

Praying through the Psalms

Here's a simple how-to guide to assist you in praying the Psalms. This can be used to pray on your own or as a group.

To consider as you're reading:

- **Make the Psalms' words your words.** Augustine of Hippo said, "If the psalm prays, you pray. If the psalm laments, you lament. If the psalm exalts, you rejoice. If it hopes, you hope. If it fears, you fear. Everything written here is a mirror for us." As you pray the Psalms, you will learn how to pray in every season, whether rejoicing with those who rejoice or mourning with those who mourn.
- **Meditate on the Psalms.** By meditating before we pray, we are following in the way of the psalmists themselves (Ps. 1, 19:14, 63:6, 77:12, 119, 143:5 145:5). If anything in the psalm sticks out to you: pause, ask the Spirit to shine His light on it, then mull it over in your mind until it begins to ignite your heart. Without a doubt, the warmth of the Psalms is due to the kindling of meditation.
- **Pray the psalm like an apple tree or a Christmas tree.** You can either take the pleas and praises of the Psalms as your own, picking them like apples. Or you can decorate the psalm like a Christmas tree, hanging your pleas and praises on it. Use its words to respond to God, who has already initiated the conversation.

FIRST READING: Insights & Inquiries

Read the psalm aloud once, slowly, pausing briefly between sections/stanzas, attending to the overall tone of the Psalm (e.g. If a praise, read excitedly. If a lament, read gloomily). If reading with a group, have people share insights (what is in the text) and inquiries (questions of the text).

- What is the structure of the Psalm? Where are the breaks between stanzas?
- Is this a psalm of praise, lament, confession, thanksgiving, instruction, etc.?
- What is the experience of the Psalmist?
- What is the emotion of the psalm? How can you tell?
- What is the psalmist going through?
- What kind of imagery and metaphor does the psalmist use (e.g. "The LORD is my shepherd").

- How does this connect with our experience?

SECOND READING: The Prayers of Jesus

Read the psalm again, slowly, possibly in another translation. From Paul to Augustine, from Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Tim Keller, the Church has heard all 150 psalms as coming from the lips of Jesus. This allows us to hear Jesus at prayer with His Father in a whole new way (Hebrews 2:11). We also get a glimpse into how Jesus shares our humanity, with all of our weaknesses and triumphs, successes and struggles.

- How does it illuminate the meaning of the psalm to hear it coming from Jesus' lips?
- Would Jesus have prayed this during His life, death, resurrection, ascension, reign, or second coming?
- How does it help us understand Jesus' solidarity with his church (He is the head, we are His body)?

THIRD READING: Pray the Psalm

If reading as a large group, it may be helpful to break up into groups of 2-3 for this part. Read through the psalm again. Pause after each stanza and turn the words into prayer.

- Paraphrase the words of the psalm as you pray them in your own words.
- Take the very words of the psalm as your own.
- Use the psalm as a jumping off point to pray in line with the psalm.

Move through the psalm this way, stanza by stanza. If you're praying the psalm altogether, the leader can turn the stanza into prayer, then pause in silence for the rest of the group to turn the words into their own prayer either silently or aloud. We may not face the same foes or circumstances or foes as the psalmists, but their words of lament, rejoicing, etc. can provide a template for us to express those same emotions in the context of our own lives.

Original resource by Benjamin Kandt, modified by Kelly Bronson

For other resources on praying the Psalms from Benjamin Kandt, visit his website [here](#).