



Spirit Renewal Ministries

Transforming Lives - Renewing Communities

Praying with the Psalms - 2024

One of the most outstanding and highly respected international leaders of the twentieth century, Sweden's Dag Hammarskjöld, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, died in a plane crash in September, 1961. On his travels he always took three items with him. These items were found in his briefcase at the crash site: a copy of the New Testament, a copy of the Psalms, and a copy of the United Nations Charter. He understood that the book of Psalms presents nothing short of God's claim upon the whole world and that it articulates God's will for justice, righteousness, and peace among all peoples and all nations. It is our prayer that each of SRM's members, friends, partners, and leaders will take this year to read all of the psalms and come to place that Hammarskjöld did, they are "God's claim upon the whole world."

January: Lament Psalms Community; 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89*, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129

The function of a Lament or Psalm of Petitionary Praise is to provide a structure for crisis, hurt, grief, or despair; to move a worshipper from hurt to joy, from darkness to light, from desperation to hope.

February: Lament Psalms Individual; 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27*, 28, 31, 36*, 39,

40:12-17, 41, 42-43. The theological significance of a lament is that it expresses a trust in God in the absence of any evidence that He is active in the world. Through a sequential and deliberate structure, the lament moves from articulation of the emotion of the crisis, to petition for God to intervene, to an affirmation of trust in God even though there has been no immediate deliverance from the crisis

March Lament Psalms Individual; 52*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89*, 120, 139,

141, 142. There is little difference theologically between individual and community laments, especially since the same metaphors occur in both, the structure is similar, and the same theological conclusions are expressed in both.

April: Specialized Lament Psalms, Penitential; 6, 32*, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143 Imprecatory; 35, 69, 83,

88, 109, 137, 140. There are seven psalms that the church has traditionally understood as Penitential Psalms, prayers specifically for forgiveness from sins committed. The **Imprecatory Psalms** or **Cursing Psalms** are a much more radical version of the lament. In this handful of psalms, there are curses pronounced on those who have caused the crisis. Sometimes these are people within the community who have committed injustice, and sometimes people outside who, like the Babylonians, have invaded the country and brought destruction on the nations (Psa 137).

May: Thanksgiving (Todah) Psalms Individual; 18, 21, 30, 32*, 34, 40:1-11, 66:13-20, 92, 108*, 116,

118, 138. The function of a Thanksgiving or Todah Psalm, or Psalm of Declarative Praise (Wester-mann) is to praise God for something He has done for the Psalmist, to offer thanksgiving in the form of worship. There are three main aspects to Todah Psalms: 1) praise for a deed God has done or an experience of God by the Psalmist; 2) it is an immediate response evoked by God's action; 3) the tone is one of joy. This is not a general attitude of thankfulness in most cases, but an outpouring of emotive celebration in worship based on some immediate experience of God's goodness and grace.

June, 2024 Thanksgiving (Todah) Psalms Community; 65*, 67*, 75, 107, 124, 136* Thanksgiving is the next step after lament. In lament, the petitions are brought to God with an affirmation that he will act. The thanksgiving prayer is the response to God's actions, acknowledging that he has heard the petition and answered in some way that has been experienced by the worshipper.

July, 2024 Specialized Thanksgiving (Todah) Psalms Salvation History 8*, 105-106, 135, 136

Songs of Trust 11, 16, 23, 27*, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 13. The sequence of **lament-todah** is not "please-thank you," but petition-praise. "Thanks" is only one aspect of the praise of todah, and is a way to give content to the praise. But the real impact of todah is that God is acknowledged as the source of all goodness in life. This moves todah psalms to theological confession rather than simply "thanks" for positive experience. **Salvation History** psalms recount in some way the story of God's creation of the people of Israel. Most often, this includes an abbreviated version of the exodus story, concluding with praise to God for his deliverance, or calling the people to respond in praise and faithfulness to God's grace. These tend to be more theologically reflective than other psalms, since they move to exhortation based on Israel's experience of God in her history. However, they can also call for praise that comes very close to hymn.

August, 2024 Hymnic Psalms; Hymn and Doxology: 8*, 19:1-6, 33, 66:1-12, 67*, 95, 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150. The function of a Hymn or Psalm of Descriptive Praise (Westermann) is to praise God because He is God, and we know He is because we have cried to Him and He has acted. While Thanksgiving Psalms begin with deliverance of God in history and end in praise, hymns assume deliverance and God's actions in history, and praise God for being the kind of God who acts in certain ways. Doxology moves to the most abstract form of praise, where God is honored in joyful abandon simply because he is God.

September, 2024 Liturgical Psalms (for Public Worship); Covenant Songs; 50, 78, 81, 89*, 132

Royal / Enthronement; 2, 18, 20, 21, 29, 45, 47, 72, 93, 95*, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 110, 144. One of the largest groups of these are the Liturgical Psalms, so called because they were most likely used in special festivals or services of worship in the life of Ancient Israel. For example, the Royal Psalms likely had their original setting in the coronation of Israel's king. While they were preserved and adapted to other uses long after the monarchy came to an end, the remnants of their original purpose is often obvious and helps understand some of the features in the Psalms.

October, 2024 Liturgical Psalms (for Public Worship); Songs of Zion 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122; Temple Liturgies; 15, 24, 68*, 82, 95*, 115, 134. The Covenant Psalms may have had their original setting in an annual covenant renewal ceremony, while the Songs of Zion and the Temple Liturgies could be used for any of several festivals celebrated in Jerusalem.

November: Community Psalms; Wisdom Psalms 1*, 36*, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133. Wisdom Psalms are so called because they share features with the Wisdom traditions of the Old Testament (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) in terms of literary structures, vocabulary, and concepts. They frequently deal with topics such as the injustices of life and the justice of God, the responsibilities of choosing the correct path or manner of living, the relative value of riches, and the transitory nature of human existence.

December: Community; Psalms, Torah Poems 1*, 19:7-14, 119. Poems of the Law, which includes the lengthy Psalm 119, are simply psalms that reflect on the value of living life by the instructions of God preserved in the torah. In theme, these are close to thanksgiving psalms, in that the torah is celebrated as a gracious gift of God whereby he provides instructions for living life well in the world that he has created. The call to faithfulness to these instructions, in terms of being blessed or suffering consequences, picks up convenantal themes as well, but moves more closely to the "blessings" of life that come from accepting responsibility that is a feature of the Wisdom writings.