

A Personal and Pastoral Reflection

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by David Schrock

Psalms 1, 23, 51, 103, 110, 121 and 139. These are just a few of my favorite Psalms. Through the years, I have prayed these Psalms, memorized them, preached them, and turned to them in dozens of counseling situations.

In fact, I remember one Sunday a few years ago when in preaching Galatians, I called an audible and preached Psalm 103, because the needs of the congregation were so great that only a Psalm could reach the depths of emotion present in the room that Sunday. And another time, a distraught husband visited church, and Psalm 32 became the landing zone to help assess the impact of his sin and the hope of finding forgiveness—"Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven" (v. 1)

More personally, the Psalms have been a regular source of strength, comfort, and encouragement to me. When first learning how the Bible applied to all areas of life, Psalm 139 gave sufficient reason to oppose abortion. I still remember turning to verses 13–16 to explain why Bible-believing Christians must defend life in the womb. Likewise, when facing trials, Psalm 121 has regularly been a comfort. Its promises of the Lord's protection have steeled my heart from many worries. And more recently, when facing the hostility of a purported minister of the gospel, Psalm 55 was sufficient to strengthen my soul. To know that God's people face betrayal is gut-wrenching reality, but one that the Psalms are capable of addressing. In short, the Psalms have played a necessary role in my life over the years. They have fed my soul. And I've seen them feed the souls of others.

Practically, I read at least one Psalm a day. (Except for those days when I don't and then I catch up on the following day or two). In chronological order, I read through the whole Psalter in five months (January–May), with one extra month (June) to read them through more quickly. I do this to help facilitate prayer, but also to remind myself of the storyline of salvation contained therein. Yes, there is an order to the Psalms and knowing it adds greatly to understanding the Psalms and worshiping their God.

Just under ten years ago, I was introduced to this canonical approach to Psalms, and ever since I have sought to read the Psalter not as a collection of disparate praises and laments, but 150, neatly-arranged songs that follow God's history of salvation and that bring us to Jesus Christ. To be sure, I don't quite know how they all fit together. But over the years, their shape has become more identifiable, which in turn helps me to see how they relate to the larger message of grace in Jesus Christ.

In fact, Jesus himself says that all the Psalms point to him. In Luke 24 he says, "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (v. 44). Indeed, while the Psalms were written by David (and Moses and Solomon and Asaph and others), they were written to lead us to Christ. As Acts 2:25 quotes Psalm 16, saying, "David says concerning him." The 'him' is Christ. Clearly, Peter understood that the final aim of the Psalms was to lead us to Christ. And thus, we know we are on the right track in the Psalms, when their lyrics move us toward the Lord Incarnate. In fact, Hebrews 10:5 even puts Psalm

40 into Christ's mouth, adding further texture to the way in which the Psalms lead us to Christ.

All of these reflections are a bit of a whirl, but not unlike the Christians experience with the Psalms. As we read the Psalms all our emotions are engaged. Or better, they are demanded. For the dour the Christian who struggles to express joy, they excite jubilant praise. And for the happy-go-lucky Christian who struggles to be serious, they require sober reflection and lament over evil without and sin within. Even for the non-Christian, the Psalms invite obedient trust in the king whom the Psalms exalts. Just read Psalm 2.

For everyone, then, the Psalter is a treasure trove that awakens emotion and strengthens faith. It not only captures the rise and fall of genuine faith in a fallen world, it also shows how the God who promises to set his son on Zion (Psalm 2:6) will accomplish it---not by bringing the kingdom in Psalm 3, but by the end of the book. Through the story of David and David's Son, we find a soundtrack that presents God's plan of salvation and invites us to find our part in his story.

Indeed, to rightly understand and apply the Psalms to our lives we must read them as one collective whole---a soundtrack of salvation which leads us to know God and worship his son. Over the next two months, I will be preaching on the Five Books of the Psalms. Sunday, I will start with an overview of the Psalter, seen through the introductory lens of Psalms 1 and 2.

If you have never considered how the Psalms fit together, take time to watch this [video](#). In less than ten minutes it will give you an overview of the whole book. I pray it will help you see the unity of the Psalter, which in turn will stir your heart to know more of the Psalms and the Son to whom it leads. This, ultimately, is the purpose of the Psalter and the message therein.

For His Glory and your joy,

Pastor David