

PSALMS BOOK IV Bible Reading Schedule

3 Weeks

WEEK 1

Did you know that the Book of Psalms is actually broken down into five separate books? I want us to read one of those sections over Thanksgiving and into the Christmas season. You can anticipate another rendition of Advent readings in a few weeks, but until then, I invite you to read, reflect, enjoy, and meditate on Psalms 90 to 106, which is known as the 4th Book of Psalms. These psalms wrestle with questions about God's plan during hard times. The only sure way to endure is to grow in godliness and dependence on the Lord. Even though some might question God's love and faithfulness because of hard times, he still loves the people, and the flock under his care. The Psalms have continually been a source of strength and comfort for me. I anticipate our journey through this section to be very meaningful and helpful. Let the truth of who God is sustain you and also fill you with gratitude.

DAY 1 – Psalm 90

This Psalm is so fascinating to me because it is attributed to Moses. This means it was written around 1300 BC. This Psalm had to be very important to the Hebrew people. They kept it as a reminder of the consequences of doubting God. You can tell that Moses is writing about "heavy" times for God's people. I think it is connected to the people wandering in the wilderness. Verse 9 suggests to me that life closes for the people before there is any evidence of rescue, "We live our lives beneath your wrath, ending our years with a groan." This is coupled with the fact that one's life span is quite short and so making selfish, sinful choices can rob us of the blessing and favor of God given to those who cry out to the Lord. "O Lord, come back to us! Take pity on your servants." (V13) The punishment in the wilderness seems relevant to me as I visit with inmates in the jail. They feel the loss of time because they have disobeyed God and have committed crimes that have consequences for incarceration. I plan to teach this Psalm in the jail in the near future. Moses lived longer than 70 to 80 years as is referenced in verse 10. But the people in the wilderness did not. Verse 12 has such strong practical application. "Teach us to realize the brevity of life (teach us to number our days), so that we may grow in wisdom." Please read this Psalm twice through and listen to the statements and phrases that God might want to highlight in your life. The Lord would answer several of these prayers in verses 13 to 17 as the people, under the leadership of Joshua, victoriously move into the Promised Land. How do you respond to the tough love of God? What is the Lord's message to you through this Psalm?

DAY 2 – Psalm 91

There is no question about it, this has become a favorite Psalm of mine and a passage I share at funerals quite often. The Psalm is quite personal and focuses on an individual believer more so than the overall community of faith. The outline of this Psalm seems important and often assists me in my prayers. The first two verses share 5 dynamic qualities of God which is a marvelous way to begin my prayers. The next

two verses give me the assurance of God's faithfulness and many promises for me to enjoy. So, what will be my response? I will not fear because God is good and he will protect me (verses 5-8). In fact, my trust in the Lord is even stronger as I remember his guardianship over my life from verses 9-13. But my absolute favorite verses conclude this Psalm with my love for Him and his power to rescue and protect. God promises to be with me in the day of trouble. (V15) The promise of a long life is parallel to the gift of salvation I have received. (V16) I think of it like Psalm 23:6, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Psalm 90 reminds us of how brief life on earth can be and yet our eternal home is truly the "long life" we can anticipate. I invite you to slowly read through this Psalm and pray these words in appreciation to God. This is a psalm to pray! There are many touch points in these verses that will stir up thanksgiving and devotion. How has this Psalm inspired you?

DAY 3 – Psalm 92

I love the fact that this Psalm is scheduled for us the day before Thanksgiving. Verse 1 reads, "It is good to give thanks to the Lord..." This is a hymn of thanks and praise to God which is the heartbeat of Thanksgiving Day for the believer. The Psalm is identified as a Song for the Sabbath. That means this Psalm was used in worship to God. I experience worship as I read this Psalm. The middle section of the Psalm announces how empty life is without the Lord and is sure to lead to destruction. But verses 12 to 15 are easily my favorite and have become the theme verses for our Classics Community at New Harvest. The word "flourish" is mentioned twice as well as the strength of a solid tree which is portrayed as the life of a godly person. It reminds me of Isaiah 61:3, "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor." (NIV) But verse 14 in this Psalm stands out to us seniors, "They will bear fruit in old age; they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, 'The Lord is upright...'" Bearing fruit is the message of John 15 as Jesus shares the analogy of the Vine and the Branches. "A part from me you can do nothing," says Jesus. The idea is that those who abide close to Christ will bear fruit both in character and in impact. This Psalm is relatively new for me, since the launch of our Classics ministry, but it is becoming a treasured Psalm of mine already. Verses 1 to 5 elevate worship. Verses 6 to 11 remind us of how empty and dark life is without the Lord. Verses 12 to 15 promise the righteous a flourishing life as we grow and continue to praise our God. What phrase and/or truth got your attention in this Psalm? Why?

DAY 4 – Psalm 93 & 94

These two psalms can easily go together because Psalm 93 is introductory and shorter. This first Psalm is especially important because it elevates the Lord as everlasting and majestic King. I like how the NIV summarizes these thoughts with verse 2, "Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity." This phrase reminds me of what we read in Psalm 90, "from beginning to end, you are God!" As King, the Lord is also Judge. This is how Psalm 94 begins. The psalmist is calling on God for justice. We can understand this kind of prayer as so often the world ignores God and takes advantage of the weak and the poor. Plus, as I read this, I thought of the thousands of believers around the globe who are being mistreated/persecuted because of their faith in Christ. Verse 5 says, "They crush your people, Lord, hurting those who you claim as your own." Verse 10 coincides with this idea, "He punishes the nations—won't he also punish you? He knows everything—doesn't he also know what you are doing?" This is a message to the ungodly who do evil. Our God punishes his enemies by giving them what they

deserve. The psalmist brings hope and assurance beginning in verse 12. Please reread this section; what phrase or truth about God's concern for you gets your attention in verses 12 to 22? I am drawn to verse 19 as it says, "When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer." The word "doubts" can be translated as "anxiety" or "troubling cares" which fits me better because the concerns of life can weigh me down if I take my eyes off of the Lord. Peter invites us to "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) A sincere prayer asking for God's help brings me comfort time and again. We are encouraged to be self-sufficient in our world. But the Bible never teaches us to live that way. I hope that the message of these two psalms increases your confidence in the Lord. He will carry you through this turbulent world and bring you to the other side. Amen?!

DAY 5 – Psalm 95

This Psalm begins on such a high note and then from verses 8 to the close, it reminds us about days gone by when the Hebrews didn't trust God and grumbled about their lack of water and food. Of course, the Lord took care of them as we know but they tested God's patience. I love the invitation to worship God and thank him for all he does on our behalf. Let worship and praise keep your hearts soft before God as we "kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is God." (V6) The Biblical theme of God's greatness and his goodness are combined in this Psalm as well. He is great and "we are the people he watches over, the flock under his care." (V7) The challenging piece of history in the wilderness also seems to be the backdrop of Psalm 90 (verses 7 to 11) as Moses writes about the difficult days beneath God's anger. Remember the situation because it will be devastating if it is repeated. "Don't harden your hearts..." (V8) The Israelites hardened their hearts before God at the border of the Promised Land. No! "Let us come to him with thanksgiving. Let us sing psalms of praise to him." Yesterday was Thanksgiving Day and this Psalm is especially relevant with appreciation for God's handiwork and his marvelous care over our lives. I am sure you agree with me that the words of this Psalm are worth contemplating and praying back in a personal way to our God. Please turn verses 1 to 7 into a personal prayer. How has he faithfully watched over you and your loved ones? Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever!

WEEK 2

This week's readings are the least familiar to me from this section of Psalms. But I did read that Psalms 96 & 98 are often readings for Advent. Maybe you can ask yourself why these Psalms fit Advent. I have some ideas but I will leave the investigation to you. There's no doubt that this section promotes God as King. In fact, he is the great King over all the nations. This is often connected to his role as Creator God. If he made it all, he surely must rule it all. These psalms are shorter allowing you time to read and reread the Psalm as well as contemplate more deeply what the Lord might be saying to you through each Psalm.

DAY 6 – Psalm 96

In 1 Chronicles 16:8-36, David's songs of thanksgiving are recorded as a composite of three different Psalms; Psalm 105, Psalm 96, and Psalm 106 which is also a part of our reading next week. This elevates the prominence of all of these psalms but today we are reading Psalm 96 which is deemed as one of David's most noteworthy psalms. I think this Psalm is especially inspiring as it affirms the Lord's universal Kingship. The gods of the nations are nothing compared to our God. I recognize the words of verses 8 to 10 as a recent worship song we sang. The descriptive words that David uses are very worshipful with honor, majesty, beauty, glory, splendor, and reigns all used to heighten the greatness of God. There is present-day truth ringing out in this Psalm but these are also words of anticipation because when the Lord reigns he will bring justice and judge the world justly (V13). The news of the Lord's coming is meant to generate hope and much joy. This could be the advent connection, of course. Christmas is the celebration of Jesus coming to earth but the anticipated time of his reign over all nations is still in the future. Advent tells us that his first coming assures us of his second coming. I think a great way to apply this Psalm to your life is to express your love and devotion to God by using the marvelous words of worship and praise in this Psalm by sharing a personal prayer of worship from your heart to the Lord God. What specific words of worship stand out to you?

DAY 7 – Psalm 97

There are several aspects of our Christian life that we more easily emphasize and practice. We understand the importance of knowing God's truth and His Word. We know that a believer is meant to serve God and others. We pray and when we do, we pray for God to act on our behalf or on the behalf of others. But personal worship and recognition of the greatness of God as the most important aspect of our devotion to God and our prayers to him is often missing. This Psalm is all about God's greatness and the blessing of praising his holy name. Have you ever dedicated a season of prayer (like 20 or 30 minutes) to just worship God and thank him for his goodness? As much as I believe in a worshipful connection to the Lord, I don't often focus my prayer time on worship alone. But I notice that this Psalm does just that. "For you, O Lord, are supreme over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods." (V9) I am sensing the Spirit's conviction about sincere personal worship before the Lord. To me, it is like telling my wife that I loved her when we got married, and if anything ever changes, I will let her know. Of course, a spouse, in a marriage is meant to express love often and continuously. My love for the Lord is real and so, I am called to express it because the Lord is worthy. Amen! Yesterday's Psalm and today's are reminders of worship and adoration for the Lord. These are first and primary in my walk with God. Which phrase inspires you to worship? What words might you use to express your love for the Lord?

DAY 8 – Psalm 98 & 99

Which Psalm gets your attention? Why? Psalm 98 has several touch points for me with a new song, God's faithfulness to his promises, victory, and the assurance he will judge with justice, to mention a few. Overall, this Psalm celebrates the Lord's Kingship as has been a theme since Psalm 93. The Lord is the true champion as well as the savior for his people. The Lord displays his righteous rule to all the nations throughout the earth, which will culminate in a worldwide kingdom of justice. Consequently, all the earth must worship and rejoice together because the Lord is coming (98:9, Advent). 99:5 says it quite succinctly, "Exalt the Lord our God! Bow low before his feet, for he is holy!" Moses, Aaron, and Samuel all approached God in this way and the Lord heard their cries for help and he answered them. These are both short psalms but powerful with exaltation which again elevates the greatness of God. We are reading similar words these days that hopefully are sinking into our souls. This God of ours is worthy beyond our understanding and deserves our praise. I put Psalms 98 & 99 together because they are shorter but also have a strong emphasis on singing and worship, "Let them praise your great and awesome name. Your name is holy!" (99:3) How might these two Psalms inspire your praise? As we transition from the importance of Thanksgiving last week, we look forward to honoring the coming King with the days of Christmas just before us. Why is praise such a great way to anticipate Advent?

DAY 9 – Psalm 100 & 101

I put these two psalms together because they are short not because they have a similar theme. The message of Psalm 100 is much more familiar and upbeat. It is clearly a psalm of thanksgiving. I appreciate the invitation and often need a reminder to "make a joyful noise." (KJV) It is a common statement to suggest a joyful "noise" because not everyone is an especially good singer. Obviously, what God cares about most is how we approach him. In the Psalm, there's joy, gladness, thanksgiving, and praise, as we say "yes" to the invitation to enter his gates with rejoicing. Why? "We are his people!" The Lord has shared his goodness with us (V5). I appreciate this enthusiastic psalm! Psalm 101 is quite different; they do not really go together but for our purposes, we can take in both themes because they are worthy of our application. Psalm 101 clearly expresses a commitment to live with integrity and to avoid sin. This is David's desire and most likely this Psalm was written later in his life. He is repenting by pledging to God a life that honors the Lord from this step forward. Previously, David had made choices that dishonored the Lord but from now on he will reject evil and be conscientious of whom he chooses to partner with, "I will search for faithful people to be my companions." (V6) 1 COR 15:33 reads, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" In fact, David is committed to ridding his house and the city of the Lord from corruption and ungodliness. David might even be referring to his son, Absalom who did evil in the eyes of the Lord and David ignored it. The result was David fleeing from Jerusalem as Absalom took over the palace. Nonetheless, those closest to us are sure to influence us. This can be positive, of course, but it can also lead to deception and compromise. Let us learn from David the negative results of compromise. Which Psalm spoke to you and why? Plus, how do you respond to the unique message from each of these Psalms?

DAY 10 – Psalm 102

It is always surprising to me that the idea of suffering and pain should not be a part of a genuine Christian's life. But this Psalm is another example of God's receptivity to the cries of his people. In Exodus 3, God told Moses that he heard the cries of his people and had decided to deliver them. "You will arise and have mercy on Jerusalem—and now is the time to pity her, now is the time you promised to help." (V13) The honesty of the Psalmist is a clear example of God's compassion and his willingness to listen. I don't know how open you are with the Lord but I find the listening ear of our God to be of incredible help and such a significant way to cleanse my heavy heart and emotions with the invitation to be completely honest with the Lord. What honest prayer request are you drawn to in this Psalm? Let me suggest that we are much more comfortable praying heartfelt prayers for others than addressing God about our burdens. I have referred to 1 Peter 5:7 before, "Cast your cares on him because he cares for you." Psalm 103 includes a timeless truth in verse 8, "The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love." So, listen to Psalm 102:27, "But you are always the same; you will live forever." God's character is sure and his posture is continuously compassionate. The unchanging love of God means he will always respond in a loving way for what he knows is best for you. Do not hold back your honest prayers to the Lord. Amen!?

WEEK 3

Let's enjoy one more week in Book IV of Psalms. These next five psalms are inspiring, of course, but also full of history and how God has been active since the beginning. These psalms demonstrate an important principle of remembering how God has protected, guided, blessed, and provided for his people. Our first Psalm will highlight the people of God praising the Lord as a community. The next Psalm is a creation hymn exalting the Lord for his handiwork. Both Psalms 105 & 106 are full of gratitude for how God has worked in history. Then, Psalm 107 is a marvelous surprise and a beautiful way to wrap up the three weeks we have read from the Psalms.

DAY 11 – Psalm 103

It is not an exaggeration to say this is one of the most cherished psalms in the Book. From start to finish, it is full of powerful statements worth memorizing because of their inspiring truth. We are to remember and celebrate God's compassion, forgiveness, and goodness. If you ever need a list of ways that God has blessed his people, just read verses 1 to 5 in this chapter. Which benefit in verses 3-5 catches your eye? Why? Verse 8 is repeated in the Old Testament over 6 times making it a summary statement about the character of our God. What attribute of the Lord touches your heart from this verse? Verses 11 to 18 are my favorite and announce a promise or two for those who fear the Lord. How many times does David say, "Those who fear the Lord?" Why is that an important qualifier? What promises are given to the person who fears the Lord? Do you notice the love, forgiveness, and compassion of our God? Some of these statements are the most endearing in all of Psalms. I usually share a few more thoughts about the reading but this Psalm speaks for itself so strongly that I can let it speak to you without any assistance. Amen?! Which verse do you camp on? Why? If this is one of the most illuminating chapters in the Book of Psalms about the character of God, what do you learn about God? What do these thoughts and insights mean to you?

DAY 12 – Psalm 104

There's no doubt that this Psalm affirms the creative work and ability of the Lord. The Psalm refers to the original creation with words like, "You placed the world on its foundation so it would never be moved." (V5) There's also much about God's sustaining his creation with words like, "When you supply it (food), they gather it. You open your hand to feed them, and they are richly satisfied." (V28) This theme begins in verse 10 as the Psalmist highlights how the earth became a splendid place for animals and humans in so many ways. But that is not all. We read about the promise of a future new creation. The combination of renewal and cleansing is found in verse 30 and the opposite in verse 35: "When you give them your breath, life is created, and you renew the face of the earth." (V30) But also, "Let all sinners vanish from the face of the earth; let the wicked disappear forever." (V35) This means sin and sinners alike will be separated from the beauty and glory of the Lord forever. I think the outline for this Psalm is simply 1) the original creation, 2) the present world as God continues to create and supply, as well as 3) the future new creation that is mentioned in verses 30 to 35 but is more fully expressed in Isaiah 65 & 66. Since I haven't read Psalm 104 often, I appreciate the reminder of God's activity from beginning to end. He is the creator, sustainer, and the culmination of all things; the Alpha and the Omega. Amen! Even though I

know God is great, I often need this kind of reminder to solidify my understanding and perspective regarding the God of the whole universe. How did God speak to you through this Psalm?

DAY 13 – Psalm 105

Why should they praise the Lord and be thankful? Because the Lord has done great things for his people. He fulfilled his covenant with Abraham and watched over his people every step of the way. “Remember the wonders he has performed, his miracles, and the rulings he has given...” (V5) This could be the theme verse for this Psalm because the words of this Psalm are words of remembrance from the time of Jacob and especially connected to Joseph. In fact, the Psalmist says things about Joseph that I don’t remember reading in the Genesis account. Like verse 18, which describes Joseph in prison, “They bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar.” Why? “...the Lord tested his character.” (V19) The reason the Psalmist would give greater detail is mostly likely connected to the stories in Hebrew culture about Joseph. There’s no doubt that Joseph is a hero among the Hebrews. The story continues with the plagues in Egypt and tells us another part of the story that can be overlooked but is essential to the survival of God’s people. “The Lord brought his people out of Egypt, loaded with silver and gold” because the Egyptians were afraid of the Hebrews with the evidence of God’s miraculous power. They gave the Hebrews everything they wanted. This would provide for God’s people. For example, how could Mary & Joseph survive unless the Magi had supplied them with expensive gifts so that the baby Jesus could live in Egypt for some time? God has worked in history in such a profound way that the people would listen and obey but that didn’t last long, right? “All this happened so they would follow his decrees and obey his instructions.” (V45) So too for us; God’s goodness is meant to motivate you to obey him with a grateful heart. Is that true for you? How do you respond to this inspiring historical record in Psalm 105 as a hymn of praise?

DAY 14 – Psalm 106

Even though the first verse contains familiar words, I still appreciate the sound of “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.” Tomorrow, Psalm 107 will begin with the same words. It seems to me that the Psalmist had read the story of the wilderness in the Book of Numbers before writing this hymn. The first 33 verses are about the discipline of the Lord because of the lack of faith among the Hebrews. “They forgot God, their savior, who had done such great things in Egypt...” (V21) The lack of faith caused the Israelites to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. “The people refused to enter the pleasant land, for they wouldn’t believe his promise to care for them.” (V24) We know that God loves us with an unfailing love but that does not mean it is just a soft kind of love. The backdrop of this Psalm highlights the tough love of God. It is the picture of discipline and even meant eventual death for the generation of God’s people in the wilderness. There’s no question that God implements tough love and that is what it is – love! Proverbs 3:11-12 says it so clearly: “My child, don’t reject the Lord’s discipline, and don’t be upset when he corrects you. For the Lord corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.” Hebrews 12:5-11 has even more to say about this indispensable principle. God refined his people in the wilderness and they rose up as people who believed God. Remember, “Without faith, it is impossible to please God.” (Hebrews 11:6) How do you respond to this Psalm and these thoughts?

DAY 15 – Psalm 107

I decided to add this Psalm to our readings even though it is not included in Book IV of Psalms. There's another important and timeless truth repeated in this Psalm besides the beauty of verse 1. Each time the people cried out to the Lord, he answered them. It is a fascinating Psalm with the rhythm of a hymn that highlights the consistency of God to help and intervene. I especially appreciate the message of verses 1 to 9 because it is about thanksgiving and was the focus of a devotional I shared before Thanksgiving. But as I read on, this Psalm is more and more meaningful to me. Verse 6 begins the emphasis of pleading with God in prayer for help and he is faithful each and every time. Verses 6, 13, 19, & 28 have the same wording on purpose. It is like a refrain in a song of worship which isn't surprising since the Psalms are the worship songs for God's people. The first situation in verse 5 points to the need for provision and rescue from God and he provides. Verse 11 tells us about rebellion and God's punishment but when the people cried out to God for mercy, he saved them from their distress. In verse 17, some were dying and suffering because of their sin and God responded to their cry for help. Some were in dire straights in verses 23 to 27, but when they cried out to God, he rescued them. Can you recall times in your life when you experienced the grace of God to provide, to save, to rescue, to forgive...? The Psalmist is encouraging us to remember the times when God "turns the desert into pools of water, the dry land into flowing springs." (V35) The NLT translates verse 43 this way, "Those who are wise will take all this to heart; they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord." (V43) That summarizes the message of this Psalm so well. How have you seen the unfailing love of God throughout your history?