

PSALMS  
FOR  
TRIALS

MEDITATIONS ON  
PRAYING THE PSALMS

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# CONTENTS

Foreword by Rachel Jankovic . . . . .	ix
Preface . . . . .	1

## P A R T I

### PRAYING WITH THE PSALMS

Introduction . . . . .	13
Praying through a trial (Psalms 119:71, 92, 114–117, 153) . .	17
Praying when trials are long (Psalm 102:1–2) . . . . .	21
Praying when we are in trouble (Psalm 6:2–5) . . . . .	25
Praying when we are overwhelmed (Psalm 38:9–10) . . . . .	31
Praying when God is silent (Psalm 22:1–5) . . . . .	35
Reminding God of His promises (Psalm 89:49) . . . . .	39
Remembering God’s goodness in prayer (Psalm 143:5–6, 11) .	43
Praying for contentment (Psalm 73:23–26) . . . . .	47
Asking for blessing (Psalm 67:1–2) . . . . .	53
Remembering God’s generosity in prayer (Psalm 84:10–11) .	57
Praying for our work (Psalm 90:17) . . . . .	61
Praying for our words (Psalm 141:3) . . . . .	65

P A R T II

PRAISING WITH THE PSALMS

Introduction.....	73
God's gift of joy (Psalm 126:1-3).....	77
God's gift of hope (Psalm 27:13-14).....	81
How to praise God for His goodness (Psalm 100:4-5).....	85
How creation brings God glory (Psalm 104:14-18).....	89
How God sees ingratitude (Psalm 106:13-15).....	93
God's generational promises (Psalm 48:12-14).....	97
Praising God for His lovingkindness (Psalm 63:1-3).....	101
God's gift of comfort (Psalm 71:20-21).....	105
Praising God for trials (Psalm 66:8-12).....	109
Praising God in failure (Psalm 30:11-12).....	113

P A R T III

PREACHING THE PSALMS TO YOURSELF

Introduction.....	119
God's perspective of man (Psalm 33:15).....	121
God as the healer (Psalm 103:1-3).....	125
God as a shield (Psalm 3:1-3).....	129
God's favor as protection (Psalm 5:11-12).....	133
Meditating on God's goodness (Psalm 16:6-11).....	137
God's goodness pursues us (Psalm 23:6).....	141
God cares for the dying (Psalm 116:15).....	145
God cares about our heart's desires (Psalm 37:3-4).....	149
God as a rock (Psalm 62:5-8).....	153

God as the source of longsuffering (Psalm 86:15).....	157
God's protection in fear (Psalm 139:5-6).....	161
God's gift of courage (Psalm 56:1-4).....	165
God's gift of peace (Psalm 29:11).....	169
God overcomes anxiety (Psalm 94:19).....	173
God as the deliverer from enemies (Psalm 59:9-10).....	177
God in control (Psalm 46:1-3).....	181
God as our teacher (Psalm 18:30-36).....	185
God as the guide of our decisions (Psalm 121:7-8).....	189
God as the giver of prosperity (Psalm 127:1-2).....	193
God's promise to hear us (Psalm 34:17-18).....	197
God's forgiveness (Psalm 32:3-7).....	201
God's reward (Psalm 97:11).....	205
Waiting on God (Psalm 130:1-5).....	209
Conclusion.....	213





## FOREWORD

THERE ARE A FEW THINGS THAT THE WORLD can never get too much of, and one of those things is women who fear the Lord, are saturated in His Word, and practice the things they find there. We simply cannot have too much of this: there is no such thing as an overdose of practical spirituality. The more women who seek to apply Scripture to their lives, the better. The more women who habitually look for ways to conform their thoughts to the Word of God, for ways to let the Word of God shape their behavior as well as their emotions, the better. It isn't the kind of thing that you can overdo—but it is actually the kind of thing that many Christians have never even *tried* to do.

We long with the prophet Habakkuk for the day when “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (2:14).

This glory begins in the lives of normal believers—people who let their own lives be washed over in the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Let it cover you completely. Let it cover your life. Your thought life. Your children's lives. The world was made for this glory, and it all starts with normal obedience, normal faithfulness, and normal listening to what the Word of the Lord is telling us.

Lindsey offers us here just this kind of normal obedience. Look to the Word, look to your life, apply what you learned, repeat it forever. Like a bucket brigade bringing the knowledge of the glory of the Lord to the earth, may the Lord raise up many women who will take their place in this line, encouraging one another with Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs as we give our strength to the kingdom.

RACHEL JANKOVIC

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## PREFACE

EVERYTHING CHANGED THE SUMMER THAT I turned fourteen. We had been living for the previous three years in Cambridge, England where there was always a heavy cloud cover and the vegetation was lush. A few months after my father finished school, he accepted a teaching position in Idaho and our family of ten drove across the United States for the first time. As we came to the last leg of our journey, we drove from the mountains in northern Idaho into the Palouse: a land of rolling hills and farms, with few trees. The sky felt uncomfortably huge, and the space empty. When we arrived it was early August and the fields were gold and dry. Dust clouds formed on the dirt roads surrounding our new house. I took one step out of the van and a sea of brown grasshoppers fled. *Where are we?* I thought, *What is this desert?* The contrast of moving from England to Idaho was stark, but the irony was strong in our story. What had



literally looked like a lush garden had been something of a spiritual desert for us, and what looked at the beginning like a wilderness was going to become a garden of life for our family.

A few weeks after we moved to Idaho we attended a Psalm Sing in the living room of a doctor's home. We found a wonderful church to attend, and every month they met to sing psalms together. The first time we attended, I sat on the stairs that overlooked a living room which held a sea of strangers. Through a nearby window I could see the sunset reflecting pink on the mountain. The crowd below belted out Psalm 42: "As the hart, about to falter, in its trembling agony, longs for flowing streams of water, so, Oh God, I long for Thee." I had been learning the Psalms since I was a small child, but I had not realized how much I needed them to guide me through my life until I began to sing them regularly.

The transition to Idaho was hard. The move took several months to complete, and I changed from homeschooling to attending private school, which meant that my laziness in my previous studies was showing itself. I was very behind the rest of the class, and I was scrambling to catch up. I joined the volleyball team to try to make some friends, but I soon found that I was terrible at it, and I spent every game on the bench. I was insecure and awkward and confused. Psalm 42 stuck to my bones, and at many times I found myself overwhelmed and humiliated by my own

inabilities, not knowing what to pray for, whispering those words: “As the hart...so my soul longs for You.” When everything I was trying to do was failing, when all my inabilities were showing themselves strongly, these were sometimes the only words that made sense. I knew that even though my childish struggles were overwhelming to me, in God was found the security that I needed and in Him was the wisdom that I lacked.

Twenty years have passed since I first landed in Idaho, and my love for the Psalms has continued to grow. My trials and challenges have become more difficult than learning high school Latin. God has led me through many hardships that are common: financial difficulties, miscarriage, illness, complications in pregnancy, moving, job loss, loneliness, learning contentment, learning to be a mother, and wrestling with my own pride and selfishness. Through all these I have looked to the Psalms to shape my prayers and my thoughts. I am not writing to you as someone who has a perfectly peaceful life, but rather as someone who needs the Psalms every day to keep me afloat. Many of the examples that I offer in this book are from my own experience. I am a wife and a mother, and I look for ways the Psalms can encourage me in my current calling. But I encourage you to think of how the Psalms can meet you in your current calling. Are you jolting through the teenage years, learning what it means to be an adult? Are you struggling with chronic illness? Are you climbing the mountain of higher education? Are you trying to start a school or

a church? Are you faithfully working a job that is not what you dreamed of? Are you adjusting to the quietness of empty nesting? My hope with this book is to show you how the Psalms can shape your prayers and thoughts as you walk through the common challenges of life. My hope is that as you read the Psalms you will start to see God as a person in your life who is working through and in all the details. I hope you will begin to talk to Him constantly. I challenge you, after reading each section in this book, to find words in the Psalms for your prayers, as well as encouragement and perseverance in your particular situation. I hope that as you start praying the Psalms, you will feel His presence in all the things that you do, and you will feel His guidance both through storms and long periods of waiting. I hope that you will see God as your life and breath instead of as your religion.

The book of Psalms is unique, because it is neither history nor exhortation, and unlike Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, it is not addressed to a person in order to teach wisdom. Psalms is a song book, most of it originally set to music, but it is also a prayer book, with the words usually addressed to the Lord. Seventy-three of the Psalms are written by King David, twelve by Asaph who was a songwriter for David, twelve by the Levites who were working under David, two by King Solomon, one each by the songwriters Heman and Ethan, and one by Moses. They were written to teach the people of God how to praise Him and how to plead with Him. Although the

Psalms were written thousands of years ago, their words are still helpful for us in our prayers, in our worship, and in our trials.

We can learn much theology from the Psalms, especially about what kind of person God is. We can learn how to talk to Him, and we can learn how He responds. We can learn what He thinks is important. We can learn what it looks like to pray without ceasing. The Psalms address every area of our hearts: sin, confession, pain, loss, joy, shame, gratitude, fear, and much more. We can come to a better understanding of our relationship with God. We can see how He relates to us and how much He loves us. Timothy Keller puts it this way: “Psalms anticipate and train you for every possible spiritual, social, and emotional condition—they show you what the dangers are, what you should keep in mind, what your attitude should be, how to talk to God about it, and how to get from God the help you need.”\*

When you begin to read the Psalms, some of them may seem distant, especially the later psalms that were written while Israel was in captivity in Babylon. They talk about exile and longing for the temple, specific situations that many of us do not quite relate to. But our God is both infinite and specific. His words transcend time. The more you learn the Psalms, the more you find the words apply to your own life, even though the original context is vastly different. The Spirit has

\* Timothy Keller, *The Songs of Jesus: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms* (New York: Viking, 2015), viii.



P A R T I

PRAYING  
*with the* PSALMS





## INTRODUCTION

MANY OF THE PSALMS CONTAIN A COMBINATION of prayers, praises, and passages of preaching the truth. In this section we will be focusing on portions of the psalms that are prayers. I encourage you to start using quotes from the Psalms as you pray. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul’s exhortation to “pray without ceasing” can seem a little overwhelming. Praying without ceasing seems impossible. Obviously we can’t pray out loud every second of every day; we have to interact verbally with other people. But can we pray in our hearts all day, every day, and in any waking hours of the night? The Psalms are a perfect guide for us in this. We should pray with our own words to God, but I have found that my words often run out. I hear of a friend who has been diagnosed with cancer and I pray, “Lord, give her the strength to withstand the treatment, give her the courage not to be afraid as she spends many days in hospitals and many

days at home in pain. I ask that the side effects of her treatment would be minimal and that you would heal her and bring her back to full health.” These are good words, but repeating them constantly “without ceasing” eventually starts to feel desperate. But if I follow these words with Psalm 103:2–3, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases,” then two things are happening. First, I am reminding God that He is the One who heals diseases. I am showing that I believe He is who He says He is, and that He can heal bodies. Second, instead of lifting up my friend in prayer over and over again and constantly waiting impatiently for an answer, I am praying the answer. God says yes. He is the One who heals all diseases: He will heal her. Sometimes His healing comes by bringing His people to Himself, and sometimes He gives our earthly bodies more years. But either way, the psalm gives me the answer to my prayer as I am praying it. While I continue to plead with God for her comfort and strength and earthly healing, I can continue to pray without ceasing because the promises in the Psalms have given my prayer hope.

The Psalms encourage us to tell God what we are feeling. David was a man of great courage and faith, and he had no lack of emotions. Though God knew what David was feeling, He wanted David to pour out his heart. In Psalm 6:6 he says, “All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with tears.” This might seem slightly melodramatic to modern evangelicals, but David



knew the context in which he should pour himself out. He knew when it was time to grab his sling and run unarmored into battle with a giant, and he knew when it was time to express his emotions in prayer.

When life seems so overwhelming, we may not even be sure where to begin our prayers. Sometimes God gives us a disappointing answer, and then what do we say to Him? This is where David's words can meet us and give us great comfort. As we learn psalms, we learn what words to use in our own situations. Maybe you are dealing with a physical illness or trying to raise a difficult child or muddling your way through a tough marriage. Maybe you have been pinching pennies for what feels like forever or you have been praying for an open womb. Maybe you just have a hard job and the basic stress of making it through your daily work leaves you feeling exhausted physically and spiritually. This is why you must learn psalms. They will give you the words to help you pour out your heart to God, and they will give you the hope that He hears and that He cares.





## PRAYING THROUGH A TRIAL

It is good for me that I have been afflicted,  
that I may learn Your statutes.

PSALM 119:71

Unless Your law had been my delight,  
I would then have perished in my affliction.

PSALM 119:92

You are my hiding place and my shield;  
I hope in Your word.

Depart from me, you evildoers,  
for I will keep the commandments of my God!  
Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live;  
and do not let me be ashamed of my hope.

Hold me up, and I shall be safe,  
and I shall observe Your statutes continually.

PSALM 119:114–117

Consider my affliction and deliver me,  
for I do not forget Your law.

PSALM 119:153

Psalm 119 is famously the longest psalm in the Bible with 176 verses. It is a meditation on the excellence of God's law. The psalmist keeps coming back to this theme: Affliction teaches us that there is no sweeter thing to study and to meditate on than God's law. When we are struggling with affliction, we may quickly be tempted to look to human means for help first. Though seeking the help of a doctor or counselor may be wise, we will totally miss the point of the trial if we are not viewing it as a gift from the hand of God and part of His purpose and plan for us. We can learn so much from Psalm 119 about the blessing of trials.

The first thing the psalmist does is express gratitude. He says that it was good for him to be afflicted, because it brought him to Scripture (v. 71). His hardship brought him to seek after God's law, to cry out to God, to look to God for answers about how to live and how to think. When we see our trials as discipline that is testing us and ultimately refining us, we can see the good that God is doing in them. When we view hardships this way, they change us. Give thanks for the change.

Second, the psalmist says that he would have perished in his affliction if he did not delight in God's law (v. 92). His soul would have been consumed with fear, discontent, and anxiety. He found that the only defense was to study the Word of God. Scripture is like the vitamin C for our soul immune systems. Being in the Word creates a strong defense against enemies. When life gets busy and fast, it is harder for us to find time to be in

the Word. But what does the psalmist say? You will die without it!

I am well acquainted with the difficulty of keeping a consistent Bible reading routine through normal life changes, but I encourage you to find a time each day when you can feed your soul, no matter how short of a time it is. Whenever our family has faced a big change, it has been hard to keep up with reading my Bible. When we have moved or had a baby, or even transitioned from the school year to the summer months, my routine is changed, and my well-established habits suffer. I have had to learn to make it the most important thing I do in a day. On average, reading one chapter of the Bible takes less than five minutes. Spend five minutes to nourish your soul, and you will find that your soul is thirsty for more.

The third thing that the psalmist does in his trial is to ask God to uphold him. He calls God his “hiding place” and his “shield” (v. 114). Later he asks for deliverance, but here he asks for protection. The psalmist needed physical protection while he was still in the trial. I ask God often to protect me from bitterness, resentment, anger, impatience, and pride. He can be our hiding place from sin in the same way that He was a physical hiding place for the psalmist. When we are in Him, surrounded by the defense of His law, we are safe.

In verse 153 we see the psalmist’s fourth step in dealing with his affliction. He asks God to consider him. He argues that he has kept God’s law and delighted in God,

and now he wants God to notice. He wants God to respond and deliver him. This reminds me of when my children are unhappy with a decision we have made. We tell them to eat their dinner, and after a few bites they ask, “How many more?” They are asking us to remember them, to consider the obedience they have shown, and to revoke the decision. They want to be done with the affliction of eating salad. The psalmist believes that God is the kind of Father who responds to appeal. Even before God became man and lived in the sinful world, the psalmist knew that God was merciful and understanding. How much more can we pray for God to consider us? Christ has become man; He knows exactly what we are experiencing.



*When you are facing hardship, use Psalm 119 as a guide for how to walk through it. First, give thanks: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.” Second, read the Word. Third, pray for God to be your “hiding place” and your protection. Fourth, pray for deliverance: “Consider my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget Your law.”*



## PRAYING WHEN TRIALS ARE LONG

Hear my prayer, O LORD,  
and let my cry come to You.

Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble;  
incline Your ear to me;  
in the day that I call, answer me speedily.

PSALM 102:1-2

IN THE BEGINNING OF PSALM 102, THE AUTHOR is desperate. He has been suffering for a while, and he needs deliverance now. He asks the Lord to hurry up! For the rest of the psalm he pours his heart out to God, telling Him exactly how painful and hard his life has been. By the end of his prayer he has found peace. He has found God to be his rock, and he has found the strength to continue praising God even in the middle of hardship, while waiting earnestly for God to deliver him.

In this psalm we are given additional words to pray as we ask for deliverance, and we are led to see the peace that comes when we draw near to God in a trial.

When a hardship drags on for a long time, we can easily grow weary and impatient. We want God to fix it immediately. We want answers, resolution, clarity. We start to feel desperate for deliverance. This kind of desperation or impatience will drive us somewhere. We may start Googling for advice or asking friends. We will most likely start complaining and talking about our struggle more than we should. Or we try to suppress the pain by any distraction we can find that numbs how we feel: drinking, smoking, overeating, watching too much TV, shopping, changing whatever we can in life. Impatience in trial takes away our ability to be content.

I remember one particularly emotional day during my teenage years. I was crying and having trouble articulating why. To me it seemed like everything was wrong with my life, and I didn't know where to start. My father, who is a writer and doctor of theology, calmly handed me a book about the theology of emotions called *The Cry of the Soul* by Dan Allender and Tremper Longman. The authors explain how to differentiate between emotions that are righteous and emotions that are destructive. But what stood out to me the most was their explanation of how God uses emotions to draw us to Himself. Our righteous emotions should be viewed as signals that we need to look to God. Often we try



to suppress emotions with distractions instead of using them to build our relationship with the Lord.

The emotion of desperation in the middle of a tough time is a red flag that we need to run to God. If impatience drives us somewhere, we should let it drive us to the Lord. When we are impatient to be done with our trial, we need to look at what the psalmist does: he prays. He tells God exactly what he is feeling. He searches for answers in God instead of in the world. When we are weary, this emotion is like an empty light on the dashboard. We need more fuel, and we need to find it in His Word.

We can find our fuel by reading Scripture, making sure we have made regular reading part of our life. Maybe you have a quiet time set aside already each day. Can you fit in another one? Can you begin and end your day with time in the Word? Finding this time is not easy for many people, especially for busy parents who are always caring for another person. When I became a mother I started listening to Bible audio while I washed dishes and folded laundry. I listen to it while I am doing puzzles or coloring with my little ones, simultaneously training them to be quiet. Where can you find a few minutes in the Word? Do you have a long commute when you could listen to the Bible? Can you squeeze in a chapter to read aloud at breakfast, lunch, or dinner? We are also fed by regular prayer, both alone and in groups. We are fed by attending church weekly. We are fed by seeking counsel when needed from friends or professionals.