

SONGS OF THE HEART.

READING GUIDE

Six ancient songs.
with wisdom for
life's biggest questions.



SONGS OF THE HEART

READING GUIDE

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"If you can take a piece of life and put it in a song, it's going to be a good song - especially if it's from the heart."

— Jon Pardi (American country singer)

"I want the deepest, darkest, sickest parts of you that you are afraid to share with anyone because I love you that much."

— Lady Gaga

Throughout history the Psalms has been a source of strength, encouragement and comfort, speaking directly into the lives of millions of people. No other book in the Bible is read more frequently than the Psalms. Consisting of 150 poems, the Psalms provides a unique look at the nature of ourselves, this world and a higher power.

This reading guide, titled 'Songs of the Heart,' is recognition that the Psalms speak to some of humanity's deepest yearnings. It is real, it is honest and authentic. The purpose of this reading guide is to see how the Psalms help us explore ourselves, our environment, our desires and challenges, and how something greater might make a difference to our lives.

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CAN I GET JUSTICE?

A conversation with Jennie Pakula

As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest.

— Nelson Mandela

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Justice

Within all of us is a heart that cries out against injustice. But in a world where injustice is rife, where is true justice to be found?

Questions for discussion

1. Is this world fair? Do you believe that wrongs are eventually righted?
2. How would you go about achieving justice?
3. What do you think about the Psalmist's view on where justice is to be found (verse 11)?
4. How is the Psalmist's view of justice different from our own? How may this change how they respond in the face of injustice?

Psalm 58

To the Choirmaster: According to *Do Not Destroy*. A miktam of David.

1 Do you rulers indeed speak justly?

Do you judge people with equity?

2 No, in your heart you devise injustice,

and your hands mete out violence on the earth.

3 Even from birth the wicked go astray;

from the womb they are wayward, spreading lies.

4 Their venom is like the venom of a snake,

like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears,

5 that will not heed the tune of the charmer,

however skillful the enchanter may be.

6 Break the teeth in their mouths, O God;

Lord, tear out the fangs of those lions!

7 Let them vanish like water that flows away;

when they draw the bow, let their arrows fall short.

8 May they be like a slug that melts away as it moves along,

like a stillborn child that never sees the sun.

9 Before your pots can feel the heat of the thorns—

whether they be green or dry—the wicked will be swept away.

10 The righteous will be glad when they are avenged,

when they dip their feet in the blood of the wicked.

11 Then people will say,

“Surely the righteous still are rewarded;

surely there is a God who judges the earth.”

WHAT IS AUTHENTIC SPIRITUALITY?

A conversation with Matt Jacoby

The spiritual life is not a life before, after, or beyond our everyday existence. No, the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of the pains and joys of the here and now.

— Henri Nouwen

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Spirituality

Within many of us is a deep seated belief that there is more to this world than we can see and touch. But after exploring the spiritual, many are left disappointed. Is there a spirituality that is tangible and fulfilling?

Questions for discussion

1. Why do people find spirituality important?
2. How do you think a spiritual life should look like?
3. What do you think of Psalm 37's description of a spiritual life (verses 3-7)? Is it appealing?

Psalm 37

Of David.

1 Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;

2 for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.

3 Trust in the Lord and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

4 Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

5 Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him and he will do this:

6 He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.

7 Be still before the Lord
and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.

8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.

9 For those who are evil will be destroyed,
but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.

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WHERE CAN I FIND JOY?

A conversation with Silvie Paladino

Beauty is the only thing that time cannot harm. Philosophies fall away like sand, creeds follow one another, but what is beautiful is a joy for all seasons, a possession for all eternity.

— Oscar Wilde

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Joy

Now more so than ever before are people in search for a life filled with joy. Some seek it in friends, others in family, others in religion and some still in wealth. But is there a joy that persists through all of life, or are we left in a constant battle against circumstances to hold onto that joy?

Questions for discussion

1. What makes you joyful?
2. Why is it so hard to hold onto joy?
3. What do you make of the Psalmist's statement in verse 6 below? Why does he link weeping with joy?
4. Can we really find joy that persists in all circumstances?

Psalm 126

A song of ascents

1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dreamed.

2 Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy.

Then it was said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

3 The Lord has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.

4 Restore our fortunes, Lord,
like streams in the Negev.

5 Those who sow with tears
will reap with songs of joy.

6 Those who go out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with them.

HOW CAN I BE MENTALLY FIT?

A conversation with Dr. Jenny George

Mental strength is something you either have or you haven't.
— Katie Taylor

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Resilience

The world has never before been more conscious of the mental health of the individual. While efforts have been put into protecting the individual from mental harm, has this been at the cost of us developing mental resilience?

Questions for discussion

1. What is it to be mentally healthy?
2. Describe times in your life you have been under mental strain.
3. How can we be mentally fit? What role does thankfulness play in mental fitness?
4. In verse 7 the Psalmist describes that their identity lies in being God's people. What impact would this knowledge have on mental health?

Psalm 95

1 Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.

3 For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.

5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

6 Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;

7 for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

Today, if only you would hear his voice,

8 "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness,

9 where your ancestors tested me;
they tried me, though they had seen what I did.

10 For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways.'

11 So I declared on oath in my anger,
'They shall never enter my rest.'

IF GOD IS REAL, WHERE IS HE?

A conversation with David Robertson

Whenever there is a catastrophe, some religious people inevitably ask, 'Why didn't God do something? Where was God when all those people died?'

— Tony Campolo

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God

In mankind there appears to be an innate belief in the existence of God. Yet, no one has ever seen God. Our belief in an all powerful, all good being comes up against the objections of “why doesn't he make himself known” and “why does he not intervene”...

Questions for discussion

1. Why do people believe in God?
2. Do you find the existence of God appealing?
3. Do you resonate with the objection raised in Psalm 42 verses 3 and 10, 'where is your God?'
4. What do you make of the Psalmists response to this question?

Psalm 42

For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah.

1 As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

3 My tears have been my food
day and night,

while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

4 These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.

5 Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

6 My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,

the heights of Hermon—
from Mount Mizar.

7 Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.

8 By day the Lord directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.

9 I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”

10 My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

11 Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I DIE?

A conversation with Mark Conner

When you died, you were supposed to live on in the memories of others. That's what I'd always been told. Didn't matter what you believed, which religion you subscribed to, what god you worshipped. The simple fact was that none of us knew what lay beyond. Immortality and eternal life? The only sure shot at that was the memories of those you left behind - your friends and family...

— Brian Keene

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Death

Considered the final frontier, humanity has always struggled with the idea of death. It is always approaching, so inevitable, so final. Are those that believe there is life after hoping against truth? If our death is really the end, why live at all? What happens when we die?

Questions for discussion

1. How does the thought of death make you feel?
2. What do you make of the idea of life after death?
3. Do you find the Psalmist's description of what happens after death appealing (see verse 15)?
4. How may the belief in life after death change the way we live and the way we die?

Psalm 49

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

1 Hear this, all you peoples;

listen, all who live in this world,

2 both low and high,

rich and poor alike:

3 My mouth will speak words of wisdom;

the meditation of my heart will give you understanding.

4 I will turn my ear to a proverb;

with the harp I will expound my riddle:

5 Why should I fear when evil days come,

when wicked deceivers surround me—

6 those who trust in their wealth

and boast of their great riches?

7 No one can redeem the life of another

or give to God a ransom for them—

8 the ransom for a life is costly,

no payment is ever enough—

9 so that they should live on forever

and not see decay.

10 For all can see that the wise die,

that the foolish and the senseless also perish,

leaving their wealth to others.

11 Their tombs will remain their houses forever,

their dwellings for endless generations,

though they had named lands after themselves.

12 People, despite their wealth, do not endure;

they are like the beasts that perish.

13 This is the fate of those who trust in themselves,

and of their followers, who approve their sayings.

14 They are like sheep and are destined to die;

death will be their shepherd

(but the upright will prevail over them in the morning).

Their forms will decay in the grave,

far from their princely mansions.

15 But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead;

he will surely take me to himself.

16 Do not be overawed when others grow rich,

when the splendor of their houses increases;

17 for they will take nothing with them when they die,

their splendor will not descend with them.

18 Though while they live they count themselves blessed—

and people praise you when you prosper—

19 they will join those who have gone before them,

who will never again see the light of life.

20 People who have wealth but lack understanding

are like the beasts that perish.

SONGS OF THE HEART

WHAT NEXT?

Did the songs of the Psalmist resonate with the song deep in your own heart? If so, you may be thinking **what now?**

The Psalmist's songs reflect the deep longing and cry within each and every one of us. But these songs are crafted in a context where a good, wise, and loving God exists. These longings reflect the reality of who God has designed us to be in relation to him...

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. — Ecclesiastes 3:11

In another song from the Psalmist, he sings that we should "*taste and see that the Lord is good*". The discovery of God is only found through entering into a relationship with him; he is not to be held at arm's length.

At *City Bible Forum* we believe that we meet God primarily through the Word he has given us, the Bible.

We would like to invite you to keep exploring, and consider how this journey of exploring the songs of our hearts within each one of us may lead to a life-changing meeting with God.

Explore further by:

- **Checking out the Bigger Questions podcast (biggerquestions.org)**
- **Reading something of a biography of Jesus**