



## Let's Go Deeper...

Wednesday, April 20, 2016

Last Sunday afforded us an opportunity to delve into the Psalms.

**It's only fitting that the psalms are found at the heart of the Bible.** Exactly halfway through the little Bible I carry around with me—on page 608 of 1216 pages-- is **Psalm 145: "I will extol thee, my God and King, and bless thy name for ever and ever."** An appropriate sentiment, indeed, for a verse found at the very heart of scripture.

The psalms have been taken to heart by people in countless ways across nearly 3,000 years. For instance, **certain figures of speech from the Psalms** have lodged themselves in our vocabulary to the point people may not even know that what they're saying is from the Psalms when they're talking.

For instance, the expression "The apple of my eye" is from **Psalm 17:8**.

"My heart's desire" is from **Psalm 21:2**.

Ever called someone a "smooth talker?" **Psalm 55:21**.

Ever been "at wit's end"? **Psalm 107:27**.

The expression "His days are numbered": **Psalm 90:12**.

Someone's life being "the pits": (**Psalm 143:7**).

Or the blessing of being "taken under someone's wing": (**Psalm 91:4**).

**Just noticing the manner in which the Psalms are arranged bears witness to their importance.** You may know that the Bible's first five books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy-- have always been accorded a place of preeminence in the Bible. Well, Psalms is likewise divided up into five books (1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150) as if to say that just as the first five books of the Bible contain the essence of God's Word to us, the Psalms capture the essence of our words to God.

**There are several types of Psalms.** Just as when you walk into a Barnes & Noble you see several types of books (Fiction, Non-Fiction, Biography, Business, Children's, Humor) and when you walk into a music store you see Classical, Bluegrass, Pop, Rock, Folk, Hip Hop, Heavy Metal, and Jazz, likewise when you walk into the Book of Psalms you will find various types of psalms to fit any mood.

**Hymns of Praise**, of which there are at least 15 psalms, revel in the magnificence of God's creation (think of standing at the rim of the Grand Canyon for the first time) and the majesty of God's sovereignty (think of the Hallelujah Chorus: "and He shall reign for ever and ever"). They capture the moods of awe, wonder, and reverence. **Psalm 8** is one of my favorites.

**Lament psalms**, of which there are over 50, cry out from the depths of pain, suffering, grief, injustice, betrayal, and loneliness (think of "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," Bach's haunting Passion Chorale "O, Sacred Head Now Wounded", or "Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, let me stand, I'm tired, I'm weak, I'm worn"). They capture the moods of sorrow, anguish, and anger. **Psalm 22** bears within it a foreshadowing of Jesus on the cross.

Psalms of **Trust and Thanksgiving**, of which there are 17 or so, provide the blessed assurance of God's ability to help or praise God for assistance already

rendered (think of “The Lord is My Shepherd, I shall not want,” “Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come, ‘tis grace hath brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.” They capture the moods of bold hope, and renewed encouragement. In addition to 23, I have 46 and 121 memorized.

Then there are the dozen so-called **Wisdom** psalms filled with sage advice on how to live life to the fullest, promising the righteous that wrongs will be righted and justice will be done and warning evildoers of their comeuppance and accountability for what they’ve done. Think of “Deep in my Heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day” or “He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; he is sifting out all human hearts before his judgment seat; O be swift my soul to answer him, be jubilant my feet, his truth is marching on!” They capture the mood of quiet confidence and unshakeable assurance. **Psalm 1** is my personal favorite with its comparison of the fruits of righteousness to a deep-rooted oak and the end of snarky, scoffing fools to inconsequential chaff.

Bottom line: the Psalms provide us with a veritable menu of moods and emotions-- praise as well as perplexity, gratitude and grief, hope and heartache, awe as well as anger. By so doing, they provide us an outlet for every emotion and assure us that all experiences of life can be translated into prayer.

I mentioned on Sunday Dr. Bill Paulsell’s inquiry of a monk years ago.

“What can I do to deepen my prayer life?,” Bill asked.

“Do what we do,” answered the monk. “Pray the psalms.”

Four years ago, Jennie and I had the pleasure of spending a couple days with Eugene and Jan Peterson at their home on Flathead Lake in Montana. Dr. Peterson, author of numerous books that plumb the depths of Christian Spirituality, is best known for *The Message*, his superb paraphrase of the Bible.

Here is a new video featuring U2’s Bono and Eugene Peterson talking about their shared affinity for the Psalms filmed at the Petersons’ home in Montana. <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=-l4oS5e9oKY>

