

**Kris Langham:** [00:00:00] Welcome, my friends, to the Book of Psalms. My name is Kris Langham, and this is the most beloved book in the Bible. And for good reason. The Psalms are the music, what a film score and soundtrack are to an epic movie. So are the Psalms to the Bible's grand story. The way Rocky's theme puts you back in the fight, and Indiana Jones stirs your heart to adventure.

So the Psalms stir up themes, stories, and faith, from God's Word. Where the Bible has heart, the Psalms give it rhythm. Where the Bible brings understanding, the Psalms add feeling. Emotions are expressed in the Psalms like nowhere else in the Bible. Here you'll find some of your favorite verses.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for you, O Lord. My God, why have you forsaken me? That last one is surprising. I thought [00:01:00] God never forsakes us. That's true, but that doesn't mean you won't feel that way sometimes. And music gives voice to our feelings.

We express our emotions and process our struggles, right or wrong, faithful or doubting, clear or confused, through music. And the Psalms help us bring all of that to God. Have you ever seen the way music can bring a person out of themselves? A guarded heart learns to dance, cry, scream, and shout for joy.

And consider this reality. As we read, pray, and sing these words, we are joined in chorus by believers around the world and across time, in every generation for the last three millennia.

That's a staggering thought. And to honor that connection, we're bringing several voices to take turns in this series. First up is our dear friend and Bible teacher, Melanie Hurlbut. Melanie, what are the [00:02:00] Psalms? What's their purpose and message for us?

**Melanie Hurlbut:** Well, the book of Psalms is Israel's prayer book. A compilation of a hundred and fifty songs, prayers, and poems written for life in the gap.

The gap between who they are and who they are not, and who they're called to be. David, for example, credited with writing almost half of the Psalms, lived much of his life in this gap. There are many years between when he's first anointed king by Samuel, and when he becomes king of all Israel. He's struggling to do the right thing when everyone and everything around him is

going very wrong. So David's Psalms teach us to pray and worship with him as we live through that kind of dissonance.

Struggling to hold on to God, his plans and his promises, and see them come to fruition. Not just for ourselves, but for his people and his world. In this way, much like the Lord's Prayer in the New Testament, the Psalms connect us to God. They make us partners with [00:03:00] him in his promise to bring his kingdom into our mixed up and messy world.

**Kris Lingham:** Thanks, Melanie. Peyton Jones is also with us. Peyton, what makes the Psalms powerful?

**Peyton Jones:** Well, Kris, we all know that music is a powerful force, a gift from God to move the heart and awaken the senses. Sometimes it taps directly to the emotions like adrenaline. Other times, the words grab hold of our reason and wrestle with us, strengthened by the rhythm of music.

and repetition. Music has empowered movements, spiritual revivals, justice and civil rights movements, rebellions against tyranny and oppression. Let freedom ring. The Psalms are musical and that music opens our hearts and helps us process our emotions. Emotions come in many genres and so does music. Just as music today is rock, country, goth, punk, hip hop, classical, and many [00:04:00] more, so the Psalter takes us on a journey through praise, lament, thanksgiving, royal psalms, wisdom psalms, and psalms of confidence with many crossovers.

By the way, Psalter is another word for the whole book of Psalms. As you read the Psalms, remember that here emotions come before logic, and they give us a pattern of talking to God that frees the emotions to be expressed and redeemed. You only talk to someone the way David talks to God when you wildly And completely trust them.

There's a freedom here that we don't see much in Kristian music. A freedom to come to God with the fullness of our emotions. And the fullness of ourselves. Yet those same wild emotions are tamed and redeemed as the Psalms anchor them to the solid rock of God's nature and God's covenant. The Lord is my rock and my refuge.[00:05:00]

**Kris Lingham:** So that's the power. Now, Melanie, what about the historical context for the psalms? When I think about modern music, I see a powerful connection between music and history. 60s, 70s, 80s, the music expresses and

reflects our hearts and our happenings. So what was happening when the psalms were written and compiled?

**Melanie Hurlbut:** Well, individual psalms were written over hundreds of years. Largely for temple worship. Each psalm reflects its own time. But likely the compilation was made in the 400s BC, after the exile. Put yourself in that time with God's people, holding on to God's promises of king and kingdom, after a time when all that appeared to fall apart, and restoration is barely beginning.

These psalms express their hearts and connected them back to those who originally received the promises. Yet, the Book of Psalms isn't a songbook. After the exile, it was intentionally [00:06:00] organized like a poetic Torah into five books, each ending with a doxology of praise. Psalms 1 and 2 introduce the Psalter, underscoring the need for a righteous human being.

Then, zooming in on Yahweh's promise to Davidic's son to carry out God's purposes for Israel. The Psalter ends with five amazing victory psalms celebrating God's triumph throughout the earth. In between, in the gap, each book moves us from the glory of David as anointed king through to the anguish of Israel's exile and the failure of the Davidic line.

Psalms 89 says it well. You have sworn in your holiness and will not lie to David that his line will continue forever. But You've rejected, spurned your anointed one. You've defiled his crown in the dust. David's line has gone to dust in the same way [00:07:00] as Adam's. The Lord alone is left to fulfill His covenant promises of life to Israel and the nations.

In this way, the Psalms gather us up, all our struggles, our loss, our failure, into the human struggle and into God's promise to bring His Messiah to reshape His people and establish His glorious kingdom throughout the earth.

**Kris Langham:** Powerful stuff. Thank you, Melanie. Thank you, Peyton. And for you listening, The following are some vital keys to reading the Psalms well.

Key number one, respect the genre. This is poetry. So read in the genre, Psalms and epistles are not the same.

Can you imagine reading lyrics to a song as if someone wrote you that in a letter? It's weird. And do not read the Bible as an encyclopedia of theological truths. It's not. Not a single book in the Bible is written as systematic [00:08:00] theology. God did not choose that. Key number two, respect the poet. Let them be human and they'll help you embrace your own humanity.

Key number three, respect the poet's feelings. Let them feel their feelings, and they will help you experience and process your feelings. Key number four, respect the poet's process. The Psalms often do not end where they begin, and that's powerful. Some begin with hard questions and hurt feelings, yet heal through the process.

So process with them. Pay attention to what changed and why. And key number five, read the Psalms musically. Now this one is tricky, because even though I said that the Psalms are the music of the Bible, technically, that's not quite true. We don't have the original music. The lyrics were preserved, but the music was lost.

Lyrics without [00:09:00] music are missing something, but these lyrics were written for music. Many Psalms open with musical instruction in the header, but many of those musical words are tough to translate. So that gives us the opportunity to fill in the gap in our minds and hearts. To help you do that, we'll sometimes share a song or artist that we connect to a psalm to give you a sense of how it feels to us.

However, we do not vouch for the character nor the doctrine of any musician noted. We've done no background checks. For that matter, David's life was far from purity, yet the Holy Spirit took hold of his voice and ordained the words time and again. We might even reference secular artists. Don't read too much into that.

And one last note. Here in the Psalms, and especially for shorter ones, I encourage you to read the whole psalm before and after the audio guide. And through the Word app, you can adjust the settings to Bible, Guide, Bible. [00:10:00] And that's it. Time to dive in. Melanie, Peyton, and I are ready to roll. We'll see you on the journey.