

C11 - Studies in the Psalms

Study 1 - Introduction and Psalm 139

BIBLE READING:

Psalm 139

KEY VERSE:

**“Search me O God,
and know my heart.”**

Psalm 139: 23

The Book of the Psalms is the longest and most varied of the Books of the Bible. The word ‘psalm’ means ‘song’ or ‘hymn’ and the Book of Psalms is actually the hymn book of the Jewish nation. Many different authors were responsible for the Psalms - seventy-three bear David’s name, the great Shepherd King.

Psalms is a collection of five books, divided as follows:

Book 1 - *Psalms 1-41*

Book 2 - *Psalms 42-72*

Book 3 - *Psalms 73-89*

Book 4 - *Psalms 90-106*

Book 5 - *Psalms 107-150*

The Psalms themselves express the whole range of human feeling and experience, from dark depression to exuberant joy. Although they are rooted in particular circumstances, they are timeless, and so are among the best loved and most often read parts of the Bible. In our modern age we are still stirred by the same emotions, puzzled by the same fundamental problems of life, and cry out in need, or worship, to the same God. As such, the Psalms are a rich source of comfort, guidance, and wisdom.

There have been many attempts to classify the Psalms, and they can be grouped in various ways, for example, by theme. In our studies we have categorised them as follows:

Psalms of Wisdom - focus on the pursuit of godly living, these Psalms offer insights into the nature of righteousness, the consequences of sin, and the path to true happiness.

Psalms of Kingship - these Psalms highlight the role of the king in God’s plan for His people. They point to the ultimate kingship of Jesus Christ, foreshadowing His reign over all creation.

Psalms of Praise - these are songs of joy, celebrating God’s mighty deeds and the beauty of His creation, turning our hearts towards gratitude and worship.

Psalms of Lament - these Psalms give voice to sorrow, expressing deep anguish and pleading for God’s intervention. They teach us the value of bringing our struggles to God.

Psalms of Trust - these psalms inspire us to place our trust in God’s steadfast love and faithfulness, reassuring us of His presence in every circumstance of life.

Psalms of Thanksgiving - these are joyful expressions of thanksgiving, for God’s blessings, provision, kindness and deliverance.

Psalms of Pilgrimage - sung by Jewish pilgrims as they travelled to Jerusalem for the great feasts.

These categories serve only as a guide, and some psalms fit into more than one category. **Psalm 139** is one such psalm and we shall consider it now.

PSALM 139

Written by David, this psalm reminds us that:

GOD IS ALL-KNOWING (VERSES 1-6)

There are depths in every person’s life which always remain hidden, even to our closest friends, but all of our thoughts, words and deeds, are known to God. This intimate, detailed knowledge is seen as part of God’s protective care. It is wonderful to think that despite our sin and however much God knows, He loves us!

GOD IS ALL-PRESENT (VERSES 7-12)

God is everywhere. The Psalmist thinks in terms of distance, depth and even darkness, and realises that all are cancelled out as potential hiding places because GOD is there. God’s presence remains the same in all the varied circumstances of life.

GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL (VERSES 13-18)

When David wants to describe God’s power in this psalm, he looks at his own body. **“I am fearfully and wonderfully made”**. (verse 14) He realises how intricate his body is - proof of God’s wisdom and skill. These verses also remind us that not only has the Creator planned our life, but all our experiences are under His sovereign control! The only response to knowing the Creator specifically made us is worship and adoration.



This is the first of two units on **The Psalms**.

C11 - Studies in the Psalms

Study 2 - A Psalm of Wisdom - Psalm 1

BIBLE READING:

Psalm 1

KEY VERSE:

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.”

Psalm 1: 1

Psalm 1 is often classified as a Psalm of Wisdom. Wisdom psalms give us examples of human behaviour to demonstrate that some behaviours are wise and some are foolish. **Psalm 1** easily divides into two parts: the path of life (**verses 1-3**) and the path of death (**verses 4-6**).

What makes you happy? This is a good way to see what is important to you. The roots of true joy and happiness go deep below the surface and are unaffected by the changing moods and circumstances of life. At the gateway to this book of the Psalms, we are given a picture of a truly happy person, and in this study we will consider this **“blessed”** person in four ways.



1. HIS CHOICE

It is clear that the way in which this person lived came by choice and not by chance. He really wanted to know joy and satisfaction, so he decisively turns his back on evil and sets his heart and mind on God's law. As Christians we cannot afford to be careless, casual or indifferent about the way in which we live. We can easily drift along on the tide of evil if we make the wrong decisions. It takes determination on the part of the individual to be a true follower of Christ, as more and more we see the norms of society and popular opinion running counter to the holy standards of God.

2. HIS COURSE

Notice **verse 1**. Where he walked, or stood, or sat, was designed to avoid negative influences. He avoided the advice of the wicked and he did not join in with the scoffers. The scornful love to criticise others, putting them down, but as Christians we should seek to build up others.

In **Matthew 7: 13-14**, the Lord Jesus told the parable of the two roads. The broad road led to destruction; the narrow way led to life. Happiness comes from setting the right course and treading the right road in life. We are left in no doubt as to which the right course is, for the Lord Jesus said of Himself, **“I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life”**. (**John 14: 6**)

3. HIS CONSIDERATIONS

“His delight is in the law of the Lord and on His law he meditates day and night.” (**verse 2**) In his thinking and meditation, this person has found the source of his joy. He loved God's Word, and it brought him delight to think upon it. The righteous man ponders the Word of God. He does not just hear it and forget it; he thinks about it. As we read and meditate on God's Word, we, too, shall find true happiness.

4. HIS CONDITIONS

The Psalmist pictures a tree planted beside a flowing river. A tree by a river has a continual source of water. The roots of the tree would go right down into the river, drinking deeply of its life-giving waters. It will never wither away, because it is always getting what it needs. The person who is happy because his life is right with God, is like this tree.

This tree **“yields its fruit in its season”** (**verse 3**) The fruit comes naturally from this tree, because it is planted by the rivers of water. It is abiding in a life-source. In **John 15: 4-5** Jesus says, **“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself... neither can you, unless you abide in Me.”**

In stark contrast, we have presented in **verses 4-6**, a picture of the present life and future fate of the wicked. Everything true about the righteous person - stable as a tree, continual life and fruitfulness - is not so regarding the ungodly.

At the conclusion of our study of this first Psalm we can learn this lesson: Holiness and happiness go together. The righteous can have the confidence of **Psalm 16: 11** **“You have made known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures for evermore.”** God has a path, and it is a good road to take!

Answer Sheet

C11 - Studies in the Psalms

Study 1 - Introduction and Psalm 139

Return address on back of answer sheet

Name: _____

Address: _____

1. Why is the Book of Psalms sometimes referred to as a hymn book?

□ /2

2 Answer the following:

a) The five books of the Psalms are listed below. Read the final verse(s) of each of the books and summarise what it says. The first one is done for you.

Book	Psalms	Final Verse(s)	Description / Summary
Book 1	<i>Psalms 1-41</i>	<i>Psalm 41: 13</i>	Praise to the God of Israel.
Book 2	<i>Psalms 42-72</i>	<i>Psalm 72: 18-20</i>	
Book 3	<i>Psalms 73-89</i>	<i>Psalm 89: 52</i>	
Book 4	<i>Psalms 90-106</i>	<i>Psalm 106: 48</i>	
Book 5	<i>Psalms 107-150</i>	<i>Psalm 150: 6</i>	

□ /4

b) In what way are these final verses similar?

□ /2

3. Explain in your own words why the Psalms are often described as 'timeless'.

□ /3

4. Read *Psalm 139: 1-4* again and list five things that the Psalmist says that God knows about him.

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____
- iv. _____
- v. _____

□ /5

5. What comfort can the Christian receive from verses 7-12?

□ /3

6. What do verses 13-16 teach us?

a) About God _____

b) About ourselves _____

□ /6

THINK: Pray the words of *Psalm 139: 23-24*: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

TOTAL = □ /25

Answer Sheet

C11 - Studies in the Psalms

Study 2 - A Psalm of Wisdom - Psalm 1

Return address on back of answer sheet

1. In this Psalm the way of the righteous and the way of the ungodly are contrasted. Describe in your own words three things that the righteous person does NOT DO.

/3

2. Why is it important to choose the right companions in life?

/3

3. What do the following verses teach us about meditation?

a) *Joshua 1: 8* _____

b) *Philippians 4: 8* _____

/4

4. What pictures does the psalmist use to describe the:

a) godly person? _____

b) ungodly person? _____

/4

5. Answer the following questions:

a) According to *Galatians 5: 22-23* what are the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit? _____

b) How can we grow this fruit in our lives? _____

/4

6. In verses 5-6 what are the ultimate consequences and final destiny of the two types of lifestyles found in this Psalm?

/4

7. *Psalm 1* is often classified as a Psalm of Wisdom. List three pieces of wisdom that are found in this Psalm.

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

/3

THINK: Am I choosing God's way or the way of the world? One of the ways we choose God's way is through the study of His Word. What kind of relationship do you have with the Bible? Think about it and ask God to give you a delight for His Word.

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet

C11 - Studies in the Psalms

Study 3 - A Psalm of Praise - Psalm 8

Return address on back of answer sheet

1. In what two ways can Psalms of Praise be used?

- i. _____
ii. _____

Explain what David means when he refers to God's name. (*verse 1, 9*)

□ /2

2. Read *Psalm 8: 1b, 2* again.

a) What are the two contrasting places where God's glory is seen in *verses 1b and 2*?

- i. _____ ii. _____

b) What were the circumstances that led Jesus to quote *Psalm 8: 2* in *Matthew 21: 16*?

c) How is *verse 2* possibly linked to David's own experience?

□ /6

3. What was David's firm belief about how the universe came into existence? (*verse 3*)

□ /2

4. *Psalm 19: 1-6* is another description of the heavens. Here, David focuses on how they communicate a revelation of God.

- a) What do the heavens declare? _____
b) What does the sky proclaim? _____
c) Where is the voice and words of Creation heard? _____
d) How does David describe the sun? _____

e) What two aspects of the stars is the Creator concerned with in *Psalm 147: 4-5*?

- i. _____ ii. _____

□ /8

5. In what ways does *Psalm 8* point to the significance and dignity of man?

□ /3

6. Read again *Hebrews 2: 5-9*.

a) Write the sentence from this passage which tells us that man has lost the position he had at the outset of Creation.

□ /1

b) What is the writer bringing to our attention about the Lord Jesus?

□ /3

THINK: *Psalm 8* is written in praise of God as Creator. David focuses on the skies above (*verse 3*) and on mankind (*verses 4-8*). If you were to write a similar Psalm of Praise, what aspects of Creation would you include?

TOTAL = □ /25

Answer Sheet

C11 - Studies in the Psalms

Study 4 - A Psalm of Thanksgiving - Psalm 40

Return address on back of answer sheet

1. Contrast the psalmist's 'before and after' experience in verses 1-3.

	Before	After
Where is he?		
What are his steps like?		
What is his response to God?		

a) Which two words indicate that his rescue was not immediate?

i. _____ ii. _____

b) What will be the result when others witness David's rescue?

□ /8

2. Read verse 5 again.

a) What aspects of God's goodness to him does David mention?

b) What difficulty will David have in communicating these to others?

c) How does **1 Corinthians 2: 9** describe God's abundant generosity to those who love Him?

□ /5

3. Answer the following:

a) Fill in the missing words which relate to David's witness to others.

i) I have _____ the glad news. (**verse 9**)

ii) I have _____ of your faithfulness and your salvation. (**verse 10**)

iii) I have not _____ my lips. (**verse 9**)

iv) I have not _____ your deliverance within my heart. (**verse 10**)

v) I have not _____ your steadfast love and faithfulness. (**verse 10**)

b) What can we apply from this when witnessing as Christians?

□ /5

□ /2

4. David waits for God's deliverance again at the end of the Psalm. (verses 11-17)

a) Describe how David is being afflicted in **verses 12-15**.

b) What makes David certain that God will act on his behalf?

□ /5

THINK: Can you relate to David's experience of waiting for God to intervene in a difficult situation? Give thanks to God for the times he has shown you His steadfast love and faithfulness.

Return your completed answer sheet to:

TOTAL = □ /25 UNIT TOTAL = □ /100

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C11 - Studies in the Psalms

Study 3 - A Psalm of Praise - Psalm 8

BIBLE READING:

Psalm 8; Hebrews 2: 5-9

KEY VERSE:

“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!”

Psalm 8: 9

Many of the Psalms are songs of praise to God, either by individuals or for use in communal worship. This study will focus on **Psalm 8**, a psalm of David. It begins and ends with the same refrain (**verses 1, 9**) – see Key Verse. We need to understand that God’s ‘name’ is not just an identification label but embraces the many attributes of His character. Reflecting on God’s character gives much reason for praise! In these opening and closing verses, David is giving God the highest place. not just as the God of Israel but as Sovereign over all the earth.

While the glory of God’s creation and the wonder of His love to us are evident on earth, His glory “above” the Heavens is so much greater. (**verse 1**) With our finite limited minds, we cannot comprehend the extent of His glory. Yet despite this, David continues to contrast another amazing way God’s glory is expressed on earth, namely, **“out of the mouths of babes and infants”!** The Lord Jesus cited these words as children praised Him while His enemies were doing their utmost to condemn him to death. (**Matthew 21: 16**) In this instance, God was silencing His enemies through the words of children who were telling of the Lord’s strength. When David wrote **verse 2**, he was perhaps thinking of his encounter with Goliath. As a mere youth with only a sling, God showed His power through David’s weakness and **“the enemy and the avenger”** was defeated! God demonstrates His glory when He takes the insignificant ‘babes’ of earth and uses them to confound the ungodly.

The remainder of the Psalm gives praise to God as Creator. There are two points to note:

CREATION IS UNDISPUTED.

Carefully consider **verse 3**. As a shepherd David spent hours under the vast starlit sky. For him there was no doubt that God was the Creator of the universe. He believed that the astronomical bodies were designed and set in place by God’s fingers. As you read the Psalms you will find ample confirmation of **Genesis 1: 1**. The universe is not the result of a random explosion but rather the handiwork of a master designer. Look at **Psalm 19: 1-6, Psalm 33: 6-9, Psalm 147: 4-5**.



MAN IS THE CROWN OF GOD’S CREATION.

Having wondered at the scope and splendour of Creation, David now turns his attention to the seeming smallness and insignificance of mankind or humanity. His double question **“What is man that You are mindful of him and the son of man that You care for him?” (Verse 4)** leads to an exploration of the even greater wonder that God should have designated such amazing purpose and place for mankind in His overall plan! Note the following:

- a) **“Yet You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings” (verse 5a)** God has made mankind very special in comparison with any other part of His creation, lower than the angels but in His own image. (**Genesis 1: 27**)
- b) As image-bearers, humans are characterised by His **“glory and honour”**.
- c) From the beginning, man was given authority over the rest of creation (**verses 6-8, Genesis 1: 26**)

Following this description of man’s high calling and destiny, David concludes with his original refrain of praise to God in **verse 9**.

David was aware as we too know that man lost his high position in creation because of disobedience and sin. (**Genesis 3; Romans 5: 19**) But, through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, man will one day regain his place in the universe as God designated.

It is interesting that **Psalm 8** is quoted in **Hebrews 2: 5-8**. The writer of Hebrews continues to state that at present we do not see everything subject to man! In **verse 9**, he introduces the Lord Jesus - **“But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels”** emphasising His condescension in coming to earth. He then highlights the glory and honour which are now His because of what He has accomplished for us. **Psalm 8** is a great psalm of praise, but **Hebrews 2** elevates our praise to a new focus and dimension - to none other than the Lord Jesus Himself.

C11 - Studies in the Psalms

Study 4 - A Psalm of Thanksgiving - Psalm 40

BIBLE READING:

Psalm 40

KEY VERSE:

“He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.”

Psalm 40: 3

As mentioned in Study 1, the Psalms express the whole range of human emotion and experience. Psalms where the psalmist arrives at a place of thankfulness to God are especially uplifting! In **Psalm 40**, David expresses his gratitude for God’s intervention in his life. We will gain an insight into how this enables him to grow in his walk with God.

WAITING FOR THE LORD (VERSES 1-3)

These verses move from tragedy to triumph. David has been in the pit of despair. But his waiting patiently for the Lord has paid off. The Lord hears his cry and lifts him up. Now he is on a rock, a firm foundation. The result is that he has a new song to sing, **“a song of praise to our God.”** This experience mirrors our salvation when we are freed from the effects of our sin. As Christians, we are not immune from circumstances that get us down. In such times our waiting upon the Lord is not wasted. He can provide a way out and bring us to a different place!

WONDER AT GOD’S WORK (VERSES 4-5)

The new song has two stanzas. The first refers to the way of faith, chosen by **“the man who makes the Lord his trust.”** The second stanza glorifies the Lord Himself whose supernatural marvellous deeds reflect His inner thoughts and purposes for us. There is a real thrill in being a Christian because of the marvellous power of God in our lives!

WORSHIP BECAUSE OF GOD’S ACTIVITY (VERSES 3, 16)

Wonder at God’s working in our lives leads to worship. The new song of **verse 3** becomes a continuous refrain in the lives of those who love God for what He has done – **“May those who love your salvation say continually, Great is the Lord!” (verse 16)** We do not necessarily stop what we are doing to worship but rather it becomes a perpetual attitude of heart.

WILLING SURRENDER TO GOD’S WILL (VERSES 6-8)

Look at these verses very carefully. They can only apply to the Lord Jesus. This Psalm is a Messianic Psalm because it looks forward to the coming Messiah. We shall look at further examples of these in the next unit. In application to ourselves we can learn that true worship is not about outward observances or a pattern of things that we do but instead comes about by our willing surrender and a life of continual obedience to the will of God.

WITNESS TO GOD’S POWER (VERSES 3, 9-10)

Notice how effectively David proclaimed what God had done for him. David did not hold back from recounting any details of God’s love and faithfulness to him. The challenge for us too is to share our experience of God so that others may be blessed.

Up to this point in the Psalm we can observe a progression of thought. Waiting leads to wonder, to worship and an understanding of obedience to God’s will, all of which has its outworking in witnessing to others. But in the final section we note that David has come full circle.

WAITING FURTHER FOR GOD’S DELIVERANCE (VERSES 11-17)

Again, David is in a situation where only God can deliver him, probably not dissimilar to **“the pit”** of **verse 2**. Note his ongoing confidence in God (**verse 11**). In **verse 17**, David humbly states **“I am poor and needy”**, but knows that God is there for him. None but the Lord can help! His confidence in God’s faithfulness and ability to act on his behalf has grown through his previous experience. Thankfulness permeates his ongoing trust in God. This is a mirror of how Christians grow and is very useful for us to reflect on and apply in our lives.



This is the first of two units on **The Psalms**.

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