

## Introduction

The past few weeks have been a surreal and disheartening experience as our country was rocked by violent and merciless looting. These, and many other painful experiences, cause us to look up and wonder what on earth is going on and where is God in all of this?! These are age-old questions and so it is good for us to seek out wisdom.

The Psalms, often referred to as wisdom literature, are prayers written over a long period of Israel's history, which were then collected and sung post their painful exile, when they returned to the promised land after being scattered over Babylon.

This book is often described as a 'medicine chest' for the soul because the authors invite us into their hearts and minds as they wrestle with God through their doubts, questions and concerns living in a broken world. Even though they were written thousands of years ago, they address our world and present-day circumstances with clarity... and most importantly, they remind us of timeless truths of a God who is sovereign and in control, a King who is coming to bring justice and restoration, and calls us now, while we wait, to worship God and obey his word.

We've selected a handful of psalms to meditate on over the next 6 weeks:

Study 1 – Psalm 10: A question we all ask

Study 2 – Psalm 139: Behold your God

Study 3 – Psalm 141: A desperate prayer

Study 4 – Psalm 146: A reality check

Study 5 – Psalm 1: The way of wisdom

Study 6 – Psalm 148: A call to wisdom

# Psalm 10

<sup>1</sup> LORD,<sup>[a][b]</sup> why do you stand so far away?

Why do you hide in times of trouble?

<sup>2</sup> In arrogance the wicked relentlessly pursue their victims;  
let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.

<sup>3</sup> For the wicked one boasts about his own cravings;  
the one who is greedy curses<sup>[c]</sup> and despises the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> In all his scheming, the wicked person arrogantly thinks,<sup>[d]</sup>  
“There’s no accountability, since there’s no God.”

<sup>5</sup> His ways are always secure;<sup>[e]</sup>

your lofty judgments have no effect on him;<sup>[f]</sup>

he scoffs at all his adversaries.

<sup>6</sup> He says to himself, “I will never be moved—  
from generation to generation I will be without calamity.”

<sup>7</sup> Cursing, deceit, and violence fill his mouth;  
trouble and malice are under his tongue.

<sup>8</sup> He waits in ambush near settlements;  
he kills the innocent in secret places.

His eyes are on the lookout for the helpless;

<sup>9</sup> he lurks in secret like a lion in a thicket.

He lurks in order to seize a victim;

he seizes a victim and drags him in his net.

<sup>10</sup> So he is oppressed and beaten down;  
helpless people fall because of the wicked one’s strength.

<sup>11</sup> He says to himself, “God has forgotten;  
he hides his face and will never see.”

<sup>12</sup> Rise up, LORD God! Lift up your hand.

Do not forget the oppressed.

<sup>13</sup> Why has the wicked person despised God?

He says to himself, “You will not demand an account.”

<sup>14</sup> But you yourself have seen trouble and grief,

observing it in order to take the matter into your hands.

The helpless one entrusts himself to you;

you are a helper of the fatherless.

<sup>15</sup> Break the arm of the wicked, evil person,

until you look for his wickedness,

but it can't be found.

<sup>16</sup> **The LORD is King** forever and ever;

the nations will perish from his land.

<sup>17</sup> LORD, you have heard the desire of the humble;

you will strengthen their hearts.

You will listen carefully,

<sup>18</sup> doing justice for the fatherless and the oppressed

so that mere humans from the earth may terrify them no more.

### Footnotes:

- a. 10:1 Some Hb mss, LXX connect Pss 9–10.
- b. 10:1 Together Pss 9–10 form a partial acrostic.
- c. 10:3 Or *he blesses the greedy*
- d. 10:4 Lit *wicked according to the height of his nose*
- e. 10:5 Or *prosperous*
- f. 10:5 Lit *judgments are away from in front of him*

### Help in the Psalms:

In many of the psalms the author asks a question or faces trouble/hardship, which is described or explained. The psalm then goes on to resolve the question or trouble. Be on the lookout for any questions and then try see why the psalmist is asking this particular question, and how a resolution is found.

## **Study 1 – A question we all ask**

- 1. Read through the psalm and with a pen/pencil underline the question the psalmist asks, and what experiences have led him to ask this question? (*Hint: Look for repeated words / ideas*)**

- 2. Do you relate at all with the psalmist in your experience of the world? If so, share your frustrations with your group.**

*Let your group share*

- 3. What truths about God begin to ease the psalmist's concern and how do they comfort you?**

**4. Read Romans 3:9-25. Paul quotes Psalm 10:7 in his letter to the church in Rome.**

**a. How do these verses deepen your understanding of the wicked in Psalm 10, and what does God do?**

**b. With Jesus' sacrifice in mind answer the question of Psalm 10:1.**

# Psalm 139

**For the choir director. A psalm of David.**

<sup>1</sup> LORD, you have searched me and known me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I stand up;  
you understand my thoughts from far away.

<sup>3</sup> You observe my travels and my rest;  
you are aware of all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue,  
you know all about it, LORD.

<sup>5</sup> You have encircled me;  
you have placed your hand on me.

<sup>6</sup> This wondrous knowledge is beyond me.  
It is lofty; I am unable to reach it.

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go to escape your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I go up to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I fly on the wings of the dawn  
and settle down on the western horizon,<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>10</sup> even there your hand will lead me;  
your right hand will hold on to me.

<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me,  
and the light around me will be night"—

<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you.

The night shines like the day;  
darkness and light are alike to you.

<sup>13</sup> For it was you who created my inward parts;<sup>[b]</sup>  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup> I will praise you  
because I have been remarkably and wondrously made.<sup>[c][d]</sup>

Your works are wondrous,  
and I know this very well.

<sup>15</sup> My bones were not hidden from you  
when I was made in secret,  
when I was formed in the depths of the earth.  
<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw me when I was formless;  
all my days were written in your book and planned  
before a single one of them began.  
<sup>17</sup> God, how precious<sup>[e]</sup> your thoughts are to me;  
how vast their sum is!  
<sup>18</sup> If I counted them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand;  
when I wake up,<sup>[f]</sup> I am still with you.  
<sup>19</sup> God, if only you would kill the wicked—  
you bloodthirsty men, stay away from me—  
<sup>20</sup> who invoke you deceitfully.  
Your enemies swear by you falsely.  
<sup>21</sup> LORD, don't I hate those who hate you,  
and detest those who rebel against you?  
<sup>22</sup> I hate them with extreme hatred;  
I consider them my enemies.  
<sup>23</sup> Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my concerns.  
<sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive<sup>[g]</sup> way in me;  
lead me in the everlasting way.

### Footnotes:

- a. [139:9](#) Lit *the end of the sea*
- b. [139:13](#) Lit *my kidneys*
- c. [139:14](#) DSS, some LXX mss, Syr, Jer read *because you are remarkable and wonderful*
- d. [139:14](#) Hb obscure
- e. [139:17](#) Or *difficult*
- f. [139:18](#) Some Hb mss read *I come to an end*
- g. [139:24](#) Or *idolatrous*

### Help in the Psalms:

As you read the psalter you will notice that interpreters have given all the psalm a title to help us see the big idea / summary of each psalm. These can be useful... but they not in the original manuscripts and therefore are not authoritative. However, some psalms do have superscript, like here is Psalm 139, "*For the choir director. A psalm of David.*". This is in the original manuscript and part of God's inspired word to us. These give us important details of who the author was, which often helps us better understand the context and meaning.





**4. Read verse 23-24. What is the right response to this all seeing and ever-present God?**

**a. Read Hebrews 4:12-13. How does God search us?**

**b. Read Matthew 5:43-44. According to King Jesus what is the right response to our enemies?**

**c. Read Ephesians 6:12 & 2 Corinthians 10:5-6. Who do we fight against?**

# Psalm 141

## A psalm of David.

<sup>1</sup> LORD, I call on you; hurry to help me.

Listen to my voice when I call on you.

<sup>2</sup> May my prayer be set before you as incense,  
the raising of my hands as the evening offering.

<sup>3</sup> LORD, set up a guard for my mouth;  
keep watch at the door of my lips.

<sup>4</sup> Do not let my heart turn to any evil thing  
or perform wicked acts with evildoers.

Do not let me feast on their delicacies.

<sup>5</sup> Let the righteous one strike me—  
it is an act of faithful love;

let him rebuke me—

it is oil for my head;

let me<sup>[a]</sup> not refuse it.

Even now my prayer is against  
the evil acts of the wicked.<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>6</sup> When their rulers<sup>[c]</sup> will be thrown off  
the sides of a cliff,

the people<sup>[d]</sup> will listen to my words,  
for they are pleasing.

<sup>7</sup> As when one plows and breaks up the soil,  
turning up rocks,

so our<sup>[e]</sup> bones have been scattered  
at the mouth of Sheol.

<sup>8</sup> But my eyes look to you, LORD, my Lord.

I seek refuge in you; do not let me die.<sup>[f]</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Protect me from the trap they have set for me,  
and from the snares of evildoers.

<sup>10</sup> Let the wicked fall into their own nets,  
while I pass by safely.

### Footnotes:

- a. 141:5 Lit *my head*
- b. 141:5 Lit *of them*
- c. 141:6 Or *judges*
- d. 141:6 Lit *cliff, and they*
- e. 141:7 DSS reads *my*; some LXX mss, Syr read *their*
- f. 141:8 Or *not pour out my life*

### Help in the Psalms:

Much of Hebrew poetry is shaped around the idea of "Parallelism" – where the two lines in a verse contain the same idea, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> building on the 1<sup>st</sup>. So take verse 1 here for example:

"LORD, I call on you; hurry to help me" focusses on the urgent need David has, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> line: "Listen to my voice when I call on you" returns to the idea of "I call on you" – and contains among other things, more personalised and human terms; listening, voice, calling. Together the two lines highlight the personal, urgent need of David which he expresses to God.

As you read the Psalms – let the two lines enrich your understanding of what the verse is saying.



**4. How is David being kept on the 'straight and narrow'? How can we work harder at this, especially living in a post-modern culture?**

**5. Although we are not sure of the exact meaning of the Hebrew phrase in verse 6-7, what is David clearly facing as he seeks to walk the path of righteousness? Have/are you facing anything like this?**

As righteous friends pray for one another knowing that, like David in verse 2, your prayers are pleasing to God and they enter his very throne room, *"And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne..."* – Revelation 8:3

# Psalm 146

<sup>1</sup> Hallelujah!

My soul, praise the LORD.

<sup>2</sup> I will praise the LORD all my life;  
I will sing to my God as long as I live.

<sup>3</sup> Do not trust in nobles,  
in a son of man,<sup>[a]</sup> who cannot save.

<sup>4</sup> When his breath<sup>[b]</sup> leaves him,  
he returns to the ground;  
on that day his plans die.

<sup>5</sup> Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD his God,

<sup>6</sup> the Maker of heaven and earth,  
the sea and everything in them.

He remains faithful forever,

<sup>7</sup> executing justice for the exploited  
and giving food to the hungry.

The LORD frees prisoners.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD raises up those who are oppressed.<sup>[c]</sup>

The LORD loves the righteous.

<sup>9</sup> The LORD protects resident aliens  
and helps the fatherless and the widow,  
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD reigns forever;  
Zion, your God reigns for all generations.

Hallelujah!

### **Footnotes:**

- a. 146:3 Or *a mere mortal*
- b. 146:4 Or *spirit*
- c. 146:8 Lit *bowed down*

### **Help in the Psalms:**

The 1<sup>st</sup> word in a Hebrew sentence is often the main focus of that idea. It's where the emphasis lies. We're not always able to translate that effectively into English, but in this Psalm the emphasis on who the dependable one is, is clear from vs.7b-10. The LORD... Him and no other... that's the point being made by having His name first in the line.

## **Study 4: A reality check**

### **So far:**

- Psalm 10: God sees all that the wicked do and will bring justice for the oppressed.
- Psalm 139: God is all knowing and ever-present therefore nothing is hidden from him.
- Psalm 141: A request for God to keep the believer from engaging in evil

**1. Read Psalm 146 and with a pen/pencil break it up into sections, giving a short title/summary of each section.**

**2. While employing a tone of praise what is the Psalmist committing to in Psalm 146?**

**3. Why will hoping in nobles/people ultimately fail?**



**4. What is important about the names he calls God by in vs.5-7, and how does it add to his overall purpose?**

**5. In vs.5-10 he gives a number of reasons for trusting in the LORD. Think about the promises that politicians, kings, and people often make for us. Why are these verses key for us in our South African context?**

**a. Make use of the righteous rebuke of a friend (from Psalm 141:5) – where do you need correction here?**

Read vs.5-10 out loud, with feeling – like a victory cry; and then praise the Lord in your prayers because he is the one who can ultimately bring good in this world of ours.

# Psalm 1

<sup>1</sup> How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers!

<sup>2</sup> Instead, his delight is in the LORD's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.

<sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams<sup>[a]</sup> that bears its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers.

<sup>4</sup> The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand up in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

<sup>6</sup> For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.

**Footnotes:**

- a. 1:3 Or *beside irrigation channels*

**Help in the Psalms:**

Contrasts like 'light/dark' and 'cold/warm' add valuable depth to Hebrew poetry. In many Bible translations Psalm 1 will be called, "The Two Ways". It's a Psalm of contrasts and as you read through it look out for them and explore the power of these in Question 4.



#### **4. Consider the contrasts in this Psalm:**

**a. What are they?**

**b. How do they add to the power of the Psalm?**

Often sermons will have “read your Bible” as an application. Taking your answers to Question 3 pray as a group that your reading of God’s word would lead you to greater delight in the God who speaks to you through it.

# Psalm 148

<sup>1</sup> Hallelujah!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights.

<sup>2</sup> Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his heavenly armies.

<sup>3</sup> Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars.

<sup>4</sup> Praise him, highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens.

<sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for he commanded, and they were created.

<sup>6</sup> He set them in position forever and ever;  
he gave an order that will never pass away.

<sup>7</sup> Praise the LORD from the earth,  
all sea monsters and ocean depths,

<sup>8</sup> lightning<sup>[a]</sup> and hail, snow and cloud,  
stormy wind that executes his command,

<sup>9</sup> mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars,

<sup>10</sup> wild animals and all cattle,  
creatures that crawl and flying birds,

<sup>11</sup> kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all judges of the earth,

<sup>12</sup> young men as well as young women,  
old and young together.

<sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted.

His majesty covers heaven and earth.

<sup>14</sup> He has raised up a horn for his people,  
resulting in praise to all his faithful ones,  
to the Israelites, the people close to him.

Hallelujah!

**Footnotes:**

- a. [148:8](#) Or *fire*

**Help in the Psalms:**

The Psalms have been the songs for public and private worship of God's people since before the time of Jesus. Psalm 148 would have been sung corporately as worshippers made their way to the temple (it's one of the "Songs of Ascent"). As we've moved from "worry to worship" notice how a song of lament, or worry, or despair fits into our lives of faith, and how God is willing for you to bring all your prayers and petitions to him. Lay them at his feet using the words of these 150 songs, and let them remind you of his majesty, faithfulness and care.

## **Study 6: A call to worship**

### **So far:**

- Psalm 10: God sees all that the wicked do and will bring justice for the oppressed.
- Psalm 139: God is all knowing and ever-present therefore nothing is hidden from him.
- Psalm 141: A request for God to keep the believer from engaging in evil.
- Psalm 146: Resetting our hearts to depend on God rather than on humans or human structures.
- Psalm 1: Expressing our trust on God through delighting in his word.

**1. Read Psalm 148 and with a pen/pencil break it up into sections, giving a short title/summary of each section.**

**2. It's hard to miss the call to praise God, but have a careful look using your answers from above:**

**a. Who is called to praise him?**

**b. Why should they praise him?**

**c. Think back to Psalm 1. How does nature as described here, teach us a lesson?**



**3. In Psalm 10 we called out to God with our despair and worry. How would the author of Psalm 148 comfort the author of Psalm 10?**

**a. What comfort do you need to take to heart?**

Spend time reflecting on some of the truths that have corrected or helped you move from worry to worship over the past few weeks. How can you bring these things to God in praise like this Psalm does?