



BIBLE STUDY

**MUSING ON GOD'S
MUSIC: FORMING
HEARTS OF PRAISE
WITH THE PSALMS**

Scott Aniol

Musing on God's Music: Bible Study

Copyright © 2023 by Scott Aniol

Published by G3 Ministries

www.g3min.org

Permission is granted to print this material unaltered for non-profit purposes.

Table of Contents

Teaching Resources.....	ii
Lesson 1: Unsung Songs	1
Lesson 2: Forming an Image of Blessedness	3
Lesson 3: Delight in the Torah.....	5
Lesson 4: Conflicting Images	7
Lesson 5: Song of the Anointed One.....	9
Lesson 6: Movement I: The Lord’s Anointed Preserved.....	11
Lesson 7: Movement II: Davidic Rule Extended to the Nations.....	13
Lesson 8: Movement III: Is the Davidic Covenant Abandoned?.....	15
Lesson 9: Movement IV: Reaffirming Foundations.....	17
Lesson 10: Movement V: The Rule of God’s Anointed.....	19
Lesson 11: Who May Dwell on God’s Holy Hill?	21
Lesson 12: Forming Hearts of Repentance.....	23
Lesson 13: Forming Hearts of Trust.....	25
Lesson 14: Forming Hearts of Thanks	27
Lesson 15: Forming Hearts of Praise	29
Lesson 16: The New Song	31



Study Resources

The simple study guides in this resource are meant to help the Bible study leader identify the important points and discussion ideas for each chapter of Scott Aniol's book, *Musing on God's Music: Forming Hearts of Praise with the Psalms* (G3 Press, 2023). The guide could also be used by an individual studying through the book as well.

Other Recommended Resources

The following are resources that can be particularly helpful for those who want to deepen their understanding of the purpose and power of the Psalms.

Beeke, Joel R., and Anthony T. Selvaaggio, eds. *Sing a New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for the Twenty-First Century*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021.

Godfrey, W. Robert. *Learning to Love the Psalms*. Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2017.

Hamilton, James M. *Psalms*. 2 vols. Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary. Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2021.

Lefebvre, Michael. *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms*. Revised edition. Christian Focus, 2011.

Mays, James L. *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

Robertson, O. Palmer. *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2015.



Lesson 1

Unsung Songs

Main Point

God has given us the psalms, not merely to find a mood that fits our present state of being, but rather, God has given us the psalms to *form* us.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 3

Important Points

1. The 150 psalms were deliberately organized into five books (or movements) with a particular purpose.
2. Emphasis on praise does not appear in the psalms until near the end.
3. Lament and confession are emphasized for most of the first three books.

Discussion Points

1. Why do you think most evangelicals do not sing all the Psalms today?
2. What would you say is the main theme of the Psalms?
3. How would viewing the Psalms as *formative* rather than merely *expressive* change the way that we use them?

Conclusion

Failing to recognize the deliberate canonical organization of the Psalter and not understanding the purpose and power of poetry have contributed to the neglect of psalm singing among Christians today. Therefore, the important corrective that will remedy modern deficiency among

contemporary psalm usage is to understand this: **God has given us the psalms, not merely to find a mood that fits our present state of being, but rather, God has given us the psalms to *form* us.**



Lesson 2: Forming an Image of Blessedness

Main Point

The Book of Psalms is structured so that we will know how to be blessed in the *midst* of wickedness without and sin within.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 1

Review

1. The 150 psalms were deliberately organized into five books (or movements) with a particular purpose.
2. Emphasis on praise does not appear in the psalms until near the end.
3. Lament and confession are emphasized for most of the first three books.

Important Points

1. Psalms 1 and 2 function as an introduction—a “prelude,” if you will—to the five-movement cantata.
2. The first word of the Psalm 1 captures well the intended purpose of the Book of Psalms: blessedness—to flourish; to prosper. It’s what we might call “the good life.”
3. Genesis 1:28 and 3:15 and their underlying promises of blessing by exercising dominion through a seed of the woman are key in understanding the progression of thought through the psalms and ultimately the nature of true blessedness.
4. Psalm 1 is setting up a contrast between two different approaches to pursuing the good life.

Discussion Points

2. How do most people today define blessedness?
3. If we conceive of blessedness as a life completely free from sin and oppression, how will that affect how we live?
4. How does the poetry of Psalm 1 contribute to forming our image of blessedness?

Conclusion

Blessed is the man, Psalm 1 tells us, whose imagination is shaped by delighting in the Torah rather than the wicked image of a prosperous life *apart from* submission to God.



Lesson 3: Delight in the Torah

Main Point

We *muse* on the Torah when the Torah takes on the form of *music*.

Opening Scripture

Psalms 19

Review

1. Psalm 1 introduces a contrast between two different conceptions of blessedness, one that fulfills God's promise in Genesis 1:28 for those who submit to his rule, and one that conceives of blessedness as a life of prosperity apart from God.
2. The truly blessed person, the psalms teach, will not allow his conception of blessedness to be shaped by the counsel of the ungodly.
3. Rather, "his delight"—what will shape and form his path—"is in the law [Torah] of the LORD."

Important Points

1. The editors of the Psalms arranged the psalms in Five Books in parallel with the Five Books of Moses as a way to say, "These Five Books of songs are the Torah of God with just as important, life-regulating significance as the Five Books of Moses."
2. Our lives are driven ultimately by whatever we allow to shape our image of what it means to be blessed, and whatever image you have set before you is what will shape your path.
3. Meditation is *slow formation*. It is letting "the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col 3:16).
4. Image-forming meditation on the Torah requires God-inspired songs.

Discussion Points

1. In what ways do most Christians approach the psalms differently than other portions of Scripture?
2. Why is correct doctrine *alone* (as important as that is) insufficient to form a biblical image of blessedness?
3. In what ways is an insufficient view of singing evident among Christians today?

Conclusion

As the Five Books of Moses are the Torah for the mind, so the Five Books of Psalms are the Torah for the heart; God intends for this collection of psalms to form and shape our image of what it means to be blessed, our image of what it means to flourish as we meditate on these songs, as we muse on the music of God-inspired psalms.



Lesson 4: Conflicting Images

Main Point

A wicked person's image of blessedness is prosperity *apart from God*, but a righteous person will have an image of prosperity *under the rule of God*, and this proper image will be formed by musing on the Torah of God.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 2

Review

1. Our lives are driven ultimately by whatever we allow to shape our image of what it means to be blessed, and whatever image you have set before you is what will shape your path.
2. Meditation is *slow formation*. It is letting "the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col 3:16).
3. Image-forming meditation on the Torah requires God-inspired songs.

Important Points

1. The Hebrew word for "plot" in Psalm 2:1 is the exact same term as the word "meditates" in Psalm 1:2, this idea of musing on something, something that forms and shapes your imagination.
2. The ungodly image of the good life is a life of prosperity apart from God, with explicit rejection of his rule, because they imagine that rule to be oppressive.
3. The fundamental principles of blessedness first introduced to us in Psalms 1 and 2 are developed thematically throughout all 150 psalms:
 - (1) The Lord reigns
 - (2) The Lord has determined the destiny of the wicked and the righteous.
 - (3) Take refuge in the Lord.

Discussion Points

1. How does an overly intellectualized Christianity fail to recognize the purpose and power of the Psalter in forming a Christian imagination of the good life?
2. What are some ways that the ungodly image of the good life has worked itself out in world history?
3. What are some evidences of Christians who have been shaped by an ungodly image of blessedness?

Conclusion

Psalms 1 and 2 express two different images of life under God—as a flourishing tree, or as an oppressive bondage. Which image forms you will determine your path and your ultimate destiny.

Hope is formed in our hearts in the midst of all of this by musing on the Torah of David, by traveling along this path the psalm editors created for us *from* darkness, *through* adversity, *to* blessedness. We sing our way through the psalms from songs of lament to songs of praise.



Lesson 5: Song of the Anointed One

Main Point

God fulfilled his promise of blessing by uniting his sovereign throne with the mediatorial throne of man in a son of David who is both God and Man, Jesus the Anointed One.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 20

Review

1. Central to a proper image of blessedness is a conception of God's rule as that which brings flourishing, rather than conceiving it as burdensome.
2. God pronounced a blessing upon Adam in Genesis 1:28 that gave him the right to rule as God's chosen representative under God's ultimate authority, but Adam forfeited his right to rule as God's regal representative.

Important Points

1. God's intent to bless man by giving him rule over all things under his ultimate rule did not end with Adam's failure. God still intends to bless humankind through the mediatorial rule of an Anointed One, and this is a critical element of a proper image of blessedness.
2. David's hymn of thanks in 1 Chronicles 16, along with God's covenant in 1 Chronicles 17, are very important in the Book of Psalms.
3. The specific connection between God's Anointed One and delighting in his Law is also key to the overarching image of blessedness the psalms portray.
4. The connection between the Anointed One's rule and Yahweh's rule is critical for understanding the canonical flow of the psalms, and indeed, the progress of redemptive history.

Discussion Points

1. To whom in Scripture does the title “the Lord’s Anointed” apply?
2. How does recognizing that the Davidic psalms are fulfilled in Jesus open up their relevance for Christians today?

Conclusion

God promised to bless humankind by exercising his sovereign dominion through man as his mediatorial king over the earth. Adam failed, and so God promised the fulfillment of his dominion blessing in another seed of the woman. He narrowed that promise in his covenant with David, vowing to bring about his blessing through David’s seed. David’s son failed, but God remained faithful to his promise through David’s Greater Son. This side of the cross, we now know that this is Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man. God fulfilled his promise of blessing by uniting his sovereign throne with the mediatorial throne of man in a son of David who is both God and Man, Jesus the Anointed One.



Lesson 6:

Movement I: The Lord's Anointed Preserved

Main Point

All of the psalms in Movement I (3–41) are written by David, and they are organized to portray the fact that God preserved his Anointed One in the midst of wicked oppression from without and even sinful temptation from within.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 18

Review

1. One key reason for decline in psalm singing among evangelicals is that most Christians do not recognize the deliberate organization of the 150 psalms into five books with intentional thematic progression.
2. The psalms are intended to form within us a proper image of blessedness under God's rule, and in particular, God's rule through his Anointed king is embodied in the Psalter as the organizing structure for that kind of formation.
3. The five books of Psalms are largely a musical meditation on the outworking of the Davidic Covenant in history; it is a five movement cantata that musically explores the way that God will fulfill his covenant with David, his Anointed One.

Important Points

1. Much of the first half of Movement I focuses on the failure of God's Anointed, both because of external opposition and because of personal sin.
2. As encapsulated in Psalms 18 and 19, when we meditate on God's revelation and delight in it, we will confess our sins (Ps 19:12–13), trust in God's Anointed as our redeemer (Ps 19:14), and we will be blessed.

3. Movement I is designed to form in us a proper image of true blessedness in the midst of wickedness around us and sin within us.

Discussion Points

1. How would focus on the preservation of the Lord's Anointed be an encouragement to the Israelites returned from exile?
2. What lessons would there be for the returning exiles by the fact that much of the adversity experienced by David was of his own doing?
3. How do these overall messages apply to us today?

Conclusion

Movement I of the cantata expresses much uncertainty in the midst of wicked people seeming to flourish in their campaigns against God's Anointed, and yet remember the central goal introduced in Psalms 1 and 2: to form in us a proper image of true blessedness in the midst of wickedness around us and sin within us. Already we can see how Movement I is designed to do just that.



Lesson 7:

Movement II: Davidic Rule Extended to the Nations

Main Point

Movement II (42–72) of the cantata is focused on the continued preservation of God's Anointed through David's royal son, Solomon, and the extension of that rule beyond to borders of Israel to all the nations of the earth.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 51

Review

1. All of the psalms in Movement I are written by David, and they are organized to portray the fact that God preserved his Anointed One in the midst of wicked oppression from without and even sinful temptation from within.

Important Points

1. Movement II, Psalms 42–72, continue along similar themes as Movement I, but just like Psalm 1 is more individual and Psalm 2 expands to the nations, so Movement I focuses on David more individually and Movement II is more corporate.
2. One of the ways this expansion to the nations is signaled is with a preference for the title *EI* ("God") over *Yahweh* in this movement.
3. The movement begins with uncertainty in the midst of pagan nations, but very quickly, psalms in Movement II change the focus to extending the Anointed One's rule over all these wicked nations, culminating with the rule of Solomon.

Discussion Points

1. What would changing the name for God in Movement II from his covenant name (Yahweh) to a more generic name (El) communicate about the message of the movement?
2. How would the message of this movement encourage Israelites recently returned from exile?
3. How is the message of the movement applicable to us today?

Conclusion

God promised David that he would raise up his seed and establish his throne forever, and the first two movements of the cantata musically bear that out. God has preserved David (Movement I), and God has raised up his seed who is acclaimed by all the nations (Movement II).



Lesson 8:

Movement III: Is the Davidic Covenant Abandoned?

Main Point

The psalms of Movement III (73–89) help to form within us hope rooted in reality and in a reaffirmation of God’s faithfulness to his covenant with David.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 86

Review

1. All of the psalms in Movement I are written by David, and they are organized to portray the fact that God preserved his Anointed One in the midst of wicked oppression from without and even sinful temptation from within.
2. Movement II of the cantata is focused on the continued preservation of God’s Anointed through David’s royal son, Solomon, and the extension of that rule beyond to borders of Israel to all the nations of the earth.

Important Points

1. We have seen much lament and confession in Movements I and II, but Movement III (Psalms 73–89) is certainly the darkest movement of the Psalter. There is only one psalm by God’s Anointed, David, in this movement. David is missing. His only psalm is Psalm 86, and it is a dark lament.
2. Movement III poetically portrays the destruction of Israel and Judah and brings into question whether God has abandoned his covenant with David.
3. Most of the psalms in Movement III are corporate and focus on devastation by pagan nations. The movement contains a notable lack of trust and hope, instead filled with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty.

Discussion Points

1. Why is it important to acknowledge wickedness and sin rather than try to ignore and escape them?
2. What do these psalms teach us about questioning God?
3. What do these psalms teach us about the importance of lament and confession?

Conclusion

What this movement reveals is that it is only through a deep and experiential knowledge of who God is that we can come to truly trust him, no matter if kings and giants are trying to kill us, or our own children rebel against us; no matter if nations destroy God's holy city and take his people captive; no matter if the culture around us views us as intolerant, immorality is celebrated, and persecution is on the rise—we can pray with confidence, “You are my God; save your servant who trusts in you.” In the midst of dark uncertainty, the solution is to trust in God's sovereign rule and pray that he will keep the promises that he made to his Anointed.



Lesson 9: Movement IV: Reaffirming Foundations

Main Point

Movement IV (90–106) focuses on reaffirming that Yahweh reigns so that God's people have confidence that he will keep his promises to his Anointed.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 97

Review

1. All of the psalms in Movement I are written by David, and they are organized to portray the fact that God preserved his Anointed One in the midst of wicked oppression from without and even sinful temptation from within.
2. Movement II of the cantata is focused on the continued preservation of God's Anointed through David's royal son, Solomon, and the extension of that rule beyond to borders of Israel to all the nations of the earth.
3. The psalms of Movement III help to form within us hope rooted in reality and in a reaffirmation of God's faithfulness to his covenant with David.

Important Points

1. Movement IV of the Psalter is a key turning point for the unfolding of the Davidic Covenant in the canonical flow of the five movements, and it is consequently important for the formation of a biblical conception of blessedness under God's rule, especially when it appears as if God's promises to his Anointed have failed. This movement is all about reaffirming the foundational principles first introduced in Psalms 1 and 2 that form a proper image of blessedness:
 - (1) The Lord reigns.
 - (2) The Lord has determined the destiny of the wicked and the righteous.

- (3) Take refuge in the Lord.
2. Moses is a major focus of this movement. He begins the movement, he is referenced three times in the final psalm (Ps 106:16, 23, 32), and he appears three more times in between (99:6, 103:7, 105:26).
3. David's name never appears in the movement—the focus is more on reaffirming that Yahweh reigns so that God's people have confidence that he will keep his promises to his Anointed.

Discussion Points

1. Why would the editors have begun Movement IV with the oldest psalm, a psalm of Moses?
2. Why is it fitting that David's hymn of thanks is so central to Movement IV?
3. Why is it significant that "Hallelujah" does not appear in the Psalter until Psalm 104?

Conclusion

Movement IV serves to give confidence to God's people that, though they have sinned greatly against the Lord, and though he has punished them severely by expelling them from their land, his steadfast love endures forever. Therefore, this is also a call to the people to confess their own sin, submit to God's rule, and find refuge in him. Based on the reaffirmation of Yahweh's sovereign rule developed throughout Movement IV, the movement ends with a cry to God for deliverance from captivity.



Lesson 10:

Movement V: The Rule of God's Anointed

Main Point

Movement V (107–145) of the cantata is about anticipating the final fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, when God's throne and David's throne will finally merge into one.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 110

Review

1. All of the psalms in Movement I are written by David, and they are organized to portray the fact that God preserved his Anointed One in the midst of wicked oppression from without and even sinful temptation from within.
2. Movement II of the cantata is focused on the continued preservation of God's Anointed through David's royal son, Solomon, and the extension of that rule beyond to borders of Israel to all the nations of the earth.
3. The psalms of Movement III help to form within us hope rooted in reality and in a reaffirmation of God's faithfulness to his covenant with David.
4. Movement IV focuses on reaffirming that Yahweh reigns so that God's people have confidence that he will keep his promises to his Anointed.

Important Points

1. The key refrain of thanksgiving from 1 Chronicles 16 permeates Movement V, appearing thirty-two times. Throughout the Old Testament, this refrain is always associated with the establishment of God's temple in David's Royal City. In the imagination of any Israelite, this refrain would signal a confident anticipation of the David covenant fulfilled—the rule of God's Anointed in union with the rule of Yahweh.

2. Psalm 110 is one of the most quoted psalms in the New Testament, because it is a very important prophetic psalm about the promised fulfillment of God's covenant with David.
3. And yet, God's promise has not yet fully come to pass. Purification for sins is finished. Jesus is now seated at Yahweh's right hand, and he intercedes for his people as the great High Priest (Heb 6:12), but the victory promised in Movement V is still future even for us.

Discussion Points

1. How did David bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem foreshadow the message of Movement V of the Psalter?
2. Why is it significant that some of what is foreshadowed in Movement V has now come to pass with Christ's first coming, but not all of it?
3. What is embodied by the fact that, though the wicked are prevalent toward the beginning of the Psalter, they are completely absent in Psalm 150?

Conclusion

Much of God's promises to David were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but some are not yet fulfilled. They are meant to create in us anticipation and hope in the midst of darkness and uncertainty. And, in fact, we have even more reason to have hope in the complete fulfillment of this psalm, the final fulfillment of God's covenant with David, *because* we have confidence that part of this prophecy *is* already fulfilled. If God has already fulfilled verse one, we can be confident that he will fulfill the rest.



Lesson 11:

Who May Dwell on God's Holy Hill?

Main Point

The Psalms don't just *describe* the gospel, they *form* the gospel into our hearts, shaping our imagination of what a truly blessed life will be in willing submission to the King of Glory.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 24

Review

1. The Book of Psalms is deliberately composed to form our conception of blessedness as a life of flourishing under the rule of God.
2. This rule of God through the Lord's Anointed is poetically portrayed in the five-movement cantata.
3. The Psalms ultimately form trust and praise in our hearts toward God in the midst of wickedness around us and sin within us by portraying the Lord's steadfast faithfulness and sovereign rule, and by anticipating the perfect rule of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Important Points

1. The editors placed Psalms 15 and 24 intentionally to form an *inclusio*—they both deal with the same questions and the same answers: only a perfectly righteous person may ascend the hill and dwell in the presence of the Lord.
2. As the New Testament's treatment of the Psalms makes clear, ultimately the Psalms point to the true Blessed Man, the King of Glory who opened the gates of heaven to all who put their trust in him and stands as their mediator and intercessor. In other words, the Psalms encompass the gospel.
3. The Psalms form the gospel within us by embodying the realities of the gospel:

- (1) Revelation
- (2) Confession & Propitiation
- (3) Trust & Thanksgiving
- (4) Lament & Supplication

Discussion Points

1. Do we need to confess our sins this side of the cross?
2. How is the gospel embodied in a gospel-shaped worship service?
3. How can we use the psalms in a gospel-shaped worship service?

Conclusion

Recognizing how the gospel is embedded in the psalms helps us to see, not only their value for our personal growth and sanctification, but also their importance in corporate worship. This is why it is helpful to classify the psalms based on their function in what we might call a “gospel-shaped liturgy,” that is, how individual psalms function in a service that helps us to reenact our covenant relationship with God through Christ.

In the next four lessons, we will explore a few examples of these gospel psalms and how they form us through their place in the canonical shape of the Five Movements, their content, and the poetic expressions they contain. These will serve as examples of how we should use all of the psalms as God intended, to shape our image of blessedness and form hearts of praise.



Lesson 12: Forming Hearts of Repentance

Main Point

Psalms of repentance move us artistically from a feeling of repentant desperation to a feeling of complete hope and confidence in the forgiving steadfast love of God.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 130

Review

1. The Psalms *form* the gospel into our hearts, shaping our imagination of what a truly blessed life will be in willing submission to the King of Glory.
2. We continue to need Psalms of confession to form our hearts, to regularly shape us to be people of repentance.

Important Points

1. The first necessary response of one who desires to ascend God's holy hill—to be truly blessed, is confession of sin and trust in David's Greater Son as Redeemer and Lord. One of the most important uses of the psalms for Christians today is to help form hearts of repentance.
2. Psalms of repentance clearly express and form within us the reality of our sin, God's judgment of sin, and the forgiveness that is possible for those who repent and believe, forgiveness that is based upon the sacrificial atonement of the Son of God.
3. Before we can get to praise in corporate worship, we must corporately repent. We must acknowledge our unworthiness to be in his presence and the fact that we are only there as those forgiven by the blood of Christ.

Discussion Points

1. How is repenting through song different than simply speaking repentance?
2. In what ways do psalms of confession model biblical repentance?

Conclusion

Repentance through singing was a regular part of the corporate worship life of ancient Israel. As the people made their way toward the temple in Jerusalem, as they approached the presence of a holy and just God, they would sing these Psalms of Ascent, several of which are songs of repentance and trust in God's steadfast love. This shaped the people's hearts so that when they arrived at the temple, they fully acknowledged their unworthiness to be there and the fact that it is only by God's grace and mercy that they are able to draw near to the presence of God. And by doing this regularly as part of corporate worship, it created a rhythm of repentance for life.



Lesson 13: Forming Hearts of Trust

Main Point

Trust and praise formed *through* lament and confession are far more deep and profound.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 11

Review

1. The Psalms *form* the gospel into our hearts, shaping our imagination of what a truly blessed life will be in willing submission to the King of Glory.
2. All biblical confession and lament will necessarily lead us to thanksgiving and trust.
3. One who has been forgiven of sin responds with trust and thanksgiving, which, as is embodied in the canonical flow of the psalms, is a necessary pathway from lament over sin and wickedness to praise.

Important Points

1. Regular confession of sin solves our internal problem of sin, but as we have seen, the psalms also help us to deal with the reality of the ungodliness that surrounds us in a sin-cursed world.
2. The imprecatory prayers in the psalms are not expressions of unbridled rage and vengeance made in a moment of passion, they are carefully crafted expressions of *trust* in what God had already promised he would do, and by singing these expressions, they form hearts of trust even if (or perhaps better, *especially* if) the worshiper doesn't exactly *feel* trust at that moment.
3. When adversity comes, the psalms help us to reaffirm the foundations:
 - (1) The Lord reigns.

- (2) The Lord has determined the destiny of the wicked and the righteous.
- (3) Take refuge in the Lord.

Discussion Points

1. Should we sing imprecatory psalms?
2. Why is it important that trust and praise be formed *through* lament and confession?
3. What are some evidences that many Christians try to escape the realities of adversity rather than acknowledge them and trust the Lord?

Conclusion

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? The foundations are *not* actually destroyed. The fundamentals that God has established will never be moved. And if you shape your image of reality by *that* foundational reality—if you muse on the music of God’s Word so that your image of true blessedness is shaped by the Word rather than the vain imaginations of the wicked, then you *will* be blessed, even as the righteous foundations of the society crumble around you.



Lesson 14:

Forming Hearts of Thanks

Main Point

It is important to recognize the necessity of expressing *thanks* to God—a humble recognition of God’s goodness and mercy—before we are prepared to express *praise*.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 96

Review

1. The Psalms *form* the gospel into our hearts, shaping our imagination of what a truly blessed life will be in willing submission to the King of Glory.
2. When adversity comes, when it seems as if God is far away, a truly blessed man who has repented of his sin, submitted to God’s Anointed, and received mercy and forgiveness will form a heart of trust in God by reaffirming who God is, and this is what leads to a heart that responds with heartfelt thankfulness.

Important Points

1. To “bless the LORD” is to respond to God’s blessings with a heart of thanksgiving for all his benefits.
2. We typically assume that praise is the ultimate expression of worship toward God—we expect that true worship will be characterized by intense emotion and heightened praise. But as the progression of psalms illustrates, the affection we must express *first* before we get to praise is actually something perhaps less flashy, less viscerally intense, and less directed to a particular feeling; the affection we must express first is thanksgiving.
3. Biblical singing avoids the extremes of emotionalism and intellectualism by expressing both the heart’s affection toward God and the reasons for those affections.

Discussion Points

1. Why do we typically assume that praise is the ultimate expression of worship toward God?
2. Why does singing often devolve into emotionalism?
3. How can focusing on thankfulness help us to avoid emotionalism in singing?

Conclusion

As modeled in Psalm 96, we sing in worship because it helps us express thanksgiving toward God in response to the worthiness of his character and works, which both glorifies him and is a powerful witness to the unbelieving world.



Lesson 15: Forming Hearts of Praise

Main Point

The Psalms form and shape our minds and our hearts as we consider God's nature and works—in particular, his true image of blessedness—and respond rightly toward him.

Opening Scripture

Psalm 114

Review

1. The Psalms *form* the gospel into our hearts, shaping our imagination of what a truly blessed life will be in willing submission to the King of Glory.
2. One of the reasons we sing is as a response to God's nature and his works.

Important Points

1. There is a second reason we sing beyond merely responding to God's nature and works: When we sing in response to something that has not yet happened, we are in a sense acting out that future reality and, in so doing, we are formed by it.
2. The goal of art is to shape the inclinations of our hearts (our worldview), and we do that as we muse on God's inspired embodiment of true blessedness in the canonical flow of the psalms and in the poetry of psalms individually.
3. Images in the psalms help us to properly conceptualize blessedness under the rule of God by connecting that abstract reality to concrete experiences in real life.

Discussion Points

1. Why do you think many people today do not recognize the purpose and power of poetry and song?
2. Why is it important to recognize that singing is meant to *form* us, not just be a means of expressing what is already in our hearts?

Conclusion

The poetry in the psalms shapes our heart-conception of true blessedness in submission to God's rule. And this is what will ultimately form hearts of praise.



Lesson 16: The New Song

Main Point

We sing our way through the psalms from songs of lament and repentance, through songs of thanksgiving and trust, to songs of praise.

Opening Scripture

Psalms 144

Review

1. The central purpose of the Book of Psalms is to shape our image of what it truly means to be blessed such that we will be able to praise the Lord, even in the midst of a wicked world and our own sinful flesh.
2. The Book of Psalms traces out the conflict between two images of life under God's rule throughout all of history in such a way that we will be able to know how to praise the Lord in the midst of that conflict.
3. The five-movement cantata traces the outworking of God's rule through his Anointed One in the midst of a wicked world by creating an artistic image of that outworking of God's plan that can form our imagination more powerfully. Movement I shows the preservation of David, God's Anointed King; Movement II unfolds the continuation of the Davidic rule over his enemies and extended to his son, Solomon; Movement III portrays the anxiety created by the Babylonian exile that God had abandoned his covenant to David; but Movement IV reaffirms that God is still on his throne and that his steadfast love endures forever; this leads to Movement V anticipating the coming of David's Greater Son and progressively moving to thanksgiving and trust, until the last five psalms break forth with unhindered praise to the Lord.

Important Points

1. One particular term in the psalms encapsulates the formative goal of praise: "new song."

2. The goal of praise is reached when we walk *through* the dark valleys, confessing our sin and crying out in lament, all the while having our hearts formed to trust God and thank him for his many blessings.
3. The new song is a song in direct response to the finished work of Christ on the cross and his worthiness to receive the throne of dominion promised so long ago—it is a song of the redeemed.
4. We need *all* the psalms to form within us a true and proper and realistic imagination of what a truly blessed life in this world happily submitting to the gracious rule of God will be like. Only then can we truly sing a new song; only then can we give thanks and praise that is due the LORD and his Anointed.

Discussion Points

1. How does recognizing that “new song” refers to a song of the redeemed reveal the relevance of the psalms for Christians today?
2. What types of psalms have you discovered you need to use more faithfully?
3. What are some ways you can start intentionally using the psalms in your personal and family worship?

Conclusion

Evangelical Christians today so desperately need to return to singing the psalms. We *need* the songs of lament; we need the penitential psalms; and we need the psalms of trust, and the wisdom psalms, and litanies, and the psalms of praise. We need them *all* to form within us a true and proper and realistic imagination of what a truly blessed life in this world happily submitting to the gracious rule of God will be like. Only then can we truly sing a new song; only then can we give thanks and praise that is due the LORD and his Anointed.

When we truly recognize what the Book of Psalms—God’s music—does for those who muse on these songs, the absolute necessity of singing them all becomes apparent. Hope is formed in our hearts in the midst of wickedness around us and sin within us by musing on the Torah of David, by traveling along this path the psalm editors created for us *from* darkness, *through* adversity, *to* blessedness. We sing our way through the psalms from songs of lament and repentance, through songs of thanksgiving and trust, to songs of praise.

For more helpful resources
that encourage, equip, and educate the church,
visit www.G3Min.org.

