

NCAC Adult Sunday School
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Learning to Love the Psalms

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Who is Robert Godfrey?

Dr. W. Robert Godfrey is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow and chairman of Ligonier Ministries. He is president emeritus and professor emeritus of church history at Westminster Seminary California. He is the featured teacher for many Ligonier teaching series, including the six-part series [*A Survey of Church History*](#). He is author of many books, including [*God's Pattern for Creation*](#), [*Reformation Sketches*](#), and [*An Unexpected Journey*](#).

Introduction: Attractions and Difficulties

The Psalms have a Godward direction, being God's words to us to give back to Him. In these two videos, Dr. Godfrey discusses the uniqueness of the Psalms as well as the difficulties that must be overcome if we are to learn to love them.

Lesson Objectives

1. To highlight the unique place of the Psalms in the Christian life
2. To introduce the five difficulties we have when reading the Psalms
3. To simplify the difficulties of poetry and perspective in the Psalms
4. To explain how the Old and New Testament relate in the Psalms
5. To showcase the overarching themes in the Psalms

- The unique place of the Psalms in the Christian life

The Psalms have been a tremendous comfort to God's people historically and remain something with which we can richly connect.

The poetic nature of the Psalms continually unveil things previously unseen every time we read them.

The Godward direction of the Psalms make them uniquely helpful; they are God's inspired words to us to give back to Him.

- Five difficulties we have when reading the Psalms

1. The Psalms are a collection of 150 poems that a glance do not appear to be organized, which makes it difficult to interpret in terms of the whole book.

2. The Psalms have a poetic literary form that requires us to slow down and meditate on them, contrary to our fast-paced, non-poetic age.

3. The Psalms require that we understand who is speaking to us in them.

- a. The Psalms are God's words to us to speak back to Him, but they must be understood within the appropriate context.

- b. Psalms, like the imprecatory psalms, make it difficult for Christian to understand how they relate to the context of the New Testament.

4. The Psalms must be read with an understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament in order to see their relevance.

5. The Psalms are difficult to outline.

- a. Some books of the Bible have a clear outline, but the Psalms are difficult to outline even when considered individually.

- b. Psalm 95 is an example of how an individual psalm can shift thematically from a call to worship to a solemn and severe warning.

The Psalms are divided into 5 books

Book 1: Psalms 1-41 (Confidence in God's Care)

- a. The psalms in Book 1 tend to be personal, reflection some level of distress that quickly resolves into confidence in God.
- b. They are where you should look for comfort in distress, being psalms for those who are oppressed, sick or suffering.

Book 2: Psalms 42-72 (Commitment to God's Kingdom)

- a. The psalms in Book 2 are less personal but more community oriented.
- b. They take into consideration the whole people of God and how God is providing for His people.

Book 3: Psalms 73-89 (Crisis Over God's Promises)

- a. The psalms in Book 3 are the emotional heart of the Psalms, containing the most distressful psalms in the Psalter.
- b. They represent a great crisis in the life of the psalmist, a spiritual crisis of doubt and disillusionment in the promises of God.

Book 4: Psalms 90-106 (Comfort in God's Faithfulness)

- a. The psalms of Book 4 reflect on God's work in creation and His covenant with Abraham.
- b. They set out to answer the cry of the psalmist in Book 3 by proving that God is faithful to His promises.

Book 5: Psalms 107-150 (Celebration of God's Salvation)

- a. The psalms in Book 5 are a review of Israel's history and show that God has had a plan throughout the history, even amidst exile.
- b. They further prove that God is a promise-keeping God and culminate in psalms of praise toward the end of the book.

The structure of the Psalms demonstrates that it is a cohesive collection of 150 poems that have not been put together randomly.

- a. Psalms 1 and 2 serve as personal and cosmic introductions to the book, respectively, and the psalms of praise in Book 5 are its conclusion.

- b. The movement of the Psalms mirrors the lives and experiences of the people of God, giving us the language to pray to God when in crisis and reminding us of His faithfulness so that we might praise Him.

God's goodness and unfailing love for the righteous is the great theme of the Psalms.

Three subordinate themes in the Psalms are:

1. The sinfulness of the righteous is prominently seen in psalms of confession and lamentation.
2. The mystery of the providence of God is seen in psalms that question the suffering of the righteous and the success of the wicked.
3. The confidence in God and the future is also seen weaved throughout the Psalms in prayers for relief and songs of praise.

Questions

1. What are some of the reasons Dr. Godfrey titled this series Learning to Love the Psalms?

2. Why are the Psalms uniquely helpful in the Christian life?

Describe a time in your life when the Psalms were a great comfort or help in time of need.

3. What would be some benefits in memorizing the titles Dr. Godfrey gave to each book of the Psalms.

4. Why is it important to understand all the psalms as royal psalms? How does this understanding change the way you view the Psalms, especially as concerns the person and work of Christ?

Next Week : The Power of Poetry, Psalm 11

