

September-October 2014

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All
About
Psalms



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2014: Worship

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A publication of the

Church of God (Seventh Day)

This magazine is published to advocate the Bible, represent the Church, and glorify the God of grace and truth.

Volume 148 • Number 5

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The BIBLE ADVOCATE (ISSN 0746-0104) is published bimonthly by Bible Advocate Press, 330 W. 152nd Ave., Broomfield, CO 80023. Periodicals postage is paid at Broomfield, CO, and at additional offices. Subscription is free to any who ask. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Bible Advocate Press, Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.

Bible Advocate Press

Calvin Burrell: Editor

Sherri Langton: Associate Editor

Keith Michalak: Director of Publications, graphics

Sylvia Corral, Raul González: Translation, proofing

LeRoy and Hope Dais, Linda Michalak: Correspondence, proofing, clerical

Subscriptions and Orders

Bible Advocate Press
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
phone: 303/452-7973
fax: 303/452-0657
e-mail: bibleadvocate@cog7.org
orders: bap.orders@cog7.org

Notice: Send all address changes and other correspondence to the address above.

Publications Agreement No. 40042428

Cover photo: @ Galis 11 —Dreamstime.com

The Bible Advocate Online appears at www.BAonline.org.

150 Untapped Aids to Worship

In a familiar verse that most folks can quote (the last four words at least) Jesus says God must be worshipped “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). What does this mean? None of us have *spirit* or *truth* fully figured out, but let’s keep trying. To better grasp the rich implications of these two words in Scripture is not a simple study, but each step we take toward that goal yields a happy recompense.

Psalms can help. The word *spirit* occurs in these 150 poems about eighteen times. It refers to the human spirit (i.e., breath of a living soul), the internal sense of a person that is described as contrite, broken, overwhelmed, failing, steadfast, and/or right. Less often it may be a preview of the Holy Spirit: good, free, and omnipresent.

The Psalms authorize worship that includes singing, shouting, giving, clapping, thanksgiving, and praise, though none of these worship forms are therein linked to the words *spirit* or *spiritual*.

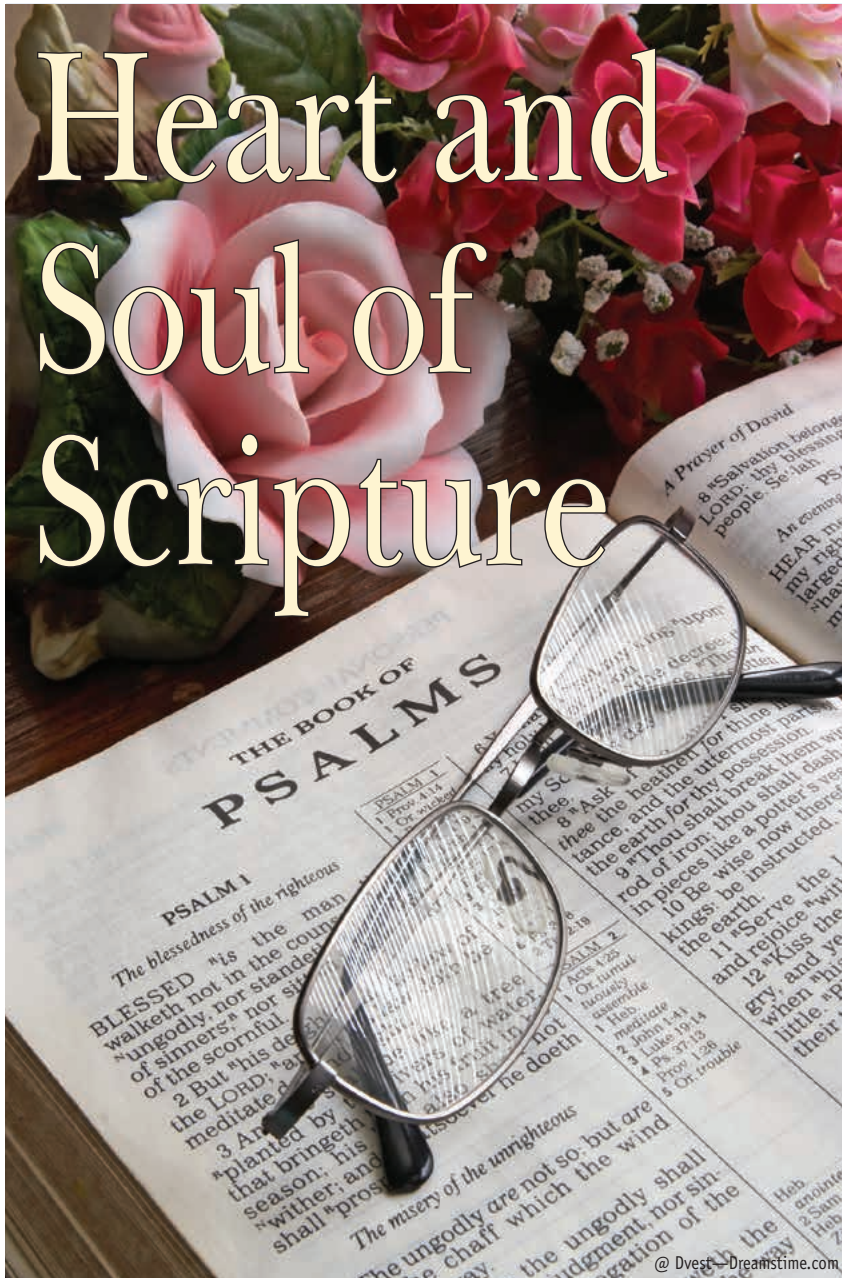
Rather than teaching directly about spirit, these songs help us worship “in spirit” by providing many good examples of a psalmist doing just that. Wire these poems of the spirit through your own soul; read them aloud; sing them on your knees; memorize and recite them to get a feel for and learn the practice of intense and authentically spiritual worship.

Though not usually a prime source for doctrine, the Psalms do mention *truth* about forty times, more than twice as often as they mention *spirit*. This will surprise people who may think of *spirit* as denoting “heartfelt” and “passionate,” while *truth* suggests dry interests of the head. Not in the Psalms!

My appreciation for one unique facet of doctrinal truth in the Bible’s premier worship texts grew considerably this summer as I read *The Case for the Psalms*, by N. T. Wright. In this brief volume of 198 pages, well-reasoned support for this church’s convictions on the kingdom, on God’s active intent to restore the earth, and on popular teachings regarding heaven and hell, etc., gushed from unexpected, mostly untapped sources in Psalms. And all this earthy teaching found its mainspring in that great touchstone of New Testament gospel: Christ’s resurrection!

continued on page 22





Broaden and deepen your friendship with this wonderful Bible terrain.
by Calvin Burrell

In dealing with the Psalms, we join a multitude of folks who resort there regularly for solace and strength. These 150 “chapters” are among the most oft-read texts in the world’s best-seller!

People of faith are attracted to the Psalms for good reasons. They occupy high and middle ground in Scripture. They stand out as the Bible’s longest book —

fifty Hebrew words longer than Jeremiah, the runner-up.

A *psalm* is Hebrew poetry that was once set to music for use in Solomon’s temple. The psalms in our Bibles were in the “hymnbook” from which Jesus of Nazareth sang in the synagogue. As they helped shape and sustain Him in His human formation, so they can serve us in like manner — if we learn them.

Wonder and woe

A common misconception is that the Psalms consist *mostly* of praise poems, written to exult in God’s goodness. Of these there are many, like Psalm 100, a premier poem of public praise, and Psalm 150, a crescendo of instrumental applause at the Psalter’s end. Between these two are the marvelous 103rd and more hallelujahs in 111-113, 117, 135, and 144-149.

Further reading, however, shows that the “mostly praise” description fits less than a quarter of the psalms in our Bible. In contrast with the constant praise we expect, what we actually find is a higher fraction of psalms permeated with protest and complaint. Psalm 88 is a prime example of these, and many other psalms (6, 7, 14, 35, 42, 43, and 51-60, for example) carry more gloom than gratitude. David and all other Hebrew poets had their enemies, so themes of grievance and strife are common here.

The presence — even popularity — of this less positive psalm-type reflects the trials, troubles, and tribulations common to all God’s children, both ancient and modern. In good times and bad, Christians can find their voice in the Psalms, and God shows

Himself patient to bear with us through them all.

Let it also be said that expressions of hope and trust in the Lord are sprinkled through most of these vexed and vexing sections of Psalms. After the nadir of Psalm 88, the tone brightens considerably, with only few exceptions to the psalmists' joy, through to the end.

Unique comfort

How do the psalmists deal with the reality that life is often painful? Mostly, they cope by honest expression of their feelings in God's presence.

One thing they do *not* say is that the whole mess is evil and should be abandoned for some heavenly retreat in the sky. Neither the earth (read Psalm 8) nor our physical bodies (139:14) are responsible for suffering, fearfully and wonderfully made as they are.

As Creator of the natural world with its solemn majesty and simple marvels, God places great value on what He said was very good at the start. Several psalms of nature express a worldview that pushes back against those who see the created order as fodder for the fires of a future judgment day. Read, for example, the nature passages in Psalms 8, 19, 72, 104, 147, or 148 – then celebrate the fresh and lofty dignity given to God's creative handiwork, whether popularly renowned or not.

From the 93rd through the 99th psalms, we find a Hebrew equivalent of the tension seen in Jesus' message that the kingdom of God is present now in His message and ministry, yet has not yet

filled the whole earth. The blessedness of salvation is "already, but not yet," we may say.

This double-edged truth was here in the Psalms, centuries before Christ: "The LORD reigns . . . Let the earth rejoice. The LORD is great in Zion . . . high above all the peoples . . . Your throne is established . . . from everlasting. . . . You have established equity [and] executed justice . . ." (93:1, 2; 97:1ff; 99:1-5): These words recognize God's kingdom in the present of David's time. The same psalms also say that since evil often triumphs and suffering abounds (94:1-7), the same Lord who already reigns in the earth must come to judge the earth in righteousness and the peoples with His truth (96:13; 98:9). Both the "already" reign of God in His marvelous created order and the "not yet" coming of the Lord to put it all right again are causes for great praise in the Psalms.

The Psalms teach us not to expect escape from here to heaven but to anticipate God's coming here and bringing His justice to all things, all people, all creation. One unmistakable application of this is that God's people should care for all things natural – our bodies, our health, our environ-

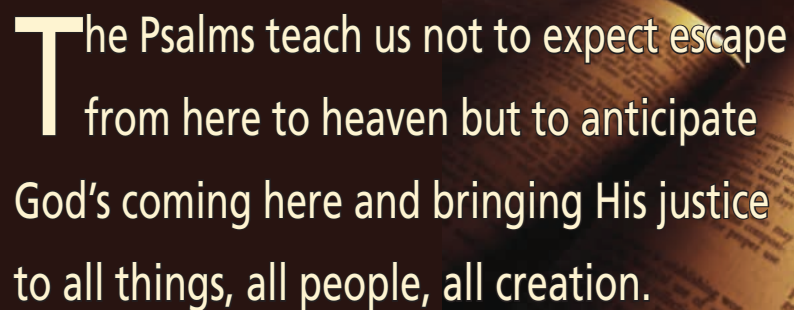
ment – because God does! He made literal bodies and worlds at the beginning, and they are in His plan for the blessed end of all things: resurrection of bodies in immortal yet physical form and restoration of the earth to its original splendor and more – all in the Psalms.

Christian gospel?

The Psalms provide several brief but energizing glimpses of the Messiah-Christ and of the gospel message preached by His apostles and the early church.

As essential backdrop for the Christian gospel, the Psalms uphold the law of God in no uncertain terms. This begins in the first psalm and gains momentum in the magnificent 19th. The psalmist's greatest praise for God's Torah instruction through the written Word is found in the massive 119th, though, where all but a few of the 176 verses echo a positive refrain on the biblical materials known as law: His testimonies, His statutes, His ordinances, His judgments, His commandments, His ways, and His Word.

In upholding God's moral instruction so strongly as the Psalms do, the reality about sin



The Psalms teach us not to expect escape from here to heaven but to anticipate God's coming here and bringing His justice to all things, all people, all creation.



King David

Jesus in the Psalms

God's Son, the Messiah, is anticipated in the Psalter (see Luke 24:44). Prominent Messianic psalms are 2, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 72, and 110. These verses stand out:

"You are My Son, today I have begotten You" (2:7).

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (22:1).

"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore

God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (45:6, 7; quoted about Christ in Hebrews 1:8, 9).

"The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool'" (110:1).

"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" (118:22).

— Calvin Burrell

must also be faced in truth: More law from God means more sin for people. (The two halves of Psalm 119:96 in King James English suggest both the breadth of God's law and the corresponding failure of humans to fully obey.) No surprise, then, that several psalms major on confession, repentance, forgiveness of, and salvation from, sin.

That every human needs this salvation is seen in Psalms 53:3 and 130:3. That Jesus is the penal substitute provided for our sins is conveyed in Psalm 69:9, where the Messiah says to God, "The reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me."

Psalm 51, King David's repentance song, is strewn with pleas that can be effectual to bring grace again when humbly read

and heartily prayed by any present-day sinner. Other penitential segments are in Psalms 32; 38; 103:3, 10-14; and 130:3-8.

The answer to our sin problem in Psalms is not to remove the law (as some say Paul does in the New Testament) but to magnify *mercy* (110+ uses in Psalms), *salvation* (110+ uses), *deliverance* (90+ uses), and *redemption* (20+ uses). The Lord's mercy toward His people is seen in His not dealing with us as our sins deserve (103:10ff) — a preview of Christ's work on the cross.

A core message of the Psalms is that the afflictions and sins of the righteous are many, but the Lord delivers us from every one (34:19).

Summary psalm

We conclude with the majestic 19th psalm, which has been declared the most marvelous poem ever written. It begins by telling how God uses the solar system and all creation to get out the word of His glory, a point we earlier tried to make:

The heavens declare the glory of God;

And the firmament shows His handiwork.

Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.

There is no speech nor language

Where their voice is not heard.

Their line has gone out through all the earth,

And their words to the end of the world.

In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,

Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,

And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.

Its rising is from one end of heaven,

And its circuit to the other end;

And there is nothing hidden from its heat (v. 1-6).

Then the sweet Psalmist of Israel turns from the revelation of God in nature (His created world) to His revelation in the Torah (His written Word), to which we previously referred:

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;

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Questions & Answers



In our congregation, we had a lively discussion on what happened to Jephthah's daughter. Some believe she was actually offered up as a burnt sacrifice. Others believe she was not put to death but remained a lifelong virgin in God's service. Please tell us her fate.

The discussion you had was duplicated a dozen times over in churches that studied the Sabbath lesson on Jephthah's vow. I can't tell you her fate for sure, but I'll comment on your good summary of the usual options for dealing with this difficult story.

Option 1: Jephthah's daughter was literally offered as a burnt sacrifice to the Lord. This explanation has the advantage of being most faithful to the words in Judges 11:30-40. If he actually vowed to do such a thing and fulfilled the vow, Jephthah may be seen as a "good bad example" of making rash vows (Lev. 5:4; Prov. 20:25; Eccl. 5:2-5). He would be one "who swears to his own hurt and does not change" (Psa. 15:4b).

On the other hand, this explanation has the disadvantage of suggesting that God could ever require or be well pleased with human sacrifice, other than that of His own Son for our sin.

Option 2: Jephthah's daughter was not put to death but was dedicated to serve the Lord as a virgin for life. This explanation avoids the main problem of Option 1. It suggests that Israel's God would rather see Jephthah repent of his rash vow and face those consequences than see him kill anyone — least of all his own innocent daughter. Jesus twice quoted Hosea 6:6: "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

The primary disadvantage of this second explanation is that it lacks a solid anchor in the text itself. Even so, Option 2 commends itself to many readers because it relieves us from the pain of imagining how any rational, caring dad

could offer up his daughter to literal flames and how that could happen with God's approval.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Knowing the duty to love our enemies and not resist evil (Matt. 5:38-44), how do we treat those psalms that record curses for enemies and for wicked men?

The psalms you ask about are called *imprecatory*. They pronounce a curse, like this one: "Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell . . ." (55:15). David had many enemies, and Israel lived in a tough neighborhood, helping us understand why dozens of psalms have one or more verses with this tone. Other imprecations are found in Psalms 35:4-8, 26; 58:6-10; 68:2; 69:22-28; 83:9-17; 109:6-20, 29; and 137:7-9.

Though the psalmists often vented their anger against those who opposed them and made life difficult, this probably served to relieve pressure by written or oral expression, not by a more damaging kind of violence. Prayers of imprecation, though not the most noble response, may indicate anger yielded to God for His justice.

Cursing an enemy is not the only Old Testament Scripture form that finds change in Christ. Animal sacrifice and other Mosaic ordinances, the counsels for Israel to war against and destroy other nations: These too are practices about which Jesus could say, "You have heard that it was said to those of old . . . But I say unto you . . ." (Matt. 5:21-48).

Just as there was change in the law without total abolition of it (Hebrews 7:12), so has there been change for imprecatory psalms. These attack prayers of David's day have been reformed and elevated in the light of Jesus' blessed example and teachings (1 Peter 2:21-23).

— Elder Calvin Burrell



Restored

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One precious psalm heals one grieving mom.
by Shirley Brosius

Have you ever wanted something so badly that you knew if you only had it, your life would be nearly perfect?

I felt that way when I became pregnant with our third child. Already blessed with a wonderful husband and two healthy sons, I welcomed the chance to have a little girl. I pictured the perfect family: mommy, daddy, three kids, a house in the country. . . .

Difficult death

Our baby girl arrived five weeks early on an April Fool's Day morning. But our cries shattered the dawn, not hers. Christy

Marie weighed five pounds, so doctors could not explain her under-developed lungs. We were devastated by her death. I felt God had pulled a cruel joke on us.

How could God take our baby, our only daughter? We loved God and had dedicated our lives to serve Him in whatever way He called. Our congregation had prayerfully supported me throughout a difficult pregnancy. How could God say "no" to our prayers for a healthy baby?

I lay on my hospital bed, turning the pages of Scripture, which seemed dry as fall leaves. Numb with grief, I found no encouragement there. I felt God had deserted me.

My pastor said I would learn from this experience. What could I possibly learn from this tragedy?

Finding hope

The weekend after Christy's funeral, my husband took our sons to church, and I listened to a Christian radio station. While a choir sang "As the Deer," hope, like a leaf in the spring breeze, stirred ever so slightly in my soul.

Psalm 42, on which that song is based, perfectly reflected my feelings. When I read it, I discovered that like the psalmist, I thirsted for God and wanted to get to know Him better through this tragic, unexpected experience. I related to the psalmist's emotions; tears soaked my pillow. And although my soul was "downcast" and my emotions yo-yoed, I determined I would put my hope in God and trust that someday I would again praise Him (vv. 1-5).

I clung to that hope. I memorized Psalm 42 and repeated it to myself as I sought refuge in God during that long, dark night of my soul.

Depletion

Some time later, I found out my pregnancy had aggravated a hearing condition known as otosclerosis, and I needed surgery. Too emotionally distraught, I put it off for a year. My severe loss of hearing, however, left me feeling isolated and trapped in my grief.

Once I had that surgery and could better communicate, I hoped I could move on in my grief, but I developed cancer and needed major surgery. The loss of my child, the loss of normal hearing, and the loss of my child-bearing ability — in three consecutive years — left me feeling depleted mentally, physically, and emotionally. I truly doubted that

I would ever again lead a happy, productive life.

But as I waited on God, I applied more of Psalm 42 to my sad situation. I began by remembering how good God had been to me in the past (v. 6). He had seen me through many losses and disappointments. When I was a child, I suffered from rheumatic fever that limited physical activity during my youth. My father was ill throughout my childhood, restricting our income. He died when I was 19.

And it was only by God's grace, shown through the good will of a brother, I had gone to college.

Turnaround

During my pregnancy I had given up my job as church secretary because I'd planned to stay home with our new baby. Now with no baby, no job, and both sons in school, how would I spend my time? How might I get my mind off my grief?

At our pastor's suggestion, I enrolled in seminary courses to better equip myself for Christian service. The studies informed my faith, gave me something productive to do, and brought joy to my heart. I love to learn. In time my pastor suggested I earn a master's degree in Christian education and join our church staff. God had closed a door, but His grace had opened a window.

For ten years I served as a director of Christian education. Our two sons eventually brought wonderful daughters-in-law into our lives, then grandchildren. In fact, I was in the birthing room when my first granddaughter arrived. Just like her aunt, Christy Marie, Rachel appeared five

weeks early, but she immediately let us know her lungs were quite healthy. Twenty years after Christy's death, Rachel's birth helped to heal my heart and made me one happy Grandma.

In time I discovered my niche as an inspirational writer and speaker, and I found that by sharing the story of how God restored my life, I could offer hope to others experiencing loss and heartache. People can identify with my struggles and draw strength for their own journeys.

Personal benefits

Psalm 42 reminds me that God is personal. As the psalmist poured out his soul to God (v. 6), so I poured out my soul. I prayed that my grief would lessen, that I would receive strength for the day, that my physical strength would return. God answered my prayer by calming my spirit, bringing friends and relatives to support me in my sorrow, and blessing me with a husband who held me and cried with me. God cares — for me.

Psalm 42 reminds me that when I thirst, God refreshes me and acts on my behalf. Through the verses I memorized, His song whispered encouragement to me in the night (v. 8). And just

as a drink quenches my physical thirst, His Word refreshed me as I read promises of Scripture in the morning light.

When I struggled to focus on Scripture in general, Psalm 42 applied to my life in a real way. It told me that I could hope in God and that someday I would be able to praise Him for His help (v. 11). So I hoped and waited, and today I praise Him for seeing me through this difficult time and letting me learn through it, as my pastor said I would. I developed greater compassion for people who experience loss of any kind. I learned to trust God, even when He appears untrustworthy. And eternity has become more real to me, knowing our Christy will one day find its air easier to breathe.

Many times I have received God's comfort and grace through the words of the psalmists. My picture-perfect life never developed, but with God in the picture, life is good. Very, very good. **BA**

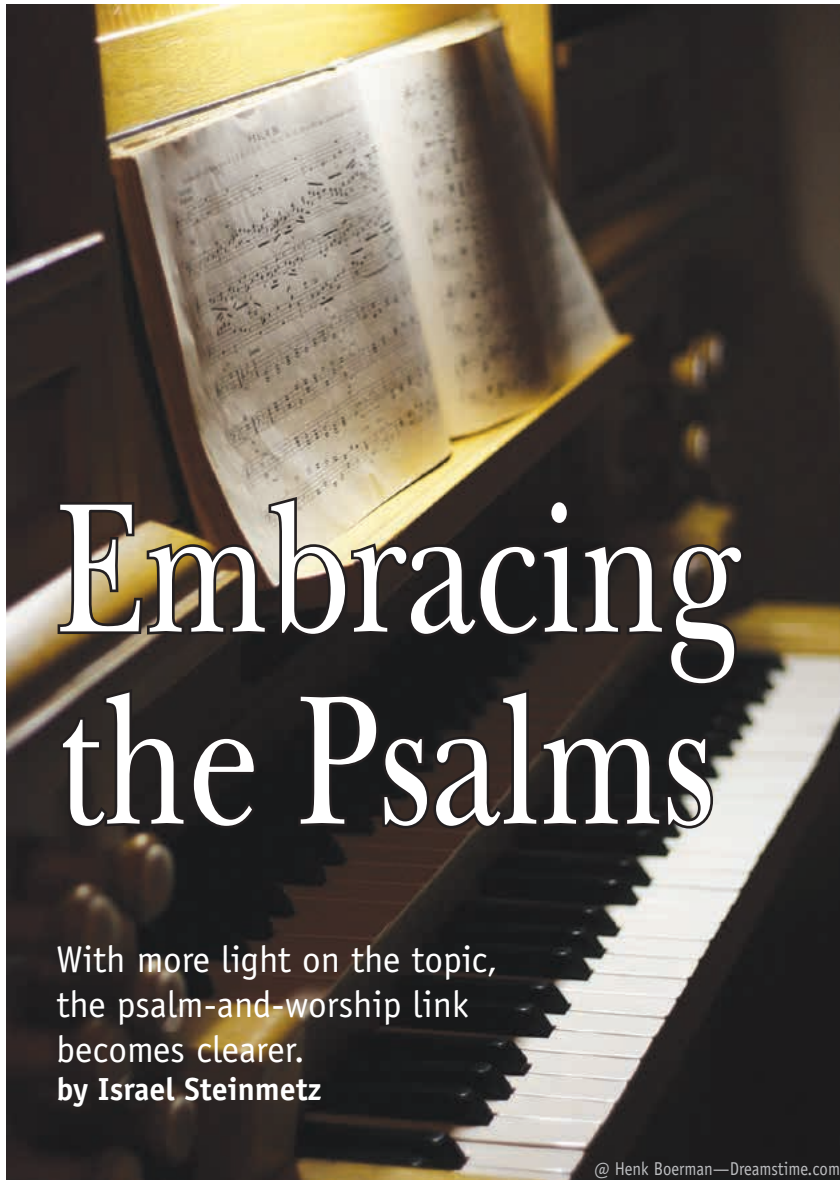
Shirley Brosius
writes from Millersburg, PA.



Psalm 42 told me that I could hope in God and that someday I would be able to praise Him for His help.



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Embracing the Psalms

With more light on the topic, the psalm-and-worship link becomes clearer.
by Israel Steinmetz

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In their helpful book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart describe the Psalms as a “guide to worship.”¹ How can this collection of one hundred fifty ancient hymns and poems guide our worship? What must we understand about them, and about worship, so we can embrace the Psalms as a resource in becoming a church passionate in worship? Let me propose a few ideas.

Progression

First, consider worship as a progression of three *r*’s: *revelation, recognition, response*. Worship begins as God *reveals* Himself. The transcendent God of the universe makes Himself immanent in activity like creating, speaking from a burning bush, or coming to earth as the divine-human Savior.

But not everyone sees God for who He is. We must recognize Him as He reveals Himself, which becomes the basis for our

response. Worship of God does not happen among those who shut Him out. Once we willingly recognize God for who He is, we are compelled to respond in multi-faceted worship. How could we not respond?

That worship looks something like this. Recognizing God as loving, we respond in love. Recognizing God as sovereign, we respond in service. Recognizing God as beautiful, we respond in adoration. Recognizing God as powerful and faithful, we respond in fear and faith.

Categories of psalms

Now we turn to the Psalms. Fee and Stuart describe them in seven categories:

Psalms of Lament: “express struggles, suffering, or disappointment to the Lord.”

Psalms of Thanksgiving: “help a person or group express thoughts and feelings of gratefulness.”

Psalms of Praise: “center on the praise of God for who God is, for God’s greatness and beneficence. . . .”

Psalms of Salvation-History: review the “history of God’s saving works among the people of Israel, especially his deliverance of them from bondage in Egypt”

Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation: include covenant renewal liturgies, royal psalms, and songs of Zion/Jerusalem; express faith in God’s faithfulness to His people and the coming Messiah-king.

Psalms of Wisdom: describe “the merits of wisdom and the wise life.”

Psalms of Trust: focus on the truth that “God may be trusted

... even in times of despair, his goodness and care for his people ought to be expressed."²

In each category, the three *r*'s are in the background. We respond to God with our laments, our praise, our trouble, and our joy because the Word reveals Him as the source of all good, provider of every need, and protector from every harm. We honor God because we recognize Him as the beginning and the end, the author and finisher of our faith. We look to God as the source of all wisdom and the one in whom to place our trust. Why? Because He has revealed Himself faithful, we have recognized His trustworthiness, and we can't help but respond in worship and adoration.

Focus on God

The Psalms invite us to join the ancient Israelites in worshipping God in every season of life, for who He is and what He does. They urge us to praise God for every blessing and come to Him with every need. They prompt us to remember what God has done in the past and celebrate what He will do in the future. **BA**

Notes

1. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* — Fourth Edition, 231.
2. *Ibid.*, 220-222.

Israel Steinmetz serves as Dean of Academic Affairs for LifeSpring School of Ministry.



Return of a Classic

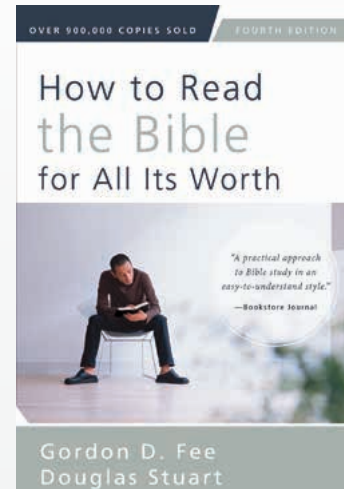
When then-BA editor Jerry Griffin hired me twenty-five years ago, he required two things of me (other than working forty hours a week): take a class at Summit School of Theology on CoG7 doctrines and another on biblical interpretation. His thinking about the latter was that when I edited an article, I could tell if the writer had correctly interpreted Scripture. Considering the magazine I worked for advocates the Bible, I had to properly understand the Bible myself.

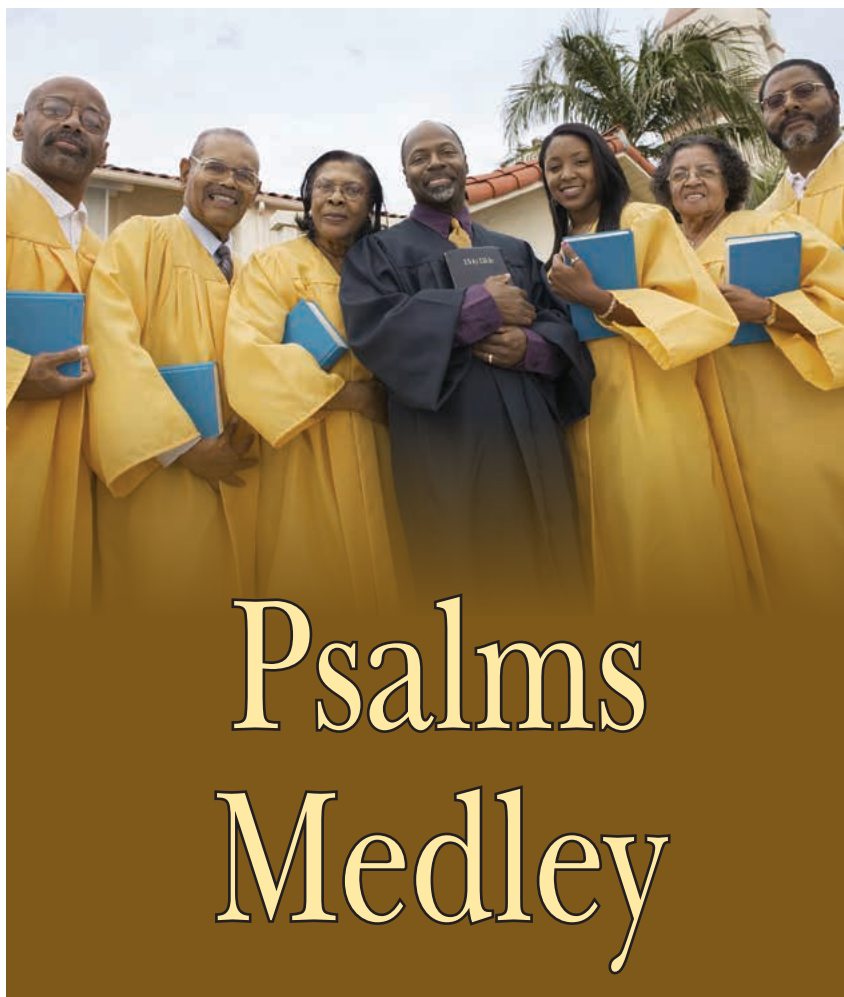
The Biblical Interpretation class proved invaluable, not just because of Jerry's expert instruction but also because of a book he selected for our study: *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. In it, authors Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart offer keys to correctly unlocking the Bible's literary depths and diversity. I learned that when we interpret the Bible, we must apply different rules to its different genres of writing so we can understand the authors' intent and apply it accurately.

The fourth edition of this book from Zondervan hit the shelves in June, and it proves to be the same valuable resource as were the earlier editions. Among other things, readers will notice better readability thanks to contemporized language, diagrams that have been revised and redesigned, and an updated list of recommended commentaries and resources.

Besides these changes, quality scholarship from two outstanding Bible professors secures *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* a permanent spot in the libraries of Bible lovers. For example, Fee and Stuart's explanation of Hebrew poetry in the chapter on prophecy provides a strong foundation for interpreting the Psalms. Poetry, they write, was used in ancient Israel as a way to learn. A few lines of poetic verse stick in the brain much longer than a paragraph of prose. So, long prophetic oracles were written in poetic form for God's people to better recall.

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Psalms Medley

Psalm-y Summer

By the time you read this, the San Diego CoG7 will have spent most of a summer in the Psalms. This twelve-week season began for us June 21 and will end September 13.

The initial idea came one April evening at sunset on La Jolla Shores beach while I sought God’s guidance on my preaching. Typical sermon prep for me involves three things: looking at Scripture, looking at the world around, and looking to God for discernment in comparing and contrasting the two.

Where in Scripture could I find expressed both the high and

low tides of life? Where in the Word is there described both the struggle of emotions that shift like sand and the blessing of faith as solid and unmoving as the rock wall just down the beach? Where in the Bible is there a crying out from the crushing waves of suffering, with assurance of a rescue that doesn’t just save us from drowning but actually lifts us up to ride in victory over those waves?

We find all of that throughout the Word, praise God. But He was directing me to a specific section of Scripture: the Psalms.

I’d like to tell you what it looks and feels like on the other side of this twelve-week summer season, but I can’t. We aren’t there yet!

As I write this in the first week, we’ve begun a congregational plan to read through the Psalms, and every sermon, every Sabbath class, and every Sabbath praise time will be based out of, or inspired by, passages from this book. As we internalize, memorize, meditate on, and apply the Psalms, we will cry out for spiritual revival in every area of our lives.

And we don’t want to stop there! We are asking God to use us in a mighty way so that the revival can spread beyond our congregation – to our friends, co-workers, family members, neighborhoods, and community.

“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18).

“My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up” (5:3).

“But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me” (13:5, 6).

These are our prayers, that the almighty, sovereign God would open our eyes to see wonderful things in His Word; that He would accept our “Summer in the Psalms” as a sacrifice prepared for Him; that we will watch with faithful expectation, trust in His steadfast love, and rejoice in His salvation. We also pray that the conclusion of this season will see us singing in thanksgiving because of the bountiful way God has dealt with us.

Amen!

— John Marlin
San Diego, CA



Good Shepherd

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and us as His sheep is one of the Bible's most powerful reminders of the enduring love of Christ. While this idea is often associated with the Gospels, it is also held in the pages of the Psalms.

In the most famous psalm, 23, David describes our Lord as a shepherd who meets the needs of His flock, finds them pleasant resting places, and guards them against danger. David's youthful experiences tending his father's sheep helped him create this memorable illustration of the Savior's love for us (1 Samuel 17:34).

Later in the Psalms, Asaph sings, "We, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever; we will show forth Your praise to all generations" (79:13). Similar sheep themes appear in Psalms 95:6, 7 and 100:3.

In Psalm 28:9, David prays, "Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them also, and bear them up forever," and Psalm 80:1, 2 contains a kindred prayer. Psalm 78:52 describes the Lord's rescue of the Israelites from Egypt as a specific instance of Him guiding His people like a flock.

Psalm 49:14 takes a different approach, portraying unrepentant sinners as sheep who will end up in the grave, shepherded by death. Those who follow the Good Shepherd will be led safely through the valley of the shadow of death and escape this fate (23:4).

Thankfully, if ever our lives are not as they should be, we

can cry out as David did, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments" (119:176). Long before Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7), David knew the Lord cares about us and will save us, no matter where we are.

Foreshadowing similar allegories in the parables of Jesus, the Psalms' images of our Lord as the Good Shepherd and us as His sheep share the same comforting truth: Christ watches over us lovingly, and always will.

— Jonathan Garner
Mobile, AL

God's Silence

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? . . . I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear (Psalm 22:1, 2).

Has your soul ever reached out to God, and the only response you got was deafening silence? The Psalms often express the grief of God's silence, with a plea to be heard and answered (for other examples, see 28:1, 2; 55:1, 2).

We were born as conversing beings, with God and others. From the beginning God enjoyed

sweet communion with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. Then He spoke to His people through prophets. Now God has spoken to us through Jesus Christ and the God-breathed Scriptures.

The truth is that our heavenly Father is always speaking, but we are often hard of hearing. Thus, God's seeming silence. If you find yourself not hearing from God, consider these strategies:

- Take steps to ensure you are in the will of God (Psalm 19:14; 139:23, 24). Disobedience can block the channel of hearing from God. He is not obligated to speak to us if we have not obeyed His instructions. Have you despised the counsel and corrections of the Lord?

- Consider you are being tested. As master teacher, God teaches us His words and life lessons, then permits a test. When I teach an aspect of curriculum, I have to allow my students to undergo tests so they'll know what they've learned, then identify the gaps in their learning. God was silent at some points in Job's trials so that Satan could know that Job feared God with integrity. Has God given Satan permission to examine you as one of the trophies of His grace?

- Be still and know that He is God (46:10a). When we stop struggling for answers, they often

The Psalms' images of our Lord as the Good Shepherd and us as His sheep share the same comforting truth: Christ watches over us lovingly, and always will.



Fun Facts, Trivial Pursuits

Bible readers and lovers of the Psalms often recall that the Psalter is the Bible's longest book (150 chapters) and home to its shortest (the 117th, with two verses), its longest (the 119th with 176 verses), and its most beloved (the 23rd) chapters.

Between the shortest and longest psalms is Psalm 118, often mistakenly said to be the Bible's middle chapter. This honor belongs to Psalm 117 instead.

The Bible's middle verse is not so easy to calculate because of varying ways to count superscriptions (sub-titles) in the Psalms, subscriptions (concluding remarks) in Paul's epistles, and other factors. This middle verse distinction has been claimed for Psalm 118:8, but a more accurate count may land us at Psalm 103:1, 2 instead. Read and rejoice!

— Calvin Burrell

come. In times of silence, make a conscious effort to be confident in the things you know to be true of God: He is faithful, kind, all-powerful, and wise. He never makes a mistake (103:1-5).

- Make sure God hasn't already spoken through Scripture. Sometimes people wait for a word from God when the Bible has provided answers or guidelines. Search the Scriptures, for in them are His words of wisdom and life (19:7).

- Evaluate the experiences of your life. Divine dialogue is happening consistently. What is God saying to you through your daily events? Seek wise counsel to help analyze your silent situations.

- Be patient. God is sovereign; He will "speak" when He chooses (62:1, 5).

- Be committed to a lifestyle of praise. An authentic, consistent worshiper captures the attention of God, who inhabits the praise of His people. In the environment of thanksgiving God is more likely to speak. Like

David, make the decision to bless the Lord at all times, and let His praise be continually in your mouth (34:1)!

Everything God does is stamped with purpose — even His silence. Be so secure in His love that you can trustingly embrace His handpicked seasons of silence and wisely take action according to your situation.

— Donna Sherwood
London, England

My Favorite

My favorite psalm wouldn't make most people's top ten list. It's not the 1st, 23rd, 51st, 100th, 119th, or 150th. It's Psalm 25, a psalm in which a few key themes of the Psalter speak most powerfully to me.

Whatever I may appear to be outwardly, inwardly I am often troubled by sin and emotional turmoil. I often find myself in need of deliverance, forgiveness, and instruction in righteousness.

It's then I find myself quoting the final verse of Psalm 25. Thanks to my unique name, I don't even need to personalize it: "Redeem Israel, O God, out of all [his] troubles."

Psalm 25 is a desperate plea for God to answer us in our distress, rather than letting us fall to our adversaries (vv. 1-3). It's a supplication for our Savior God to teach us to live in righteousness (vv. 4, 5). It's a humble confession that we need God to remember His endless compassion rather than our numerous sins. It's a proclamation that God is good and upright, that as sinners we depend on His loving-kindness to teach us a new way (vv. 6-11).

Psalm 25 reminds us that God is faithful and that following Him is the pathway to true and eternal life (vv. 12-15). It ends with a plea that God would turn to us and be gracious, healing our lonely affliction and forgiving our sins (vv. 16-18). Whereas in other psalms David offers imprecatory prayers against his enemies, here he simply asks for protection and deliverance as he walks in integrity and uprightness (vv. 19-21). He ends with a humble plea for redemption from all that ails him, offered to the only God who can answer (v. 22).

I often return to Psalm 25, particularly when I don't know what else to pray. There I find a kindred spirit in David, a man who knew sin and sorrow, but also knew the God of mercy and righteousness who could deliver Him. Like David, I seek that God with the words of Psalm 25. And like David, I always find Him faithful.

— Israel Steinmetz
San Antonio, TX 

by Dorothy Nimchuk

In an effort to get youngsters off the couch, a Canadian TV commercial promotes “Bring back play.” This concept is certainly conducive to good health, prompting children to be active.

Even more important, however, is spiritual health in which godly obedience supersedes bodily exercise — something Paul mentions in 1 Timothy 4:8. This is a special challenge in our current culture in which sports and entertainment have taken center stage and crowded out spiritual pursuits. In addition, the air around us is often polluted with lewd stories, loose lips, and loud curses.

We’ve lost our ability to praise God in this kind of worldly environment. It’s time to “bring back praise” and honor the heavenly Father.

How can we do this? By returning to the Psalms. They are filled with praise for what God has done. They encourage people to serve the Lord with gladness, sing praises to His name, acknowledge His power and glory, and be thankful for His blessings. He is so deserving of praise.

For example, Psalm 36:5-9 is an ode to God’s mercy, faithfulness, righteousness, judgments, and loving-kindness. It teaches that we can safely trust in His care and provision. The joy we experience in God’s presence transcends the balance in our bank accounts or the food served on our tables.

But praise doesn’t always come easily in life. David composed many psalms while in the solitude of the desert with his father’s sheep. He praised God for



strength and courage to kill a lion and a bear that threatened the sheep. Serving under King Saul, David led his troops into battle in the name of the Lord and praised Him for victories won. When Saul turned against him, David poured out his heart to God through his psalms, battling his own demons of despair.

Worse times for David came when he lusted for another man’s wife and experienced God’s disfavor. Brought up short by Nathan the prophet for his misdeeds, David was remorseful and quick to repent. He pleaded that God’s presence would not leave him.

In times of fear and distress, David remembered to call upon the Lord in both prayer and praise, with the sure knowledge that he would find solace and solutions. Many of us echo his sentiments in times of distress. God should be praised for the good times but also for the growing times when life appears bleak and we seek to learn its lessons.

We are the crowning glory of God’s creation. When we enter into God’s presence, it is fitting to bring a gift to the Host — a gift of self as a living sacrifice, wrapped in a garment of praise and tied with the ribbon of cheerful obedience. The Psalms serve as a kind of “commercial” in the Bible, reminding us to do that — especially in hard times. They recall God’s greatness, power, and authority and that God stands between His people and their enemies.

The Psalms encourage us when we’re depressed and lift us up when we’re low. In both private reading and public worship, they offer relief from trouble in the expression of highest praise.

BA

Dorothy and Nick Nimchuk, retired CoG7 pastor, live in Medicine Hat, Alberta.



Sons of Korah



Editor's note: Who are the sons of Korah? In the Bible, they're responsible for writing a number of the psalms. In Australia, they're a band of musicians dedicated to giving a fresh voice to the Bible's hymnbook, using a unique acoustic, multi-ethnic sound.

The BA caught up with the group's leader, Matthew Jacoby, while they were touring in Australia recently.

BA: We see "Sons of Korah" in the subtitles of a dozen psalms, all in the second and third books (Psalms 42-89). Who was Korah, and who were his sons?

MJ: The name Sons of Korah comes from a group of Levitical musicians to whom at least thirteen of the psalms are attributed (see the small print titles under the numbers of Psalms 42-49 and 84-88). The original sons of Korah were responsible for the ministry of music and song in Old Testament worship, particularly with the musical composition and performance of psalms. What follows is the remarkable story of this family, according to the Bible's brief record.

The sons of Korah tell a wonderful story of God's grace. It appears that this family of musicians were descendants of the same Korah who led a rebellion against Moses in the desert (Numbers 16). This was a serious crime that led to serious consequences for all those involved. We read that God caused the ground to open up and swallow all those who were involved in the rebellion along with their families (vv. 31ff). In Numbers 26:11 we read the words "The line of Korah, however, did not die out" (NIV throughout). And sure enough as we follow the genealogies through Chronicles we see that the line of Korah did indeed continue. According to 1 Chronicles 6:31ff, when David organized the different tasks for the temple worship, he assigned the ministry of song for a large part to the Kohathites. The head of this group was Heman, who

is the writer of Psalm 88 and a direct descendant of Korah the Kohathite. Hence the psalm is also attributed to the sons of Korah. It seems that at some point this musical family came to be named after their rebellious forefather. The continuing existence of this family line — sons of Korah — was a living testimony to the grace of God that they were happy to declare. They certainly had much to sing about. We feel the same way.

BA: Which few psalms have become your audience favorites, and why?

MJ: Psalm 121 is probably the most requested. It is a psalm of assurance and comfort in the uncertainties of life. Psalm 139 is another that people tend to go back to. The other one that's very popular is Psalm 27. We recorded this in four parts, and to date it is the work I am most happy with. It is an amazing expression of a heart devoted to God and therefore so impervious to fear in the midst of the greatest threats.

BA: Do you stick verbatim with mostly one translation of the psalms for your lyrics?

MJ: We take some liberties with the text in order to make it work with the music, but not so much that the text itself becomes unrecognizable. We want people to recognize the Psalms and memorize them in a form that is as close to a good English translation as possible. We use the NIV as our main guide simply because it is the most widely used translation. I think the NIV trans-

lators did a good job of keeping the poetic element in the psalms.

BA: Does your group have a default music style, or does each psalm call for a slightly different genre?

MJ: Yes, each psalm calls for its own style. To express the wide range of emotions in the Psalms we draw on a wide range of musical styles. For many of the praise psalms, for example, we draw on the exhilarating sounds of Latin music. For the lament psalms we often use the haunting tones of Arabic music, which also evokes the original eastern context of the psalms themselves. There are also hints of Celtic music here and there. Overall, these styles are hybrids and blends. The result, I think, is something interesting and engaging.



To work with many psalms, we have had to move outside the standard three-minute pop song. Many of them run over

a few tracks on our albums and are structured in movements that follow each psalm's emotional content. Other psalms do fit into a simpler folk-pop form that keeps them accessible. We play mostly acoustic instruments to keep a timeless element in the music. We do use some electronics though to create a kind of movie soundtrack effect that acts as a bed upon which the acoustic sounds can create an ambient and reflective mood.

BA: The "Sons of Korah" subtitle is found on several bright psalms, like 84 and 85, but also on Psalm 88 — one that N. T. Wright calls "the darkest poem in the whole book." Do you sing the darker psalms as often as you do the brighter ones? How do people respond differently to these genres?

MJ: We sing many of the darker psalms. We believe this genre to be a really important aspect of the prayer life of the Christian community. Darker psalms are an acknowledgment that there are things that grieve God, and in some way they are therefore the reciprocation of the sadness of God over the lost state of the world. If we are to take hold of the truth of the good news, we must first face reality. Unless you



face the dark realities of life, the good news will be meaningless. In the lament psalms, the psalmists are faced with the realities of a broken world, and even their own depravity. As they face these realities, their “groaning” sets their hope on what God is doing, and faith rises up. According to Psalm 126, “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.” The goal of the Psalms is joy, but the first rung of the ladder to joy, so to speak, is down in the depths of lament.

The idea of complaining to God is a vital expression of faith. It is a faith that will not lower expectations of God when the human situation seems to contradict the promises of God. We should not be content with alienation and spiritual powerlessness when God promises us fellowship and empowerment. So when the psalmists feel that they lack what God has promised, they complain. The Psalms are showing us what faith does in

this respect. They model prayer and worship in the tension of life in a broken world in which we await the culmination of God’s work of redemption. The Psalms are the expression of the groaning that Paul talks about in Romans 8. This groaning, according to Paul, is a fruit of the Spirit (v. 23). The Psalms are not merely Old Testament songs; they are songs for the church because they are the expression of people praying “in the spirit on all occasions” (Ephesians 6:18).

We tend to want the joy without the sorrow. But that is not possible. James speaks to this situation when he says, “Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:9, 10). That sounds like the lament psalms to me. Sorrow is not a thing of the past; it is a vital aspect of faith. So long as there are things in the world and things in us that grieve

God, just so long will there be causes for lament.

BA: How do the Psalms speak to the postmodern world?

MJ: They present a faith that is real and grounded in reality. Spiritual expressions are not romanticized; they are authentic and honest. This gutsy and relational spirituality goes beyond prayers of token piety. It is people relating to God through the roller coaster ride of human experience. As a result, you have a far broader range of expression than you find in popular spirituality today. So many expressions in the Psalms would be counter-cultural in today’s church context. Yet they speak powerfully to our world. They show us the journey of faith not in abstract form, but from the inside. They are experiential in nature and they invite us into experience. **BA**

Visit the Sons of Korah at sonsofkorah.com.



“I made up my mind to be happy today.”

So said my friend Raul often when we worked closely in ministry. He was always happy in spite of what was “happening” around him — plus or minus. Whether his days were clear or cloudy, Raul talked to God, persevered through it, and practiced inward and outward joy.

Unhappy stuff happens to everybody, even to those near to God’s heart. Soak in the Psalms and you’ll see. A recent read-through turned up twenty-five of one hundred fifty poem-songs that would never win a positive-thinking essay contest. Thirty-two more I listed as “mixed”: They included several verses of misery and gloom alongside their more positive features.

I’m grateful the Psalms don’t require unbroken joy and praise, because there are days I don’t feel very happy either. Those are usually the times I don’t like others or myself much. Some days are just like that; they too shall pass.

What’s the source of our negative feelings? Who knows, but I don’t think it’s the Devil alone who causes them. Instead, I suspect most emotions are generated within us as a soul-ish (mind, will, emotions) response to all the stimuli we’ve received on any given day.

Do our feelings have moral implications? Some say that emotions are neither right nor wrong; they just are. It seems better to say that our feelings, like our thoughts, do carry either positive or negative charge, more or less. Most feelings may be indicators of how well we’re letting this mind be in us that was also in Christ Jesus. The Spirit of God

Are You Happy?

by Calvin Burrell

within us helps us discern these things.

What’s the best way to cure those feelings that carry a negative charge? Overcome them with positive thoughts, words (like Raul’s), and actions. Let the joy of the Lord be our strength.

Experience says that the most likely thing about gloomy feelings is that they will change. Sometimes in an hour or less, but usually after a good night’s sleep, melancholy moves on.

I hope life works like that for you, too — by the grace and truth of God. Martin Luther caught a fine truth in this rhyme: “Feelings come and feelings go, / And feelings are deceiving. / My warrant is the Word of God — / Naught else is worth believing.”

For me, time, rest, and regular input of Scripture are reliable cures for gloom and despair.

Every negative emotion we’ve ever had, someone else had it first. Many someones, really. Even the godliest people — men and women after God’s heart —



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have endured dark nights of the soul.

Most of the negative feelings we’ve ever had find an echo in the psalms of Scripture. We can read them, sing them, meditate on and pray them, if we will — then wrestle with the feelings or put up with them until they too pass.

The corollary of this is also true: Every positive emotion we’ve ever had — joy, peace, praise, contentment, delight, exhilaration, etc. — somebody else had first. The Psalms reflect most or all of our positive emotions as well. By putting feelings into words, they serve to perpetuate the emotion and root it deeply so that it blossoms more regularly. Let’s be wise to trace our finest feelings to their Source and thank Him as David did.

My friend Raul is still happy today because he settled that in his mind, because he seeks the psalmists’ high refuge daily, and because he daily echoes their praise. **BA**



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by **Bill Simmon**

The michtam psalms (16, 56, 57, 58, 59, and 60) are a beautiful set identified through wording like this: “Psalm 16: A Michtam of David.” *Strong’s Concordance* defines *michtam* as “an engraving, that is, (technically) a poem.” When the Old Testament (Hebrew) Scriptures were translated into Greek before 200 BC, the word *σπηλογραφία* was chosen for *michtam*. Its English equivalent, *stelography*, is defined as “the practice of chiseling commemorative inscriptions in pillars, tablets, etc.”

These pillar engravings in ancient days projected ideas to an entire society as lasting reminders. They were a proclamation set in stone for all to see, a vigilant witness as new generations were born and died. Every reader — rich, poor, Jew, or Gentile — was given the same wisdom. What David intended was powerful and important, something to be inscribed for future generations to know and remember.

These michtam psalms pass along ideas intended to encourage and maintain the daily

awareness of the reader. They are to be etched into the pillars of our conscience also, guiding our lives toward God.

Psalm 16:1: Preserve me. This tells how to be God-connected. Withdraw from idol worship: “Their drink offerings of blood I will not offer” (v. 4). Then, engrave these concepts within: The Lord is my portion and my counselor; only He guides me on the path of life to fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (vv. 5-11). From start to end, David exhorts us to find God and be preserved in the world.

Psalm 56:1: Be merciful. Facing life’s trials and on the precipice, David pens these encouragements: Whenever I’m afraid, I will trust in You; I will not fear what flesh can do . . . I will praise God’s word . . . You have delivered me from death (vv. 3, 4, 10-13). Faith etched deeply inside us will run deeper and stronger than fear of this moment in the flesh.

Psalm 57:1: In the shadow of Your wings. Though in the struggle again with his soul “among lions,” David does not fear but maintains an eye on his future deliverance with a steadfast heart of song and praise (vv. 4-7). Our

faith too must be deeply engrained and unfaltering.

Psalm 58:1, 2: Judgment of the wicked. David’s reflection becomes pointed talk toward those who are willingly “deaf and dumb” (vv. 1-5) and do not speak and act for truth and justice. The end of the wicked is that “God will take them away “as with a whirlwind,” but the righteous have a reward (vv. 9-11).

Psalm 59:1, 2: Deliver me. Though much of this psalm is a plaintive cry against his foes (vv. 3-15), David finds courage to expect rescue and sing praise (vv. 8-10, 16, 17), requiring a faith embedded by time and use.

Psalm 60:1: Restore us again. Amid trouble at home and abroad (vv. 6-11), David’s words are self-convicting: O God, You have cast us off, scattered us, been displeased, shown Your people hard things, made us drink the wine of confusion (vv. 1-3). Repentance comes from an engraved knowledge of right and wrong that convicts us. God is a loving Father who will rise up on our behalf. Through God we will do mighty things.

Our struggle is to live these concepts and remain faithful witnesses during dark times, both to those who witness our trials and to those who provoke them. This becomes easier when God’s words are etched deeply inside: michtam. **BA**

Bill Simmon is a used equipment manager for a tractor dealership and serves with a Sabbath fellowship in Wichita, KS.



Psalm for Troubled Times

by Martha Rohrbaugh

More than mere songs of worship, the Psalms offer multilayered insight, promise, and prophecy to those who discern them. The 91st psalm, for example, is filled with promises for threatening situations. Many a soldier has drawn strength from these powerful lines while preparing for battle:

You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day . . . A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you (vv. 5, 7).

God uses hardship, danger, and even death to achieve His purposes. We can't always know *how* a tough situation grows us until we've gotten past it. During hard times we can pray this psalm to remind us that the Lord does care for us in every trial and promises to carry us through the difficulty:

Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. . . . under His wings you shall take refuge (vv. 3, 4).

A woman was interviewed about a prowler who attacked her at home. After escape, she testified that verses of Psalm 91, memorized earlier, ran through her mind during the altercation.

These words were a comfort to her in advance, her sure defense in trouble. We too can claim them in crisis:

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust" (vv. 1, 2).

These promises are for those who dwell in the "secret place of the Most High" and have made the Lord their "refuge and fortress." Let's take a hard look at what might be keeping us from shelter in that secret place. In the Psalms and elsewhere, many of God's promises have conditions:

Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling (vv. 9, 10).

Through David's pen, the Spirit tells us how to trust in the Lord's protection: by making the Lord our refuge and the Most High our dwelling place. We must draw near to Him now, not wait until dangerous times come. Now is the time to get tucked tightly under His wings, to allow Christ to wash away sin and restore us to our Father. As we turn from paths of sin, we can claim God's promises with assurance.

Let us keep the words of Psalm 91 close to our hearts and



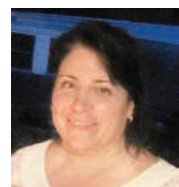
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engraved upon our minds. May our first response to any situation be to pray these promises from our heavenly Father, Redeemer, and Lord.

"Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him . . . He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (vv. 14-16).

Much like Israel of old, our land has gone its own way and yet expects God's protection to continue. Let us turn back to the Lord with all our hearts, seek His will, and then rest under this wondrous protective power. **BA**

Grandmother of three, **Martha Rohrbaugh** lives in Glen Rock, PA, and attends the congregation in Harrisburg, PA.



150 Untapped Aids to Worship

continued from page 3

Read Wright for a minute:

The Psalms offer us a powerful vision in the form of a celebration of God as creator and God as judge . . . “resurrection” is what you get once you embrace those other two doctrines: the good creation and the promise that the same creator God will one day sort it all out. The material world matters; our human material bodies matter because the God who made them will remake them, and what we do with them in the present . . . is a genuine anticipation of what they will be in the future (p. 152).

Over and over, this author finds preview of and implication for further development of the message of Jesus’ empty tomb in the Hebrew Psalms. Although I think Wright is wrong on some points (aren’t we all!), he is both helpful and readable. I recommend him.

This BA on the Psalms converges with our biennial conference theme of worship. May the words of Christ, of His hymnbook — the Psalms — and of the *truth* that He is, ever adorn our worship. May readers in New York, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Florida, Arizona, California, Alberta, Illinois, and points nearby choose to attend a “Worship in the *Spirit*” event coming your way soon. See page 25 for more information on this Conference Tour of 2014-15.

— Calvin Burrell

Heart and Soul of Scripture

continued from page 6

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them there is great reward (vv. 7-11).

The final verses glance back to our third psalm theme above: the reality of sin and the good news of salvation. As you read them, look for categories of sins, one of which anticipates apostolic teaching about a “sin unto death” (KJV) in 1 John 5:16, 17.

Who can understand his errors?

Cleanse me from secret faults.

Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins;
Let them not have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless,
And I shall be innocent of great transgression (vv. 12, 13).

Now whisper with David his closing prayer for inward holiness, ending in confidence that the holy Lord who was His strong rock and Redeemer is our Lord and Savior indeed!

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

Be acceptable in Your sight,

O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer (v. 14). **BA**

Return of a Classic

continued from page 11

But poetry also expressed prayers and praise of the ancient Israelites and was used in their worship through the Psalms. The psalmists expressed the deep and varied emotions of the human spirit — things we often feel but can’t put into words.

The Psalms, of course, are just one sampling from Fee and Stuart’s work. The authors delve into such things as the structure of Bible narratives, literary content of epistles, levels of Old Testament narratives, and forms of prophetic messages. The authors also light on several of Scripture’s slippery slopes, like symbolism in apocalyptic writings, historical precedent in Paul’s letters, and the dangers of misusing Old Testament narratives.

One of the attractions to Fee and Stuart’s book has always been that you don’t have to be a Bible scholar to understand and appreciate the content. Any lay person (like me) can read it — and be the better for it.

Thanks to the authors’ impressive Bible knowledge, this fourth edition is a renewed invitation to taste the literary delights of the Bible. Fee and Stuart show their deep reverence for the Word of God and desire that it be understood correctly so it will be applied correctly. That is how we can all advocate the Bible.

— Sherri Langton



Mail Bag



Misgivings about Muslims

Thanks for your service. We always enjoy the BA. This issue [July-August '14] was thought provoking, particularly "The Muslim Mandate" [p. 14]. My reaction ranged from "interesting" to "alarming." Interesting the author doesn't tell us what the Muslim mandate might be.

Interesting he makes such a cozy comparison between God's holy Scripture and the Qur'an when he states, "... three of us would get together to study God's truth in both the Qur'an and the Bible." God's wonderful truth is *not* found in the Qur'an!

Interesting the author fails to define "devout Muslims." Are these Muslims those who behead Christians, those who financially support Jihad, or those who sit by and make no mention of the darker side of Islam (Isaiah 5:20)?

Interesting he considers it a privilege to come alongside "spiritual Muslims" — my thought was of Matt. 7:6. Oh, I know every knee will bow, every culture and individual will have opportunity to know the Lord. Will the mass conversion of Muslims occur by our efforts? I doubt it (John 6:44).

Interesting he states the Qur'an

only "seemingly" denies the divinity of Jesus. Let's be factual: It is a blunt and highly restrictive denial with no provision for our Lord's divinity.

Lots of "interesting" items in the article.

Alarming is that I would read it in the BA. Shame on the *Bible Advocate*: Someone fell into Satan's trap to appear politically correct in printing this article — no service to Christ. Keep 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 in mind when selecting articles.

J. K.
Portales, NM

Editor's response: The author's stated intention was to "look at some attitudes and approaches that appear to have influenced" recent growth in the number of Muslims coming to faith in Jesus. One of these approaches was a willingness to read the Qur'an with Muslims who would read the Bible with him. Yes, the Qur'an contains some or many verses that echo the truth revealed in our Scriptures. These have provided common ground for fruitful discussion and a bridge to the Bible for some Muslims.

Yes, Islam has its dark side: Some fanatical Muslims do commit heinous violence in the name of their leader, Mohammed. The same may be said of Christians for two thousand years, in the name of Christ — even if to a lesser degree. As is true in Christianity, a majority of Muslims do not applaud or identify with the evil deeds of their co-religionists.

No, we'll not succeed in converting anyone to follow Jesus apart from the Spirit's call. But that truth should never become an excuse to disobey our Lord's mandate to bless

*all peoples with Christ's gospel. Hooray for those who missionize among Muslims, even if their methods are not those we'd use. I like that Doug York missionizes among Muslims (and writes about it) much better than I like the way I'm **not** doing that mandated task (and still writing about it).*

Politically correct? My guess is that about as many politicians (and citizens) would agree with one side of this discussion as the other. Thanks for reading BA and for carrying enough about what you read to write as you did.

(Read Doug York's response to this reader at baonline.org.)

Shedding light

You go into the old problem of "Those who never heard" ["Q & A," p. 9]. I suggest that John 5:28, 29 might be helpful where it says that some are resurrected to "damnation" (KJV), an erroneous translation of *krisis*, which should read "judgment." And *judgment* isn't a sentencing but a probation period of judgment, as we are under now as the books have been opened (Revelation 20:12). This is intended to be helpful in the discussion.

P. S.
Worcester, England

Sharing BA

BA is one of the most exceptional publications on the market. I never discard a copy; some I share. As a Bible teacher in my church for 63 years, I often include BA material in my lessons.

D. S.
Tipton, OK

A serene landscape featuring a red and blue canoe on a calm river. A large, moss-covered tree with dense green foliage dominates the left side, its branches extending over the water. The scene is reflected in the still water, creating a mirror image of the boat and the tree. The lighting is soft, suggesting a quiet time of day like dawn or dusk.

Psalm 1

*Happy the man who does not take
The wicked for his guide,
Nor walk the paths that sinners make,
Nor sit the scorners' side.
The law of God is his delight:
His meditation day and night.*

*For he is like a tree with roots
The streams of water by,
Which yields in season due its fruits
And leaves that never die.
In all he does he's prosperous;
The wicked do not prosper thus.*

*Like chaff before the driving wind,
The wicked shall not stand;
From 'mongst God's people they are thinned
When judgment is at hand.
God watches o'er the way of right,
But, for the wicked, waits the night.*

Kevin McCabe

“Worship in the Spirit” Conference Tour



Cobourg, Ontario, Canada **June 28, 2014**
Houston, TX **Aug. 9, 2014**
New York/
New Jersey **Oct. 11, 2014**
Oklahoma City, OK **Nov. 1, 2014***
Port St. Lucie, FL **Dec. 6, 2014**
Phoenix, AZ **Dec. 13, 2014**
Lodi, CA **Jan. 17, 2015**
Los Angeles, CA **March 21, 2015**
Acme, Alberta, Canada **April 11, 2015**
Chicago, IL **May 2, 2015**

* Subject to change

Worship is one thing that affects everything. Because redeemed worshippers aren't perfect, they bring both good and bad to the worship experience. Therefore, worship must be guided, its meaning taught, and the desire to be true worshippers encouraged. That's the goal of these tour events. The tour team and I look forward to sharing this unique experience with you.

— Whaid Rose

Publications

This tract is *not* for you.

In a recent mailing for the BA magazine, you were introduced to a little tract titled *May I Tell You a Story?* As a CoG7 member and/or BA reader, you know about God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, about sin and salvation — much more than many others know, around the corner and around the world. That's why the tract we sent is not for you — that is, not for your learning but for your use with others who don't know much. It's for their learning.

In the US and Canada, one out of five adults are non-Christian in their views, and that ratio is growing. The world numbers for Christianity total close to 32 percent. The other 68 percent are Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or none of the above. So how would you share Jesus with one of the 68 percent who has little or no knowledge of Him?

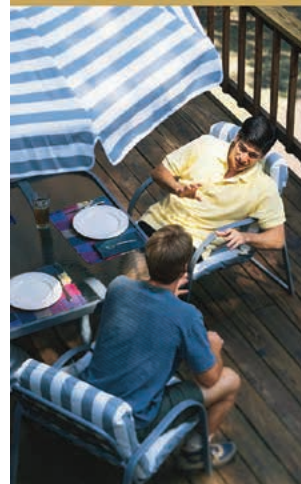
Take the first step in helping someone know more by giving away *May I Tell You a Story?* and letting the Holy Spirit draw the reader. This tract may not be for you, but it could be just what someone needs to get started down the pathway of faith.

As part of BAP's ongoing effort to provide free literature to those who request and need it — including non-believers — we need your help. Give generously to Publications in September, and support our free literature fund every fifth Sabbath. Thank you!



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May I Tell
You a Story?



Keith Michalak
Director



Myanmar students. These men are training for pastoral service at the CoG7 school taught by Tluang Kung and others in Yangon, Myanmar (Burma). Asian Christian Theological Seminary was built and is sustained by G. C. Missions from the US and Canada.



Zimbabwe celebration. During a recent visit by Zone 5 Representative Robert Crawford (second from right), leaders of the growing Bulawayo congregation enjoy musical equipment obtained by that group with support from UK and G. C. Missions.



Philippine reconstruction. Pastor John Villarante of Mindanao administered Disaster Relief funds in Manduawak province of central Philippines and assisted with rebuilding churches and homes there after Super Typhoon Haiyan hit in late 2013.

CoG7 Events and Dates

North American Ministerial Council, September 15-20, Shocco Springs Conference Center (shocco.org), Talladega, AL (303-452-7973)

Central Young Adult retreat, September 19-21, Hyatt Place, Schaumburg, IL (cog7central.com or abe.endecott@gmail.com)

Northeast Women's retreat, October 3-5, Mackinaw Island, MI (Esther416@charter.net or 989-574-7325)

Youth/Young Adult Retreat, October 31-November 2, Camp IODISECA, Solon, IA (abe.endecott@gmail.com)

"Worship in the Spirit" Conference Tour in four locations this fall-winter; see listing on page 25 (cog7.org)

Dozens Die in Sierra Leone

Substantial amounts of Disaster Relief funds were sent to the Sierra Leone church in July and August. The Ebola outbreak in that West Africa nation has put 700 CoG7 members at risk and claimed the lives of 23 members thus far. Seven have survived its effects. As Church leaders put protective measures in place and assist those in danger in this largely Muslim nation, the Church grows significantly.

Thank you for prayers and for standing with the Church during this great trial through offerings to the Disaster Relief Fund.

— Bryan Cleeton



Faithful East African. Makuey Gai Tudeal, leader of fledgling CoG7 in South Sudan (where Disaster Relief funds have assisted brethren in recovering from recent civil strife), also serves in Ethiopia.



International Ministerial Congress (IMC) Sabbath, May 17. This CoG7 group met in Zaragoza, Spain, to celebrate that worldwide event.



National yMinistry SWORD Retreat: 100+ young adults gathered in Hawkins, TX, May 23-26 to enjoy the great outdoors and hear from CoG7 ministry leaders, including those from LifeSpring and G. C. Missions, about serving in today's world.

LifeSpring School of Ministry

Spring 2014 Graduates

- Certificate of Biblical Studies: Dirk Anderson, Jacksonville, Florida; Thomas Childers, Artesia Wells, Texas; Alejandro Larios, San Antonio, Texas; Ronald Cummings, Corpus Christi, Texas
- Certificate of Family Ministry: Makayla Schlenker, Owosso, Michigan
- Diploma of Pastoral Ministry: Narciso Betances, Silver Spring, Maryland

Spring 2014 Dean's List

Marina Anderson, Jacksonville, Florida; Jody Crowson, Springfield, Oregon; Worrel Lergie, Apopka, Florida; Martin Ramirez, Fort Smith, Arkansas

September 16 - Fall course registration ends

September 28 - Fall classes begin



IMC looks ahead. The British Conference board poses with Portugal's Paulo Coelho (front, center) in Manchester, England, July 26-28, to plan work across Europe — Zone 7.



SHINE Travels to Belize

by **Bev Brenneise**

SHINE presented five days of clinics in Belize's jungle-like regions June 15-23. The weather was hot and humid; the people were needy. Some 60 individuals made up the largest medical, dental, and pastoral team ever.

Clinics were held at San Jose Palmar in the northern Orange Walk area, Santa Familia in the western Cayo area, and the Belmopan area (Aldea de Camilote) in mid-Belize. Though securing

medications again proved challenging, this SHINE mission was successful, reaching higher levels of performance. Organization and teamwork were strong, and leadership grew by training new members for new teams, boding well for future missions.

In Belmopan, 16 seasoned team members worked with and trained 15 folks from an independent CoG7 in Florida. That church already supported a group in Belmopan and wanted to extend its services.

A four-hour bus ride over

bumpy roads tested the stamina of the Santa Familia team members. They arrived at the San Ignacio Hotel at midnight, but the truck carrying the luggage didn't come until an hour later.

Early the next morning most of the team traveled on to Santa Familia, just eight miles from Guatemala, to work from a police station. People came by bus, car, motorcycle, wheelchair, foot, and truck. Medical and nursing students at the clinic rotated among the various doctors, nurses, and nurse practitioners. They examined patients, took blood pressure, checked glucose levels, and learned to start IVs or give injections.

Daniel Espinoza from Mexico won this year's SHINE contest (for young people interested in becoming doctors or dentists) and was sponsored for the mission. Ironically, the contest came to his attention only after his aunt picked up a contest application from the floor of her church.

In Belmopan, SHINE team members arrived at the building rented to house the clinics and met the volunteers from Florida's New Beginnings church. Patients came, were registered, and had basic vitals recorded by nurses. Then they were sent to various





doctors and dentists. Progress became so efficient that SHINE's new ER doctor could even transport a child to the local hospital for MRI tests. The suspicion of a hole in the heart was verified.

In five days of clinics, SHINE saw 2,932 patients. Seven doctors were part of this year's team, plus a naturopathic physician and two advanced care medical workers. Ten registered nurses came (five from New Beginnings), along with eight dentists. Other members included three medical and pre-med students, nine pastors, medical assistants, security personnel, photographer-writers, and general assistants.

SHINE encountered many challenges: a badly deformed leg due to an earlier untreated fracture, a blind woman, a deaf-mute man, severe palsy, walking difficulty, skin and joint infections, holes in the hearts of young children, hearing and dental

dysfunctions, severe arthritis and elevated blood pressure, tumor behind the eyelid and on a finger, a small child with *pectus excavatum* (caved-in chest), abuse, epilepsy, HIV, diabetes, and hypertension. Most of the people we saw could not afford conventional medical treatment.

TV crews came to clinics, interviewing directors and videotaping what they saw. Positive news spread, causing many more to seek the clinics where SHINE distributed walking canes and reading glasses; gave injections; provided preventive pediatric care; counseled for assault injuries, physical abuse, and depression; made home visits; gave Bible classes for children; held prayer sessions; preached evening evangelistic services; baptized six persons; and handed out 180 pounds of medications — all without charge.

Nearly 500 people met on Sabbath at a gymnasium in Bel-

mopan. Individual CoG7 congregations, clinic patients, and team members merged to worship our Lord who made this all possible. Songs of praise resounded in the hall. Numerous individuals and families requested prayer, and an abundance of pastors answered the call. God showed His presence in Belize.

Though the ship carrying barrels of medications and supplies arrived in Belize prior to the mission, it was not unloaded until late on the last day of clinics. Plans are now to use these medications in a September mini-mission in southern Belize.

Please consider becoming a part of the SHINE mission. Watch for announcements regarding applications, and consider giving support through the General Conference website (cog7.org, select "Giving" at the top left, and follow instructions.)

Above all else, please keep SHINE in your prayers!





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International Congress

Central America

By God's grace, IMC President Ramon Ruiz and Zone 2 Representative Carlos Ceron made official visits to El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama May 30 - June 8. Mexican CoG7 President Ismael Becerra joined them in the first two countries.

El Salvador: The ministers preached in different congregations in San Salvador on Sabbath morning, May 31, including Ciudad Arce, San Juan Opico, Las Moras, Tikal, Nejapa, Aguilares, Residencial Libertad, Guasapa, Atiquizaya, Magdalena, El Roble, and Santa Ana. Then they met with the national executive board and nine district boards for an IMC report and discussion of the state of the Church in El Salvador. The meeting was held at El Eden, the newly acquired CoG7 convention center, 37 miles east of the capital city.

June 1-2, about 300 pastors from around the country met to

hear sermons and reports by Elders Ruiz and Ceron. The Q & A period at the end resulted in better understanding of the international Church.

On June 3 an extraordinary meeting at El Eden saw CoG7 leaders from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Convened by the Salvadorian executive board and supported by the IMC Zone 2 representative and president, the meeting promoted unity and progress among members of Zone 2. It had a good outcome, thank God.

Honduras: June 4 and 5, Elders Ruiz and Ceron traveled to Honduras to meet with the CoG7 executive board and Halmer W. Salinas, president. The main purpose was to learn the state of the Honduran church and unity among the churches in Central America.



Honduras: Church leaders with guests

Panama: On June 6 Elders Ruiz and Ceron traveled to Panama, where they were welcomed by Elder Ruben Amet Chong, president of the church. On Sabbath they enjoyed a joyous Sabbath fellowship with the only congregation in this country, in La Chorrera, twelve miles north from the capital city. The brethren were encouraged and strengthened to see that they are not alone but are part of the Church of God around the world.

— Elder Sergio Carlos Cerón
Zone 2 Representative



El Salvador: Ministers and leaders, with Ramon Ruiz and Carlos Cerón



Guatemala: Officers of the national CoG7 conference



Pilgrim Songs

Love for the Psalms is universal among believers. Why? Because they speak the language of our heart. They reflect the full gamut of our emotions. They help us settle our souls in God's presence.

Charles Spurgeon affectionately called the Psalms "The Treasury of David." Surely the prince of preachers must have known David didn't pen them all. Some psalms are credited to Moses, Asaph, sons of Korah, Solomon, and others. But by far, David wrote more of them than anyone else. He was "the sweet singer of Israel," the nation's poet laureate. So Spurgeon's title is allowed, for so much in this treasure chest belongs to David.

Among its treasures is his private diary, his personal prayer journal. Reading it, we identify with the emotional cries of David's wounded heart. We resonate with his pleas for forgiveness and mercy. We long for God's presence like he did, to live in repentance and contrition, to give unbridled praise to our faithful God, to be true worshippers.

As a hymnbook, the Psalms assist our worship. Its original Hebrew title, *Tehillim* (meaning "praise songs") affirms that this was Israel's official hymnal. The German reformer, Martin Luther, believed that the Protestant Reformation would not be complete until God's people had two books in their possession: a Bible in their own language and a hymnbook with which to respond in praise and worship to the truths revealed in the Bible. The Bible-book must be balanced by the hymnbook. But long before Luther stated this principle, God underscored it by placing this hymnbook in the middle of our Bible.

Its songs cover a variety of subjects: the fruitful life, praise, thanksgiving, lament, the law, repentance, wisdom, etc. There are royal psalms (referencing Israel's Messiah), psalms of ascent

(sung during the annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem), imprecatory psalms (invoking judgment upon one's enemies), and those simply titled "Songs of Zion."

They are beautifully arranged, divided thematically into five books covering fallen humanity (1-41), God's deliverance (42-72), the sanctuary — God's dwelling place (73-89), God's righteous reign over all the earth (90-106), and God's greatness and the sweetness of His Word (107-150). Each book ends with a doxology and "double amen." For example, Book II ends "Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen" (72:18, 19). That God has collected and so beautifully arranged these one hundred fifty songs highlights the wonder of divine inspiration, calling for our loudest "Amen!"

The Christian life has been described as "a long obedience in the same direction," and the Psalms are a reliable guide for our pilgrimage. Along the way, they teach us how to be honest with God about our doubts, fears, hopes, dreams, disappointments, and even enemies. They teach us to trust, to rest, and to worship, leading us into the depths where we cry with the psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (73:25, 26). Alas, our long obedience becomes a thing of joy, as our "ought to" is transformed into "want to," one psalm at a time.

— *Whaid Guscott Rose*



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