

Psalm 44:1-13,23-26

The Psalms are our prayerbook

[read Psalm 44:1-13,23-26 NLT]

Ps - best-known collection of poetry & prayers ever.

how many of you have spent some time in Psalms, rdg them in personal devotional time / studying them?

[raise hands]

how many of you, after attempting read bk of Ps , gave up / too many qs ?

were many "good" ones. but others ruined exper for you.

[raise hands]

eg. Ps 44 - some of the vvs nourish our faith / lifts us up.

⁴ *You are my King and my God. You command victories for your people. ...*

⁶ *I do not trust my bow; I do not count on my sword to save me.*

⁷ *It is you who gives us victory ...*

⁸ *O God, we give glory to you all day long and constantly praise your name.*

but then vv23-24 ...*Lord! Why do you sleep? [Don't] reject us forever. Why do you look the other way? Why do you ignore our suffering...*

why is that even in B ?

are we supposed let that shape our theology/ understanding of God?!

or is there another purpose (God had in mind when gave us Psalms)?

I gave up on the Ps first several times tried read thru bk .

but last 10 yrs love the Ps . nourished by them. feed my soul on them.

God spks to me now in ones that mainly just offended me in yrs past.

many days in my devotional time, a Ps is what hunger for.

I'll share an understanding that helped give-me-the-Ps as something I cherish.

insight that helps me appreciate the Ps .

when we read a Ps , who is the psalmist usually addressing?

(God) Ps 44 starts out *O God, we have heard ...*

intended (initial) audience is gen not other people--us--, but God.

in Psalms we see how God's people responded to Him as they faced all kinds of sits --threatening, joyous...

since the Ps are the B , we tend to read them as God-presenting-himself-to-his-people.

but instead **Most of the Psalms are people presenting themselves to God (not God presenting himself to his people)**

look at the most common types of Psalms

adapted from categories used by *Reading the Bible for All its Worth--A Guide to Understanding the Bible* by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart 1982

--in laments that express pain and distress **and cries for deliverance**

deep, honest prayers at times of death, loss, or serious struggle most common kind of prayer in Ps.

first couple vvs of **Psalm 13 (NLT)**

O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever?

How long will you look the other way?

² How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day?

How long will my enemy have the upper hand?

³ Turn and answer me, O Lord my God!

Restore the light to my eyes, or I will die.

--in songs of thanksgiving, praise and trust

"songs of thanksgiving" - express joy over a recent experience of God's goodness

writer had exper-ed God's faithfulness, protection, and benefit. express their gratefulness.

then "hymns of praise," unlike "songs of th ", not have partic ref to past miseries or recent joyful events.

are more to God and for his goodness toward the whole earth and his people.

a lot of these Ps express strong trust in God.

first vvs of **Psalm 91:1-7 NLT**

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

² This I declare of the Lord:

**He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;
he is my God, and I am trusting him.**

**³ For he will rescue you from every trap
and protect you from the fatal plague.**

from "every" trap!

& the "fatal plague." we don't worry about dying from epidemic thanks to modern medicine. but very real concern for ancient world.

keep rdg next vvs :

⁴ He will shield you with his wings.

He will shelter you with his feathers.

His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

**⁵ Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night,
nor fear the dangers of the day,****⁶ nor dread the plague that stalks in darkness,
nor the disaster that strikes at midday.****⁷ Though a thousand fall at your side,
though ten thousand are dying around you,
these evils will not touch you.**

are other kinds of psalms:

wisdom psalms - are like what most Sc is: God presenting himself to people. and a psalms written for Israel's public celebrations --celebrating the king, cov , Jerusalem.

but "most of the Psalms are people presenting themselves to God" --in a lament, praise, word of thanksgiving/trust.

so rdg Ps - like a sampling sp journals / personal ltrs to God.

so as read them, should take that into account. let it shape how approach .

Approach the Psalms as a sampler of spiritual journals

personal ltrs to God.

read them as an over-the-shoulder reader, since the intended audience was not other people, but God.

& once I started letting that shape way I approach the Ps , the Psalms stopped frustrating me as much.

(still do some! but not as much.)

& started nourishing my sp-al life more.

gave me key to profiting from Ps .

saying Ps are "people presenting themselves to God" not mn Ps are not inspired word of God.

are Spirit-inspired compositions. have very impor use.

what is that use?

(Philip Yancey's chapt on the Psalms in *The Bible Jesus Read* helped me put this into words.)

I used to approach Ps as a graduate student might approach a textbook: in search of *correct and important concepts* to be noted and neatly classified.

Yancey, p.113-4

my mind was searching for some truths about God or his dealings w people. or some principles he wanted me put into practice.

(maybe you don't try to analyze/categorize things as much as I do! but isn't that basically how we read the B ? (look for truths God saying)

I would read all those laments.

is God wanting me to know how to doubt him/ be depressed??

is God teaching me that sometimes he forsakes us, forgets us??

the most graphic difficulty was what do w that form of the lament that we call the cursing (or imprecatory) psalms.

furious outbursts. on the level of "I hope you get hit by a truck!"

what principles am I to learn from these ill-tempered, vengeful prayers?? why are those outbursts even in the holy Bible?

the fact that Ps are not God-presenting-himself-to-his-people but "people presenting themselves to God" / "sampler of spiritual journals" gives us answ :

The psalms are not focused on teaching us Correct and Important Concepts

but that **They are in the Bible to teach us to bring all our emotions--whether full of distress or well-being--to God**

so, these last yrs , I don't go there to collect truths so much as go there for a model of how I can approach God. as a "prayerbook" I can use.

again, P Yancey's words:

... I began trying to project myself back into the minds of those authors. ... *Could I pray these prayers?* I ask myself. *Have I felt this peculiar anguish? This outburst of praise?* Then I proceed to think through situations in which I might pray the psalm in front of me." --Yancey, p.113-4

eg Ps 91. beautiful image of protection.

we looked at first 7 vs.

¹ *those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty...*

*won't fear the terror of the night, arrow that flies by day, pestilence that
stalks in darkness,*

⁷ *A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you. ...*

continues like that: vv9-11

⁹ *Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place--
the Most High, who is my refuge--*

¹⁰ *no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.*

¹¹ *For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.*

when I used to read this "in search of Correct and Important Concepts", I would think: what about Chrns arrested by the Nazis in WWII? or by hostile Muslim gov'ts today?

or [some current situation]

NIV v10 - *no harm will befall you*

but now I realize

Neal Plantinga in CT (June 15, 1998):

what Ps 91 does is express one of the moods of faith (one of the loveliest, one of the most treasured). it's a mood of exuberant confidence in the sheltering providence of God.

prob the psalmist has been protected by God in some dangerous incident. & is celebrating.

on other days, & in other moods, (& in darker seasons of his life), same psalmist might have called out to God in despair & a sense of abandonment.

ie, we're not taking this Ps as giving principles. as if spoken in technical precision. (just as we don't take Ps 13 re: God forget us as theol truth.) it's poetry expressing a prayer of joyous thanks & trust.

it's a song that is opening a window into psalmist's exper w God.

this understanding gave Ps 91 back to me. no longer unreal / Pollyanna-ish.

this understanding also helps me understand why so many ps are lament.

--perhaps as many as 70% include lament in them.

why would God have so many laments in the Ps ?

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his people have that many laments.

beginning of article by Shane Hipps, pastor of Mennonite church in Phoenix:

I scanned the congregation as we finished our third song extolling the wonders of God and our joy for all God has done. As we started the fourth song with the same spirit of energetic celebration, I glimpsed a friend, sitting in the back, who had told me that week that his wife had cheated on him and wanted a divorce.

At that moment the lyrics kicked in, and we started singing joyful thanks for God's abundant blessings. The words I was singing suddenly felt forced, false, and even mocking. I had to spend the rest of the song looking away from my friend, who stood with his mouth shut, staring out the window.

After the service I approached him and said, "I was thinking about you the entire service; it must have been painful sitting through some of the songs."

"Yeah," he said. "I'm not sure this is a good time for me to attend church. It is painful to observe celebration and not be able to join. It accentuates my loneliness." ...

raises all kind of qs about our worship services --how can we be more hospitable to those coming to our worship services immersed in pain? difficult bec persons at different places.

but at least everyone can turn to God's worship book & find psalms for them!

the 2 main categories of Ps --laments & songs of thanksgiving/praise/trust-- correspond to the 2 large conditions in which we find ourselves.

no matter what emotion we feel, there is a psalm that resonates.

sometimes we feel like Ps 23 .

"the world's favorite prayer." sweeping promise, comfort.

but right before it: Ps 22. seems like another planet from Ps 23.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?

² *O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. ...*

P Yancey (p.119) : "I, for one, am glad my B includes both kinds of psalms. ...

By itself, Ps 23 leads to an easy-answer faith; by itself Ps 22 leads to spiritual despair; together, the two offer a bracing mixture of realism and hope. ... "

there's a lot of good that comes from praying a lament.

laments - help us express struggles, suffering, or disappointment to the Lord eg J on cross.

when we "stuff" (repress) doubts/pain into subconsc , powerless to do anything about it. we are at its mercy.

the very act of venting neg feelings brings them out into the open where can look at them, make a decision on them, & maybe gain a better perspective.

typical struc of lament:

by end of Ps , moves toward praise & thanksgiving. feels heard and cleansed. the psalm, or prayer, works out the transformation.

"sp therapy"

assists in preventing emotions from controlling us

eg I attended a prayer mtg . man shared neg / doubts.

one woman: "not say that."

rest of us encouraged to talk; listened . talked himself around to faith!

but while I'm praying a lament, has my faith has "gone out the window" for those moments? is there faith involved those moments I'm "lamenting"?

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way to help see this:

do you ever "lament" to another person?

who to?

Dan Allender: "To whom do you vocalize the most intense, irrational anger?

Would you do so with someone who could fire you or cast you out of a cherished position or relationship? Not likely. You don't trust them -- you don't believe they would endure the depths of your disappointment, confusion.... The person who hears your lament and far more bears your lament-against-them, paradoxically, is someone you deeply, wildly trust.... The language of lament is oddly the shadow side of faith."

- www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr01/lament1.html

bec the psalmists have that trust in their God, they can unload.

& bec have that trust, as they talk, they work thru it. listening to God.

& so their faith gets built by the lament.

typical structure of lament - end up w assurance, praise.

when I take these feelings to God, I have oppor for correction/healing.

P Yancey: **"I am continually amazed by the spiritual wholeness of the Hebrew poets, who sought to include God in every area of life by bringing to God every emotion experienced in daily activity."** --Philip Yancey, *The Bible Jesus Read* p.123

a personal eg from Aug 2005 journal entry:

I felt my actions had been completely misunderstood and judged as unloving and insensitive by someone who is quite significant in my life--their opinion of me matters!

I couldn't arrange any good opportunity to talk about it w the person that day. And I wasn't really sure what line of explanation would be successful either.

So I didn't sleep very well that night.

I was replaying what happened --thinking of various explanations, various ways of confronting the person-- trying to come up with a strategy of how to get the person to feel good about my actions.

I wasn't coming up with any sure-fire ones.

Part of me was thinking I might have to let it go--forgive the person for their misjudging rather than confront them. But I'm a people-pleaser, and a bigger part of me didn't want to just let someone think bad of me. Not a fun night!

Next morning for my Bible reading, I picked the marker in Psalms. (I have a marker in the OT, NT, and Psalms.) I read *Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have led a blameless life ...* ² *Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind ...* ⁶ *I wash my hands in innocence ...* ¹¹ *... I lead a blameless life; redeem me and be merciful to me.* (Ps 26)

10 yrs ago I would have heard that as self-righteousness --an egotist need redeemed by J .

but now, all of a sudden I realized that I--unlike the Psalmist--was leaving God out my situation.

had spent hours on it ... without bringing God into it.

Why not do like David and have a dialogue with God going through my mind rather than just a frustrating and futile (imaginary) conversation with the person?!

God fully understood the ways I was innocent, the ways I was guilty.

It would have given a lot more peace if I had channeled my mental restlessness into a (real) conversation with God, resting in him feeling good about me rather than vainly wishing I could make that person feel good about me.

The night had gone badly, but now I had a strategy for facing the day, at least!

(Later that day the Lord opened the door for the person and I to talk, and the explanation came naturally as an aside.)

the bk of Psalms was Isr's "prayerbook"

has been the ch's prayerbk for centuries. contrib much to ch having authenticity & health in their faith.

can be your prayerbook too.