appropriate, after all this is Yakima, the *Psalms* Springs of Washington, right? Hopefully it will be after we're done with this series!

I can recall when I first started reading the Bible, I wondered what the deal was with the book of "Palms." I wondered if it had anything to do with the palm branches and Palm Sunday. I was a little embarrassed, but I had to ask my youth pastor how you pronounce it with that "s" in there. P-Salms? Palms? Finally, I found out it's not the "s" that's silent, it's the "p" that's silent.

If you are like most people, you've read a few of the Psalms when you were dealing with a particularly difficult issue, or maybe you saw them on your way reading through the Bible. But many of us have missed the incredible depth and richness of the Psalms. We're going to use the Psalms as a guide to prayer. In fact, our goal is that, by the time we are through, you will have a greater ability to pray, in greater depth and authenticity, no matter what you are praying about or what you are going through.

So if you don't mind, I'd like to begin by giving you an overview of the Psalms, then what our plans are for this series, and then we're going to begin by looking at one Psalm in particular today. Then, each week we'll look at another Psalm.

As far as this introduction goes, you don't have to write all the things down; just write down what you want to remember.

Probably the easiest thing to establish first is in the title – the Book of Psalms, the word "Psalms" is plural. In other words, it is a collection of 150 Psalms, and each one is a "Psalm." So, if you are referring to one of them, say the 23rd one, you would call it "Psalm 23" or "The 23rd Psalm," but it is not "Psalms 23." Make sense? That might be a simple grammatical thing, but it's important to remember so that you can understand what the book really is, because it is a collection of 150 poetic prayers or songs. I'll go into more detail on that in a second, but actually, whether they are poems or songs, they are *all* prayers. They are prayers that originally were either to be read or sung, but still they are *all* prayers. So they are going to teach us how to pray.

Okay, so I'm going to give you some background information that might not seem super exciting at first, but still it's important to know, and the more we get into this background information, the more interesting it will actually get. Trust me?

First, "there is probably no Old Testament book more familiar to Christians than Psalms. We catch snatches of the Psalms in the New Testament, we sing them in choruses and hymns, and we recite them in worship. Instinctively, we turn to them for comfort, confidence, and confession. With good reason Martin Luther called this the 'book of all the saints.' Everyone, in whatever situation he or she may be, can find words and Psalms that fit the situation as if they were put there just for his or her sake.

(But) if we are honest ... most of us would have to admit that we use a few Psalms a [lot,] but others not at all. When we *do* read the Psalms, we hear strange things: the psalmist cursing his enemy, scolding and complaining to God, claiming to be righteous. Then there is the difficulty of trying to understand what life was like in the ancient Near East about three millennia ago."¹

Also, these aren't the only poems in the Bible; over and over again, "the Old Testament repeatedly breaks out into poetry. Even its narratives (like Genesis and Exodus and Kings) are graced here and there with a couplet or a longer sequence of verse to make some memorable point...and its prophecies (are) predominantly [poetic]... (but) the Psalms are the *main* body of poems in [the Bible]."²

The book itself is a *collection of collections*.³ It has an introduction – the first two chapters, and then is a collection of five compiled books, and then concludes with the last five chapters.

Almost half of the Psalms were written by David (73 of them), but other authors are Asaph (12), the sons of Korah (11), a couple by a couple of other guys (Heman and Ethan, 2), and even Solomon and Moses have a few (3). A third of them are anonymous (49). They actually came to be used by the choirs that sang in Israel's Temple, but it's not a hymnbook. After the Babylonian captivity, the Israelites took this group of poems and compiled them into the book of Psalms.

The best way to understand how it is structured is to start with the last five chapters, 146-150. They are filled with praise to God, and each one begins and ends with the word "hallelu-yah," which is a Hebrew command to tell a group of people to praise "Yah" – a shortened version of the divine name, Yahweh. This underlying message is through all of the Psalms.

Then, you might notice your Bible shows section headings for five large sections: "Book 1" is 3-41, Book 2 is 42-72, Book 3 is 73-89, Book 4 is 90-106, and Book 5 is 107-145. Again, the last five books end with stirring praises to God.

¹ Stephen J. Lennox, *Psalms: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1999), 13.

² Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 13.

³ The following information is from the video, *Overview: Psalms* by The Bible Project, <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/psalms/>

Now we can look at the first two chapters, which are introductions, and from them we can see how they sort of set the stage for the structure of each of the five books.

The first chapter talks about how blessed a person is who reads and meditates day and night on the Torah, or the “teaching,” which refers to the *five* books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). These are the basis and foundation of all Jewish society, morals, and beliefs. Moses authored those five books. How many sections of the Psalms are there? *Five*. So the Psalms were written to give a new way of teaching the Torah, *designed to help God’s people pray* as they strive to obey God’s commands in the Torah. Got that? Pretty cool, huh? That’s all laid out in Psalm One.

Psalm Two is a poetic reflection of God’s promise to David from 2 Samuel 7, in which God promises to one day send a Messiah to be the eternal King to rule over all of God’s creation and defeat evil. It concludes by saying that all those who take refuge in the Messiah will be “blessed” – the same word that’s used to open Psalm One. So Psalm One is setting the stage for a new way to learn and pray and obey the Law, and Psalm Two follows it up with the necessity of the Messiah to obey the Law. Is that cool?

So together, these two chapters tell us that:

Psalms is the prayerbook of God’s people who are striving to be faithful to the Torah while they wait for the Messiah to come and establish God’s Kingdom.

And you can see these two themes throughout each of the five collection books that follow.

Did you know that? Hopefully that helps you, so that you can begin to read them realizing that

Psalms is a book of prayers to help you obey God’s Word and stay faithful to the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Now, there are all types of different prayers in the book of Psalms, scattered throughout all 150 chapters, or poems. Different scholars have categorized them in all kinds of different ways. But for our series, we are going to look at seven different categories, or types, of Psalms:

One type (and we’re going to look at one of these in just a moment), is “Praise and Thanksgiving.” There are a lot of these, and we’ll look at three of them by the time we’re through with this series.

Another type we’ll look at is “Royal/Messianic” Psalms. These are specifically about the Messiah. Another type that we’ll be looking at is the “Wisdom” Psalms. These are instructional, much like the book of Proverbs. Another type are the “Liturgical” Psalms. These are poems written specifically to be used in worship settings, and we’ll use them in similar ways. The fifth type that we will be looking at is the Psalms of “Lament.” These are agonizing poems that can be prayed during times when we are really depressed or discouraged or facing dire circumstances. The sixth type we’ll look at are called the “Imprecatory” Psalms. These are going to be

very interesting to look at. These are angry Psalms that call down curses on people. The writers actually pray that their enemies' teeth will be shattered by chewing on rocks, and it gets worse from there. How do we make sense of *that*? Stay tuned!

Finally are the "Penitential" Psalms. These are poems of confession to God. They are deep and heartfelt and honest and authentic ways to pray to God and confess and find forgiveness.

So even though there are five collections or books, within those five books are lots of different *styles* of poems or prayers, and it's those *styles* of prayers that we are going to be looking at together in this series.

Does that sound like a good plan to you?

Great. So let's take a brief look today at Psalm 8. This is a praise and thanksgiving prayer, and it is an incredibly beautiful and powerful Psalm to pray. We actually have a video that presents Psalm 8 to us by reading it. Even though it's via video, let's honor the fact that it is God's Word by standing together as we watch and listen.

Play video

Thank you! You can be seated.⁴ I'd like to walk us through this amazing prayer of praise, and then I'll show you how to use it in prayer. And, by the way, you are going to see that the Gospel is deeply imbedded in this Psalm.

The first thing we need to see, and it's hard to miss, is the statement of...

1. ***Worldwide* glory.** (vs. 1-2)

The very first word of this Psalm is "YHWH." This is more than a declaration about his name; this is insisting on his name causing an energetic celebration!

In case you didn't know, "YHWH" is the divine name that God used when Moses asked God what his name was. This is the story in Exodus: Moses said to God:

"Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I am who I am. (*hint: that's the word YHWH*) This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to

⁴ Sources of research:

David Thompson, *Psalms 1-72: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 2015)

Stephen J. Lennox, *Psalms: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1999)

Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973)

Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985)

John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Ps 8

Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’

“This is my name forever,
the name you shall call me
from generation to generation.” (Exodus 3:13-15, niv)

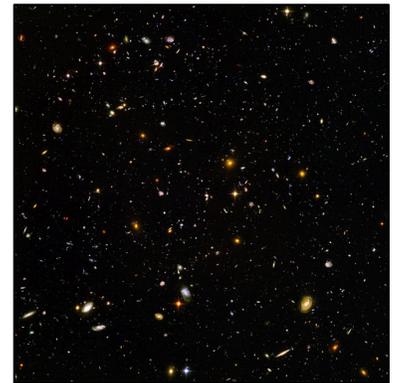
By the way, here’s a hint: whenever you are reading your Bible and you see the word “LORD” in all capital letters, that’s there to tell you that in the original language manuscript, the name “YHWH” was being used.

That name is considered so holy to Jews that they don’t speak it or write it. In their minds it is so holy that for it to be spoken from a sinful voice would be desecrating it. Also, if they wrote it down, the paper might get messed up or stepped on or thrown away, which would also desecrate the name. So they don’t speak it or write it, despite the fact that it is used nearly 7,000 times in the Old Testament. In the New Testament this name applies to Jesus the Messiah. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Philippi about the holy name of Jesus. Keep in mind that Paul had been a devout Jew, so he knew how holy the name was. So with full understanding of the holiness of the Name, Paul wrote:

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11, niv)

So from the beginning of Psalm 8 we are praising God the father *and* God the Son, Jesus Christ.

If you stand outside on a dark, clear night and look up into a star-studded sky it fills you with a sense of God’s splendor. I remember as a teenager, before I accepted Christ but after I’d heard that he loved me, one summer night I was looking up in the night sky at the stars and I was overwhelmed with the immensity of God’s creation – and therefore God who is bigger than *that* – and it caused me to weep at the thought that he knew me and loved me. That may have been the experience that inspired King David to write Psalm 8. He begins, however, by praising God not for natural wonders, but for God’s name.



David knew that God’s name was more than the title given Him; it describes God’s nature. Yahweh (LORD), meaning “I am who I am,” is a name worth praising, because it points out the eternal nature of God as God revealed himself to Israel as a people. By making His name known, Yahweh gave Israel privileged access to His ear and heart. To think that this eternal God, who created the heavens with His word, had linked himself with Israel filled David with praise.⁵ The same thing should be true for us: that this eternal God, who created the heavens with his word, has linked

⁵ Stephen J. Lennox, 49.

himself to *you* through the life and death and resurrection of his one and only Son. And that should fill your heart with praise.

There's something else that might help you to know how incredible this understanding of God is. In the culture of that time, humans were considered the lowest part of creation. They believed that the greater gods created the lesser gods, and made them do all the meaningless work and toil and labor. So, the lesser gods made humans to do all the disgusting labor.

It is against this backdrop of a perspective of humans that Psalm 8 says that not only is there one God who is revealed to us, to speak his name is to speak of him via his words and deeds that reveal him, and we are told that God has chosen to be...

2. ***Revealed through humans.*** (vs 4-8)

According to Psalm 8, humans are far from being the least of God's creation; humans are actually *the way* that God reveals himself! He has chosen *us* and his relationship to us, to show how loving, forgiving, powerful, and fatherly he is.

In fact, God's strength is best revealed in the *least* of humans: in *infants*. Do you know why? Because infants show absolute trust and faith in their parent or parents. Infants completely trust that they will be taken care of and protected. That is the exact same way that we can trust God; that is the exact same way that God takes care of us. By the way, that's why it's so devastating when parents break their children's trust.

This was very important to Jesus. When the disciples were trying to stop parents from bringing their children to Jesus so he might bless them, Jesus sternly rebuked his disciples and he said:

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Matthew 19:14, niv)

This Psalm is also *exactly* what Jesus was thinking of when he did and said this: He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And Jesus said:

“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:2-4, niv)

Psalm 8 says it is *that* kind of childlike faith that defeats every enemy and every stronghold set up against us, because it is God who defends and protects us, not by our own strength.

And, in case we older humans start to think we ourselves *are* the glory of God, this Psalm goes on to ask,

“...what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” (Psalm 8:4, niv)

The indication is that we are frail and weak – *without God*. God provides even every single breath we take. And still, God has revealed himself in us! Remember that at creation, when God first made men and women, we are told that God said:

“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27, niv)

It’s worth pointing something out here: you might wonder what it means in verse 5 that we are made a little lower than the angels... the word “angels” means either “heavenly counsel” – as in God’s heavenly hierarchy, or it’s more easily translated “angels.” The point is that God has given us a privileged position – just below angels in authority, and to us God has given the responsibility to take care of God’s creation – the earth, the plants, the animals – all of it. And, God became one of us – one of his own creation – in his Son Jesus Christ. When the angels rebelled, they were cast out of heaven and are destined for hell. When *we* rebelled against God, his Son gave his life in our place, so that if we accept him, we can be back in relationship with God, and one day spend forever with him. And – if that weren’t enough – God has given us his own Holy Spirit to live within us! Once again, we have the image of God within us! God reveals his glory in us by his own presence!

One last thing before we move on: when this Psalm says that God’s glory is revealed in humanity, it doesn’t mean just Jews or Christians. It means ALL of humanity. That means that the image of God is in *every person* on this planet, whether you agree with their race, their immigration status, their gender, or their sexuality. Listen folks: we are explicitly told not to judge people, time and time again in the Bible. Only God gets to do that, and quite frankly he’s the only one I trust to do it. We *are* told to love and respect *all* people. This Psalm clearly tells us that God reveals himself in EVERY human, no matter how good or evil they might be. That’s why we are supposed to treat EVERY human with love and respect, whether they are Christians or not.

Then in verse nine this prayer concludes with...

3. ***Worldwide* glory (*again*)** (9)

This prayer opens and closes with praise to God as a theological bracket and context from which to view our lives and nature as humans. How majestic is his name in all the earth!

On a YouTube video, astronomer Dr. Peter Edwards explains the majesty of the universe. He says, “You will never, ever, get your head around how big the universe is. It is just enormous. There is no way, I think, that the human mind can comprehend the true immensity of the universe. We are happy with the size of an elephant, or the size of a tree, or maybe even the size of (a) cathedral. But if we go beyond that our brains just start to run out of gas.”

He goes on to say, “We pointed the Hubble telescope at what ... appeared to be a very ordinary patch of the night sky. If you imagine holding up your finger with a grain of sand on it and looking at the patch of sky that grain of sand blocks out, that’s the field that the (Hubble) telescope zoomed in to.

What the telescope saw was incredible. There are 10,000 galaxies in a patch of sky the size of a grain of sand held at arm’s length. If this tiny patch of sky is like every other, then we can calculate how many galaxies are out there.

The visible universe contains around 100 billion galaxies. Each one of those galaxies contains around about 100 billion stars. That means the *visible* universe contains something like 10,000 million million million stars. That means there are more stars in the visible universe than there are grains of sand on the earth.”⁶

The God who created all of that has revealed himself to you and through you to the people around you. How much he must love you! The brilliant scientist Sir Isaac Newton said that he could take his telescope and look millions and millions of miles into space. Then he added, “But when I lay it aside, go into my room, shut the door, and get down on my knees in earnest prayer, I see more of Heaven and feel closer to the Lord than if I were assisted by all the telescopes on earth.”

God’s creation is immense and vast and incredible. This is repeated all through the Bible. But at the same time, the sad story of Scripture also shows how we as humans continually squander our great responsibility to care for God’s creation. Instead of choosing “stewardly dominion,” we keep choosing “domination and exploitation.”⁷ Which is exactly why, considering the glory of humankind, that we needed the “second Adam” – Jesus Christ – to restore us to our ability to have a childlike relationship with God as our Father, and for us to return to being careful caretakers of God’s creation.

Because Psalm 8 ends exactly as it started suggests that the greatness of humanity is only and always best realized and most fulfilled when it returns to a God who is greater than us. We can only reach our fullest potential as humans when we allow the glory of God to be revealed in us. Only when we can say, “Oh Lord, our Lord,” or “God our sovereign,” can we truly experience the glory that is ours.

So, you have a couple of assignments this week: first is to pray this prayer daily using these steps (write these down):

- 1. Read and pray Psalm 8.**
- 2. Praise God for his immense power and glory.**
- 3. Confess your independence, for living in your own strength, and offer yourself to him in child-like faith.**
- 4. Acknowledge your need for Christ and your dependence on him.**
- 5. Ask God to fill you with his Spirit, that by your life you might fully reveal the glory of God.**
- 6. Commit to loving all people and caring for God’s creation.**

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AC7yFDb1zOA>

⁷ Thompson, 96

7. Praise God for his immense power and glory.

8. Read and pray Psalm 8.

Do that each day this week. That's your *first* assignment. Here's your second, and this is one we will practice every week of this series. On your way out, the ushers are at the doors with these postcards. We'd like you to consider picking up one or more of these postcards, and writing a note to someone that you want to encourage or acknowledge. Maybe it's someone who reflects the glory of God to you. Or maybe it's someone who does *not* reflect the glory of God, but just needs to know that you've been thinking about him or her, and that you love them and respect them (if you genuinely do)! Don't be condescending about it.

Okay?

Please stand, and let me send you out with the words of Jesus from John 13:17 -

“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

Have a great week!