

## A Guide to Praying the Psalms at FBCUM

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This summer, we plan to study the Psalms as a church, not just to understand what they're saying, but to be *transformed* by them. Psalms are not something we just read; they're something we *do*. They shape how we relate to God and involve us in new attitudes, promises, commitments, and emotions. Sometimes the 8-inch gap between our heads (what we know) and our heart (who we actually trust/rely in) seems to be an impossible chasm to bridge. Prayer, and in particular praying the Psalms, help bridge that gap.

### Benefits of Praying the Psalms

1. Psalms teach us how to pray – *In the midst of pain or sorrow, we may not know what to pray. Psalms are a sort of spiritual template where we learn to pray through imitation and response. Moreover, when we find ourselves praying a monotonous list, praying the Psalms pushes us out of our prayer 'rut' and breathes new life into our prayers thru biblical categories and language. We have a big God, we should pray big prayers!*
2. Psalms confront us with who God is, not who we wish he was – *"Left to ourselves, we will pray to some god who speaks what we like hearing, or to the part of God we manage to understand. But what is critical is that we speak to the God who speaks to us, and to everything he speaks to us...the Psalms train us in that conversation."*<sup>1</sup>
3. Psalms are a medicine chest for the heart – *We're not the expert on ourselves! Psalms help us to recognize what's going on in our heart. Then, by God's grace, transform fear, worry, and despair, to hope and joy in the presence of the Living God.*

### Suggestions on How to Pray the Psalms

1. Read the Psalm several times to try and understand what is said before you pray.
2. Meditate on the Psalm phrase by phrase, taking what the Psalmist writes, and using it as a springboard for your own personal prayer. So if you're reading Psalm 23, it may look something like this:

**Psalm 23:1** "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."

**My prayer:** Father, You are my shepherd. I've been struggling with discontentment this week in my job. Help me to be satisfied in You; lead me a place where I'm resting not in my circumstances, but in You.

**Psalm 23:2-3** "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his names sake."

**My prayer:** Father, I trust that your paths are best, are right. Show me how to respond in this conflict with my spouse. I am yours and I need you to lead me because I am struggling to not be proud and defensive right now. Bring me to a place of peace.

3. To help you know how to pray in response to what the Psalm is saying, consider these questions in light of the Psalm you're praying:

- What does this teach me about God that I can praise or thank Him for?
- If he is really like this, what difference should that make in how I live today?
- What does this teach me about myself that I could repent for?
- What do you learn about life that you can ask for or act on?

### The Plan

Lord willing, we'll look at Psalms 46, 26, 32, 57, 121, 55, and 56. Each week, following the sermon, we'll hand out prayer guides to help you pray that Psalm during the week. May God enlarge our hearts (Ps. 119:32) through His word this summer!

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Answering God*, pg. 5