

Praying With The Psalms ~ A Bible Study Resource

By Rev. Lillian Hyde

Even though they were written thousands of years ago, the Psalms have proven to be relevant to people of every age and time. Most people find that the Psalms are by far the most meaningful and relevant prayer resource we have.

Jesus' conversations often quoted or referred to the Psalms, most notably at his temptation, the Sermon on the Mount, and at his crucifixion. They were written as poetry, songs for Israelite worship, and then made part of the Hebrew Bible, which means they are the Word of God. Augustine called them the "language of devotion." Martin Luther called them "a Bible in miniature." In the 1990s, poet Kathleen Norris "fell in love" with the Psalms because it became clear to her "that the world it describes is not really so different from our own." They speak to people in all situations.

Though they were written as poetry, they don't rhyme, and they don't use the same kind of metaphors as modern poetry does. They rely on parallelism to express ideas. The first half of a verse expresses an idea. The second half agrees with it by restating it, such as in Psalm 95:

*"Come, let us sing to the Lord.
Let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation."*

Other times the parallelism is a matter of contrast, again in Psalm 95:

*"God owns the depths of the earth;
And the mightiest mountains are his."*

There are Psalms that can be used for prayer in certain situations. We can go directly to a Psalm that can speak to our situation, or one that helps us express to God more closely, or more prayerfully, what we are feeling. It may help us, if we are angry or discouraged, to be using the eternal language of the Psalms.

Psalms can also be prayed with every day, reading them in some sort of orderly fashion, day by day. Most monastic orders have been doing this for centuries, reading through all 150 Psalms every few months.

Some people simply read the Psalms all the way through in order. Others read by a plan that sorts them according to the day or the season of the church year. The daily lectionary in the Book of Common Prayer suggests a plan that reads through the Psalms every seven weeks.

We pray the Psalms as honest expressions of the human heart. We may pretend that we never feel such hatred or ever wish violence on others, but the truth is, there are times when we do. If we're angry at a coworker, we may not want burning coals to fall upon him, but we

may imagine them being humiliated in front of someone important or losing his job. And if we're entirely honest, we have to admit that when we're really angry, there are moments when flashes of violence pop into our heads.

If we're seriously angry, we may use such a Psalm as a personal expression of how we're really feeling. If the anger is but a distant memory, we use the Psalm as a way of recalling that, yes, sometimes we are like this.

Psalms like these keep them from becoming too distant. They are honest prayers of real people experiencing the myriad of emotions that life arouses in us. If you are interested in merely becoming religious, avoid the Psalms. If you're interested in becoming more deeply human, as well as more honestly and vitally connected to God, praying the Psalms will help.

You can access the prayer guide for the Psalms by clicking on [this link](#).