

# ***Psalms***

## ***Teach Us to Pray***

Lesson #2 for January 13, 2024

Scriptures: Psalm 44; 22; 13; Psalm 60:1-5; 105:5; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13.

1. Is it acceptable to have “learned prayers” like the psalms or the “Lord’s prayer”?

[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] A belief that only spontaneous, unlearned prayer is real prayer appears to be prevalent among some Christians. However, Jesus’ disciples were immensely rewarded when they asked Jesus to teach them to pray. God placed a prayer book, the Psalms, at the heart of the Bible, not simply to show us how God’s people of ancient times prayed but also to teach us how we can pray today.

From the earliest ages, the Psalms have shaped the prayers of God’s people, including Jesus’ prayers (*1 Chron. 16:7, 9; Neh. 12:8; Matt. 27:46; Eph. 5:19*). This week we will look at the role the Psalms played in helping God’s people traverse their life journey and grow in their relationship with God. We should remember that the Psalms are prayers and, as such, are invaluable, not only for their theological insight but also for the ways they can enrich and transform our individual and communal prayers.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sabbath Afternoon, January 6.<sup>†§</sup>

2. From early times, David and others assigned special men to the work of singing anthems for corporate worship. Those men were almost always chosen from among the Levites. (See 1 Chronicles 16:7-9; Nehemiah 12:8.)
3. Is it a good idea to memorize psalms? Is it all right to use a psalm that you have memorized as a prayer?

[BSG:] A simple way of introducing the Psalms into daily life is to devote time each day to the reading of a psalm, beginning with Psalm 1, and following the order given in the psalter. Another way is to read the psalms that correspond to your present situation, whatever it happens to be: there are psalms of lament, the psalms of communal lament, the thanksgiving psalms, hymns, penitential psalms, the wisdom psalms (seeking God’s wisdom and guidance), historical psalms, psalms containing anger and rage, and pilgrimage psalms. Over the course of this quarter, we will be looking at many of them and studying these psalms in the context in which they appear.

How, then, are we to read the Psalms?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sunday, January 7.<sup>‡</sup>

4. Are the psalms specifically intended to be read and memorized? Or, could they have an even deeper purpose?

**Colossians 3:16:** Christ’s message in all its richness must live in your hearts. Teach and instruct each other with all wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Colossians 3:16). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].<sup>‡</sup>

[BSG:] What does it mean to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16)? Why is reading the Bible the first and most crucial step for that experience?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sunday, January 7.†§

5. Rough times came on the children of Israel; it seemed, at least temporarily, that the Israelites were being defeated, and, once again, a plea went up for God to stand by them. Questions were raised about why God was abandoning them when they still prayed to Him. And finally, like Daniel in Daniel 9, they essentially said: “God, Your name is being looked down on because of what is happening to us.”
6. What kind of psalms have been read and used and discussed in modern Seventh-day Adventist Church services? Are we afraid to use some of the more blunt and accusatory psalms against God? Or, would we be better off to pray those prayers as if they were our prayers until we learn to speak more honestly to God?
7. Would we dare to follow this advice from the Bible study guide?

[BSG:] First read the psalm, engaging in simple reflection, and then pray. Ruminating over the psalm involves reflection on the various aspects of the psalm: the way the psalmist addresses God and the reasons for the prayer. Consider how your situation corresponds to the psalmist’s experience and how the psalm might be able to help you articulate your experience. You will be amazed at how often you will find yourself being able to resonate and relate to what you read there.

If something in the psalm challenges you, ponder, for example, whether the psalm corrects your present false hopes about something you are facing. Contemplate the psalm’s message in the light of Christ’s person and salvific work and the long-term hope Christ’s work offers us. As we know, or should know, it always helps to look at everything in the Bible in light of Christ and the Cross.

Also, look for new motives for prayer that the psalm supplies, and think about their importance for you, your church, and the world. Ask God to put His Word on your heart and mind. If the psalm corresponds to the situation of someone you know, intercede in prayer for that person. The point is, the Psalms cover so many aspects of life, and we can be enriched by reading and absorbing into our hearts what they are saying to us.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sunday, January 7.‡

8. In this lesson, we will focus particularly on special times when we should be using psalms for prayers. Four psalms will be our study for this week: Psalm 44; 22; 13; and 60:1-5.
9. **Psalm 44** is a communal prayer written by the sons of Korah. Remember that Korah was one of those perpetrators of evil that rose up against Moses. Korah, along with the families of Dathan and Abiram, was swallowed up by the earth in front of the children of Israel! But, Korah’s family was preserved, presumably because they were not involved in his rebellion. Psalm 44 was a challenge for the children of Israel to look back over their history and think about God’s guidance and protection since the days they left Egypt.
10. Read Psalm 44. What does this psalm say to you?

[BSG:] The selectiveness of Psalms in church worship services often reflects the exclusiveness of moods and words that we express in our communal prayers. Such restrictiveness may be a sign of our inability or uneasiness to engage the dark realities of life. Though we may sometimes feel that God treats us unfairly when suffering hits us, we do not find it appropriate to express our thoughts in public worship or even in private prayer.

This reluctance could cause us to miss the point of worship. The failure to express honestly and openly our feelings and views before God in prayer often leaves us in bondage to our own emotions. This also denies us confidence and trust in approaching God. **Praying the Psalms gives an assurance that, when we pray and worship, we are not expected to censure or deny our experience.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Monday, January 8.<sup>†‡</sup>

11. Does the wording of Psalms 44 shock you? Should it? Would you dare to speak very honestly with God if you knew that one of your famous ancestors had been swallowed up along with the families of Dathan and Abiram? Consider these lessons which we can learn from this prayer of the sons of Korah:

1. [BSG:] The sons of Korah trust in God (*Ps. 44:4–8*), no matter what humiliations they face, because they remember YHWH's [*sic*] works for them (*Ps. 44:1–3*). Their complaint is not one in which hard feelings and recrimination toward God dominate. Rather, their prayer is based on true faith in His strength and mercy.
2. They claim the Lord has abandoned them to the mercy of their enemies (*Ps. 44:9–16*). Can we express the same sentiment to our Creator without losing our faith?
3. The sons of Korah confirm they have not forgotten their God (*Ps. 44:17*). They have been faithful and acknowledge they cannot cheat the Lord (*Ps. 44:17–22*).
4. The song ends with strong cries for God to act on their behalf: “awake,” “arise,” “redeem” (*Ps. 44:23–26*). Thus, they plead mightily for deliverance.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** 26.<sup>‡§</sup>

12. Do innocent people ever suffer? If we feel that we are suffering because of some cause beyond our control, is that a valid reason for crying out to God?

13. At such times, is it a good idea to look back at times when we felt God was very near?

**Psalm 22:1-31: <sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?**

I have cried desperately for help,  
but still it does not come.

<sup>2</sup> During the day I call to you, my God,  
but you do not answer;

I call at night,  
but get no rest.

<sup>3</sup> But you are enthroned as the Holy One,  
the one whom Israel praises.

<sup>4</sup> Our ancestors put their trust in you;

they trusted you, and you saved them.

<sup>5</sup> They called to you and escaped from danger;  
they trusted you and were not disappointed.

<sup>6</sup> But I am no longer a human being; I am a worm,  
despised and scorned by everyone!

<sup>7</sup> **All who see me jeer at me;  
they stick out their tongues and shake their heads.**

<sup>8</sup> **“You relied on the LORD,” they say.**

**“Why doesn’t he save you?**

**If the LORD likes you,  
why doesn’t he help you?”**

<sup>9</sup> It was you who brought me safely through birth,  
and when I was a baby, you kept me safe.

<sup>10</sup> I have relied on you since the day I was born,  
and you have always been my God.

<sup>11</sup> Do not stay away from me!

Trouble is near,  
and there is no one to help....

<sup>14</sup> **All my bones are out of joint;  
my heart is like melted wax.**

<sup>15</sup> My throat is as dry as dust,  
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.  
You have left me for dead in the dust.

<sup>16</sup> **An evil gang is round me;  
like a pack of dogs they close in on me;  
they tear at my hands and feet.**

<sup>17</sup> **All my bones can be seen.**

**My enemies look at me and stare.**

<sup>18</sup> **They gamble for my clothes  
and divide them among themselves.**

<sup>19</sup> O LORD, don’t stay away from me!  
Come quickly to my rescue!

<sup>20</sup> Save me from the sword;  
save my life from these dogs.

<sup>21</sup> Rescue me from these lions;  
I am helpless before these wild bulls.

<sup>22</sup> I will tell my people what you have done;  
I will praise you in their assembly:

23 “Praise him, you servants of the LORD!  
Honour [*sic*-Br] him, you descendants of Jacob!  
Worship him, you people of Israel!  
24 He does not neglect the poor or ignore their suffering;  
he does not turn away from them,  
but answers when they call for help.”  
25 In the full assembly I will praise you for what you have done;  
in the presence of those who worship you  
I will offer the sacrifices I promised.  
26 The poor will eat as much as they want;  
those who come to the LORD will praise him.  
May they prosper for ever [*sic*-Br]!  
27 All nations will remember the LORD.  
From every part of the world they will turn to him;  
all races will worship him.  
28 The LORD is king,  
and he rules the nations.  
29 All proud people will bow down to him;  
all mortals will bow down before him.  
30 Future generations will serve him;  
they will speak of the Lord [*sic*] to the coming generation.  
31 People not yet born will be told:  
“The Lord [*sic*] saved his people.”—*Good News Bible*.\*†‡

14. When reading Psalm 22, we immediately recognize that these were words which Jesus spoke, and we remember things that happened to Him as He was hanging on the cross. He died when the Father, the only Source of life for every human being, was separating His beams of light and love from His Son. (See *DA* 753-754.) David must have gone through some of those same kinds of experiences. Look at the words that were repeated at the cross. “All my bones can be seen. My enemies look at me and stare. They gamble for my clothes and divide them among themselves.” (Psalms 22:17-18, *GNB*\*)
15. It is important to notice that almost all of the psalms end with words of rejoicing or praise. Why is that?

[BSG:] Praying the Psalms thus takes worshipers to new spiritual horizons. The Psalms let worshipers express their feelings and understandings, but they are not left where they presently are. The worshipers are led to abandon their burdens of pain, disappointment, anger, and despair before God and to trust in Him, whatever their circumstances.

The movement from lament to praise observed in many psalms is suggestive of the spiritual transformation that the believers experience when they receive divine grace and comfort in prayer.

How can we learn to see beyond our immediate trials and, thus, trust in God's goodness, whatever we face now?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Tuesday, January 9.‡

16. As Christians, when we begin to read Psalm 22, our thoughts go immediately to Jesus on the cross. This psalm originally was a personal petition from King David. He apparently was being pursued either by Saul shortly before Saul's death, or possibly at the time of the rebellion and fleeing from his son Absalom. Consider these expressions for Psalm 22 as listed in the Bible study guide:

- [BSG:] “ ‘My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?’ ” (*Mark 15:34, Matt. 27:46, NKJV*) is a direct quotation of Psalm 22:1.
- Psalm 22:7 is applied to Jesus on the cross and to His mockers (*Mark 15:29, Matt. 27:39, 40*).
- Psalm 22:16 (“ ‘My hands and feet have shriveled’ ” *NRSV*) is a direct allusion to Jesus being nailed to the cross, even though this particular verse is not quoted by the Gospels.
- Mark 15:24 and Matthew 27:35 allude to Psalm 22:18.
- Psalm 22:12–15 also can be applied, without any hesitation, to the experience of Jesus. Psalm 22:17 depicts the condition of our Savior on the cross: “ ‘I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me’ ” (*NKJV*)....

How inspiring to know that Jesus Himself lamented in the midst of His suffering and expressed His anguish to His heavenly Father. There is no sin in such an expression of raw honesty. Jesus even requested in the Garden of Gethsemane: “ ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me,’ ” reminding us that the genuine expression in prayer of our feelings and weaknesses is never an offense to God's ears. After Jesus poured out the feelings of His heart to His Father, He ended His prayer with perfect submission to His Father's will: “ ‘Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’ ” (*Matt. 26:39, NKJV*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** 27.‡§

17. Have you ever wondered how you could explain to someone, including to your children, why some disasters happen?

**Psalm 13:1-6:** <sup>1</sup> **How much longer** will you forget me, LORD? For ever [*sic-Br*]?

How much longer will you hide yourself from me?

<sup>2</sup> How long must I endure trouble?

How long will sorrow fill my heart day and night?

How long will my enemies triumph over me?

<sup>3</sup> Look at me, O LORD my God, and answer me.

Restore my strength; don't let me die.

<sup>4</sup> **Don't let my enemies say, “We have defeated him.”**

**Don't let them gloat over my downfall.**

<sup>5</sup> **I rely on your constant love;**

**I will be glad, because you will rescue me.**

<sup>6</sup> **I will sing to you, O LORD,**

**because you have been good to me.**—*Good News Bible.*\*‡

[BSG:] Psalm 13, then, points to the way to avoid another common mistake—focusing on ourselves and our problems when praying. This psalm can transform our prayer by leading us to reaffirm the faithful and unchanging nature of God’s dealings with His people.

Sure, though the psalm does begin with laments and complaints, it does not end there. And that’s the crucial point.

The psalm leads us to deliberately choose to trust God’s redemptive power (*Ps. 13:5*), so that our fear and anxiety (*Ps. 13:1–4*) can gradually give way to God’s salvation, and we begin experiencing change from lament to praise, from despair to hope (*Ps. 13:5, 6*).

However, a mere repetition of the words of the Psalms with only a slight comprehension of their meaning will not produce the authentic transformation intended by their use. When praying the Psalms, we should seek the Holy Spirit to enable us to act in the way demanded by the psalm. The Psalms are the Word of God by which believers’ characters and actions are transformed, not simply informed. By God’s grace, the promises of the Psalms are made manifest in the lives of believers. This means that we allow God’s Word to shape us according to God’s will and to unite us with Christ, who demonstrated God’s will perfectly and, as the incarnate Son of God, prayed the Psalms, as well.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Wednesday, January 10.†§

18. Psalm 13 raises two major questions that certainly must have been voiced, maybe just subconsciously, by each of us at difficult times in our lives. The first question is, “Why?” And the second question is, “How long?”

[BSG:] The writers of the Psalter list two questions to express desperation amid suffering and trials. **One question is “Why?”** [Heb. *lamah*]. “Why?” is used when the interlocutor wants to understand the actions of God under difficult circumstances, as follows: (1) when it seems the Lord is not doing anything to save His follower (*Ps. 10:1, Ps. 44:23*); (2) when it seems that God has forsaken the sufferer (*Ps. 22:1, Ps. 42:9, Ps. 44:24*); or (3) when it appears that the Lord has cast him off (*Ps. 42:3, Ps. 74:1, Ps. 88:14*). **In essence, this question is employed in an attempt to understand the reason for the action (or inaction) of God.**

**The second question the psalmists use is “How long?”** (*Ps. 13:1, 2; Ps. 35:17; Ps. 74:10; Ps. 79:5; Ps. 80:4; Ps. 89:46; Ps. 90:13; Ps. 94:3*). “How long?” is utterly dissimilar to “Why?” in its intention. “How long?” doesn’t dispute God’s actions in the midst of one’s suffering. Rather, “How long?” acknowledges that the Lord is always in control. Further, this question doesn’t petition God for vengeance against the source of one’s pain and sorrow. **This interrogative expression simply voices the desire to know how much longer God will require the believer to wait. Moreover, “How long?” requests the Lord to act. This question also embodies the feeling of spiritual fatigue we endure in the face of our ongoing suffering and the yearning for it to end.** We, too, with the psalmist may ask the Lord in our prayers: “How long?” Likewise, we may submit to Him a petition for His intervention and mercy. Such a plea can be termed a “grievance of faith.”

**After his painful complaint, David moves to his petition. This transition models for us an important principle in our own prayers: we must not stagnate or wallow in our regrets. Rather, we should move forward in faith: “Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes” (Ps. 13:3, NKJV). Many times what we really need is the assurance that the Creator is with us.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 27-28.†‡§**

19. Next, we turn to Psalm 60.

**Psalm 60:1-5:** <sup>1</sup> You have rejected us, God, and defeated us;  
you have been angry with us—but now turn back to us.  
<sup>2</sup> You have made the land tremble, and you have cut it open;  
now heal its wounds, because it is falling apart.  
<sup>3</sup> You have made your people suffer greatly;  
we stagger around as though we were drunk.  
<sup>4</sup> You have warned those who show you reverence,  
so that they might escape destruction.  
<sup>5</sup> Save us by your might; answer our prayer,  
so that the people you love may be rescued.—*Good News Bible*.\*

20. Do you ever feel like praying words like those?

**[BSG:] Psalms of lament are generally understood as prayers of people living through trying times, whether physical, psychological, or spiritual. Or all three.**

However, this does not mean that we should avoid these psalms, even in good times. Sometimes there may be a total disjunction between the words of the psalm and the worshiper’s present experience. That is, psalms of lament can be beneficial to worshipers who are not in distress.

**First, they can make us more aware that suffering is part of the general human experience and that it happens to both the righteous and the wicked.** The Psalms assure us that God is in control and provides strength and solutions in times of trouble. Even in this psalm, even amid the trouble (“You have made the earth tremble,” *Ps. 60:2, NKJV*), the psalmist displays his ultimate hope in God’s deliverance.

**Second, the lament psalms teach us compassion toward the sufferers.** When expressing our happiness and gratitude to God, especially in public, we must be mindful of the less fortunate. Sure, we might have things good right now, but who doesn’t know of people, all around us, who are suffering terribly? Praying such psalms can help us not forget those who are going through tough times. The Psalms should evoke in us compassion and a desire to minister to the suffering as Jesus did.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Thursday, January 11.†‡§

**[EGW:] This world is a vast lazarus house [for those with leprosy], but Christ came to heal the sick, to proclaim deliverance to the captives of Satan. He was in Himself health and strength. He imparted His life to the sick, the afflicted, those possessed of demons. He turned away none who came to receive His healing**

power. He knew that those who petitioned Him for help had brought disease upon themselves; yet He did not refuse to heal them. And when virtue from Christ entered into these poor souls, they were convicted of sin, and many were healed of their spiritual disease, as well as of their physical maladies. The gospel still possesses the same power, and why should we not today witness the same results?—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 823.3.‡

21. In order to understand Psalm 60, we need to have read 2 Samuel 8:1-14.

**2 Samuel 8:1-14:** <sup>1</sup> Some time later King David attacked the Philistines again, defeated them, and ended their control over the land.

<sup>2</sup> Then he defeated the Moabites. He made the prisoners lie down on the ground and put two out of every three of them to death. So the Moabites became his subjects and paid taxes to him.

<sup>3</sup> Then he defeated the king of the Syrian state of Zobah, Hadadezer son of Rehob, as Hadadezer was on his way to restore his control over the territory by the upper Euphrates. <sup>4</sup>David captured 1,700 of his horsemen and 20,000 of his foot soldiers. He kept enough horses for a hundred chariots and crippled all the rest.

<sup>5</sup> When the Syrians of Damascus sent an army to help King Hadadezer, David attacked it and killed 22,000 men. <sup>6</sup>Then he set up military camps in their territory, and they became his subjects and paid taxes to him. **The LORD made David victorious everywhere.** <sup>7</sup>David captured the gold shields carried by Hadadezer's officials and took them to Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup>He also took a great quantity of bronze from Betah and Berothai, cities ruled by Hadadezer....

<sup>13</sup> **David became even more famous** when he returned from killing 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. <sup>14</sup>He set up military camps throughout Edom, and the people there became his subjects. The LORD made David victorious everywhere.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

22. God certainly blessed David in spite of his faults and his sins. Psalm 60:1-5 is a promise that God will always be with us.

23. How many people do you know that need your prayers right now? Might they also need a helpful hand? Or, a ministering touch?

**Psalm 42:8:** May the LORD show his constant love during the day,  
so that I may have a song at night,  
a prayer to the God of my life.—*Good News Bible*.\*

24. Two very powerful psalms, Psalm 32 and 51, were written by David after his sin with Bathsheba and arranging for the death of her husband, Uriah the Hittite, in order to try to cover up his affair. Ellen White had some very powerful words about those psalms.

[EGW:] The confession was forced from his guilty soul by an awful sense of condemnation and a fearful looking for of judgment. The consequences that were to result to him filled him with terror, but there was no deep, heartbreaking grief in his soul, that he had betrayed the spotless Son of God and denied the Holy One of Israel. Pharaoh, when suffering under the judgments of God, acknowledged his sin in order to escape further punishment, but returned to his

defiance of Heaven as soon as the plagues were stayed. These all lamented the results of sin, but did not sorrow for the sin itself....

**The prayer of David after his fall, illustrates the nature of true sorrow for sin. His repentance was sincere and deep.** There was no effort to palliate his guilt; no desire to escape the judgment threatened, inspired his prayer. David saw the enormity of his transgression; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. **It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart.** He longed for the joy of holiness—to be restored to harmony and communion with God. This was the language of his soul.... [Psalm 32:1-2 is quoted and then Psalm 51:1-14 including 51:7,10 (KJV\*) as follows:]

*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:*

*wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow....*

*Create in me a clean heart, O God;*

*And renew a right spirit within me....*

A repentance such as this, is beyond the reach of our own power to accomplish; it is obtained only from Christ, who ascended up on high and has given gifts unto men.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ\** 24.1-25.3.<sup>†‡§</sup>

25. How many psalms have you memorized? Would it be a good idea to put a number of psalms of different types into one's memory? If we did that, would we learn to be more bold in our language with God? The psalmists expressed hope, courage, boldness, even persistence in their prayers and their requests to God. **The psalms could best be described as divine-human prayers and songs.**

1. [BSG:] Why is spontaneous, unguided prayer not the only way to pray? How can our prayer life benefit from the Psalms, the biblical prayers?
2. How can the Psalms enrich our communal prayer experience? Discuss some practical ways your local church can foster the use of the Psalms in its worship services.
3. What do the Psalms reveal about the complexity of the human pilgrimage of faith and the power of God's healing grace?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Friday, January 12.<sup>‡</sup>

26. Would you like to ask God to guide you in how to pray? Think of “the Lord's prayer.”

**Luke 11:1:** One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”—*Good News Bible.\**

27. ***How different were the disciples' prayers after that experience?***

28. **These four psalms (Psalm 44, 22, 13, 60) provide us excellent examples of how we should pray in times of difficulty. Most importantly, they remind us that God is always with us.**

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