



A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF  
**PSALMS**

Psalms 1 - 72

CORNERSTONE  
CHURCH

EQUIPPING  
COURSES

A STUDY ON THE BOOK OF PSALMS: PSALMS 1 - 72

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**A STUDY ON THE BOOK OF PSALMS:**  
**PSALMS 1 - 72**

## INTRODUCTION

In all of Cornerstone Church's Equipping Course material we don't aim to produce a commentary series or particularly technical books. Our aim is to present the Bible to our faithful Jesus followers. The Bible is our book and we aim to know and digest it as best we can. Technical matters are mostly left out unless particularly relevant. We have gone for a method we call 'application with understanding': stimulating the mind and warming the heart to help us live better for Jesus is the aim.

This booklet is predominantly meant to refresh the mind of those who attend our course on the subject material. If it helps someone who wasn't there it is a bonus. It can also be used to great effect in Life Group / home group settings.

This particular course on the Psalms is broken into two parts. The first, which is this booklet, follows a strategy seen in Alec Motyer's Treasures of the King where we will examine a few Psalms in

correlation with the life of David. We'll be looking at Psalms 1-72. The second part of the course deals with Psalms 72-150. A commentary on each Psalm is not possible here. What we will do is understand some Psalms more deeply and thus equip to help Bible readers get to grips with the rest.

As always our work relies heavily on the writing of others. These are acknowledged through direct quotes or through the flow of thought. We aim to uphold all copyrights. You can find a list of consulted works at the end of this booklet.

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## Introducing the Psalms

The composition of the Psalms may be the most loved book of the entire Bible. New Testament writers certainly loved the composition of these emotionally and intellectually stimulating canticles. A modern commentator says, “Every Psalm seems to have my name and address on it”. He is not alone. The Psalms are timeless pieces of encouragement that can be easily applied and have been used in thousands of hymns. Millions have drawn inspiration from them. A large number of Christians faithfully read a Psalm a day. And this is part of the original intention.

Psalms means, in Hebrew, ‘praises’ and in Greek, ‘to praise’ or ‘to pluck’. These are songs, mantras and pieces of truth to say, sing or shout. They are accessible and ready to apply and use. Unlike the prophetic books like Isaiah or Ezekiel the Psalms are difficult to abuse through bad interpretation. But what you will notice (and what we will cover) is that a general uninformed reading lends to a shallowness with the Psalms. They can be of more value than a little light reading in the morning. The Psalms are incredibly deep and challenging. They deal with almost every human emotion possible and present an answer to each of them in turn. But this help is not on the surface.

Considering their popularity many an avid reader has surely also noted that many of the Psalms are actually quite difficult to understand at many points. Getting a Biblical message that is deeper

than a few nice thoughts can pose a fair difficulty. Most of the Psalms are without context and the thoughts expressed are hard to reconcile at times. For example consider Psalm 137:8-9:

*O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,  
blessed shall he be who repays you  
with what you have done to us!  
Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones  
and dashes them against the rock!*

Aren't we supposed to love our enemies? Who is a daughter of Babylon to us, exactly? It is these types of difficulties we will need to iron out.

## Getting ready to read the Psalms

Anyone can pick up a Psalm and get something meaningful out of it but we can do better. A basic Bible interpretational structure will help us get more. Firstly, context needs to be understood and secondly, the message for the context. Understanding this helps us discern what the teaching for us in the Psalm is. Most importantly, we can then live out the Psalms and avoid a pale and anaemic life with lots of scriptural knowledge but not much scriptural life.

The Psalms are Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry is rhythmical and takes on its meter not by syllables but by accents on Hebrews words. The poems are supposed to be seen as a whole. Their fundamental characteristic is not flow or rhythm but the echoing of thoughts with another. This is termed 'parallelism'. Regularly the second verse will enhance the first, intentionally saying almost the same thing.

For example **Psalm 103:10** says:

*“He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities”.*

They come to us as most simple but powerful timeless, easy to translate pieces of beauty, inviting everyone everywhere to praise God. The Jews used the Psalms privately and publically for worship. They would have been sung, chanted, and sung again, fast and slow. Modern hymns are fairly similar to how the Psalms would have been used, but not exactly. There is a lot of theology in the Psalter but the message doesn't come to us as though we are being urged or argued with. We are supposed to be convinced as we see them confess the truth about themselves and God. Convinced that this is the right way to respond and think we are drawn to trust that their reality would become ours.

## Here are a few questions to answer before reading a Psalm:

### 1. How does this Psalm fit together with the others?

The Psalms are broken up into many different groupings depending on which commentator you read. A general and simplistic two-part division would be to divide the Psalms that begin with 'I' and the ones concerning 'we'. This then divides them between individual or congregational songs or poems.

There are five clear divisions in the Psalms (1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150). These groups are noted by the fact that they end with a doxology. Groups one, four and five refer to God as Yahweh 272 times. These Psalms are more personal. Group two and three uses Elohim to refer to God. These Psalms are more concerned with the greatness and immense power of God in general.

Author, content or function can also divide the Psalms. Commentators put a myriad of other divisions forward. Many of these divisions provide no immediate help to us as the readers but serve to help familiarise the reader with the material.

### 2. What kind of Psalm might I be reading?

Dividing the Psalms is not a perfect science. There are different kinds but the division is not always that clear or stark.

There are lament Psalms (44, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90). They are characterised by personal trouble and unhappiness. Reading a whole lament Psalm is important because of their structure. They all follow a five-part structure sung to slow music. Firstly there is the cry to God, then a complaint about what is wrong. This is followed by a confession of trust that God will deliver and then a petition calling on God to intervene. They all end with a promise to praise God when deliverance comes. Picking verses out of these Psalms leaves the reader lop-sided in their approach to trouble.

The second biggest group are the gratitude Psalms. A structure is present in these Psalms alike.

Psalms 6, 32, 51, 130 and 143 are Psalms of penitence. They are “saying sorry” Psalms. You will also read royal Psalms that talk of David’s experiences as king. Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72 are of this type. Some Psalms tend to be more like Proverbs than songs. There are wisdom Psalms. They take us through reflection and meditation. Psalm 73 is such. People also group what are called imprecatory Psalms together. Asking God to visit judgement on his enemies is the focus of these Psalms. We need not struggle too greatly with these. Judgment, God’s return and the place for the wicked is well described even in the New Testament. The book of Revelation echoes many of the cries of these Psalms. We interpret them through Jesus and refuse to take vengeance - leaving it for God was just what every Psalmist did anyway.

### 3. What is the heading of this Psalm?

There is no hint that the Psalms ever lacked titles even though there is debate over when they were written. The title sometimes gives considerable information to the Psalm. Psalm 51 is one such Psalm: “A Psalm of David when Nathan the Prophet went to him, after he had been with Bathsheba”. This sentence grounds the entire Psalm. It gives us the date, setting and reason for it. Even more it gives us David’s emotional and physical state, and a window into his interaction with God at this key point in his life. What do you do when you realise you have sinned against God? David tells us.

So please take careful note of the title, it is often the key to a deeper understanding and richer blessing.

### 4. Who wrote this Psalm?

David the king whose life we know well is said to have written seventy-three Psalms. Solomon wrote Psalm 72 and 127. The sons of Korah wrote twelve. They are the children of the Levite Korah who died because of his rebellion (Numbers 26:10). Asaph also wrote twelve Psalms. Asaph was a contemporary of the sons of Korah. His ministry was founded under David. Psalm 88 was written by Heman the Ezrahite. He was the founder of the sons of Korah. Moses apparently wrote Psalm 90. The only other names are Ethan the Ezrahite and Jeduthun. These are probably names for the same person. 1 Chronicles 15 tells us he was one of the leaders of the three choirs.

Sometimes the titles tell us who wrote, why they wrote, and in what situation they were in. At times there is little detail. At times ‘to the choirmaster’ is added. This suggest that a few Psalms were compiled

to be used in special occasions. Psalms 6 and 12 say that they should be done 'according to The Sheminith'. It means that the song should be done in a tenor or bass range. There are at least ten other designations that Psalms should be done 'according to'. Most of these are recognised to refer to a special instrument or special tune.

At times this information may seem superfluous to us. But the Bible is best enjoyed and most understood and appreciated when we understand the background as best we can. Small details matter.

## **5. What should I keep in mind regarding the Psalms?**

The Psalms are generally a recorded one-way conversation. They are not the 'words of God' but more the words or songs of people. The words are in response to something. It is important to try to find out this 'something'. It is often hinted to at times in the Psalm. The something may be a situation, a concern, a trouble, a motivation, or a combination of things.

It is also important to realise that while it is a one-way conversation there is much to learn about God. The Psalms teach us about God in many different ways. These truths may be the Psalms richest help.

## **6. What technical terms are being used and why?**

When you read the list below you will realise there are quite a number of terms and saying that we aren't familiar with. The truth is that no one is that familiar with them. Considerable debate surrounds the exact purpose of some of these terms. A few comments should help us be more familiar with what we are reading and why. All the following sentences should be filled with 'probably' even though not written:

(definitions taken from Kidner)

**Selah** - it occurs 71 times. Used as an interlude or pause. Possibly to change instruments.

**Haggaion** - used to signal quiet instruments to be played and a time for meditation.

**Psalm or Song** - Songs are taken to be pieces that are used with music. Psalms may or may not be used with instruments.

**Shiggaion** ~ possibly denotes a poetic form designed to stir the emotions

**Miktam** ~ possibly means 'to cover'. The context of the Psalms it is used in could mean 'a prayer uttered in silence'.

**Maskil** ~ could mean a 'teaching Psalm' but the Psalms it's used with are not very technical. Could also mean to accompany a technical and difficult piece of music.

Again, to the modern reader this may mean nothing. But we are too busy rushing from one thing to next. Quickly watch one video, forget it, and watch the next. We can treat the Psalms the same way. Like quick - who cares just glad I read it - type of nice pieces of poetry. Don't fall into that trap!

Picture an old person sitting in their big armchair with headphones on. Eyes closed they totally immerse themselves into a piece of classical music that seems to affect their very soul. Slow down. Think. Meditate. Sense the smell, understand the surroundings. Hear the very breath of the writer. Close your eyes and let it affect your very soul. This is why

'A Miktam' is an important piece of information.

## **7. Never forget, this is the Bible you are reading.**

'A little bit of devotional reading' or 'just another message' are statements that ought to concern us. Familiarity is particularly popular and common today. Please don't make the Bible just another thing to be read in your list of good reads. Don't let the Psalms turn into a 'little nice thought for the day'. We could take this too far but better we approach the Scriptures with a sense of awe, sense and appreciation. Let us not forget that it is God himself talking through the pens of men.

## **A journey in the Psalms with David**

David penned so many wonderful Psalms. This course will follow some of the fourteen Psalms that seem to link closely with key situations in his life before he took the throne. It is a great way to get into deeper study within the Psalms.

### **David's background situation**

Israel wanted a king. Up to this point God had been Israel's king. God wanted it to remain this way. Nevertheless God allowed them their desire. Saul was the first single king over Israel. He was perfectly set up for success. The great prophet Samuel had anointed and affirmed him. He is said to have had all that man could desire when it came to physical stature and crowd support. His leadership was noteworthy. He was 'the beloved leader'. 1 Samuel 9-11; 13; 15-17 tell us all the

background we need to know about Saul.

Unfortunately there is more to Saul though. He was a chronically insecure person. Motyer says, "Like all insecure people he could be astonishingly decisive, but, again like all the insecure, his powers of decision could deteriorate into silly sinful impulsiveness". Saul's failure came in the form of two major moments of disobedience. He failed to listen to God and Samuel. He forfeited his position as king and it was downhill from the moment he ceased to receive honour from God as Israel's king.

Then David appears. God took steps to replace the lost kingship of Saul. Samuel is told to anoint David - a young man from a new tribe who was the eighth and youngest son of a man named Jesse. He was a hidden talent - a great shepherd, fighter and musician. God brings David to fame in Israel but not to the throne at the same time. David does great exploits for king Saul and for Israel. But David put Saul in the shade. The stage is set for one of Scripture's epic antagonistic battles.

David writes his Psalms in the midst of the years of this troubled and sometimes puzzling time.

## Psalm 7

### WHAT TO DO WITH A KNIFE IN THE BACK

(Relates to 1 Samuel 18-19)

David finds himself in the service and court of king Saul. He is the 'master of music' and the commander of the army to battle the Philistines. Unfortunately for David all is not well in the king's court. Saul, chronically suspicious and insecure, was not short of others in the court to continue the suspicion, betrayal and hounding.

Psalm 7 is David's cry for justice. It begins with a cry to God about his suffering. His plea for God to avenge is next. David realises that sin is self defeating and so the Psalm ends with confident praise.

#### The title

This Psalm is a *Shiggaion*. This means it is a musical piece that contains emotion. We are to 'feel' the Psalm's urgency. David sang it to the Lord. This is David's prayer, reasoning and concluding as he deals through a matter with his God. The Psalm is concerned with Cush, a Benjamite (we have no clue who Cush is other than a Benjamite). Saul himself was a Benjamite and there would have been no shortage in the court either. Because we don't know exactly who Cush is we will focus on the fact that it's Cush's words that concern David. The Psalm reveals the wickedness of these words. Whatever the situation, David has no man to turn to, he is under threat and being stabbed in the back.

David's words are for anyone in a corner.

### **Live in a place of safety (v.1-5)**

Yahweh (LORD) is the place of safety. This divine name is the name that Israel was to call God. It means 'the actively present one' or, 'the actively present one who overthrows all enemies to deliver and keep His people'. David knows his god is God, the divine God. Some of us lose sight of God in a time of trouble as though faith lapses. Somehow we think that God is not there or has ceased to be himself. David knows God and calls God 'my God'. God is the object of David's faith. He is here now and is capable of handling every situation.

David has further realised his safety in God. The tense of the phrase 'in you I take refuge' is better translated as 'in you I am safe' (the verb is the perfect tense). David has already taken refuge! He is not somehow trying to take refuge and trying to hide, He has already done it and is looking on the trouble from his shelter. This is faith: To know our absolute safety in God.

David then prays to the God of his safety. He asks for saving and delivering – immediate rescue and total removal of the problem. It is not mentioned here directly but David asks knowing that God can deliver like this. Don't grumble, don't feel sorry for yourself, but pray.

### **Ask yourself what's the worst that could happen (v.3-5)**

A big problem with accusations and false talk is the pressure it puts on the person. It can lead to severe anxiety. David takes a good sober look at the situation and comes to two conclusions. Effectively he asks himself 'what's the worst that could happen here?'

His first conclusion is that he is innocent so far as he can tell. He has been slandered and accused of bribery and treachery (v. 4). His second conclusion is that facing up to the worst that could happen is strength. 'If I am wrong', he says, 'then let me be put to open, public exposure.' That's the worst that could happen. David is dealing with his fears and answering them. "If that is the worst, well then so be it" is his not-so-obvious thought. This will help us when the knife is in our back. Innocent - "well maybe I get fired". "Is that the worst?". "Well, God will be there to take care of me anyway". If we are guilty - "Well, I'll admit to it and get fired". "God will take care of me even though I have messed up." "I didn't hide it, He will deliver me."

This is how to answer the wagging finger of fear. Fear comes to threaten and cause anxiety. Ask this question. God will be there with you no matter what happens. Is it that bad?

### **Leave retaliation for God (v.6-13)**

"Never avenge yourselves," says Romans 12:19. David's call for justice is based on his knowledge of who God is and what God does. The Lord judges people and is not laissez faire about people who sin.

David wants God to stop what is happening (v.9). This is his major concern. He knows that God doesn't look lightly upon wickedness. God's judgment can come at any moment. It will always come. David asks for the inevitable sooner than later. "Please make the call now and end this," is David's cry. He appeals to God's justice to stop wickedness.

We too can leave people to God. Jesus asks us rather to wish them saved before judgement but the principle is the same. Leave people to

God's justice, not our own. Whenever we mention justice there is always a finger pointing back at us. No one can claim absolute innocence and absolute perfection. David has courage to ask God to banish wickedness because of v. 10. His shield is with God ("God is my shield-bearer"). God shields David's heart. In Jesus, God Himself shields us from His own righteous justice.

### **Leave wicked people alone, wickedness has it's own severe penalty (v.14-16)**

David is happy to shield himself in God and do nothing because He knows something: wicked people soon fall into their own trap. Sin is a boomerang. "Behold," says verse 14, this is the way it is: sin never delivers what we thought it would. Sin always leads to destruction and gives pain to the person who does it. If only they knew what they were messing with.

### **God never fails to make everything right (v. 17)**

David praises the Lord his God. He knows that God is a righteous God. He is 'addicted to what is right' says Motyer. David has been plunged into trouble, suffering at wicked person's hands through no fault of his own. God's unfailing insistence to uphold what is right means that God will end up working for Him no matter what. He is on God's side. He has done right and God will certainly save him, no question.

## Psalm 59

### PRAYER WHEN YOUR BACK IS AGAINST THE WALL

*(Relates to 1 Samuel 18-19)*

David continues to serve Saul as best as he can. The Lord is obviously with David and he continues to do great exploits amongst the Philistines for Israel and Saul. But Saul isn't happy with this at all. His anger only leads to greater problems for David. Saul lets David marry his daughter Michal. Even this was so that Saul could see David killed whilst he was bringing back one hundred Philistine foreskins - the price Saul set for his daughter. But David doesn't fall as Saul hoped. Saul (now out in the open) stations men at David and Michal's house waiting for the right opportunity to kill him.

#### The Title

The title of the Psalm demands we don't underestimate the distress and pressure the inexperienced and young David is under. David is effectively under house arrest. Watched from afar in the daytime, 'dogs' lying in wait close in for him at night. He has nowhere to go and no one to help him out of his distress. Put yourself in the situation. Imagine people with real weapons, waiting to kill you. Imagine it all over again. He has no mentor, no perspective can be gained and no person is there to counsel him in his trouble. David has absolutely no

human help. His Miktam is in the depths of his being.

## **Where do you turn when you have nowhere to turn?**

Picture David up late at night. What is he doing? What plan is he making? He is not seeking someone or some helpful counselling. David believes in praying to God, though. He believes God listens and answers prayer. David's plan A for a tight situation is to pray. He is so far from those whose last resort is to pray when every other plan fails. David's first words are 'deliver me my God'.

## **Our knowledge of God is the key to power in prayer**

The Psalm begins with 'O my God' and ends with 'God you are my personal security, my impenetrable bodyguard and the one who will never fail me'. Verse 5a highlights David's God. It is what David knows about God that makes this Psalm teach us what it does about prayer.

David affirms God 'you are Yahweh'. Yahweh is 'who' God is. In Exodus 3:15 God tells Moses that Yahweh is his memorial-name forever. The name Yahweh is linked to his being merciful, redemptive and the supreme deliverer. David has come to know that this is who God is. God is also 'God who is Hosts'. God holds all power and potential. All resources are His and His capacity is untold.

This knowledge of His name makes David apply His name to himself in his situation. Verse 17 is this application. Because of what David knows about God he is bold in dire times. Yahweh is strength but more than that He is David's personal security. His strength means David is safe no matter what. God is an impenetrable fortress but more than that He is David's impenetrable bodyguard. Then David concludes his

thoughts - this God is mine. Or rather, I am His!

## Nothing can replace the true knowledge of God

This Psalm is a lesson in prayer in a tight spot. It contains honest talk about the situation and who God is. David finds counsel in his prayer. We too will find honest prayer to be a counsel to us in a time of need.

### **David asks God for help in his situation (v.1-2)**

- He is honest and blunt about the situation and his need.
- In two verses' time he will tell God to 'wake up' and 'get moving' as though God is lying down and resting!

### **He then explains his situation (v.3-4a)**

- Take note of David's confidence because of his clear conscience. Think of the New Covenant and the promise of clear a conscience deeper than David's (Hebrews 9: 14;10:22).

### **David asks again for help but on a larger scale (v.4b-5)**

- This prayer reminds us of the Lord's Prayer. "Let your Kingdom come" is a large prayer just like David utters here. He is assuring himself. It's an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God judges all the nations and destroys wickedness on a global scale, he will surely find it easy to help little David in this small thing.

### **David now affirms God, thinking of these enemies (v.6-10)**

- His enemies are like wild dogs. Waiting, prowling and looking to pounce.
- But they think that they are unheard and unseen! Wrong.
- God is laughing at them. He sees them, he scoffs at our little enemies. They have no power, surprise attack or anything that can stand. The ant is plotting ambush against the elephant!
- David contrasts their hiding and prowling with God's brazen, awe inspiring strength and protection. David has seen this before with Goliath. But these men are not even as threatening as him.

### **David covers the same ground again**

This Psalm could be broken into two. David covers the same thoughts and prayers again but in a slightly different way.

### **David again asks for help in his situation (v. 11-13)**

- He asks that they will not be exterminated but kept alive until everyone can see their defeat.
- There are three things on David's mind: (1) people learning that sin is wrong, (2) the just punishment for sin, (3) the revelation of God.

## **He again explains his situation (v.14-15)**

- These enemies are like total dogs. There is strength in this illustration for David. If he were picturing them as 'well trained expert assassins' he would be doing himself a disservice (but that is probably what they were). Compared with God they simply aren't. They are just like dogs.

For the last time David affirms God and his place in Him (v. 16-17). David is far from wallowing in self-pity. His prayer and considerations of God and God in relation to his situation have led him to triumph in his situation. This is the goal of our counselling of others, surely. God is there for us. We need not worry about a thing. God is our personal security, an impenetrable fortress of protection. The enemy has no element of surprise and compared to the supreme power of His security the enemy is just like a ravenous street dog looking for food.

## **David still flees**

1 Samuel 19:10-11 records that Michal helped David to escape from Saul's plan. Scripture never records whether this was right or wrong. Psalm 59 doesn't shed any more light on this thought either. It would seem that the prayer in Psalm 59 and David's flight are incompatible. But the Bible is honest and David is always portrayed as a real man. He was by no means flawless. Considering all that was to come in the years of flight and cloak and dagger it would seem that David never should have left. God takes supernatural care of Him nonetheless. We will only know for sure in heaven.

## Psalm 34

### GOD IS UTTERLY AND TOTALLY RELIABLE

David has been running since he left Saul's court. He first left for safety with Samuel in Ramah. God supernaturally rescues him there. But David flees again. He doesn't find rescue in Nob and runs into enemy territory all the way to Philistine Gath.

David has clearly brought himself into trouble. It is foolish to seek refuge with the enemies of God. Achish, king of Gath captures him and probably had plans for him as a hostage or to be killed. An idea comes to David, though - he pretends to be completely mad. It's a clever scheme but also a low point for the anointed future king of Israel. Yet it worked and he was released. Psalm 34 is David's reminiscing of the event. He tells us something the 1 Samuel 21 account doesn't: God answers prayer and is faithful even when we make terrible choices. The truth comes out and David knows it full well: it wasn't his clever plan that won the day it was God who answered his prayer.

#### David first calls himself, and us, to praise (v.1-10)

David has reason for praise. This Psalm is not like the others where David claims his innocence. But God has still listened to him and answered his (probably) many prayers to be delivered. He says we 'bless' the Lord in all circumstances. This 'bless' means 'reflect on who he is and respond accordingly', according to Motyer. He further says praise is the response to what He does and blessing the response to who he is.

David's boast is not in his plan but the greatness of God. He calls on us to 'make great' the Lord with him. God is as great as he ever was. David sought him and he answered. He will never put us to shame. He will save us from troubles. The Angel of Yahweh (God himself) encamps around us. The goodness of God can be experienced and accessed. Those who fear God have nothing else to fear. These are David's reasons to praise God!

### **David calls us to his experience (v. 10-22)**

David now turns to teach us about his experiences. We are to hear the words 'now hear me', or 'now let me tell you the truth'.

David wants us to hear him and learn to take God seriously (v.11-14). Many people don't take God seriously. They take him with a pinch of salt – some don't mean to but still do. Familiarity is a slippery slope. Many charismatic Christians don't take him seriously. Christianity to them is more about hype, crowds, events, lights and music, and wild experiences. Wrong. Part of taking God seriously is learning to control our tongue, turning from evil and seeking upright living. I think we can hear a plea here from David because this is what he wished he had done whilst running. He should have taken God's promises of protection and deliverance more seriously. If he had lived in the fear of the Lord he might have ended up in a totally different situation.

We are invited to experience God's promises in our lives (v. 15-22). At times Scripture appeals to us to believe something, know something or do something. David appeals to us here to believe and know some facts about God.

- God is attentive, like a parent to a newborn.
- He is not impressed with wickedness and while evil is here for now, one day we won't even remember it at all.
- God is not deaf or hard of hearing.
- If God is anything, He is a deliverer. Ultimately we will see this in every area in life.
- The Lord is as a signed surety for us. If anyone needs to step in, he is our next of kin. It is not that we don't have trouble but he is with us in the midst of it. The trouble is regulated. Jesus never had a bone broken.
- The Lord is doing all he knows we need. No one will be destroyed or left to wither in the hot sun.

## **We are to remember the circumstances of David at the time of his praise**

When he was in the wrong and had been so very foolish God remained faithful. God's grace is truly awesome. We have all done a 'David' at times. We have the same reasons as David to praise! David got it wrong and right. We can learn heaps from David - we don't focus on effective prayer but the totally reliable God who answers the cry of the people he loves.

## Psalm 56

### FAITH – WHEN I AM AFRAID, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID!

*(Relates to 1 Samuel 21:10-15)*

Psalm 56 gives further detail that is not revealed in the account in 1 Samuel. This is the beauty of the Psalms. If we only had the Samuel account we would not have such rich windows into David's trust and faith in God.

#### The Title

The story in Gath was worthy of more than one Psalm. David had learned many lessons there. Psalm 34 was written in retrospect of the ordeal. This Psalm seems to be his reflections while he was there under arrest.

David was in trouble in Gath in two ways. Firstly, he would have been a prize for Achish [ey-kish] the king of Gath. Saul had been hurting the Philistines and to have David as leverage would have been welcomed. Secondly, Goliath was from Gath! You can bet Goliath's family wanted David's head and now they had it – him being crazy or not didn't matter to them.

The title tells us the Philistines had 'seized' or 'held' him. This is not a word for imprisonment but means 'he was not a free agent' (Motyer 2007:45). David is staring a very uncertain future in the face. In this place David pens Psalm 56.

David's trouble here will not likely be our own in its exact nature, but we can take the principle of trouble and apply it to ourselves. One application is for those who suffer from temptation to sin. They find themselves in a territory where they should never have gone. Their future is uncertain. Sin wants to have them. We can see how to respond to this through what we read here.

This way of interpreting could be grouped in the category of allegorising, which is not a good interpretive method generally. But the Psalm has a context and a meaning and we are applying the original meaning to another context. In some ways this has to be done with every Psalm - carefully.

### **Fear is met with trust (v.1-7)**

Faith is an almost equivalent word for trust. Today faith has become a rather confused principle. It's gone from trusting in God to an entity of its own. "Have faith", used to be, "Trust God". "Stir up your faith", used to be "in you God I will trust". Faith teaching today can tend to remove God, although it doesn't mean to. More people talk about faith than about the God who is worth trusting. David can help us with his words.

We are using the literal enemies of David as a picture of temptation from the Devil or from within us. Most of us reading this will never face enemies like David did. But we will face temptation with sin pressing in on us and our minds and wills waiting ready to pounce on us and dragging us down. There are many situations we could consider as being trampled upon.

David first trusts in God's mercy. He calls on God to be gracious to him. Psalm 103 is sure: He does not deal with us according to our sins,

nor repay us according to our iniquities. David knows that **God's mercy can be relied on**. We can't expect it but we can rely on it. The attitude is different. Mercy is not deserved but God is a merciful God. David knows this. He trusts that God knows He has made a mistake. God is not out to destroy David. Sin doesn't always carry proportionate consequences. David doesn't believe in karma. Thus we are to know the same. Although we may have wandered and strayed and put ourselves in the place where our flesh and temptation are knocking on our door constantly, God's mercy is an ever-present strength. It is one thing to trust when you are not in the wrong but another when you are and know you are. David is more sure of God than himself. We are to be more sure of Jesus than ourselves. We trust in the work of Jesus, not ourselves and successes to merit God's mercy.

David is experiencing fear from his harrassment. Or, for our example, temptation may trample on us. We may feel the harrassment and onslaught in our thoughts or before our eyes. We can face the truth as David does (v1-2). Temptation is powerful. It is not a toy to play with. But it is also nothing to fear. David defies his fear. Fear is its strength. Fear says, "this cannot change, it will not go away, it cannot be resisted". Fear causes paralysis. But David knows what to do with fear.

### **David defies his emotional state (v3-4).**

This is his ongoing activity ('when I am...'). He talks with his fear. He sees it as an intruder or enemy to face. The enemies trample and he is caught, but fear snuck in the door too! Get out he says! "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. I shall not be afraid, what can these do to me?!" Temptation will cease. These attackers will not endure. Our God

can and will deliver. I need not fear my life will be like this forever. My trust is not misplaced. I leave my confidence and trust in God. It shuts the mouth of this fear.

### David then has to face his fear again (v. 5-6).

Again his situation rears its head to intimidate him. This is a pretty normal experience for most Christians. David prays (v.7-8). He asks for this trouble to be put away from him. There are two reasons for his non-revengeful prayer. Firstly, God will deal with wickedness so it is not wrong to ask him to do it (v. 7) Secondly, God loves and cares for his people and can see exactly what has been going on (v.8). This time **David dispels fear with an assurance of God being for him.** In Romans 8 Paul uses the words of verse 9 to assure us that nothing can take us from the love of God in Christ.

This is a real battle for Christians today. Most only get to resisting fear with David's first step. Most Christians don't cry - especially when they have purposefully done things wrong - "I know that God is for me". Many, if they were honest, say "when I'm obedient I know God is for me" and the converse, "when I disobey, God will let things go wrong to get me right". The problem is when do we ever get things right enough? Paul insists in Romans 8 that God is for us because He is for us, not because of us. God is for us - no matter if we have fled to the enemy's camp in foolishness. God is for us no matter if we fall into temptation again... and again. The enemy harrassing us will be punished and put down because God is just. God will be merciful to us because our tears are in his book. Notice here that David doesn't think 'he deserves it' or has deserved it. He is confident in God - forget yourself - don't try and find confidence there! Now this is faith that

can dispel fear. “I don’t care what I’ve done and what you tell me I’ve done and how you tell me things will never change, God is for me no matter what I do”.

### **God can tell you your prayer is answered in advance (v. 12-13)**

David experiences his prayer being given a ‘yes I will deliver you’ in the moment. Some people say that we should thank God in advance when we pray. It’s not clear why they say that (perhaps it is because they have a faulty view of faith). Sometimes they may be jumping the gun. David does thank God but not out of rote repetition and parrot prayer, but because at some point he became sure of his deliverance. He knows God has delivered his soul and he will walk again in relationship with God, and so he says thank you to God for hearing him.

This is great maturity in prayer. Paul says he asked three times for God to take away something and then God answered him with a ‘no’. (2 Corinthians 12:8.) Please believe more in God and in praying to Him, knowing you will get an answer!

# Psalm 52

## YOUR TONGUE OR MINE?

*(Relates to 1 Samuel 21-22)*

The last few Psalms are not in an exact order as you may have noticed. We now pick up an event a little before and after the previous Psalm. The quick version of the story is that David arrives in Nob. He meets Ahimelech the priest there. He lies to him and convinces him to give him bread and Goliath's sword. We hear that one of Saul's close men, Doeg, is there listening. He sees Ahimelech betray Saul and reports it to Saul. In chapter 22, Doeg is ordered to kill the priests at Saul's word. Psalm 52 is about this situation.

### The Title

We are told David's Psalm is written about Doeg telling Saul about Ahimelech. At first glance it may seem obvious that the Psalm is about the tongue of Doeg. But that may not be the case. David could be writing about his own tongue. 1 Samuel 22:22 says that David took the death of the priests as his own fault. Surely if David had told Ahimelech the truth when Ahimelech was uncertain about helping him, his life would have been spared? Was it David's lies or Doeg's false story that is in view here? Your tongue or mine? Isn't this often the question? Maybe we should all claim that it is our tongue and this Psalm will teach us something.

### Insecurity is the seedbed for rubbish talk (v.1)

Both Doeg and David failed to know the steadfast love of God is

always there. They both tried to advance their own future. Insecurity about their future greatness and place caused evil boasting and rubbish talk. David didn't trust God enough to tell the truth, Doeg didn't trust God at all either.

### **Know this: The tongue can be like an out of control fire (v.2-4)**

Behind the tongue is a mind. The mind can be immoral, spiteful and ruthless. The tongue reveals what is in the heart.

### **Truth: God will sort it out one day (v.5)**

God's dealing with each person will be exact and complete. What is said matters, and matters much to God.

### **Know this: time will tell (v.6-7)**

When God says time is up (this may not be at the Last Day but any moment when someone is exposed) we will see how total the fall is. He who speaks evil will at some point fall, it's just a matter of time.

### **Trust is the seedbed for security (v. 8-9)**

David has chosen to be like an ever-solid and sturdy (secure) olive tree. This means trusting in the love of God. God's stable, steady unrelenting commitment to us is David's security. Boasting and rubbish talk will fail. David decides he will be secure in God's love and ability to lead him and bring him into a future. He will wait on His name. This security will be what he needs. What will make you secure?

## Psalm 54

### UNSURPASSABLE PROBLEMS CAN BE LEFT TO THE LORD

*(Relates to 1 Samuel 22)*

After the situation at Nob, David finds a more restful place in the cave of Adullam in southern Judah. He was hoping to find some rest amongst his own people. David hears about the Philistines attacking a nearby town of Keilah. After enquiring of God his men free the people of Keilah from their attackers. But what was supposed to be a help to the people turns against David. The people of Keilah turn into an entire village of informants to Saul. David is exposed and his hiding place is no longer. He writes this Psalm in this situation.

This Psalm is very similar to the Psalms we have been through already. David speaks honestly about the problem, calling on God to help. He reminds himself of God's ever-present strength and ends praising Him.

## Psalm 142

### WHEN NO ONE IS THERE, YOU ARE THERE

*(Relates to 1 Samuel 19-22, 24)*

We are not quite sure which of the caves in southern Judah David was in when he wrote this Psalm. It doesn't really matter that much. The Psalm is a treatise on prayer in a cold, dark place. Alone... but God is there.

David's prayer is personal, verbal, urgent, humble and frank, says Motyer. This is a model prayer for our lowest moments. Again, David ends in praise because he knows who he is praying to. This Psalm begs us to believe wholeheartedly in the refuge God is and the rest prayer can give us.

## Psalm 57

### GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE FINDS US ANYWHERE

*(Relates to 1 Samuel 19-22,24)*

This is David's third Psalm from a cave. We can't help but think he didn't have to end up going through all of this. Nonetheless we would not learn so much if he hadn't.

We learn a few things from this wonderful Psalm. Firstly, it is possible to fall into the same problem again, but we can pray again. And the prayer will counsel us and God will answer – all over again. And again, and again.

Secondly, prayer is our 'go to' solution, always. We may think that David by now would be thinking that God hadn't delivered him, so why bother praying. This teaches us the exact opposite. Pray again.

Thirdly, when reading the Psalm you will notice that David doesn't get philosophical. He follows much the same reasoning as the other Psalms from trouble. Ask, proclaim the truth and praise... not sulk! Too many people get philosophical and ask big and searching questions about God, life, their life and his abilities and potential troubles. This mostly causes them to be discouraged and to doubt God and, worse, to sulk. David simply, like a child, comes to his Father with yet another problem. It worked last time, might as well do it again.

## Psalm 18

### IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME

*(Relates to 1 Samuel 23 - 2 Samuel 5; 2 Samuel 22)*

This Psalm seems to deal with a fairly large period of time (from 1 Samuel 23 - 2 Samuel 5:5). From the last cave David takes refuge again with Achish. He is fortunate to receive a warm welcome and is given the town of Ziklag as his own. This doesn't last, however, and David has to leave again. The history moves rapidly and the next Philistine war that Saul enters into causes the downfall of Judah and Israel and David is invited to be king of both. David reflects on the great rescue God has performed.

And very great was God's deliverance of David. If we wait, if we face challenges and prove the faithfulness of God just like David, we too will know the loving praise this man knew. It is just a matter of time until we praise him for delivering us. As we have seen, we can even get to praise while we are in the midst of the trouble - now that is worth wanting.

As with all the Psalms there are a number of ways to break this Psalm up and journey through it. Psalm 18 is no different. This breakdown follows three major ideas in this Psalm.

#### The Title

This is a song of triumph which David sings when he looks back from

his palace in his position as king. The Lord had ultimately done all for David that he said he would. The song evidently sums up David's feelings about all that God has delivered him from. It might be more specifically looking at the period mentioned about (from the Keilah escape to being king) but that period itself is not one specific event.

Why is this important? If you read the explosive rescue operation account in verses 6-19 you might be fooled into thinking the situation was actually that in real life. Motyer points out it was nothing of the sort! In fact there was no fire, no earthquake, no storm, no lightning, floodwaters, hailstones coals or fire. None at all! This was David's way of explaining how he felt about the immensity of what God had done for him. It wasn't a sudden deliverance but tremendous none-the-less.

### **Have the right images in mind when you reflect on the power of God to save (v. 3-19)**

Karl Marx calls God a 'crutch'. Others call him a 'cosmic band aid to a hurting people'. How would you describe God's power to deliver people? David uses intense poetic imagery and language mostly taken from other parts of the Old Testament. This part of the Psalm is almost identical to the same praise passage in 2 Samuel 22.

The immensity of what God delivered him from was nothing less than death and total loss of himself (v.4). This is a common argument in Scripture. It is from bigger to smaller. If God can save me from death then anything else is, by comparison, nothing for him. And God saved David from the chords of death, many times.

But David's heart is bursting and he wants to express and magnify the mighty power of the Lord. He does this by showing that what God had

done for him was nothing less than what he had done in the past. The standard way of expressing God's divine and strong providence is by using pictures of storm, tempest, earthquake and fire.

- v. 7-8 the earthquake, smoke and fire depict the God of Sinai, still as awesome in strength and reverent holiness and fear.
- v. 9-12 the cherub, darkness and clouds is the language of many places, especially Ezekiel 1. The picture is one of an impenetrable holiness. Equivalent are the Tree of life, the Holy of Holies, the Mercy seat all attended by the creatures. Untouchable perfection and dazzling right behaviour are emphasised.
- v. 13-15 – pictures of the Exodus come to mind. There is terror at the supreme authority of God's words. God opened the sea at a mere word. Nothing stops the Lord God.
- v.16-19 suddenly the scene changes and all that has been spoken swoops in to 'me'. "He reached" from on High. Eight times David mentions 'me'. All of this immense display of power works at our point of need and rescue.

This begs the question of what images come to your mind when you think of God acting to save you?

We need to keep in mind what David is doing here. Many people quote Psalm 18 to encourage others to expect sudden, powerful and extravagant deliverance. People then expect 'thunder and lightning'. We are often disappointed. At times God does act decisively, but not always. Not in David's case. David writes of his amazing deliverance but what actually happened was in the moment not spectacular at all: (Motyer)

- a quick decision to flee and escape from Saul's army (1 Samuel 23:13).
- saved by the terrain (1 Samuel 23:26).
- a 'coincidence' of a Philistine raid (1 Samuel 23:27).
- he was saved by his sensitive conscience when twice he decided not to attack Saul when he easily could have.
- David gives himself over to Achish again. Fortunately Achish is favourable towards him and gives him Ziklag (1 Samuel 27).
- He makes himself at ends by brutally attacking neighbours for 16 months, trying to win the favour of Achish even further.
- His plan with Achish doesn't work and he and his army are banished from Ziklag (1 Samuel 29).
- Returning home from war he finds Ziklag totally destroyed, families and goods carried off. His army almost defects at their major loss.
- Saul dies in battle and in almost no time David is on the throne.

Fairly normal events one would think? No lightning, or coal at all. Not very charismatic in flashy deliverance. BUT deliverance none the less. We would do well not to focus on the method of deliverance but on the God who delivers.

We are surely to notice that all of this is in response to prayer (v.3,6). How did all of this power and magnificence of God come to David's aid? Prayer. Motyer rightly illustrates "if we were to find David in the midst of battle and were to ask him what he is doing, he would say, 'I'm praying' and that's all!"

## Righteousness is rewarded (v. 20-45)

The scenery changes and David turns to another understanding which needs to be ours. Righteousness is rewarded and should lead to greater confidence in God's way with us.

Immediately we should have problems with David's words though. "I was blameless" he says. We know better. Considering the title, David is surely talking about his dealings with Saul - there he did nothing wrong. Also this Psalm is very Messianic, picturing the work and righteousness of Jesus in the background of David's words.

- v. 20-24 emphasises two things. **Firstly, blamelessness is needed before God and secondly, right living does matter and is rewarded.** In claiming righteousness to such an extent, David is surely only talking about his dealings with Saul. Also v. 50 David speaks of 'David and his seed' showing us Jesus is in the background here. Jesus makes us totally blameless so we are able to make the sure claims here of David. But it also matters how we live. We will be 'rewarded' (v. 24) according to how we live. How we live does matter, God is recording all that we do for him.
- v. 25-29 tells us that **God rewards sincerity.** These are generalisations but prove to be true. If we follow God's ways eventually we will always come out okay. He will guide us (v.28), we will be given energy and ability (v. 29). 2 Corinthians says we will be renewed day by day. If we are straightforward with God he will deal with us in an uncomplicated and simple way.
- v. 30-45 shows us in David's life that what he has said has

proven true – and will for everyone. “The word of the Lord proves true”. Just try it, David is imploring us: “I promise it will be as I say”.

David insists that two major things are happening in our lives. (1) we are being **equipped with strength** and (2) **being made blameless** (v.32). We are being trained for war. Ready to stand and fight. Given salvation and support and learning to fight with His help. And the victory is a great one: Jesus and David and us, ‘the head of the nations’. We need strength and help from Jesus to be blameless and strong. He brought David victory (v.40) and will bring us to victory. Motyer says, “Salvation is conscription and we have a fight on our hands”.

### **True experience of God leads to adoration and praise (v.1-3; 46-50)**

David thinks of the immense power of the Lord, the call to live righteously with the overriding assurance that God is there steering and guiding the whole process. No matter what he promises he never fails to keep his promises. And David cannot keep quiet. He says “I love you” in our modern language: “I’m in love with you” with all emotions engaged (v.1). He bursts out with feelings that come from his experience of God in his daily life (v.2). When he couldn’t defend himself God defended him. When he was trapped God delivered him. When he was exposed God hid him. God protected and gave strength to him. Often when praise is slow or low, experience of God is lacking.

Praise God! David proclaims (v.49) - for all that God had done for him. Praise is not blind or uninformed, demanded by God for being God. Praise is like the exclamation “this food is brilliant” once it has been tasted. David reviews all that God is and has done through all that he

has been through. His conclusion is only this: the knowledge and experience of God is utterly priceless.

## Psalm 30

### SAYING THANK YOU - A GREAT REMEDY

*(Based on 2 Samuel 5-6)*

2 Samuel 5:12 says, "...and David knew that the Lord had established him... and David took more concubines and wives". Things have changed for our fleeing and vulnerable David. The king is getting used to being king, and of the most powerful nation in the region. Peace and prosperity characterise his reign. It would seem that David is fully engaging in the frills and spills of being a nation's king. The word 'entitled' might be right for this occasion, or pride and self-reliance. He said to himself "I will never be moved" (30:6).

#### The Title

The title should best be read "The song at the dedication of the House" (Kidner). Most commentators agree this is talking about David's personal residence. 2 Samuel 5:11 says that Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers and built David a house. We don't know how long this took, especially considering it was 160km away that the resources were coming from. Faithful and God-fearing David slowly but surely is at his low moments, beginning to become self-reliant. His arrogance and blunt response to his wife in 2 Samuel 6 shows his poor state. While she may have been wrong regarding his worship, his short and arrogant response shows a different David to the one we have come to know. Kingship is going to his head. It's reasonable to think that God

allowed David to get sick to the point of near death to get his attention again. It seems it did, for a time. The next Psalm shows his heart was still off track and he was presuming on divine favour – staying at home when he should be fighting, he sees Bathsheba and commits adultery.

We shouldn't get the total wrong picture, though. David is an incredible leader and some of his military genius is paying off for that nation.

The Psalm seems to break naturally into three parts with v. 6-7 in the middle. Part one and three carry the same sentiment.

### **Always run to the Lord (v.1-5; 8-10)**

There is one thing we are to be totally sure of, no matter what we have done or where we find ourselves – there is no reason why we should not run to the Lord. In fact, we must! David explains why his praise is great (v.5). God's character is fixed - his anger is outweighed by his mercy, always. He is also totally dependable in it; He never sulks or holds grudges. This is what His Holy name means (v.4).

God's revealed character shows that he is at least 1:37,000,000 times in favour of showing mercy and saving over anger. That is why David ran to him in prayer. He knew this; He knew Him! Weeping does come – our walk is not perfect but God's mercy triumphs. You may ask why? Because the only place where man may be totally changed is when he comes as close to the love and changing power of God as possible.

Whatever you do go to him, no matter what.

For three specific reasons David vows to 'raise Him high' (v.1). Firstly,

his life was like a bucket sinking into a well, but God drew him out. He was sick but God healed him totally. Secondly, God listened to him. David prays again. Motyer says if we could summarise the Psalms in a sentence it would be, 'take it to the Lord in prayer'. David cried out to God and he answered. David even makes an argument when he presents his plea to God (v.9) – an argument that only God can answer, however. Thirdly, he was right in his trust of God's character, again. It's like David says, "I told you so, yes!" "I knew it, I knew Him, I knew he would show mercy!"

### **Self-reliance is a shaky foundation (v.6-7)**

In preaching the Gospel this line often proves effective: "If you are trusting yourself in the day you face God, are you really sure about what you are doing?" David reveals his fault - self-reliance and presumption. The regularity of blessing deceived him into thinking it was normal and based on himself rather than the favour of God.

This happens more easily to us than we think. Who really thanks God for their salary when they have been in a stable and secure company for twenty years and there is no hint of retrenchment? David forgot. God reminded him of this with his health failing. He forgot Deuteronomy 8, "don't forget the Lord brought you here".

He was now his own shield and his own security. But the faithful Father was there to save him from himself. This same problem may be one of the greatest sicknesses in the church today – self-reliance and presumption. It leads to coolness and complacency with God. Prayerlessness and indifference are close friends.

## Thankfulness: a remedy to presumption (v.11-12)

At the end of the ordeal David again realises that “his glory is to the praise of another.” He rejoices in God’s goodness to him in this particular moment but he hopes it will not be forgotten (“...forever”). Saying thank you to God is a great remedy for presumption. We realise that what we have comes from somewhere else. It helps stop the slow creeping thoughts that we have gotten all of this ourselves. The rich and comfortable must beware – thankfulness needs to become our way of life.

## Psalm 60

### A LESSON WE BADLY NEED TO LEARN

*(Relates to 2 Samuel 8)*

What do you do when you make a mistake? Especially a mistake you know God would be disappointed with? David had done such. Sadly, although a stand-out man after God's heart, David did what kings with armies do - fight. David began to fight and fight needlessly, it would seem.

#### **There is no security except being secure with God (v. 1-3)**

The title once again sets the stage. David needlessly (it seems) through no provocation or need capitalised on an opportunity. Through no divine guidance he attacked Moab and two cities and kings in Aram - Naharaim and Zobah. It was unnecessary and overzealous. God would give Israel the land she needed, this was his promise. He had done it so far, but David's ambition got the better of him. While Aram-Haharaim and Zobah were on military campaigns securing their northern border against Hamath, David seized them.

But this angered God and roused his discipline. No sooner had David attacked when he got word that Edom to his south was attacking. Edom had done to David the same thing he had done. He sent Joab to sort out the Edomite problem and success was granted to them. But David knew something about this attack: God was orchestrating it in

allowing it. Thus God had rejected and broken their defences (v.1) he says. David knows God is angry. David addresses the whole attack to God's doing by saying, "you have...".

It is more dangerous to be on bad terms with God than on bad terms with anyone else. Please learn this lesson. Whatever you do make sure you are on good terms with God.

### **There is always a way back, with God (v.4-5)**

Although he makes mistakes David is to be applauded for his responses. This is probably one of the reasons the Psalms are there for us. He knows what to do and can teach us. Again the theme of the Psalms is God's way out, which is prayer. We can get right with him. There is a 'rally point', a banner of prayer for us. Many buildings have a designated 'rally point' as a fire escape drill. All the workers will know if the alarm sounds they must go straight to the rally point. When we fall into a place where we are sure we have missed it with God, come to the rally point of prayer - immediately. David didn't need to fix the armies. Rather he needed God 'on his side again'.

From the rally point we can pray for salvation and answers to prayer for deliverance (v.5). David does send Joab to the south to defeat Edom and God gave them a great victory there.

### **When we are unfaithful, God is faithful (v. 6-8)**

He remembers the words God had spoken in promises. He mentions all the lands that God promised Israel would be their promised land (v.6-7). Moab and Edom are added in here. "Remember David", he reminds himself. "God did it before and he will do it again. Edom won't

overtake you, neither will Moab or the Philistines. God has said so.”

### **God’s faithfulness should lead to practical encouragement (v.9-12)**

He realises that this task ahead is too great for him (v.9) and especially if God is not helping them. Only God can defeat Edom! (v.10) But God is not with them! He pleads for God to be with them. He knows then that nothing will stop them (v.11-12). Of this David is most sure: God is a mighty warrior. So great is David’s trust in God, in prayer and in God’s faithfulness, that he sends his army south to take on Edom, and win. We would do well to take on our life’s enemies with such encouragement. God is our warrior, we will win.

## Psalm 51

### YOU CAN COME BACK TO GOD

David is a real man. Scripture doesn't paint him with a romantic, idealistic brush. 2 Samuel 9-10 shows David displaying great kindness with a tender heart. Unfortunately his kindness backfires and sparks a war with the Aramean kingdoms in the North. David's initial success in the war had an unfortunate result on him and he seems to believe he isn't needed, and so he sends troops while he stays at home. His life would never reach the high point it had before he set his gazing eyes on the naked body of Bathsheba. It was a gradual downhill from the moment he committed adultery with her. She fell pregnant and David did away with her faithful husband Uriah. What he had done "displeased the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:1).

God sends Nathan the prophet to help David. David is quick to repent. Motyer says sin is like throwing a stone into a pond. Repentance is getting the stone out and redeeming the situation. When it comes to the ripples, however, God determines how far they spread. Most times God even stems the tide of the consequences but it is up to his mercy.

It was downhill for David from this time on. His family had moments of implosion. David makes serious errors in judgement with the Gibeonites. At his end we see him on his deathbed, pale and helpless as the fractured palace reflects his broken leadership.

## The Title

Psalm 51 doesn't apparently deal with the whole Bathsheba incident. Only 2 Samuel 12:13-14 is in view: "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.'" This is David's song of penitence when he realised what he had done to his God. It is the greatest of the texts on repentance.

There is little agreement on the structure of the Psalm. Maybe that's true to real life. Repentance is not a 'clean; and ordered affair'. The depth of the heart counts more than eloquent words here more than ever. We learn about true repentance in the Psalm.

Here we break the Psalm into two portions: (1) v. 1-13 - total repentance, (2) v. 16-19 - new determination.

### Total repentance (v. 1-12)

These days people don't really like to speak of repentance. It has gotten swallowed up in arguments about salvation and grace. Maybe it's because we don't like to preach about sin either. But the Gospel is a gospel of repentance from sin.

### Repentance begins with a realisation (v. 3-6)

The word repent literally means 'to change your mind'. David came to realise what he had done and what it meant. He can't help but ask for mercy in v. 1-2 because of his revelation. He says, "For I know" (v.3) my sin "confronts me head on" – it is before me. He knows that sin is wilful

disobedience (transgression), iniquity (deviance from what is right) and sin (a specific fault). He knows he has sinned against God (v.4). All sin is against God. It is personal. It is deeply offensive to God and David. We should make no attempts to belittle its offense. God had been so loving and good to David. He had led and taught him so much (v.6) and David knows that sin runs deep within him (v.5). This is a total and full understanding and admission. Repentance begins here.

### **Repentance issues a cry for cleansing (v. 1-2; 7-9)**

David realises his total guilt and helplessness. He has nowhere to turn but to ask God to remove the offense and his guilt. He reminds himself correctly of God's character (v.1). If God were not merciful or loving then repentance would not be possible. It is because of God that cleansing can happen.

He needs three aspects of sin to be cleansed. It needs to be 'blotted out', 'washed' and completely cleaned. His sin needs blotting out because sin leaves a mark that only God can wipe away. He needs to be washed because he needs the very fibres of his person to be cleaned like laundry. Cleansing is the Old Testament word referring to the removal of the barrier that sin erects between God and man. God needs to deal with these three aspects of his wrong-doing for it to be completely removed. Further than this David needs it to be total (whiter than snow v7) so that he can be restored like a sick leper who has been cleansed. Total cleansing would mean that David's conscience would be freed from feeling guilty (v. 8) and he could experience fellowship with God, whom he loves, again (v.9).

## Repentance will issue a change in desires (v. 10-13)

Some people take this lightly. Phrases like “just a little naughtiness” are actually quite common. David doesn’t think this way. He wants God to save him from himself. He issues a cry for a deep-seated desire to live rightly (v.10). Real repentance carries with it such a conviction that sin is wrong that there is a ‘mild fear’ that God would withhold blessing and life. David is worried about this. He cries out for the Holy Spirit to remain and his joy to return. He is also concerned that God may cease to use him and his life would cease to count for much (v.13-15): “May I teach transgressors?”. Can you imagine what would happen to a person if God were not to answer this request? This is surely one reason to try and avoid sin. There is no sense that God is obliged to give us the Holy Spirit.

## New determination (v.16-19)

The desire to get up and walk again with God is an important aspect of repentance. For some people it comes too early. There is no sense of self-justification in these verses. David is not hoping God will forgive him because he is ‘now trying to live better and sin less’. He knows that will not take his sin away. But he also knows that he has days to live yet and he wants to live well for God.

Our determination needs to be directed to our hearts and motives. Verse 16 is not saying that sacrifices are a waste of time. The Old Testament often says ‘not this, but that’ without writing off the former. Verse 16 and 17 call for sacrifices to be brought but for the heart to be involved. He knows that dead and token lifestyles will not cut it. Only people that really get serious with God are able to pull away properly from the life of sin. This is true initially and daily.

David's final thought is to be determined to do better for his people. To varying degrees our individual sin affects the whole body. David has hurt the whole nation. He asks God to help with the healing and strengthening of the nation as a whole. In years to come we will become all too familiar with the statement 'and he did evil in the eyes of the Lord and led the whole nation astray'. David is determined to keep his people from decline. Did you realise that your sin affects us all?

## Psalm 3

### SOMETIMES DOWN, BUT NEVER OUT

*(Based on 1 Samuel 13-15; 17-18)*

David had done so much right, but he began to rest on his laurels. He took too many wives (that was forbidden). His family soon fell into trouble. Rape, revenge and rebellion follow and David seems paralysed when it comes to dealing with his family issues... until Absalom rebels and then David springs into action. David goes to Mahanaim to draw out his enemies to a place where he was amongst friends and knew he could win. It was a three day journey to Mahanaim and somewhere along the way David pens these wonderful words.

v.1-3 are David's realistic words. He does have many foes and many are saying that even God has left him. But David knows better. Although he may have disobeyed and forfeited some of what might have been, God would not abandon him. David, once again, doesn't look at himself for confidence and encouragement. The Lord is his shield. And who needs a shield? The vulnerable. The Lord lifts the head of the lowly. David's head is a little down. Ours would certainly be too. But God will lift it, just because that is who God is. Not because of who David is, but God.

v.4-6 is where David shows his usual great trust. Motyer says, "When we pray, the very next thing that happens is the start to the answer". David prays and God grants him restful sleep. Just what he needed.

He rises fresh and his confidence is restored. Who would have suspected? God knew, He always knows just what we need.

v. 7-8: The next thing David does is pray again. Sufficiency is only found in God. David is feeling strong and ready but this is not the time to turn to his own ability or giftedness. Only the God of the Bible has the name that means 'the deliverer'. The modern person so quickly turns to their own self-sufficiency. What a terrible loss they suffer because they never get to really trusting God and seeing him for who he really is. In verse 8 he reveals that he knows what he is praying for - Absalom his son to be stopped in battle. But he knows that God will do what is best. Salvation belongs to him and blessing comes from the greater to the lesser. The greater knows what to do.

## Psalm 63

### STRESSED? DON'T ASK 'WHY' BUT 'WHO'

*(Based on 2 Samuel 17)*

The first night of the journey to Mahanaim was blessed with supernatural, restful sleep, but the second night was not the same. David wanted to face Absalom and the rebels on a terrain where he knew he could win. He was heading across the Jordan. Apparently after the Jordan is crossed the trip Northeast to Mahanaim would be terribly tough. It was weary, hungry and thirsty desert travel. That night was not restful and the battle was hard. David clings to God in a special way. It is after or during gruelling circumstances in the desert moments away from a battle with his son and some rebels that David pens this Psalm. Oh, what we learn from David, God's anointed man, on the run again!

#### The Title

Much of the background has been explained already. David is in yet another difficult spot of his own doing.

#### When we are in a tight spot, don't ask why, but who (v.1-5)

Knowing why he was in this place wouldn't comfort David. Most people think that the answer to 'why?' will solve their trouble, but they are mistaken. Why cannot take away the pain, heal a wound or steady an anxious heart. In the desert David knows what he needs - God, His

God. Just like the desert wants water all around him so he wants God (v.1). The reason he is so sure that God is what and all he needs is that he has learned this in the past. All his experience has taught him this very point. 'Just as..' should be the start of verse 2. He knows that experiencing God's steadfast love is better than an easy life. He knows that when God comforts him he will be truly confident and comforted (v.5).

### **At times we will have to help our soul (v.6-8)**

Can you picture how busy David's mind can be? Put yourself in the situation. Many would have fallen into a nervous breakdown already. And so might David, had he not learned a very useful skill. David knew how to 'cling' to God (v.8). He knew how to remember and meditate in a way that brought him great strength and peace. This is not a 'Buddhist' type of meditation he is talking about here though. He knows how to deal with his fretting soul. He recounts the goodness of God. He tells himself the stories of how God has been his help. He sings the songs from the past. He 'settles' his soul with the truth about God. The solution to an anxious heart is not to tell it "don't be anxious" but to loose it in the recounting of the faithfulness of God. Give it a try, you will see it works for you too.

### **Faith is being totally confident in God (v.9-11)**

We can't conjure up faith. Faith is when we are sure of an outcome, says Hebrews 11:1. David is sure in these verses. He has passed from 'hope' or a kind of 'wish' to complete certainty. God will deal with these people. He will put a stop to this, no question.

Well, there is one question - how do people get this kind of assurance

for themselves? Through the many Psalms we have seen. This is not a single moment in David's life. David has tested the life of faith before. He has trusted God and nothing else in prayer and circumstances so many times before. David has proved that God is trustworthy, every time we trust him. If you never trust him and pray you never get to have faith like this. All these Psalms are a great summons to come to God in prayer, nothing else, and see him deliver his people, your warts and all.

## References

As stated in the beginning, this booklet follows the idea of Alec Motyer's book *Treasures of the King* (IVP, ISBN 978-1844741939). If you wanted to buy any book on Psalms, this one is highly recommended.

Many other books were also referenced to put this material together. Here is a list with a brief comment for each:

**Longman, T: *How to read the Psalms* (IVP, ISBN 978-0877849414)**

His books are most helpful. This is worth reading for someone who wants more technical background to the Psalms.

**Kidner, D: *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and commentary* (IVP, ISBN 978-0877842644)**

This book is well referenced by other authors. It is slightly more technical but you will find the message made clear.

**Wilcock, M: *The Message of Psalms 1-72* (The Bible Speaks Today, IVP, ISBN 978-0830812448)**

This is a good series of commentaries. They emphasise the message of the Psalms. This would also be a good buy for the non-technical reader

**The New Bible Commentary (IVP, ISBN 9780830814428)**

This is probably more for the person preparing to preach the Psalms.

You would buy it because Alec Motyer writes on Psalms in the book. Excellent for the preacher.

**Leupold, H.C.: *Exposition of the Psalms* and Dickson, D: *Commentary on the Psalms***

If you are happy with old language you will get something out of these books. They are old and fairly hard to get hold of. If you can get them, though, you'll be happy you did.