

# Psalms

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? Psalms is a songbook.

**WHO WROTE IT?** King David wrote most of the psalms, but a great number of other songwriters, many of them anonymous, also contributed. Since the psalms were written to be used in worship, many were written by Levitical or priestly poets and musicians.

**WHEN DID IT HAPPEN?** The psalms were composed over many centuries. The earliest one was probably written in the 1400s B.C.; the latest in the 500s B.C.

**WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT?** Most of the psalms come from the era of Israel's united kingdom.

**THE BREAKDOWN** There are no thematic sections per se, but traditionally the Psalms were divided into five "books":

- Book I: Psalms 1-41
- Book II: Psalms 42-72
- Book III: Psalms 73-89
- Book IV: Psalms 90-106
- Book V: Psalms 107-150

**KEY CONCEPTS**

- Praise
- Glory

**SCORECARD**

**David:** The primary psalm writer  
**Asaph:** Another lyricist



WHAT'S THE POINT OF

# Psalms?

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# God

deserves

our greatest

passion.

**WORTH MEMORIZING**

Where to start? The most familiar—and most memorized—parts of the Bible are here. Choose any of the following to get going:

• **19:14**  
May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you,

• **27:1**  
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

• **119:11**  
I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

• **119:105**  
Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

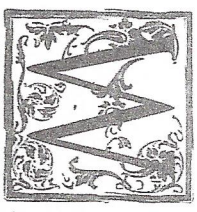
• **139:23-24**  
Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

Other great passages from Psalms to memorize include: Psalm 8; Psalm 23; Psalm 51:1-12; Psalm 91; Psalm 100; Psalm 103:1-5; Psalm 121; Psalm 150

**THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE**

• **PRaise AND WORSHIP** Some men think of praise and worship as "for women only." Yet here's an entire songbook written by men! As we read this book with open eyes, we see that worship is a man's most significant activity.



Whenever God's people gather, whether in grief or celebration, they sing. The style of music changes, but singing remains a deeply-rooted part of our heritage. From the spontaneous choir at the Red Sea in Exodus 15 to the professional choirs David assembled among the Levites, songs run through the Old Testament like musical ribbons. And in the middle of it all—at the very heart of the Bible—is the book of Psalms, the hymnbook of the people of God.

Psalms, the Bible's longest book, comprises five separate collections: Book 1 is chapters 1 through 41; Book 2 is chapters 42 through 72; Book 3 is chapters 73 through 89; Book 4 is chapters 90 through 106; and Book 5 is chapters 107 through 150. Each of these collections ends with an outburst of praise—an *Amen* or a *Hallelujah*.

Often when we cannot find words to express our fears, joys, longings, or sorrows. We find them in the pages of this book, as Psalm 100 exhorts us:

*Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.*

*10: 16* The LORD is king forever and ever! The goddess nations will vanish from the land.



## KEY THOUGHT:

The book of Psalms—Israel's hymnbook—teaches us to continually praise God for His greatness, goodness, and glory.



## KEY VERSES:

“Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing.”

Psalms 100:1-2



## KEY ACTION:

Worship! Sing! Praise!



## KEY PRAYER:

In all things let my words and thoughts honor You Lord. May my life be a living praise to Your goodness!

**51:5-9** If we fail to admit and confess our sin, it will continue to burden us with destructive guilt. We need to learn to confess and repent of our sin.

**118:22-25** God's ways are not the same as our ways. What people may cast aside as unfit for use, God uses to do awe-inspiring work. This can be true for us, too. We may feel that we are beyond repair. We may think that we will never be used by God for anything significant. God often uses the most unlikely people to work his greatest miracles, showing the world that he is at work. As willing vessels of God's power, we can be transformed to make an impact on others that goes far beyond our wildest dreams.

## BASIC SURVEY

### PSALMS

**AUTHOR:** Various, with nearly half attributed to King David. Other names noted include Solomon, Moses, Asaph, Ethan, and the sons of Korah. Many psalms don't mention an author.

**DATE:** Approximately 1400s BC (Moses' time) through the 450s BC (when the Jews were under Persian rule).

#### IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Ancient Jewish songbook showcases prayers, praise—and complaints—to God.

#### DETAILS, PLEASE

Over several centuries, God led various individuals to compose emotionally charged poems—of which 150 were later compiled into the book we know as the Psalms. Many of the psalms are described as “of David,” meaning they could be by, for, or about Israel's great king. Highlights of the book include the “shepherd psalm” (23), which describes God as protector and provider; David's cry for forgiveness after his sin with Bathsheba (51); psalms of praise (100 is a powerful example); and the celebration of scripture found in Psalm 119, with almost all of the 176 verses making some reference to God's laws, statutes, commandments, precepts, word, etc. Some psalms, called “imprecatory,” call for God's judgment on enemies (see Psalms 69 and 109, for example). Many psalms express agony of spirit on the writer's part—but nearly every psalm returns to the theme of praise to God. That's the way the book ends: “Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD” (150:6 KJV).

#### QUOTABLE

- > O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth (8:1 NKJV).
- > The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want (23:1 KJV).
- > Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me (51:10 KJV).
- > I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you (119:11 NIV).
- > I look up to the mountains—does my help come from there? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth! (121:1-2 NLT).
- > Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (133:1 KJV).

## UNIQUE AND UNIVERSAL

The book of Psalms is the Bible's longest, both in terms of chapters (150) and total word count. It contains the longest chapter in the Bible (Psalm 119, with 176 verses) and the shortest (Psalm 117, with 2 verses). Psalm 117 is also the midpoint of the Protestant Bible, with 594 chapters before it and 594 after.

## SO WHAT?

The psalms run the gamut of human emotion—which is why so many people turn to them in times of both joy and sadness.

## READ PSALMS 1 AND 69.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 106. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 101. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 101. →

**3:5-8** God comforted David so much that he could sleep like a baby in the face of his troubles. What is more, David's worries and anxieties vanished when he focused his thoughts fully on God. Thus David could view life as if all of his problems had been eliminated. By placing his problems in God's hands, David had taken the most important step toward solving them. When we surrender our lives to God, we, too, can rest easy, knowing that he is in control.

**4:1-3** David rejoiced about God's powerful protection. In times of distress our merciful God is the perfect haven of rest. He is listening, and he hears our cries for help. God wants us to put our trust in him. We insult him when we trust in our own resources, or anything else, to deliver us from our problems. When we surrender our lives to God, we become his own chosen ones, whom he promises to hear when we call out to him.

**4:6-8** Many of the people around us cannot see God at work in our lives. They see only our past failures. But as God transforms our lives, we become living testimonies of his power. True joy comes from God—a joy that is greater than all the gladness the world can produce. Nothing will bring us more peaceful nights of sleep than the knowledge that God is with us.

**5:1-7** David understood how foolish it was to look for help from anything or anyone else but God. One by one he brought his needs daily to God. Whenever we go and whatever we are doing, we can trust God to help us in our moment-by-moment walk of obedience.

**10:13-18** Even when it appears that God is blind to the evil deeds of others, we can be sure that one day he will respond with judgment. Those who drag others into sin will be judged harshly by God (see Luke 17:1-2). At times God works quietly behind the scenes, helping those who admit the reality of their situations to overcome the amenities and problems they face.

**14:1-3** Security from temptation can be found in God; running elsewhere for help will never do any good. If we turn to so me other resource for help, the people and problems that threaten to destroy us will lead us astray when we are most vulnerable. They will take advantage of us when the resource we depend on is unavailable. God is always with us. If we put our trust in him, we will have the means to overcome temptation.

**124:1-8** Without God, there is no hope in the midst of life's battles. If he is not fighting our battles with us, we will be overwhelmed by the spiritual forces arrayed against us. We should respond to God's gracious help by praising him for what he has done for us.

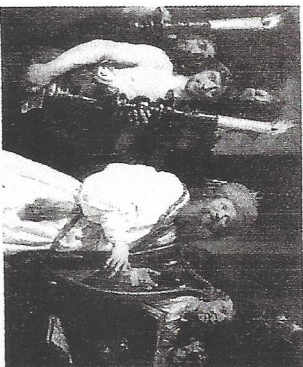
**126:1-6** This psalm was written in response to the return of Jewish exiles from captivity. During this time, they admitted their sins and returned to God. This can be our story too. Regardless of how far we have

## HEART OF THE BOOK

## DAVID: THE SWEET PSALMIST

David was an anointed musician who wrote many songs called psalms, which are a mixture of honest complaints, wholehearted cries for help, declarations of trust, and beautiful praises to God. Many people read the psalms when troubled or fearful and find great comfort. In addition, many portions of joyful psalms have been set to music once again and used to worship God.

Because David was also a prophet (Acts 2:30), some psalms were prophetic declarations about the coming Messiah. Psalms 16 and 22 are the most outstanding examples. David himself recognized this anointing, and wrote, "David the son of Jesse declares, the man who was raised on high declares, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and



King David wrote many of the psalms. He is pictured here in David playing the lyre by Janke Key (1627-1697).

the sweet psalmist of Israel, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:1-2 NASB).

Some psalms were also written by Levites called the "sons of Korah" (see Psalms 42-49). These Kohathites were inspired musicians and singers whom David appointed to worship the Lord after the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 6:31-43). They apparently wrote while David himself was alive and writing. Other psalms were written by unknown musicians who had been carried away captive to Babylon in 586 BC (see Psalm 137). Still others were written by poor, faithful Levites during the days of the Persian Empire (see Psalm 119). All these other psalmists were inspired by David's example—and most of all, inspired by God.

## READ PSALMS 95-96.

- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 106. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 102. →

## CLOSER LOOK

## SHEPHERDS AND SHEEP



David was a shepherd before he became a king. Jesus described Himself as a shepherd who would lay down His life to save His sheep.

with a strong message, He had Nathan tell him a story about a small ewe lamb (2 Samuel 12:1-9).

From David's rich experience as a shepherd comes some of the most profound and moving imagery in the Psalms. Psalm 23, called "the Shepherd Psalm," begins with the words, "The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters" (Psalm 23:1-2 NIV).

Jesus, the "son of David," declared that He Himself was the Good Shepherd who guarded His sheep and would lay down His life to defend them (John 10:1-18). He told a tender story about a shepherd who went to great lengths to rescue a lost lamb (Luke 15:3-7).

READ PSALMS 23 AND 41.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 103.



## CLOSER LOOK

## LOST BOOKS AND MISSING EPISTLES

The title above Psalm 90 reads, "A Prayer of Moses the man of God." This is the only psalm written by Moses in the book of Psalms. But the amazing thing is that it wasn't included in the books of the Law written by Moses, but was floating on its own for hundreds of years until the Levites who compiled the book of Psalms included it. Otherwise, it probably would have been lost.

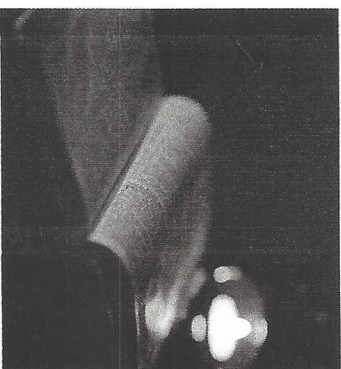
The Book of Jasher is an example of an entire book that never made it into the Bible. Small portions of it are quoted in Joshua 10:12-13 and in 2 Samuel 1:17-27, but that's all we have. It was apparently a book of poetry extolling Israel's battles. So why didn't it survive? Why wasn't it included? Apparently, God knew it wasn't necessary, so He only had scribes preserve the portions that we needed.

Think about this: after writing twenty-one chapters of his Gospel, the apostle John added that he could have gone on virtually *forever* had it been God's will: "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25 NKJV).

This also explains why Paul's epistle to the Laodiceans (Colossians 4:16) wasn't preserved in the New Testament. However, if we want to, we'll have eternity to read all these missing books in heaven.

READ PSALM 90 AND 2 SAMUEL 1:17-27.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 106.



There are several books quoted in the Bible that are not included in the biblical canon.

## HIDDEN TREASURE

## PROPHECIES OF CRUCIFIXION

Some one thousand years before Jesus' death, Psalm 22 gave a detailed description of crucifixion, a form of execution that wasn't practiced in Israel then. The following quotes are from Psalm 22:14–18 (NIV). “They pierce my hands and my feet” (v. 16). This is precisely what the Romans did. “All my bones are out of joint” (v. 14). As victims hung on the cross, their arms were dislocated from their sockets. “All my bones are on display” (v. 17). Christ’s muscles were so cut open from whipping that His underlying bones were visible. “My mouth is dried up” (v. 15). Crucified people experienced dehydration (see John 19:28). “They divide my cloth as among them and cast lots for my garment” (v. 18). This is precisely what the Romans did (see John 19:23–24).

READ PSALM 22 AND MARK 15:1–39.



Although written about 1,000 years before the crucifixion, Psalm 22 describes Jesus' death. The crucifixion is depicted in *Christ on the Cross between Two Thieves* by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640).

## HIDDEN TREASURE

## THE PROTECTION PSALM

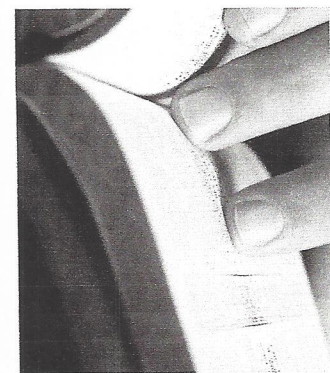
Psalm 91 is called “the Protection Psalm,” and during times of war or danger, many people claim its promises of protection for themselves or their loved ones. It states: “You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday” (Psalm 91:5–6 NKJV). It further promises that although people may be dying all around you, God will spare you. But there is a condition to these promises: you must habitually “dwell” with God and must continuously “abide” with the Almighty (Psalm 91:1 NKJV). It doesn’t work to be God’s fair-weather friend and only cry out to Him when you desperately need Him.

READ PSALMS 91 AND 140–141.

## HIDDEN TREASURE

## LOVE FOR GOD’S WORD

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible and is a complex poem proclaiming the psalmist’s love for God’s Word. There is one section for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the verses of each stanza all begin with the same Hebrew letter. This psalm was probably written by a devout Levite after the Jews had returned from Babylon but were oppressed by their enemies. Nehemiah describes such circumstances: “The survivors . . . are there in great distress and reproach” (Nehemiah 1:3 NKJV).



Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible and focuses on a love for God’s Word.

This psalm contains many beautiful promises and declarations, such as: “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11 NASB). Also: “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18 NASB).

READ PSALM 119:1–56.

## HIDDEN TREASURE

## SONGS OF ASCENT

Psalms 120–134 are mostly very short psalms, and each one bears the title “A song of ascents.” Jerusalem was on a higher elevation than the surrounding land, and the Bible often speaks of “going up to Jerusalem” (Matthew 20:18 NIV). These psalms were probably sung by Jewish pilgrims as they drew near to Jerusalem to attend the three great annual feasts (Exodus 23:14–17). As they began the ascent to the city, the crowds rejoiced and sang these songs together. “You shall have a song . . . when a holy festival is kept” (Isaiah 30:29 NKJV). Jesus and His family would have sung these psalms as they approached Jerusalem for the annual Feast of the Passover (Luke 2:41), and He and His disciples would’ve sung them as well.

READ PSALMS 120–134.

You can't tell in English, but several psalms are actually acrostics, with each stanza (or line) beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

- Psalms 9–10  
(which were one psalm originally)
- Psalm 25
- Psalm 34
- Psalm 37
- Psalm 111
- Psalm 112
- Psalm 119
- Psalm 145

#### EXAMPLE OF AN ACROSTIC IN PSALMS:

**א** The first eight lines of Psalm 119 begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph*.

**ב** The next eight lines begin with the second letter, *beth*.

This pattern continues for a total of 176 verses, completing the Hebrew alphabet.

## Houses and Children

Psalm 127

**THIS PSALM BEGINS** with the importance of a strong foundation for a family: "Unless the Lord builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted" (Psalm 127:1). The "house" the family lives in is the environment in which the members relate. If that environment is not built upon fellowship with the Lord, family members will suffer. If our homes are filled with strife, anger, and selfishness, all our work toward a happy, loving family will be in vain. We need God at the center of our families as well as our individual lives.

The second portion of this psalm tells us that children are a gift from the Lord. Granted, kids may not seem that way in certain moments, like when you're tense, irritated, or exhausted. But in fact, they are a marvelous creation that God has given us to bless our lives and stretch our souls.

It is interesting that this psalm speaks first about the "house" we inhabit and then the blessings of children. That's probably intentional: First build your marriage relationship with God as the master architect, then begin to raise a family. Give your children the benefit of an atmosphere already filled with God's love and provision.

## God's Unfailing Forgiveness and Love

Psalm 51

**DAVID IS BIGGER THAN LIFE**—yet he's also very human. He's both a man after God's own heart and a big-time sinner. This psalm was written by David after Nathan the prophet confronted him about his sin with Bathsheba.

You remember, of course, that David not only lusted but followed through on his thoughts by getting Bathsheba pregnant and then having her husband killed. What a guy. When we read similar accounts of people today, "man after God's own heart" is not typically the first phrase that springs to mind.

So why do we think so highly of David even though he was so obviously imperfect? Because David is a shining example of a man who committed heinous sins and yet was forgiven and loved by God. The condition of David's heart, revealed in this psalm, shows us how he really felt about his sin.

David made no excuses. He admitted his deeds were "evil" and asked God to "purify" him. He brought his "broken and repentant heart" to God for forgiveness and healing.

David's relationship with God is his primary concern in this psalm—he made coming into the presence of God his first priority.

This does not negate the need to restore human relationships, but it puts the importance of our relationship with God before everything else. And the way we come before God matters. He wants honesty, not excuses. He demands repentance and a desire to be restored into a loving relationship with him. He cannot forgive and heal us until we come clean with him. He already knows our hearts, but he wants us to come humbly and contritely to him, open ourselves to his scrutiny, and trust in his care for us.

## Pathway to Purity

Psalm 119:9-16

**THIS PASSAGE STARTS OUT WITH A QUESTION:** "How can a young person stay pure?"

The answers in the following verses are relevant and profitable for young and old alike. Purity isn't something you learn once and then never again have to think about. We are constantly bombarded with temptations toward impure thoughts and actions. Even the slightest slipup can infiltrate and harm our relationships. So how can one stay pure? Look at the list of helpful guidelines in this passage:

- Obey God's Word.
- Hide God's Word in your heart.
- Learn God's decrees.
- Recite his regulations aloud.
- Rejoice in God's laws.
- Study his commandments.
- Reflect on his ways.
- Delight in his decrees.
- Remember his Word.

Perhaps the most crucial task in the list is "reflecting." Of course we need to study and learn and memorize before we can reflect. But it's reflection that drives God's Word ever deeper into our hearts.

The tyranny of our days is busyness. We fly from one task to the next. We take in information at a rate beyond what we can absorb. So often we fail to manage life and instead allow life to simply happen to us. And along the way, impurity sneaks in.

If we really want to be the men God wants us to be, we must take time to really think about his Word, to reflect on what it means to us individually. This is not an easy task. In our busy lives, it's difficult to find time even to accomplish all of our day-to-day activities. But without taking the time to reflect on God's Word, our lives will never produce the purity God desires.

# Songs for the Ages

## Asaph

WHEN YOU THINK "MUSIC," who comes to mind? Mozart? Bach? Goodman? Bachman Turner Overdrive? Sibelius? Sinatra?

You probably didn't name Asaph, but he would have been a worthy nominee. This ancient master of song bequeathed to the world not only his work but also a faithful group of musicians who long continued his legacy.

The Bible first mentions Asaph as "first assistant" to "Heman the musician." King David assigned these Levites to "lead the music at the house of the Lord," along with their sons (1 Chronicles 6:31-39). When the Ark of the Covenant moved to Jerusalem for the first time, Asaph was among those who sounded the bronze cymbals (1 Chronicles 15:1-9). Shortly after this event, Asaph got a promotion and became the leader of Israel's worship (1 Chronicles 16:5).

On at least one occasion, David gave a worship song he had written to Asaph and his team to perform (1 Chronicles 16:7). For many years Asaph "proclaim[ed] God's messages to the accompaniment of lyres, harps, and cymbals" (1 Chronicles 25:1). He, his sons, and his associates "were all trained in making music before the Lord, and each of them—288 in all—was an accomplished musician" (1 Chronicles 25:7).

Yet Asaph was far more than a professional musician. Hundreds of years after Asaph's death, Hezekiah, the fourteenth king of Judah, ordered his own worship leaders "to praise the Lord with the psalms written by David and by Asaph the seer" (2 Chronicles 29:30). Supercriptions in the Psalms name Asaph as the author of a dozen songs (Psalms 50; 73-83), and yet at least three of the compositions (Psalms 74; 79; 80) seem to have been written centuries later by his descendants. Apparently Asaph exerted such a strong influence that his music and message lived on long after his death.

Was this merely a pleasant but unintended side effect of a godly life? Hardly. Asaph intended for his influence to outlive him. Listen to part of one of his songs: "I will teach you hidden lessons from our past—stories we have heard and known, stories our ancestors handed down to us. We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about his power and his mighty wonders. . . . So each generation should set its hope anew on God" (Psalm 78:2-4, 7).

Asaph warned his sons and fellow Israelites not to envy the prosperity of evil men, as he foolishly did at one time (Psalm 73). He extolled God's power and majesty (Psalm 76) and cried out in deep pain for deliverance (Psalm 77). He sternly counseled his countrymen to avoid flirting with foreign gods (Psalm 81), rebuked unjust judges (Psalm 82), and pled for God to destroy Israel's enemies (Psalm 83).

Asaph left a tremendous legacy, not only of music but also of delight in God. He proves that a faithful man can have a positive impact on his family for generations.

**THE POINT:** Your influence can live on long after your death.

# Personal Gold

from JOSH McDOWELL

## HOW TO CONVEY GOD'S PERSPECTIVE ON SEX

It is healthy for young people to study the Scriptures and gain a thorough understanding of God's perspective about sex. Such an understanding is essential for anyone who wants to say no to premarital sex.

God designed and created sex. It is not dirty or evil, and God is not down on sex. It is a carefully planned aspect of our humanness, intended for our benefit and God's glory. The Song of Songs is not only a beautiful love story, it is also a wholesome sex manual. And the apostle Paul in the New Testament not only approves of sex between marriage partners, he also recommends it often. Anyone who questions whether sex is good is actually questioning God's goodness.

The best place for young people to learn God's perspective about sex is at home. Here are a few key elements about sex you should be sharing with your kids.

It is important for young people to feel good about being male and female and to accept their sexuality as a gift from God. The psalmist says, "Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous" (Psalm 139:14, NLT). The creation of the human body, with its sex drives and organs, is something to thank him for. There are no reasons to be ashamed. From the beginning, human sexuality is seen as a reflection of the character of God, and its existence is described as "very good."

As you study God's perspective on sex, three things become apparent:

1. God is pro-sex. He created sex, and he wants us to enjoy it to the fullest. If anyone has any doubts, read the Song of Songs.
2. Sexual intercourse is intended for oneness. There is no expression of unity between a man and a woman that is more intimate than this. Oneness is one of the primary purposes of sex.
3. God designed sex for marriage—it is meant to take place between a husband and wife. Since oneness is the primary purpose for sexual intercourse, it is evident why God has restricted it to the context of marriage.

Marriage, in God's plan, is the permanent bonding of two people. Paul uses the analogy of Christ and the church to provide a deeper understanding of that union (Ephesians 5:31-32). Based on that relationship, divorce is not an option for two believers. To a culture that lives for the moment and marries for the moment, the Christian concept of lifelong commitment to one person stands out in sharp contrast.

*Anyone who questions whether sex is good is actually questioning God's goodness.*

# Personal Gold

from STEPHEN BROYLES

## IT'S OKAY TO SCREAM

I grew up in a world full of psalms. When I was a boy, a small ceramic banner hanging on the living-room wall proclaimed, "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psalm 37:4, KJV). At Appleby Elementary School, every assembly program ended with the recitation of the last verse of the nineteenth psalm: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (19:14, KJV). A counted cross-stitch that came some years ago as a Christmas present also bears a message from the Psalms: "Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths" (25:4, KJV).

We borrow words of consolation and encouragement from the Psalms, and that is good. But something has been overlooked. An element runs through the Psalms that we would not dream of nailing up on the living-room wall. I have never seen a decorative ceramic banner that reads, "You have thrown me into the lowest pit, into the darkest depths" (88:6, NLT). I have never seen a pewter serving dish bearing the inscription, "Because of my groaning, I am reduced to skin and bones" (102:5, NLT). I have never seen a Sunday-school button with this wish for the wicked: "May they be like snails that dissolve into slime" (58:8, NLT). Nor do I ever expect to see them, even though these words, and many more like them, come straight from the Psalms.

The fierce psalms are in fact easier to find than the gentle ones, because there are so many more of them. They make up a major element for which *fierce* is exactly the right word. From these psalms, we have the perfect right to borrow language expressive of our own pain, when pain threatens to overcome us.

It is frequently the case that the gentle verses that adorn plaques and collector's plates are the expressions of hope or trust, or the avowal of moral tractability, which are also a regular feature of the laments. The verse on your cross-stitch may indeed be from a lament—that is, from a psalm of rage and terror screamed into the wind.

To turn in your misery to the God who is the source of all things, even ultimately of your misery, and not only to turn to him but also to praise him with all your might until your might has drained away. That is what the psalms call us to do. That is not the complete biblical solution, but it is the beginning point of any solution. The psalms do not alone supply all we need to strive on against the icy wind. But they do fill us with strength and power for the moment of turning.

*We have the perfect right to borrow language expressive of our own pain.*

## HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW PSALMS?

# PSALMS IN REVIEW

### MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

1. In Psalm 135, David praises God for the things he has done and specifically names three kings he struck down. Which of the following is not one of them?

- A. Sihon, king of the Amorites
- B. Pharaoh, king of Egypt
- C. Og, king of Bashan
- D. Eglon, king of Moab

### WHO SAID IT?

2. "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain."

### WHO DUNNIT?

3. Who wrote the psalm that says, "May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us?"

- A. Asaph
- B. The sons of Korah
- C. Moses
- D. David

### MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

4. David designed Psalm 59 to follow the tune of a different song. What is the name of that song?

- A. The Death of the Son
- B. Lilies
- C. The Doe of the Morning
- D. Do Not Destroy

### WHO DUNNIT?

5. Who wrote the first 11 psalms of Book Three?

### MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

6. Are there any psalms with no noted author?

### WHO SAID IT?

7. "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, Lord."

### TIME TRAVELER

8. David is fleeing from you when he writes "Lord, how many are my foes! Who are you?"

### WHO SAID IT?

9. "Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved."

### WHO DUNNIT?

10. Who wrote, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God?"

### HOT SEAT

11. I wrote the psalm that contains the line "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" Who am I?

### WHO SAID IT?

12. "For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help."

### ANSWERS

1. D (135:5-6)
2. Solomon (110:1-12)
3. David (135:3-4)
4. C (135:1-4)
5. Asaph (Psalms 75-83)
6. Yes (49 psalms are without authors)
7. Ethan (3:1)
8. Absalom (16:7)
9. Asaph (16:7)
10. The sons of Korah (16:7)
11. David (135:3-4)
12. Solomon (127:1)