



St John the Baptist
Burscough

Housegroup Notes	Psalms
Themes	Introducing the Psalms

Starting Point	
<p>In this short series we will be focussing on the Psalms. The Book of Psalms is actually a collection of different kinds of poetry spanning many centuries of history (from c. 1100 BC, to c. 400 BC) finally reaching its present form around 300 BC.</p> <p>The Psalms are some of the most widely read portions of the Old Testament. They have a long history of popularity in the Christian tradition, so much so that often the Book of Psalms has been bound with the New Testament in pocket editions. Such popularity reflects the fact that the psalms are about people, the struggle and joy of living life under God. While at the same time the psalms are seen as a sort of spiritual "pick-me-up," a view reflecting the distorted "feel-good" mentality of modern society, their message goes far deeper addressing the entire range of human emotions and existence.</p> <p>It is important to recognize that the psalms are not statements of doctrine, creeds, or history but that they are both poetry and prayer, poetry intended to be set to music and prayed in worship. In ancient Israel, similar to today's world, poetry and music were the means by which people expressed their deepest feelings and emotions, their insights, and the most tragic and joyous of human experiences. It is no accident that after Israel's deliverance from Egypt on the banks of the Red Sea the people sang (Exod. 15:1-18)! Or that Hannah bursts into song at the dedication of Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1-10)! Or that David mourns Saul and Jonathan in a beautiful poem (2 Sam. 2:19-27). Much of the language of the Psalms is full of metaphor and symbolism, it is the language of the poet.</p>	

Session 1:	Psalm 40
Proprietary reading:	Psalm 40, Hebrews 10:5-7

Background

Psalm 40 appears to be two separate Psalms fused together, possibly of David, purposefully combined at some point to demonstrate the contrast between praise and lament, between answered prayer and the time of suffering. In Verses 1-11 the Psalmist's declares gratitude for God's mercy, for a God who is to be trusted even when all seems to be lost. From the "slimy pit," God sets the faithful person's feet "upon a rock" (2-3). As a result of God's power and help, the writer lives and delights in God's law and tells others of God's saving grace.

However, at verse twelve, the tone of the Psalm shifts to a lament, an acknowledgement of personal sin and loss. This verse serves as a bridge to the final verses (13-17) which express a prayer for God's deliverance and salvation. Just as the Psalm began in celebration of God's answer to prayer, it ends with the prayer waiting for God's answer once again. Once more the speaker is "poor and needy" and is asking that God "not delay."

Introduction

An opportunity to bring and share some favourite poetry. (*This needs arranging/communicating in advance*) Read/Talk through some of the groups favourite poems and discuss their meaning.

Why are poems and songs so important?

Is anyone in the group going through a particularly difficult time at the moment that they are willing to talk about. How can this psalm help?

Themes and Application

1. What do you think this psalm is about?
2. The writer has obviously been through some very difficult times prior to writing this psalm. What do you notice about his mood in the first 11 verses?
3. What do you think has happened to help lift his 'darkness'?
4. What are some of the things in your life that may be described as the 'slimy pit', the 'mud and mire' (v2)?

5. The psalmist waited patiently for the Lord, we live in world that seems to have lost the art of 'waiting'. Do you find it difficult to wait on the Lord as David did? In what areas of life are you currently waiting on the Lord?
6. Has there been a time in your life in which you cried out to the Lord and he delivered you from a troubling situation?. [verses 1-3 are also a beautiful picture of what Christ has done for those who have trusted in him, this is a good opportunity for each person in your group to share their testimony of deliverance from spiritual death to spiritual life]
7. Many of the psalms foretell and speak of Christ. Read Hebrews 10:5-7 again, and then Psalm 40: 6 onwards again. How does this change knowing that Jesus spoke these words about himself?
8. This psalm can be used as a wonderful 'prayer' for help. Particularly when we have an understanding of Jesus Christ and the salvation that comes from him. In what way can you tell others of Jesus' saving grace?

Action

As a group write your own psalm of praise for God's salvation. (Ask each person to write a simple sentence of praise on a strip of paper, then stick them together to create a group psalm.

How many verses in the psalm speak about praising God and telling of the "glad news of deliverance in the great congregation"? Spend the remaining portion of your time together praising God for the mercy He has lavished on you in salvation.

Session 2:	Psalm 24
Proprietary reading:	Psalm 24, 2 Samuel 6

Background

Psalm 24 is a psalm of praise and exultation and is believed to come from the time when David brought the ark of the covenant into the city of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). The ark, which represents the portable throne of God, is carried by Levites up the hill to the city, through the gates, and then up the hill to what would later be the temple mount. This is a psalm of royalty, celebrating the reign of Yahweh the King. It is attributed to David.

Introduction

Begin with a time of worship together. Share a few stories of how God has been working in your lives recently. Listen to a piece of Christian music and allow this to flow into a time of open prayer. Or have various household objects in a concealed bag. Allow people to choose an object (without looking) then during the music time allow God to speak to you about that object. What does it say to you? What is God saying to you. Or have words and lyrics from the song cut up into pieces and ask people to choose a couple of words that speak to them and share reasons for picking?

Themes and Application

Read through the Psalm again together

1. What belongs to the Lord? (1)
2. Why is the creation story relevant to God's glory? How does creation reveal God's power and righteousness?
3. Who shall stand in His holy place? (3-5)
4. As you read through verses 3-6 think about not the ark of the covenant, through which God made his dwelling on earth, rather think of Jesus making his way up a hill towards the cross. How do those verses speak to you now?
5. Tell of a time you wanted to be in the presence of God. Describe how living right can be a struggle?
6. Who is the King of glory? (7-10)
7. How can you recognise when you're in the presence of God? How has God revealed his might and glory in your life?

Action

Are there any emotions or situations in peoples lives that this discussion has brought to the fore. Spend some time talking with and supporting each other.

Talk about ways in which we can begin to recognise and spend more time in God's presence. What practical ways of doing this can the group share with each other. (Things that work for you etc)

Spend some time praying together, praising God for his greatness and his glory and asking God to reveal more of himself to you.

Session 3:	Psalm 27
Proprietary reading:	Psalm 27

Background

This psalm is ascribed to David, and it appears that it was written in a time of danger. As always, David found the LORD to be his "Light And Salvation In Dark Times". The first part of the psalm expresses his confident trust in the LORD for blessings received in the past, and his desire to dwell in the house of the LORD who will protect him in the future. In the second part David offers an anxious plea for God's mercy and deliverance from his enemies. It ends with a confession that he would have lost heart without faith in God's goodness, and an exhortation to wait on the Lord for strength and courage of heart.

Introduction

Think about and recall a time when God clearly answered one of your Prayers, or has clearly directed you in some way..

Ask the group to summarise David's situation as he writes this Psalm (his life is under threat, most likely during a period in which he was pursued by King Saul and his army seeking to kill David, as David had been anointed as the next King of Israel. So he naturally feels fear.). Talk through the words that help us to see and feel David's fear.

Themes and Application

1. Involvement: Read v 1-6 -
 In the midst of this threat David brings his situation to God. How does David relate the reality of God's presence to the situation of his life?
 (what characteristics of God does he focus on? what difference do these truths make to David's attitude to the danger he faces)

2. How do you involve God in your life – how do you pray about the situations you face? How does God’s presence make a difference to your attitude to the challenges of your life?

3. Intention:

What does it mean for us to seek God?

Look through the Psalm and note the places where David actively chooses

to seek God, or to allow God’s presence to change his response to the threat of his life.

4. In what ways have you made choices to seek god rather than to give up or give in temptation or discouragement?

5. Intimacy:

Read v 8-9 .David is talking about coming face to face with God.

What does

this actually mean practically?

Share your experience of coming close to God.

What are the challenges to us knowing God more closely in our daily lives?

4. Finish with each person in the group sharing what they believe God is saying to them through Psalm 27 and what practical response they are going to make

Action

Worship might naturally flow out of the above section. Ask the group to come up with as many Biblical images / names for God that communicate something of who he is. Then give each person a piece of paper and pen and them to choose one characteristic or image and write at the top of the page “God is” followed by their chosen characteristic. Ask them to describe in their own words this aspect of who God is – to describe what it means God does or how it affects his work in our lives.

Now ask them to write “Therefore I will” and ask them to write about the difference this will make to their lives and their relationship with God. Ask each person to read their words, then lead into a time of praise and

thanksgiving.