

# **In conclusion - Reflections for worship.**

**A few notes on the Psalms suggested for reading in the Home Group.**

## **Week of September 13<sup>th</sup>. Psalm 38.**

**Read the whole Psalm.** Here is a man in utter desperation! Something has gone wrong in life – and he feels that God has ‘got it in for him’ (v 1). Whatever had happened, he felt guilty and accepted that he had done it in a moment of folly. (v 5). The guilt he was experiencing was a huge burden (v 4), and the tension of it all was giving him massive back pains (v 7).

How true to life this all is – let’s not beat about the bush! Sin has a serious impact on our physical well-being (v 8), can leave us feeling dejected and miserable (v 10), and ultimately drags us down so that even our friends avoid us (v 11).

So what has this to do with worship?

It encourages honesty and integrity in our dealings with God.

There need be no hiding behind pious expressions of praise – no pretending that we are anything other than what we really are inside. You can tell God exactly how things are with you; he knows anyway (v 9), so you can get real with Him!

One of the blessings of worship or prayer in a small group is that you can be honest, and continue to appreciate the warmth of loving acceptance regardless of your circumstances. Worship is not something for which we have to put on Sunday Clothes, or wear a mask of jollity. It is a time for reality with God – even if that does mean that we grow increasingly aware of our sinful behaviour and find that we need to cry out to God for help.

As Jesus and the woman talked by the well in Samaria, He put His finger on the spot that was damaging her and destroying her life. If this happens to you as you talk with Jesus you can make the last couple of verses of the Psalm (vv 21-22) your own response.

## **Week of September 27<sup>th</sup>. Psalm 104.**

**Read the whole Psalm** – long though it is – and read it with excitement! It is all GOD, GOD, GOD. Some of the verses are addressed to other worshippers (He wraps Himself in light, He set the earth on its foundations etc.), while other parts are addressed to God (You are very great. You are

clothed with splendour...etc). The whole Psalm reflects the generosity and grace of God. The people of Israel experienced God's provision of food as they made the Exodus journey from Egypt to the land of Promise, and the Jews of Jesus' day experienced something similar as He fed the 5,000. You too can worship and praise Him for your experience of Him today.

BUT – and it is a massive BUT – how do the flood victims of Pakistan experience Him? How do those still suffering from Earthquakes, or racial atrocities, or violence in their families, feel? How do the jobless of Upper Beeding, or the abused wives, or humiliated children, feel about God's goodness?

It is good to worship God with genuine thankfulness, but let it also be touched with a feeling for those who cannot enjoy things as you do – for they are your neighbours. They are the people waiting to experience God's goodness through you! Pray for them tonight.

### **Week of October 11<sup>th</sup>. Psalm 27.**

**Read the whole Psalm.** What a mixture of emotions David brings to God! Fearlessness in the face of trouble (vv 1-3); desire to know God better (v 4); confidence in God (v 5); assurance of success (v 6); and so on.

Yet running right through the Psalm is that vital thread of desire for God, and to catch a glimpse of God's glory, beauty and goodness.

Things are not things we have to wait for until we die and are carried over into God's eternal presence. This is a 'here and now' thing. It is the lifting of our spiritual eyes beyond the mundane, above the visible trappings of this space-time creation that we inhabit to 'gaze on the beauty of the Lord'.(v 4)

Is this a commonplace experience? No – it is not, but once in a long time we might experience a chink in the fabric of our universe and find ourselves overwhelmed by the awareness of God's nearness. You can track such experiences through the Bible, and hear the testimony of other believers as they recount what they have seen.

Maybe you can recall something of this when you have been acutely aware of God. It brings renewed hope, confidence in God, and deep-rooted joy.

David expresses his longing to experience God in that way.

If you honestly share that desire, express it to God as you pray and worship together. Let the light of God shine into your life too!

## Week of October 25<sup>th</sup>. Psalm 23.

**Read the whole Psalm.** Leadership is a tough role in any situation! Who on earth would want to be a Prime Minister, an Archbishop, the Chief Executive of a large company – or even a member of the leadership team of a church!

So the great thing is that we are all called to the same role – that of a follower of Jesus. And He is a great Leader.

This is a wonderful psalm, written by an extraordinarily gifted and effective leader who united and developed the nation of Israel, and yet who regarded himself as one of the sheep under the care of the divine shepherd.

The whole psalm breathes an air of utter dependence on God in every circumstance of life. There is not one hint of personal ambition or of past achievement. There is no reflecting on his responsibilities as a leader, no fear of what the future might hold, and he even looks death in the eye with unshakeable confidence in God. Out of that conviction King David wrote a psalm that has been used in worship for over 2,700 years. It is read at weddings and funerals; it has been set to music by countless composers; it has inspired artists and poets; it has brought comfort to those who were suffering, and it still it has not lost its power to move us today.

And why is that? It is because it brings us face to face with a wonderful God who knows us, understands us and goes on leading us through life.

It is right and proper to pray for leaders in Church, national and international affairs, but tonight remember that you are a follower of the finest leader there has ever been.

‘Jesus, you lead – I’ll follow. I’m happy to be one of your sheep because you are a great Shepherd.’

## Week of November 8<sup>th</sup>. Psalm 22.

**Read the whole Psalm.** What heart-rending emotions the psalmist displays as he works through the agonies of pain, rejection, and despair. But these are real experiences, not the imaginings of a poetic mind! The psalm brings us up short and challenges us with the harsh reality that following Jesus is no easy pathway.

We so easily forget that Jesus Himself trod a path of rejection and pain, and that this was the psalm he used during his final hours on the cross. His using of it was no mere recitation of something he had learned in years gone by; it expressed his own real feelings at being ‘despised and rejected’.

There seems to be feeling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century church that our worship or conversation with God should only express praise, and that we are not allowed to be real in expressing our heartaches, feelings of despair or uselessness.

Sickness, persecution, or getting old and perhaps facing dementia, physical incapacity, or even terminal illness, can push men and women to the brink of despair. We may be aware of it in the lives of others around us even if not in our own. Being real with God means that we are free to shout to Him about it.

You perhaps know some folk in that condition – be free tonight to say to God how you feel about what is going on in their lives and in your own.

### **Week of November 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm 80.**

**Read the whole Psalm.** Three times the psalmist calls out to God – ‘Restore us, O Lord God Almighty; make your face shine upon us.’ He has a deep-seated feeling that things have got out of control and are not as they used to be!

Can you remember better times?

Do you long to experience them again?

Are there days when you feel remote from God and that He no longer remembers you or cares for you? Prayer seems to go unanswered and all you can do is cry out to God ‘Help!’

One writer puts it like this-

*Lament is faith's alternative to despair.*

*Lament is the hopelessness that refuses to give up hope.*

*Lament is the process that digs in for the long haul.*

*Lament is the self-respect that cries out to a hidden God, ‘How long, O Lord?’*

This kind of psalm of lament is getting real with God and allowing ourselves the privilege of expressing our deepest feelings to Him.

The Home Group is no place for prayers of pretence. Looking round at our brothers and sisters in Christ and saying ‘Yes, everything’s fine, thank you.’ When in reality our hearts ache, and life is tough, is not the hallmark of true fellowship.

It may just be that our ‘Gardener-God’ is in the process of pruning our lives in order to make us more fruitful. If so, now is the time to support and encourage one another.