

# Bless the Lord O My Soul!



*A study in Psalms*

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### Hesed—theme talk

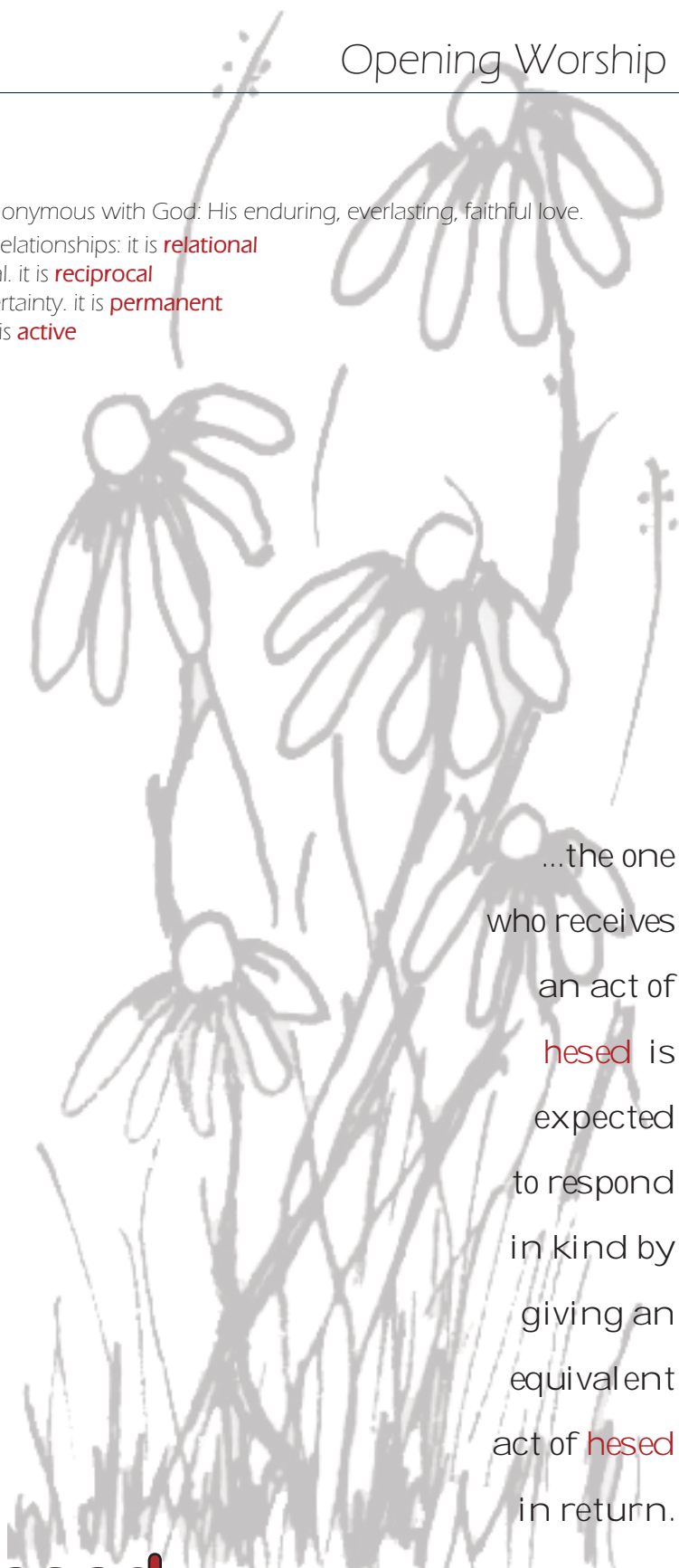
**Hesed:** The Hebrew word that has become synonymous with God: His enduring, everlasting, faithful love.

**Hesed** can be seen most concretely in relationships: it is **relational**

**Hesed** is generally considered reciprocal. it is **reciprocal**

**Hesed** emphasizes permanence and certainty. it is **permanent**

**Hesed** almost always denotes action. it is **active**



...the one  
who receives  
an act of  
**hesed** is  
expected  
to respond  
in kind by  
giving an  
equivalent  
act of **hesed**  
in return.

**hesed...**

JEANENE REESE




### Reading Structurally

What does the text say?  
How does the writer communicate its message? How does the structure of the writing and its context impact the writer's intended meaning?

## Psalm 103

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name.  
2 Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and do not forget all his benefits—  
3 who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,  
4 who redeems your life from the Pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,  
5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.  
6 The Lord works vindication  
and justice for all who are oppressed.  
7 He made known his ways to Moses,  
his acts to the people of Israel.  
8 The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
9 He will not always accuse,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.  
10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.  
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;  
12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far he removes our transgressions from us.  
13 As a father has compassion for his children,  
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.  
14 For he knows how we were made;  
he remembers that we are dust.  
15 As for mortals, their days are like grass;  
they flourish like a flower of the field;  
16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
and its place knows it no more.  
17 But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting  
on those who fear him,  
and his righteousness to children's children,  
18 to those who keep his covenant  
and remember to do his commandments.  
19 The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,  
and his kingdom rules over all.  
20 Bless the Lord, O you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
obedient to his spoken word.  
21 Bless the Lord, all his hosts,  
his ministers that do his will.  
22 Bless the Lord, all his works,  
in all places of his dominion.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

NEW REVISED STANDARD



Some psalms are  
addressed to God;  
some are spoken to  
other people--  
the righteous, the  
sinners, Israel, the  
Gentile nations....  
But in Psalm 103,  
the psalmist is  
speaking to Himself.

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE  
psalms, vol 2

holy..



### Prompts for Reading Structurally:

- Consider the psalm's opening and closing: verses 1-2 and 20-22. How are the two calls to praise similar? How do they differ? What occurs in the body of the psalm to explain these similarities and differences? How does deciding to praise the Lord affect **how** we praise Him?
- Verses 6, 8, and 19 all begin with "The Lord" and say why God deserves praise. Use the verses after each statement to more fully understand their meaning. Are these statements just a list, or can you see a reasoning or development behind their order?



The LORD is  
compassionate  
and gracious,  
Slow to anger  
and abounding  
in love.

EXODUS 34.6  
PSALM 103.8  
PSALM 86.15  
PSALM 145.8  
JOEL 2.13  
JONAH 4.2  
NEHEMIAH 9.17

holy...

# Journal

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Insights and Personal Journaling





The subject (in the psalms) is not the "Hebrew individual" but "the individual in Israel."

HANS-JOACHIM KRAUS  
theology of the psalms

holy...

# Journal

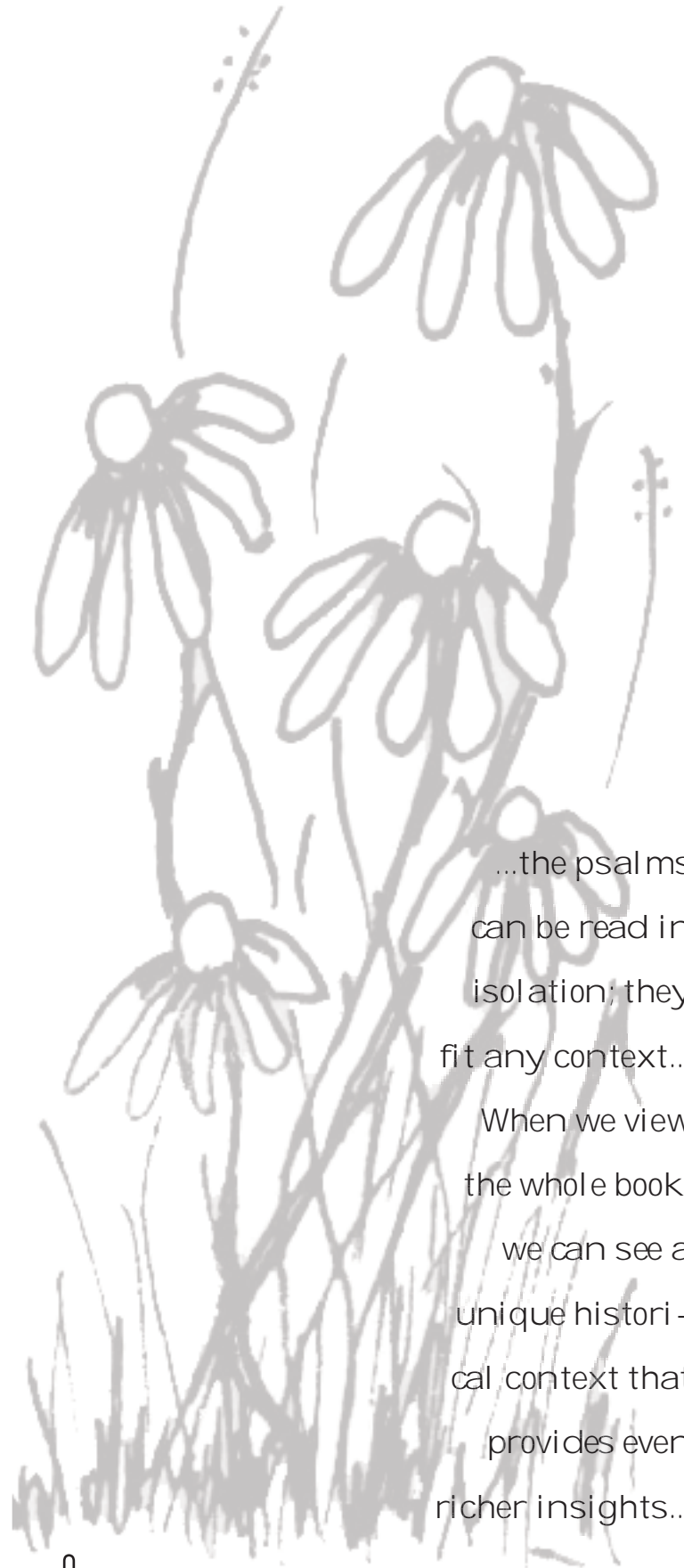
## “Making Sense of the Psalter”

### Overview of Psalms

The Story of Israel (Pre-exile, Exile, Post Exile):

There are FIVE big books of psalms divided by doxologies.

Orientation	Pre-exile	A. Book I: Ps. ____ through ____. <b>Doxology:</b> Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.
Disorientation		B. Book II: Ps. ____ through ____. <b>Doxology:</b> Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.
		C. Book III: Ps. ____ through ____. <b>Doxology:</b> Blessed the Lord forever. Amen and Amen.
	Exile	E Book IV: Ps. ____ through ____. <b>Doxology:</b> Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And let all the people say, “Amen.” Praise the Lord!
Re-orientation	Post-exile	F. Book V: Ps. ____ through ____. <b>Doxology:</b> The whole of Ps. 150 is most likely a doxology to the entire Psalter.



...the psalms  
can be read in  
isolation; they  
fit any context...  
When we view  
the whole book,  
we can see a  
unique histori-  
cal context that  
provides even  
richer insights...

JEANENE REESE

holy...



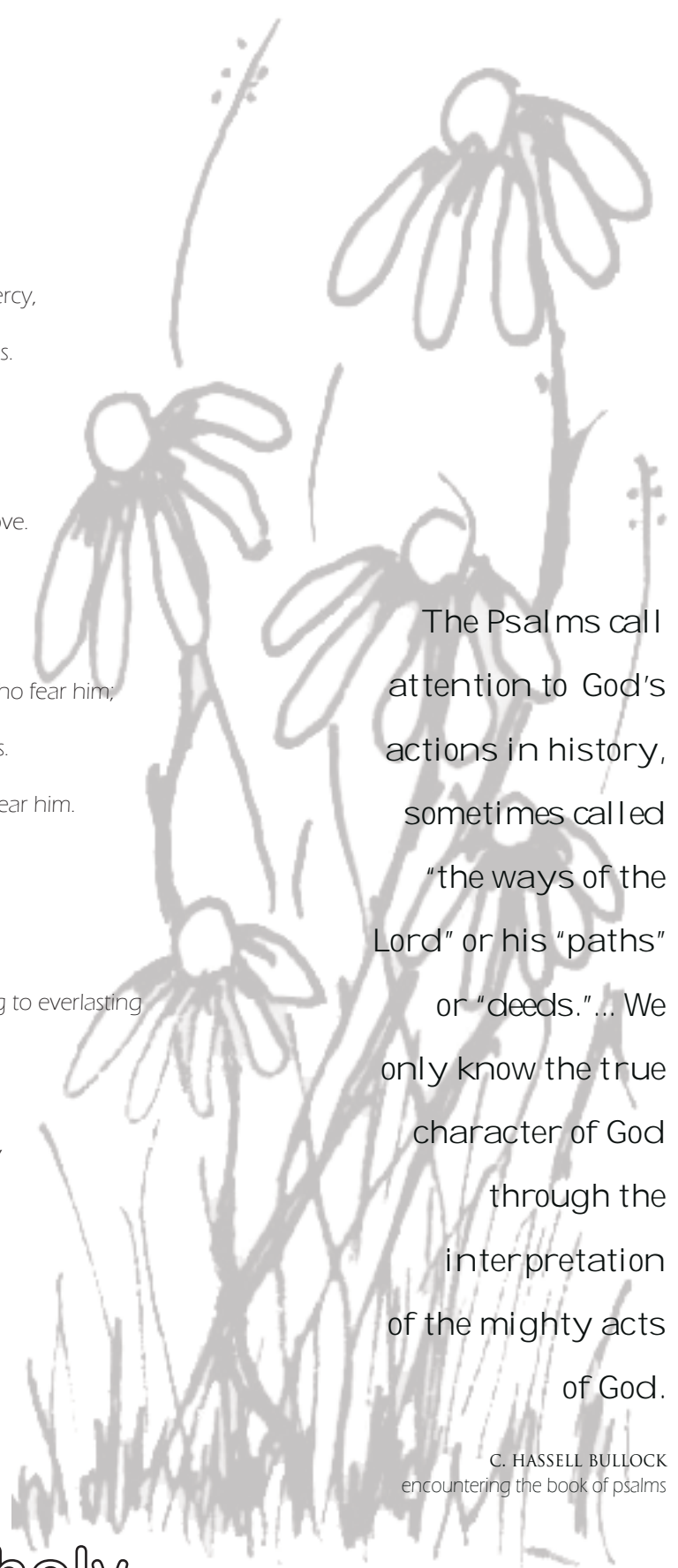
### Reading Theologically

What does the writing teach us about God?  
What can we learn about humanity from this writing? What does the writing teach about God's covenant?

# Psalms 103

- <sup>1</sup> Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name.
- <sup>2</sup> Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and do not forget all his benefits—
- <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,
- <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the Pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- <sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- <sup>6</sup> The Lord works vindication  
and justice for all who are oppressed.
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on those who fear him,  
and his righteousness to children's children,
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and remember to do his commandments.
- <sup>19</sup> The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,  
and his kingdom rules over all.
- <sup>20</sup> Bless the Lord, O you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
obedient to his spoken word.
- <sup>21</sup> Bless the Lord, all his hosts,  
his ministers that do his will.
- <sup>22</sup> Bless the Lord, all his works,  
in all places of his dominion.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

NEW REVISED STANDARD



The Psalms call attention to God's actions in history, sometimes called "the ways of the Lord" or his "paths" or "deeds." ... We only know the true character of God through the interpretation of the mighty acts of God.

C. HASSELL BULLOCK  
encountering the book of psalms

holy...

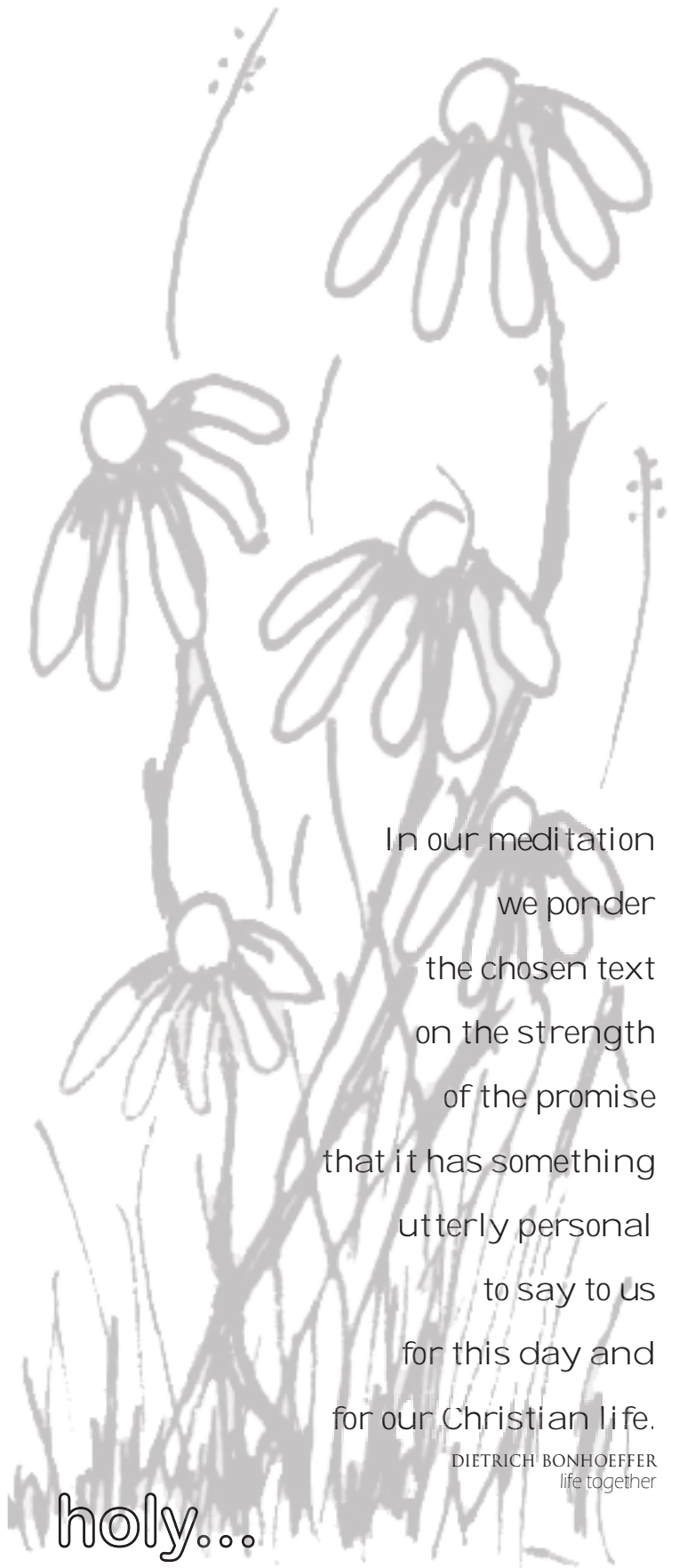


### Prompts for reading theologically:

Consider our discussion about God, humanity and covenant. Which part of that discussion most impacts your relationship with God? Why?

Ponder the above prompt as you complete the assigned art project.

What did God speak to you through the process? Use these pages to reflect on that message.



In our meditation  
we ponder  
the chosen text  
on the strength  
of the promise  
that it has something  
utterly personal  
to say to us  
for this day and  
for our Christian life.

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER  
life together

holy...

# Journal

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Insights and Personal Journaling





Where the Spirit  
does not open  
the Scripture,  
the Scripture is  
not understood  
even though  
it is read.

MARTIN LUTHER

holy...

# Journal

## Planning Worship to Reflect a Message

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Notes



Reverence declares itself  
through silence, more deeply  
and more truly than  
through speech.

PAUL WOODRUFF  
reverence

**remember...**



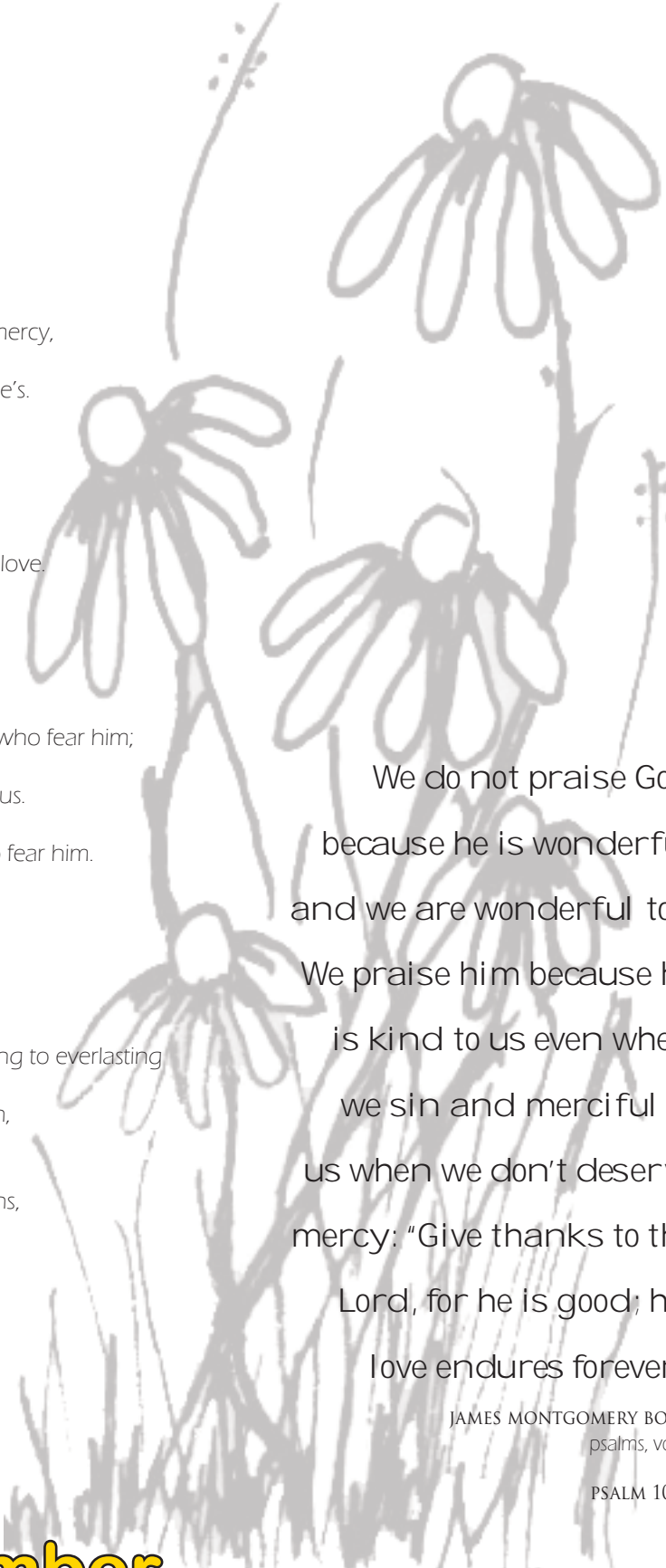
### Reading as Worship

How does this psalm call us to worship God? How might we plan a worship that accurately reflects the truths in this psalm and re-creates the essence of its meaning and call to worship?

# Psalm 103

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and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name.
- <sup>2</sup> Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and do not forget all his benefits—
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who heals all your diseases,
- <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the Pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
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so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
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in all places of his dominion.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

NEW REVISED STANDARD



We do not praise God  
because he is wonderful  
and we are wonderful too.  
We praise him because he  
is kind to us even when  
we sin and merciful to  
us when we don't deserve  
mercy: "Give thanks to the  
Lord, for he is good; his  
love endures forever."

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE  
psalms, vol. 2

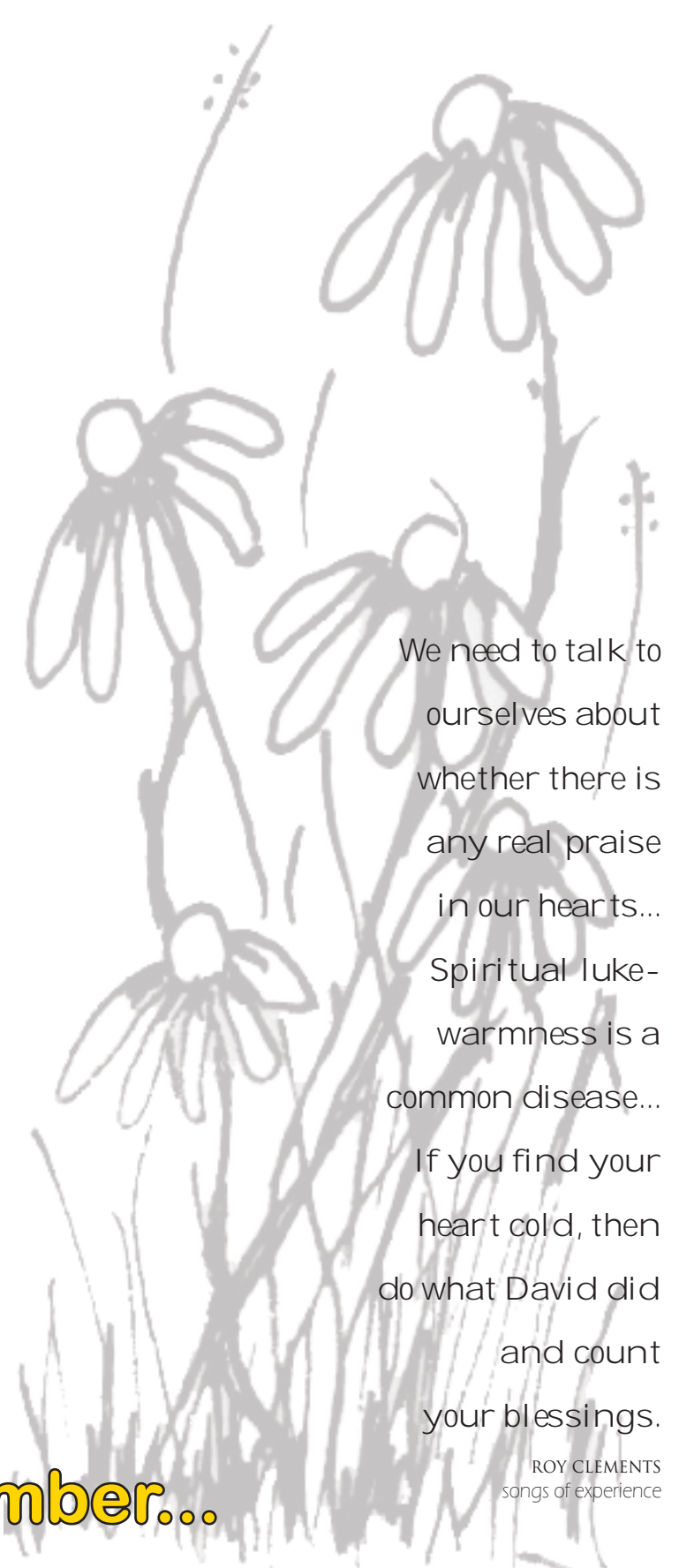
PSALM 106.1

**remember...**

# Journal

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Insights and Personal Journaling



We need to talk to  
ourselves about  
whether there is  
any real praise  
in our hearts...  
Spiritual luke-  
warmness is a  
common disease...  
If you find your  
heart cold, then  
do what David did  
and count  
your blessings.

ROY CLEMENTS  
songs of experience

**remember...**

### Notes

#### Pray beforehand:

- To be very relaxed
- To hear what is said and unsaid
- To faithfully go with them to the Lord
- That you will not attempt to solve their problems
- For fresh perspectives on difficult situations

#### Set the Stage:

Seek to know God's movement in their life at this time:

Listen for what is not being said.

Monitor the tone in the room.



Call her to reality.

Don't rush away from the "talk." If talk seems to be interrupting prayer time, reposition your discussion as one in God's presence--where every statement and wish and sigh and need is laid before the Father as you go.

Be aware of times when the woman herself should pray.

Though this is not a probing time, if issues of sin arise naturally, gently call her to repentance.

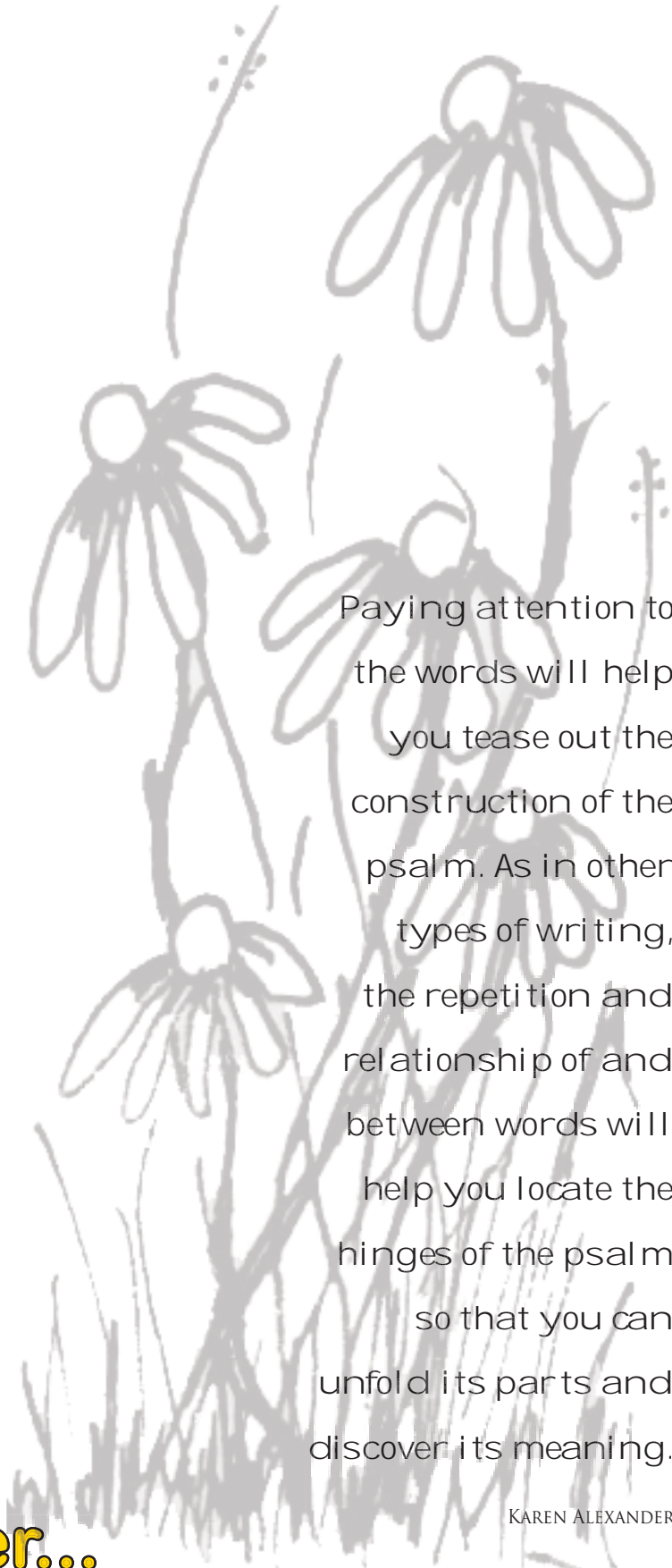
Suggest others on the team who might pray with her.

It is the heart that prays, it is the voice of the heart that God listens and it is the heart that he answers.

JEAN-NICHOLAS GROU  
how to pray

**remember...**





Paying attention to the words will help you tease out the construction of the psalm. As in other types of writing, the repetition and relationship of and between words will help you locate the hinges of the psalm so that you can unfold its parts and discover its meaning.

KAREN ALEXANDER

**remember...**



### Reading as Transformation

How does this psalm call me toward the heart of God? How does it identify needs in my heart, that must be addressed? How can it tutor me to become more like my heavenly father?

# Psalm 103

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in all places of his dominion.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

NEW REVISED STANDARD



God thirsts  
to be  
thirsted  
after.  
ST. AUGUSTINE

God wants  
to be wanted,  
to be wanted  
enough that we are  
ready, predisposed,  
to find him  
present with us.

DALLAS WILLARD  
hearing God

COME BEFORE THE WINTER, OCTOBER, 2012

**remember...**



### Ideas for active reflection:

Take a phrase, sentence, or word that the Lord brought to mind into your time of active reflection, and listen to it, reflect on it, pray over it, and rest in it as time allows. Allow it to become part of you.

**Palms Up, Palms Down:** As you speak your prayer to the Lord, place your hands with your palms facing down. When you are ready to listen for the Lord, turn your palms face up. Continue in this movement as you converse with God.

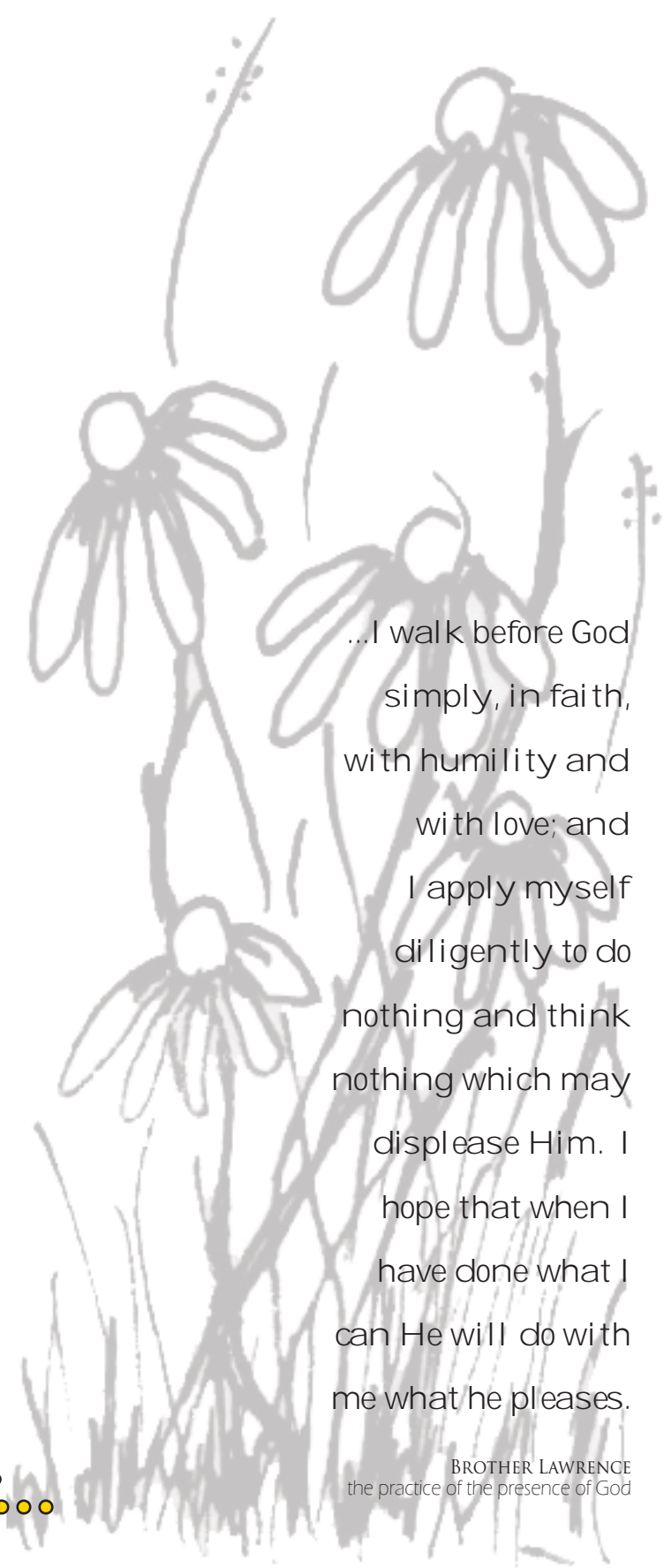
**Reflection in Motion:** Try some stretching, breathing, relaxing, and focusing on Psalm 103.

**Swim, Walk, or Jog:** As you exercise, consider doing one of the following activities:

- **Breath Prayer:** Choose a phrase to silently repeat in the rhythm of your breath. For example, “great is his love” as you breathe in, “for those who fear him” as you breathe out. Or you could breathe in the benefits of the Lord and breathe out your sins, failures, and frustrations.

**Dwelling on Imagery:** Think about the word or phrase you pondered. As you move, what melody comes to mind? How do these connect with what you have been asked to pray about? Move your body to the rhythm of this tune and listen to hear if God is giving you a new song to sing.

**Picture Journal:** As you move into your active reflection, use your camera to take pictures that represent Psalm 103 – images that you find meaningful or that depict spiritual insights you have gained.



...I walk before God  
simply, in faith,  
with humility and  
with love; and  
I apply myself  
diligently to do  
nothing and think  
nothing which may  
displease Him. I  
hope that when I  
have done what I  
can He will do with  
me what he pleases.

BROTHER LAWRENCE  
the practice of the presence of God

**remember...**

# Journal

Insights and Personal Journaling

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**remember...**

Notes



If worship does  
nothing else  
for us, it helps  
us discover the  
things that are  
important. Real  
worship will  
transform  
your life.

WARREN WIERSBE  
t

**remember...**

# Journal

## Hosting a Prayer Group that Advances the Message

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Notes

compassion...



# Journal

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## Finalizing your thoughts

- What specific insight has grown out of my study, meditation, and prayer this week in regard to Psalm 103?
- Where will this insight be **specifically** useful next week as I return home?



We wait for  
everything  
that is  
really worth  
having.... We  
even wait  
for God.

ANTHONY PADOVANO

compassion...

# Journal

Personal Journaling

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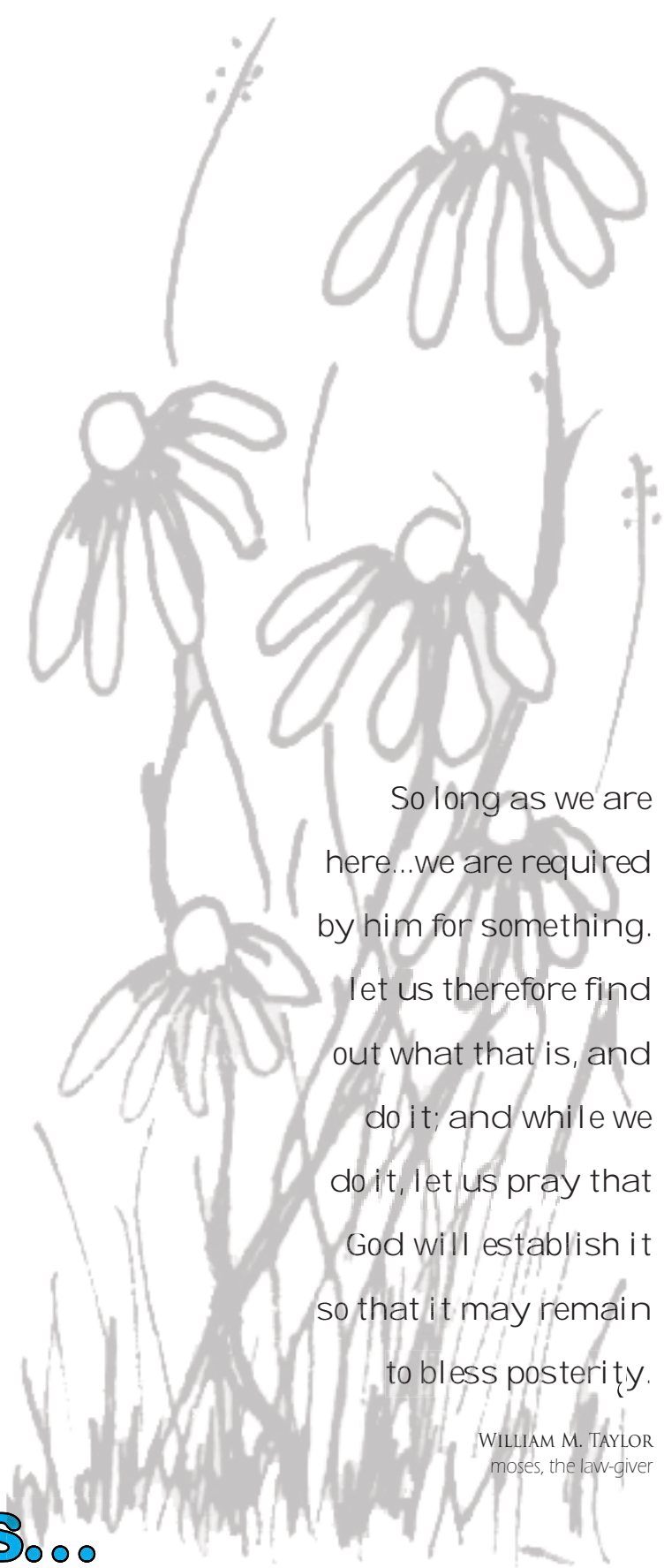


compassion...

# Journal

Personal Journaling

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So long as we are here...we are required by him for something. Let us therefore find out what that is, and do it; and while we do it, let us pray that God will establish it so that it may remain to bless posterity.

WILLIAM M. TAYLOR  
moses, the law-giver

**bles...**

## As a father has compassion...

So the Lord has  
compassion on  
those who fear him.

For he knows how  
we were made;  
he remembers that  
we are dust.

Ps 103.13-14

German church  
building,  
November, 2005.



# Glossary of terms

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## PRAYER CLUSTER

A small group of three or four that will meet each evening to share, unpack the day, and to pray. Members commit to support one another throughout the week and to pray for one another.

## EQUIPPING BLOCK

A study, reflection, and sharing segment designed to guide you in your exploration of Psalm 103. A block consists of a reading group experience followed by an hour of personal reflection (either active or passive), and ends with one-half hour of group sharing. The schedule contains four blocks; they meet in the mornings and afternoons on Tuesday and Wednesday.

## READING GROUP

A study session in which participants will focus on hearing and examining the psalm from three perspectives:

- Structural—what does it say?
- Theological—what does it teach me about God and humanity?
- Prayer—what can I learn about prayer and how to pray?

## REFLECTIVE RESPONSE

An hour of reflection following each Reading Group. Reading Group leaders will supply prompts to aid you in this time of reflection. Though some activities are designed for “active” reflection, each one is a call to personal examination and thought in respect to Psalm 103, and should therefore be experienced in silence.

## PRAYER APPOINTMENT

One-on-one prayer with a member of our team, sharing and praying about your ministry and needs.

## EVENING PRAYERS

A brief 15 minutes of worship to close the day.

# The Composition of the Book of Psalms

## APPENDIX A

Most of the material in Appendix A is adapted from Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50*, vol 19 (Nelson, 2004), 25-31.

Songs and Prayers existed in ancient Israel long before the Book of Psalms. Some examples from the Hebrew Bible are:

- The Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-18)
- The Song of the Ark (Numbers 10:35-36)
- The Oracles of Balaam (Numbers 23-24)
- The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32)
- The Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33)
- The Song of Deborah (Judges 5)

Many of these hymns would be classified as praise or victory songs. Yet others take the form of instruction, blessing, or prophecy. Some were set to music, others used in varied liturgical\* forms. What they show us is that poetry was not only natural to early Israel but that it gave full expression to the individual and the community of the most profound human feelings and experiences—prayer, praise, wisdom, worship, and lament—in relationship to YHWH and one another. Passed down from generation to generation these songs and prayers shaped the formation and identity of Israel in every historical context.

Exactly when collections of such works formed, is hard to pinpoint; the process took place over the course of many centuries. Rather than being a collection of the work of one author, they encompass the compositions of many authors from varied backgrounds and situations. As they were gathered the songs and prayers were reviewed and arranged by those seeking to

preserve the writings. This same process is evident in the Book of Psalms (also known as the Psalter\*).

Although it is not possible to identify each step in the process of collecting the Psalter some clues indicate at least four stages: (a) a psalm is composed; (b) it is linked together with other psalms to form a small collection; (c) several small collections are brought together for form a larger unit; (d) the current Book of Psalms emerged as a collection of collections with a variety of individual psalms added by the editor(s) to the final book.

Any reader looking through the Book of Psalms finds clues to this process if she will train her eyes to see them. First, titles are placed at the beginning of many psalms and are most relevant in identifying their place in the many smaller collections than in understanding the original construction of the specific psalm. Second, the conclusion found in Psalm 72:20, “David ben Jesse’s prayers are ended,” indicates that it is the ending of an early collection of David’s psalms rather than of the entire Psalter. Also subsequent psalms attributed to David are found in the Book of Psalms. Third, numerous duplications exist in the Psalter suggesting that these psalms originally belonged to independent collections but when brought together duplications were inevitable. Some examples include Ps 14=Ps 53; Ps 40:13-17=Ps 70; and Ps 108=Ps 57:7-11 + Ps 60:5-12.

Some of the basic collections in the Psalter are easy to identify while other compilations are more challenging. Examples of some of the more obvious ones are as follows:

- Collections of Davidic Psalms—Pss 3-41 (minus perhaps 33); Pss 51-70 (without possibly 66 and 67); and Pss 138-45. These three collections do not include all of David's 73 psalms and other smaller collections are possible (i.e. Pss 108-110). Other individual psalms by David may have belonged to collections originally but could have been moved to a different position in the Psalter for possible theological or liturgical reasons.
- The Psalms of Asaph—Pss 78-83 make up this collection with perhaps Ps 50. Asaph was a Levite musician who played a leading role in the music of worship during David's lifetime (1 Chr 14:17-19; 16:4-5). His descendants carried on this tradition (Ezra 3:10).
- Psalms of the Sons of Korah—includes two possible collections, Pss 42-49 (with the exception of 43) and Pss 84-88 (without 86). Descendants of Kohath: the Korahites were Levites involved in the music of the Temple (1 Chr 6:22).
- Song of Ascents—Pss 113-118 which is traditionally associated with the Passover and Pss 146-150 (both sets are known as the Hallel Psalms) which were for more general use in worship.

One of the final considerations in a basic reading of the Book of Psalms is its overall organization. The editor divided the Psalter into five books, each with a doxology at the end of it. The divisions are as follows:

- Book I—Pss 1-41—  
Doxology: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen. (Ps 41:13).
- Book II—Pss 42-72—  
Doxology: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever, may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen. (Ps 72:18-19, note also verse 20).
- Book III—Pss 73-89—  
Doxology: Blessed be the Lord forever. Amen and Amen. (Ps 89: 52).
- Book IV—Pss 90-106—  
Doxology: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And let all the people say, "Amen." Praise the Lord! (Ps. 106:48).
- Book V—Pss 107-150—  
Doxology: Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! (Ps 150:6, note the whole psalm functions as a doxology to the whole Psalter).

# Types of Psalms

John D. Witvliet, *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: Brief Introduction and Guide to Resources*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 70-71.

## APPENDIX B

### SALVATION HISTORY PSALMS

Psalms of thanksgiving for God's actions. They read like condensed history lessons about God's saving work with the people of Israel (see Pss 78, 105, and 136).

### LAMENT PSALMS

Texts that begin with laments to God about the brokenness and pain of life. Most laments move from expressions of anger to expressions of trust or praise (Ps 88 is the notable exception). Scholars often divide these texts into groups of "community laments" (Pss 87 and 137) and "individual laments" (Pss 3, 22, and 42).

### THANKSGIVING PSALMS

Scholars often divide these texts into "community thanksgivings" (Ps 124) and "individual thanksgiving" (Ps 116).

### PSALMS OF PRAISE

Texts that focus on the praise of God—usually with reference to God's being and character (Ps 8).

### WISDOM PSALMS

These Psalms mirror features of Proverbs, featuring wise statements about faithful living (Pss 37, 49, and 133).

### TORAH PSALMS

Psalms that both extol the virtues of God's law and summarize part of it (Pss 1, 19, and 119).

### SONGS OF TRUST

These Psalms express trust as their main motif (Pss 11, 23, and 27).

### COVENANT RENEWAL LITURGIES

These Psalms model and teach the importance of faithful, covenant (or promise-based) prayer (Pss 50 and 89).

### ROYAL PSALMS

These Psalms feature references to the kings of Israel and are usually interpreted by Christians in a messianic way—as referring to Jesus (Pss 2, 72, and 110).

### ZION PSALMS

Extol the virtues of Mount Zion, the location of the temple in Jerusalem, and thus focus on the beauty of the presence of God (Pss 46, 84, and 122).

### ENTHRONEMENT PSALMS

Psalms directed to or about a king. They highlight the image of God as the ruler of creation (Pss 24, 47, and 95-99).

### PSALMS OF ASCENT OR PILGRIM PSALMS

Psalms sung by the people on their pilgrimages to Jerusalem (Pss 120-134).



# Psalter Glossary

Many of the definitions in Appendix C have been taken from C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), p. 249-251.

**Though many of these words have more general meanings, many of the definitions given here are specific to the study of Psalms.**

## ANTHOLOGY

a collection of poems compiled by an editor.

## CHIASM

a feature of Hebrew poetry that structures thought in a mirror pattern, restating themes inversely (for example given three themes, “a,” “b,” and “c,” the structure might be abc-cba. In a chiasmic arrangement, it is the center point that is to be highlighted. In the previous example, therefore: c).

## COVENANT

an agreement between two parties. In the Bible, covenant is often used to describe the relationship between God and his people. Some covenants, like the one between God and Abraham, are essentially an obligation that God places on himself that does not depend on what the human party does. Others, like the Mosaic covenant, include obligations on God and the people. The Mosaic covenant is similar to ancient treaties between a conquering king and a vassal state.

## CREATION

the formation of all things by the word of the Lord. To the psalmist, this was far more than a statement of beginnings; it was a key doctrine proving God’s ownership of the earth and perfect control, both physical and moral. To affirm God as Creator was also to affirm the perfect justice and judgment inherent in his works.

## DOXOLOGY

a hymn of praise to God. An entire psalm or a section of a psalm devoted to praise can be called a doxology.

## EXEGESIS

the process of reading and studying a biblical text in an attempt to determine what the text meant to the original audience at the time it was written.

## APPENDIX C

### EXODUS OR “RED SEA”

God divided the waters of the Red Sea to deliver Hebrew slaves from their oppressors. Israel entered the Sea a rebellious and sinful tribe. (Seeing Pharaoh approaching, they cried out to Moses in unbelief, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?”— Ex. 14.11). They passed through the Sea on dry land and emerged a redeemed people of God. (“In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode”— Ex. 15.13). The Psalmists repeatedly apply this lesson in order to evoke praise and spiritual introspection.

### HESED

a Hebrew word, often translated steadfast love or loving-kindness, which summarizes the faithful, eternal, and active love that God has for his creation.

### JUSTICE

the divine standard by which all actions and attitudes are measured. The psalmists found this centered in the character of God, affirmed in his creation, and spoken of in His law. This “justice” should be lived out among others; it is a reflection of the steadfast love of God and should be given as well as received. Prior to exile, God’s prophets repeatedly warned and condemned the nation’s leaders for lacking the very fruit God sought: justice and righteousness. Justice was to be given to one another.

### LAMENT

a psalm that petitions Yahweh for help in a time of suffering. A lament can be either an appeal by an individual in a time of personal distress or an appeal by the community in a time of national distress.

### LITURGY

the rituals of a worshipping community. Many psalms were part of the liturgy of Israel’s worship.

**LORD, YHWH—YAHWEH**

the Hebrew word “Yahweh” means, quite literally, “He is.” This refers to God’s revelation of his name to Moses at the bush (Ex. 3.14); “I am.” For the Hebrew, this name for God was so holy that the people of Israel did not speak it aloud. In the Hebrew text it was represented by a group of consonants, largely unpronounceable. English versions of the Bible most often indicate the use of this name by printing it in small caps: **LORD**.

**MESSIAH**

the “anointed one.” The psalms express a special relationship between God and “the king” that would bless the people with peace. Israel’s kings were thus called “Messiahs;” they were anointed and seen as sons of God on earth. Thus, given the failure of the kings and God’s subsequent discipline through exile, the prophets began to look toward a “king”—an “anointed one,” a “Messiah.” This king would be both righteous and just, the very characteristics for which the kings of Israel and Judah were judged as lacking. His kingdom would reign eternal.

**META-MESSAGE**

the overall theme that is communicated in a text.

**METAPHOR**

a literary device in which one thing is said to be a different thing; for example, “The Lord is my shepherd.”

**PARALLELISM**

a Hebrew poetic device in which a line of the poem is made up of two or more balanced parts that complement each other. Sometimes the parallel part restates the same idea as the first part; sometimes it contrasts an opposing idea; and sometimes it extends or heightens the first idea.

**PSALTER**

another name for the book of Psalms. It is similar to a songbook or hymnal.

**REFRAIN**

a repeated line in a poem, often occurring at regular intervals.

**RIGHTEOUSNESS**

a life that values and reveres God, thus reflects the God one serves: Be holy because I am holy. Prior to exile, God’s prophets repeatedly warned and condemned the nation’s leaders for lacking the very fruits God sought: justice and righteousness. Righteousness dealt mostly with personal piety out of reverence for God.

**SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM**

the Jewish religion as it developed and was practiced in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. This second temple was constructed around 520 BCE and destroyed in 70 CE; the first temple had been destroyed at the time of the Babylonian exile in 586 BCE. The book of Psalms is sometimes called the songbook of Second Temple Judaism.

**SELAH**

a Hebrew term which occurs 71 times in the Psalms; its meaning is unknown. It may have been a musical or liturgical notation.

**SIMILE**

a literary device in which one thing is compared to another; for example, “their days are like grass.”

**STRUCTURE**

the way in which the parts of a psalm are linked or function together to convey meaning.

# Psalter Glossary

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APPENDIX C (continued)

## TELESCOPING

the Hebrews understood the present as merely a continuation of divine activity in the past and the future as also participation in the blessings of the past. In this manner Israel hopefully celebrated the past by viewing the past, present, and future within one's lens of faith. For example, when Moses preached to second-generation Hebrews about the covenant of God, he spoke as if the covenant was made with them, even though the covenant was originally spoken to their forefathers (Dt. 5.2-3).

## TORAH

the Hebrew word for the first five books of the Old Testament. It can also mean "law" or "teaching" in a more general sense.

## YAHWEH, LORD

see LORD on page 69.

# Understanding God's nature: **hesed**

Some thoughts by Jeanene Reese

APPENDIX D

The Hebrew word for loving-kindness, faithful love, and loyal-commitment, **Hesed**, is found throughout the Hebrew Bible. It is an ordinary word that takes on extraordinary meaning as it is used to demonstrate God's character. **Hesed** is first introduced in the narrative literature but occurs most often in poetry especially the Psalms. In the prophetic literature it is most frequently seen as part of summary statements or theological refrains reminding Israel of God's nature and how **Hesed** functions in relation to their sinfulness, unfaithfulness, and lack of loving response.

Several key elements of **Hesed** can be determined from its development among human beings:

1. **Hesed** is usually given in singular form and is used most concretely in relationships. It can be paraphrased by the expression, "do good." Here are examples of the types of relationships in which **hesed** is found:
  - relationships between relatives: Sarah-Abraham (Gen 20:13)
  - between host/guest: Abimelech-Abraham (Gen 21:23)
  - between friends: Jonathan-David (1 Sam 20:8, 14)
  - between sovereigns and subjects: Abner-house of Saul (2 Sam 3:8)
  - between two parties, inaugurated by an unusual act of kindness: Prisoner-Joseph (Gen 40:14)
2. Generally the one who receives an act of **hesed** is expected to respond in kind by giving an equivalent act of **hesed** in return. However, even

in places where the context of mutuality is not explicit, it is implicit because the bonds are the closest possible: between spouses, parent/child, and/or close kin or friend.

- husband and wife: Abraham/Sarah (Gen 20:13)
  - father and son: Israel and Joseph (Gen 47:29)
  - next of kin: Laban/Bethuel and Isaac (Gen 24:49)
  - friend: Hushai's relationship to David (2 Sam 16:17)
3. Several of the passages mentioned (Gen 24:49; 47:29; Josh 2:14) use language with **hesed** that emphasizes the permanence, certainty, and lasting validity of the demonstration or promise of **hesed**.
  4. Another significant quality of **hesed** in the Hebrew Bible is that it most often denotes action (cf. Prov 11:17; 14:22; 21:21; and Ruth 3:10). **Hesed** (kindness) is parallel to doing **mispat** (justice) and both are ethical requirements made by God of his people in every setting (cf. Mic 6:8; Zech 7:10; Matt 5-7).

As the concept of **hesed** shifts into God's requirement for humanity, however, there is also a change in mutuality. The widow or orphan, the sojourner and poor cannot be expected to return kindness given to them. Instead God is the one who supplies **hesed** (cf. Esth 2:9; Gen 39:21; Ezra 7:28, 9:9; Dan 1:9). In these instances God's blessing functions as a substitute for human acts of **hesed** and thus negates the mutuality of it (cf. also, Ruth 3:10; Neh 13:14).

Continued on next page

# Understanding God's nature: **hesed**

by Jeanene Reese

APPENDIX D--(continued)

Interestingly, covenant is not a pre-requisite to **hesed** but can be a by-product of it. Of course, covenant is central to family relationships but not to others. In the stories of Abraham and Abimelech or Rahab and Israel, **hesed** is extended by the former to the latter. The result of the kindness shown is that Abraham forms a lasting covenant with Abimelech and Rahab asks that one be formed with her father's house, and Israel honors the request. In this sense **hesed** precedes covenant and it also outstretches it.

All of these understandings of **hesed** apply to **Yahweh**—**God's loving kindness is relational, mutual, permanent, and active.** In the narrative history of Genesis (and beyond), the Lord continually shows kindness to a wide range of people in many different ways. But it is the demonstration of God's **hesed** to Israel that forms the central theme of the Hebrew Bible.

As Israel is formed into a nation and called to be God's people, the loving kindness of Yahweh not only shapes its history but also moves it forward—**hesed** has a divine purpose.

1. In the Exodus God leads and guides Israel while simultaneously forming them to be his own. Moses sings of God's **hesed** as he leads the people through the Red Sea delivering them from their bondage (Ex. 15:13).

So closely tied  
is **hesed**  
to **God's**  
true nature  
that...**God** is  
**hesed** and  
**hesed** is  
**God.**

2. God gives the Law through Moses at Sinai and forms a covenant with Israel that is based on faithfulness. The reciprocity and mutuality of **hesed** are central to covenant since it ultimately forms the most intimate of relationships (Ex 20:4-6).
3. Israel does not always return God's **hesed**, however; the people are often faithless, unloving, and idolatrous. Yet even as God punishes them, God remains true to his nature. The scene described in Exo 34 is what the writer of Ps 103 has in mind as he writes of God's loving nature and it is why the psalm is best described as a covenant psalm:

*The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation (34:6b-7).*

So closely tied is **hesed** to God's true nature that the writer of Psalm 142:2 refers to Yahweh as "my kindness" and Jonah equates idolaters with those who "forsake their kindness" (2:9). God is **hesed** and **hesed** is God.

Israel's faith is grounded in the continual hope and expectation that they will live with the blessing of God's loving kindness. The natural response of God's people is to respond in worship in many forms. They praise God in hymns, confess who God is (and they are not), express their confidence of and thanksgiving for God's **hesed** and even plead in lament for new demonstrations of God's steadfast love.

In turn receiving God's **hesed**, living in the eager expectation of it, and focusing on it in worship inevitably means that God's people become more filled with loving kindness, goodness, and faithfulness. They are free to move beyond the requirement to live in **hesed** and fully embrace the privilege of it.

# Overview of the psalms

by Jeanene Reese

APPENDIX E

The book of Psalms is a collection of songs, hymns, prayers across a wide span of time that reflect the worship life of Israel. In fact, the book of Psalms is a collection of collections. It became the worship manual for Second Temple Judaism. The Psalter is developed over three distinct yet large periods in Israel's development.

... a collection of songs, hymns, and prayers ... that reflect the worship life of Israel

## 1. Story of Israel (Pre-Exile):

- **Covenant with Abraham** (Gen 12:2;15:5; 17:4, 5; 18:18; 22:17; 28:14; 32:12; 35:11; 46:3).
- **Redemption from Egypt:** God forms a **new covenant with his people** (cf. Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua).
- **The Kings and God's covenant with David**
  - Jerusalem established as God's holy city
  - Temple is built (1 Kings 5-11).
- **Divided Kingdom** (1 Kings 12-22).

## 2. Story of Israel (Exile):

- First Temple and Jerusalem destroyed in 586 BCE; Israel is exiled into Babylon
- Cyrus returns Israel to its homeland (Ezra 1-2; he orders the Temple to be rebuilt

## 3. Story of Israel (Post-Exile):

- Second Temple Judaism: **what becomes clear is that *hesed* is central to Yahweh's nature**
- The story reveals God's true sovereignty and what life under his rule could be.

## The Psalter as a Whole:

The book of Psalms begins with individually written works that reflect a wide range of experiences, feelings, and needs expressed. By the time they are collected, however, there is a "meta-message" to the whole book. Just as an epistle unfolds in the message presented so it does also in the Psalter. The meta-message of Psalms can be found on 2 levels:

## 1. Five books divided by doxologies:

- **Book One—Pss 1-41**, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.
- **Book Two—Pss 42-72**. "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen."
- **Book Three—Pss 73-89**, "Bless the Lord forever. Amen and Amen."
- **Book Four—Pss 90-106**, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And let all the people say, "Amen." Praise the Lord!"
- **Book Five—Pss 107—150**, (The whole last psalm is most likely a doxology to the entire Psalter).

## 2. Read at the seams of the Psalter for insight:

- **Psalms 1 & 2** introduce the Psalter as a whole.
  - **Psalm 1** is a blessing on those who meditate on Torah (the Pentateuch, first 5 books of the Hebrew Bible, with perhaps the Psalms added).
  - **Psalm 2** focuses God and the King. Here the Son is on the throne; all will bow down. The focus on the king is featured prominently throughout the book.
- **Psalm 3** establishes that **there are problems with the king. This Davidic or royal psalm is the first to introduce a lament into the Psalter.**
- End of Book One: **Psalm 41**—all is **not** well.
- End of Book Two: **Psalm 72**—a long prayer for the king that things will turn around.
- End of Book Three:
  - **Psalm 88**—the darkest of all psalms
  - **Psalm 89**—psalm of great contrast
    - Begins with great praise for God's faithfulness
    - Psalmist accuses God of breaking covenant. The psalm in essence demolishes the message of Psalm 2.

- Book Four begins with a funeral dirge.
  - **Psalm 90**—asks how long will God be angry; it focuses on life's brevity. It laments the loss of Israel's favored relationship with God.
  - **Psalm 92**—reads much like Psalm 1. The same themes are present. It is as if the Psalmist is starting the book again.
  - **Psalm 93**—parallels with Psalm 2. It is clear here that the **Lord is King**. The language of praise changes. (cf. Ps 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1, 4, etc)

Viewing the  
psalms as a  
whole book  
allows readers  
to see the  
Psalter's unique  
historical  
context—a  
context that  
provides even  
richer insights  
to God's people  
in every  
situation...

### Observations from the book as a whole:

- Expectations clash with experiences. Worship then becomes the space where we own again the promise of God in light of whole new experiences of reality—not just personal but also corporate. For Israel the trouble is with God and they have to give public voice to that trouble.
- The psalms of the first three books represent experiences most likely found pre-exile and during exile. There are 51 laments found in the first 90 psalms. Also more teaching and wisdom psalms are found in the first three books.
- The majority of the praise songs are found in the Books Four and Five—it is God who reigns.
- Walter Bruggeman speaks of psalms of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation (these categories fit with Israel's experience of pre-exile, exile, and post-exile). Bruggeman suggests the following outline of the Psalter:
  - **Psalms of Orientation:** Pss 1-2
  - **Psalms of Disorientation:** Pss 3-89
  - **Psalms of Reorientation:** Pss 90-150
- It is important for readers to see both the macro and the micro dimensions of the Book of Psalms as they are used in worship. The psalms jolt believers whenever they are read. Reading them with a sense of their context helps readers better see not only the possible intention but also the movement present in the psalm.
- Understanding the Psalter as a collection of collections also helps the reader not only better understand the particular type of psalms (cf. Appendix B) but also allows them to group specific psalms that were meant to be read in the company of the other(s). For example Psalms 22 and 23.
- The Psalter also provides a wide range of worship experiences. It also shows how worship forms community and that teaching wisdom is a form of praise.
- The counter-cultural call of the Psalms is critical to the formation of Israel and to God's worshipping community always.

# Examining a Psalm's Structure

by Karen Alexander

APPENDIX F

**A** psalm can be engaged on many levels, many of which require a far more skilled hand than I possess. However, with the psalm, as with any writing, one gains a deeper understanding of the work by paying attention to its words and basic structure. Following are just a few thoughts that may help you take a closer look at these precious documents.

1. Determine the “genre” of the psalm and identify the pieces of the psalm in relation to that pattern. For example, a Psalm of Praise contains three parts:

- Call to praise
- Reasons for praise
- A “doxology” or expression of praise

The psalm may follow this outline as a whole, or this outline may occur repeatedly in a psalm.

2. How does it open and close?
  - Determine the section of the text that is the opening and closing.
  - What is distinctive about the opening (in contrast with the closing)? What is distinctive about the closing (in contrast with the opening)?
  - How are they alike?
  - What seems to be the relationship between the opening and the closing?
3. Is there a basic structure in the body of the psalm?
  - Where does each thought unit begin and end?
  - What is the point of each of these units and how is that point made?

Taken together, in sequence, what do all these units say?

- How do they relate?
  - To one another?
  - To the beginning and ending of the psalm?

4. Taken together, can you identify the primary purpose of the psalmist?

## Ways to uncover the basic structure:

Paying attention to the words will help you tease out the construction of the psalm. As in other types of writing, the repetition and relationship of and between words will help you locate the hinges of the psalm so that you can unfold its parts and discover its meaning. Pay attention to:

- Repeated words or identical and/or related phrases
- Parallel structure that restates, reinforces, or amplifies the psalmist’s intended point.
- Parts of speech, especially verbs and their relationships to one another; also:
  - Adjectives and adverbs, both similar and dissimilar
  - Parts of speech in lists, their relationships to one another, noting any sequence or progression
  - Words of summation or “so that” statements
- Loaded terms: for example:
  - The **hesed** – “steadfast love,” “enduring love” of the Lord
  - Locations that became shorthand for biblical references, like the “(Red) Sea.” (See p. 68, “Exodus, Red Sea”),

## A few words of warning:

- The psalms are “musical poems;” they are intended to evoke emotion and to cause their readers to respond from and with the heart. As Gordon Fee writes, “It is dangerous to read a psalm as if it taught a system of doctrine.”
- Look for the **intended** meaning behind the metaphors; don’t take them too literally or extend them too far.
- Psalms were written with a purpose in mind. Readers can misapply meaning if they remove a psalm from its intended use.



# Psalm 103

NEW REVISED STANDARD

- 1 Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name.
- 2 Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and do not forget all his benefits—
- 3 who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,
- 4 who redeems your life from the Pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- 5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 6 The Lord works vindication  
and justice for all who are oppressed.
- 7 He made known his ways to Moses,  
his acts to the people of Israel.
- 8 The Lord is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- 9 He will not always accuse,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.
- 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
- 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- 12 as far as the east is from the west,  
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
- 13 As a father has compassion for his children,  
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.
- 14 For he knows how we were made;  
he remembers that we are dust.
- 15 As for mortals, their days are like grass;  
they flourish like a flower of the field;
- 16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
and its place knows it no more.
- 17 But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting  
on those who fear him,  
and his righteousness to children's children,  
18 to those who keep his covenant  
and remember to do his commandments.
- 19 The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,  
and his kingdom rules over all.
- 20 Bless the Lord, O you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
obedient to his spoken word.
- 21 Bless the Lord, all his hosts,  
his ministers that do his will.
- 22 Bless the Lord, all his works,  
in all places of his dominion.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

# Psalm 103

REVISED ENGLISH

- <sup>1</sup> Bless the LORD, my soul;  
with all my being I bless his holy name.
- <sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, my soul  
and forget none of his benefits.
- <sup>3</sup> He pardons all my wrongdoing  
and heals all my ills.
- <sup>4</sup> He rescues me from death's pit  
and crowns me with love and compassion.
- <sup>5</sup> He satisfies me with all good in the prime of life,  
and my youth is renewed like an eagle's.
- <sup>6</sup> The LORD is righteous in all he does;  
he brings justice to all who have been wronged.
- <sup>7</sup> He revealed his ways to Moses,  
his mighty deeds to the Israelites.
- <sup>8</sup> The LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
long-suffering and ever faithful;
- <sup>9</sup> he will not always accuse  
or nurse his anger for ever.
- <sup>10</sup> He has not treated us as our sins deserve  
or repaid us according to our misdeeds.
- <sup>11</sup> As the heavens tower high above the earth,  
so outstanding is his love towards those who fear him.
- <sup>12</sup> As far as east is from west,  
so far from us has he put away our offences.
- <sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
- <sup>14</sup> for he knows how we were made,  
he remembers that we are but dust.
- <sup>15</sup> The days of a mortal are as grass;  
he blossoms like a wild flower in the meadow;
- <sup>16</sup> a wind passes over him, and he is gone,  
and his place knows him no more.
- <sup>17</sup> But the LORD's love is for ever on those who fear him,  
and his righteousness on their posterity,
- <sup>18</sup> on those who hold fast to his covenant,  
who keep his commandments in mind.
- <sup>19</sup> The LORD has established his throne in heaven,  
his kingly power over the whole world.
- <sup>20</sup> Bless the LORD, you his angels,  
mighty in power, who do his bidding  
and obey his command.
- <sup>21</sup> Bless the LORD, all you his hosts,  
his ministers who do his will.
- <sup>22</sup> Bless the LORD, all created things,  
everywhere in his dominion.  
Bless the LORD, my soul.

# Psalm 103

## NEW INTERNATIONAL

- <sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, O my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- <sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits—
- <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins  
and heals all your diseases,
- <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion,
- <sup>5</sup> who satisfies your desires with good things  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- <sup>6</sup> The LORD works righteousness  
and justice for all the oppressed.
- <sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses,  
his deeds to the people of Israel:
- <sup>8</sup> The LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.
- <sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
- <sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.
- <sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;
- <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- <sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
- <sup>14</sup> for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.
- <sup>15</sup> As for man, his days are like grass,  
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
- <sup>16</sup> the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.
- <sup>17</sup> But from everlasting to everlasting  
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's children—
- <sup>18</sup> with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts.
- <sup>19</sup> The LORD has established his throne in heaven,  
and his kingdom rules over all.
- <sup>20</sup> Praise the LORD, you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
who obey his word.
- <sup>21</sup> Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,  
you his servants who do his will.
- <sup>22</sup> Praise the LORD, all his works  
everywhere in his dominion.  
Praise the LORD, O my soul!

# Psalm 103

NEW CENTURY

- 1 All that I am, praise the LORD;  
everything in me, praise his holy name.
- 2 My whole being, praise the LORD  
and do not forget all his kindnesses.
- 3 He forgives all my sins  
and heals all my diseases.
- 4 He saves my life from the grave  
and loads me with love and mercy.
- 5 He satisfies me with good things  
and makes me young again, like the eagle.
- 6 The LORD does what is right and fair  
for all who are wronged by others.
- 7 He showed his ways to Moses  
and his deeds to the people of Israel.
- 8 The LORD shows mercy and is kind.  
He does not become angry quickly, and he has great love.
- 9 He will not always accuse us,  
and he will not be angry forever.
- 10 He has not punished us as our sins should be punished;  
he has not repaid us for the evil we have done.
- 11 As high as the sky is above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who respect him.
- 12 He has taken our sins away from us  
as far as the east is from west.
- 13 The LORD has mercy on those who respect him,  
as a father has mercy on his children.
- 14 He knows how we were made;  
he remembers that we are dust.
- 15 Human life is like grass;  
we grow like a flower in the field.
- 16 After the wind blows, the flower is gone,  
and there is no sign of where it was.
- 17 But the LORD's love for those who respect him  
continues forever and ever,  
and his goodness continues to their grandchildren  
and to those who keep his agreement  
and who remember to obey his orders.
- 19 The LORD has set his throne in heaven,  
and his kingdom rules over everything.
- 20 You who are his angels, praise the LORD.  
You are the mighty warriors who do what he says  
and who obey his voice.
- 21 You, his armies, praise the LORD;  
you are his servants who do what he wants.
- 22 Everything the LORD has made  
should praise him in all the places he rules.  
My whole being, praise the LORD.