Using Psalms to Help **My Troubled Heart**

Have you ever felt so totally overwhelmed by a difficult trial, a painful circumstance, or even your own sinful choices, that you find it difficult to put the thoughts of your heart into words? When speech fails us, and we don't have our own words to express our heart to the Lord, God has given us a book from which we can "borrow" words. In the book of Psalms, we find countless examples of people just like us, who experienced deep pain from the difficult experiences of life. The Psalms helpfully express the kinds of deep emotions, thoughts, and longings we naturally experience in overwhelming situations. And the Psalms help us know what it looks like to run to God in the midst of trouble, and find refuge in Him.

We find an amazing example of Christ Himself using the Psalms to express His heart to God during His times of deepest suffering. (For example, see Psalm 22:1 and Matthew 27:46.) The Psalms give us a language to talk to God about our pain and sorrow. Like Christ, we too can call out to God—who not only promises to be our rock, fortress, and deliverer, but delights to hear and answer us when we call out to Him in faith.

Look at the truths about God packed into the verses below! Just like the psalmist, we can call out to God in our times of distress because we He promises to hear us, be with us, and meet our deepest needs.

- **Psalm 4:1, 3** *Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer. But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him.*
- **Psalm 5:1-3** *Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.*
- **Psalm 50:15** *And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*
- **Psalm 55:16-17** *As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.*
- **Psalm 86:6-7** *Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.*
- **Psalm 91:15** *He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him.*

The book of Psalms is a priceless gift from God, our Father. Through the psalms we learn not only how to speak to God about our problems, but also how to speak to Him about the joy and delight we find in His presence. The psalms teach us to go beyond just pouring out our hearts to God about our trouble; they teach us to pour out our hearts to Him in worship because of who He is.

If we "lean… [to our] own understanding" when trouble comes, we will be unstable and likely respond in ways that do not honor God. God's Word teaches us how to handle our overwhelming emotions. God's Word teaches us what to do when trials and painful circumstances come. God's Word teaches us what to do when others hurt us. Choose one or more of the following suggestions to start studying the Psalms to help you "think Bible" about your trouble and about your God.

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Ideas for Using Psalms to Help Your Troubled Heart:

- Choose a Psalm and start using it to speak to the Lord about the sorrow or isolation you feel in your own heart. Read it out loud and then pray it back to the Lord. Write down any truths you learn about God from the passage (e.g., *My God is…, God is my…*). (A good starting place: Psalms 3, 13, 27, 46, or 91.)[1]

- In the four gospel accounts of Christ's life, read through the prayers of Jesus on the cross, in which He quoted directly from the Psalms. (For example: Matthew 27:45-46; Mark 15:33-34; Luke 23:44-46; John 19:24, 28-30.) What specific circumstance surrounds His use of the psalm that He quoted? Use cross references in the margin of your Bible to locate the passage Jesus quoted in the book of Psalms. Read the verse in its full context and record anything interesting you learn about the author or circumstances surrounding the writing of that psalm. What do you learn about how Christ handled difficulty? How can you follow His example?

- Read through the entire book of Psalms using the *"What Do I Know About my God?"* Bible study guide by Mardi Collier. (You can find it at: https://lifelineforteens.com/resource/wdikamg.)

- Use a concordance or Bible app or website (like Blue Letter Bible or Olive Tree) to find every use of the words "call" and "answer" in the book of Psalms. Write out these verses and record what you learn about God. What does God do? What is God like? Are there any commands to obey or promises to believe?

- Read through one psalm each day and record any verses about praise, thanksgiving, or worship. Highlight any commands to give praise, thanks, or worship to God. Write down the specific reasons for which the psalmist praises God or challenges others to praise Him. How often do you find that the psalmist starts a psalm in trouble and despair, but ends with praise and thanksgiving? What steps might you need to take in order to follow the same pattern?

- Choose a psalm to memorize. Commit to memorize one verse each day until you can quote the entire psalm from memory. Every time you feel overwhelmed or begin to spiral into wrong thinking, start quoting the psalm out loud. This practice will help you keep your thoughts focused on God when you are tempted to despair.

- Use a concordance or Bible program to find all of the uses of the words "hope" and "despair" in the book of Psalms. Use a journal to write out each verse and record what you learn about God. What counsel does God give His people about *hope* and *despair*? What do these verses teach you about *where* a person can find real, lasting hope?

As with any Bible study, it is important not to stop short in your study from making personal application. As you study, take time to prayerfully consider what God wants you to do with the truth He has shown you. With God's help, how can you put the truth you learned about God into action, demonstrating growing trust in Him? Especially identify the specific steps you think God wants you to take when you feel overwhelmed by trouble. Consider asking a godly, trusted adult to walk beside you as you seek to grow.

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[1] You can access the growth study, *Praying the Lament Psalms*, at https://lifelineforteens.com/book/help-i-lost-someone-i-love.

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