

# *Psalms: An Introduction*



This week, purely out of curiosity, I looked up Rolling Stones top 100 songwriters of all time. A few spots on the list surprised me a little but let's see if you agree with their ordering. I'm not going to read all 100, but I'll hit a few of the names that we are familiar with today.

97 Taylor Swift

95 Bee gees

91 Eminem

84 Kanye

82 Marvin Gaye

76 Loretta Lynn

69 James Taylor

68 Jay Z

60 Willie Nelson

59 Tom Petty

56 Madonna

54 Kurt Cobain

53 Stevie Nicks

50 Billie Joel

48 Elton John

47 Neil Diamond

43 Johnny Cash

40 John Fogerty

39 David Bowie

35 Bono and the Edge

34 Michael Jackson

33 Merle Haggard

31 Dolly Parton (3000 songs, 20 country #1)

29 Buddy Holly

26 James Brown

22 Van Morrison

18 Prince

16 Leonard Cohen

14 Bruce Springsteen

12 Brian Wilson

11 Bob Marley

10 Stevie Wonder

9 Joni Mitchell

8 Paul Simon

7 Carole King and Gerry Goffin (Wrote music for the Beatles, Dianna Ross, Whitney Houston, Gladys Night and the pips)

6 Mick Jagger and Keith Richards

5 Smokey Robinson

4 Chuck Berry

3 John Lennon

2 Paul McCartney

1 Bob Dylan

These are the people who write the score that lays behind the scenes of most of our lives. I'm one of those people who gets overwhelmed with nostalgia anytime a song from my early years comes on the radio. My wife on the other hand grew up weirdly sheltered. We have this pattern that we have probably played out 1,000 times in our marriage where an old song will come on and I immediately start to sing along and I'll look Esther right in her eyes and sing the rest of the line like I'm an 80s rock star and she's my groupie and the look that she returns to me is so blank that I almost feel the need to introduce myself to make sure she hasn't forgotten who I am. Then I say, "Remember this song?" to which she ALWAYS says, "no". Ugh. So frustrating. She grew up listening to bad Christian music or her mom's music from the 50s and 60s or Barry Manilow. She can sing every Barry Manilow song by heart.

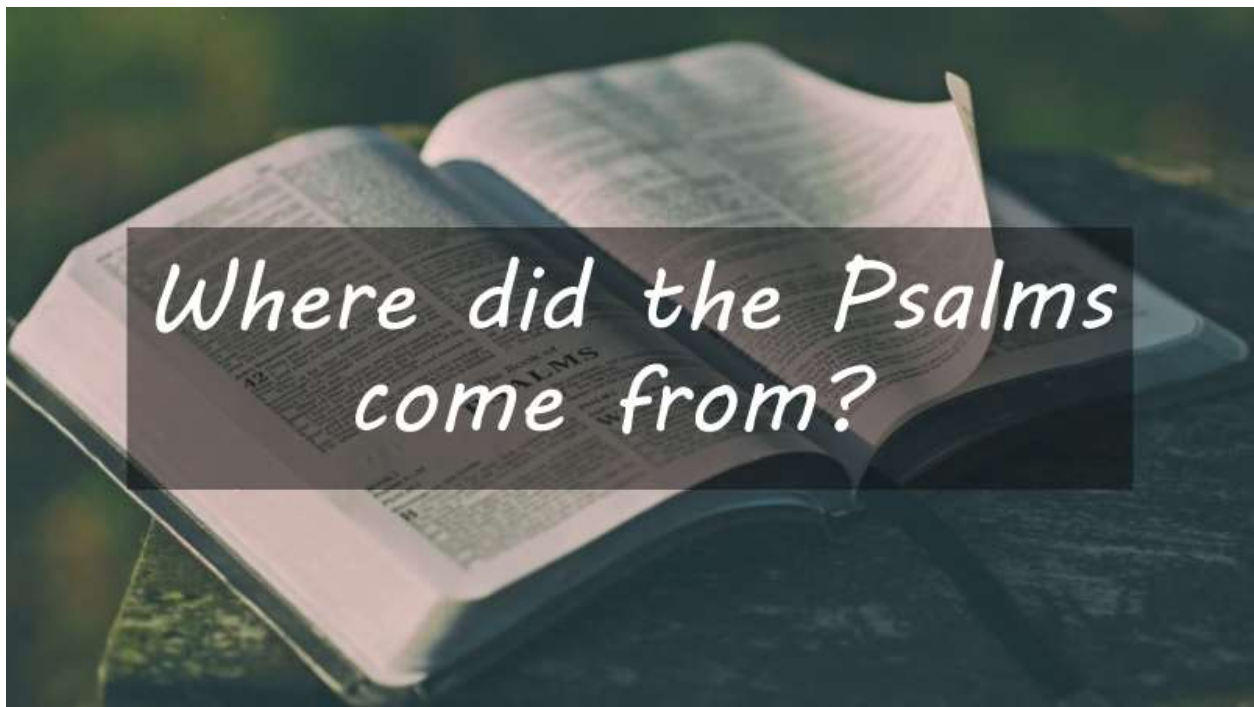
Music has a way of getting in our heads and lodging there, forever. Who hasn't had that one song that wedges itself in your head and just won't leave? An entire industry of One-Hit-Wonders has been built on this annoying trait of music to get in your head and refuse to leave. I actually looked up VH1's top 100 One-

hit-wonders and it was way more fun of a list than the top 100 song writers. I was singing out loud in the coffee shop where I was writing this sermon.

Well, I've been talking for a few months now about how we are going to spend the summer studying the Song Book of the Bible, and I'm crazy excited to announce that that starts tonight. Now, because the Book of Psalms is a compilation of 150 or so different songs, I felt the need to pare down the list of Psalms that we will actually treat this summer, so I decided that even though he didn't make the list of Rolling Stones top 100 song writers, we would focus on the Psalms that are credited to David. It seems to me that writing over 70 songs that are still enjoyed and covered and memorized by millions of people 3,000 years later should qualify you for at least the top 100 list, but just because Rolling Stones doesn't recognize the genius of this Jewish song writer, doesn't mean we can't make a great Summer study out of his work.

So tonight, we're going to lay a bit of a foundation that we'll build on for the next 25 or so weeks. We're going

to look a little bit at the Psalms as a whole and the roll they've played over the past 3,000 years and then we'll look a tiny bit at David and how his life will affect our study. So a little bit of tonight will be academic but I don't think we can dive in without this preface.



This is actually a very important question and will have some bearing on our study. Most of us as Gentile Christians just take the Psalms for granted as a book of the Old Testament and we see it as a book of songs and poems and we really don't think about it beyond that. Historically though, the Psalms didn't exist as a book until the Babylonian captivity.

When the Jews were taken out of their own land and found themselves in a foreign nation with no National Geography, no temple and no sacrifices, the Scripture, for the first time really, took a preeminent position in Jewish Worship.

Does anyone remember the story of Josiah, the young king of Israel just a few generations before the captivity? I don't want to get deep into the story, but Josiah was cleaning out the Temple and stumbled across the Torah. He had never seen it before and when it was read to him, he was shocked to learn for the first time in his life what God's expectations for His People were and how far the nation had strayed from God. See, we have this picture of first temple Jews holding the Torah at the center of their lives, but historically that just wasn't true. Josiah was able to become King having never even seen the Scripture.

Well, when the Jews were taken captive, they realized that they were going to need the scripture to be central to their lives if they were going to maintain any cultural identity, so the Rabbis for the first time ever began to compile the multitude of scrolls and scraps and they probably even wrote down oral traditions and maybe even a few original works. They basically began to

compile the first ever Old Testament Canon, though they wouldn't have called it "Old". They called it the Tanakh. So, the Rabbis of the captivity engaged in the process that the early church would later engage in with the letters and histories of the Apostles, and during this process, the Rabbis built, out of random individual scrolls written by at least seven listed authors as well as 49 Psalms written by anonymous authors, five song and prayer books. Some of you, if you have old fashioned Bibles with real pages, might have at the top of Psalms 1, the Heading Book 1. Some Jewish Bibles, have that heading over Psalms 3 as Psalms 1 and 2 are considered an introduction to the entire set. The Psalms were originally compiled to be five different books most likely to correspond to the five books of the Torah, and they seem designed to have a thematic purpose that would resonate with Jews in captivity. The complexity that this introduces for our study is the fact that David's Psalms are not only scattered throughout the collection, but the compilers were not interested in any Chronology in their compilation. So some of David's earliest Psalms could be late in the book and some of his more mature later Psalms come right at the front. I say all of that to say that we'll be bouncing around quite a lot.

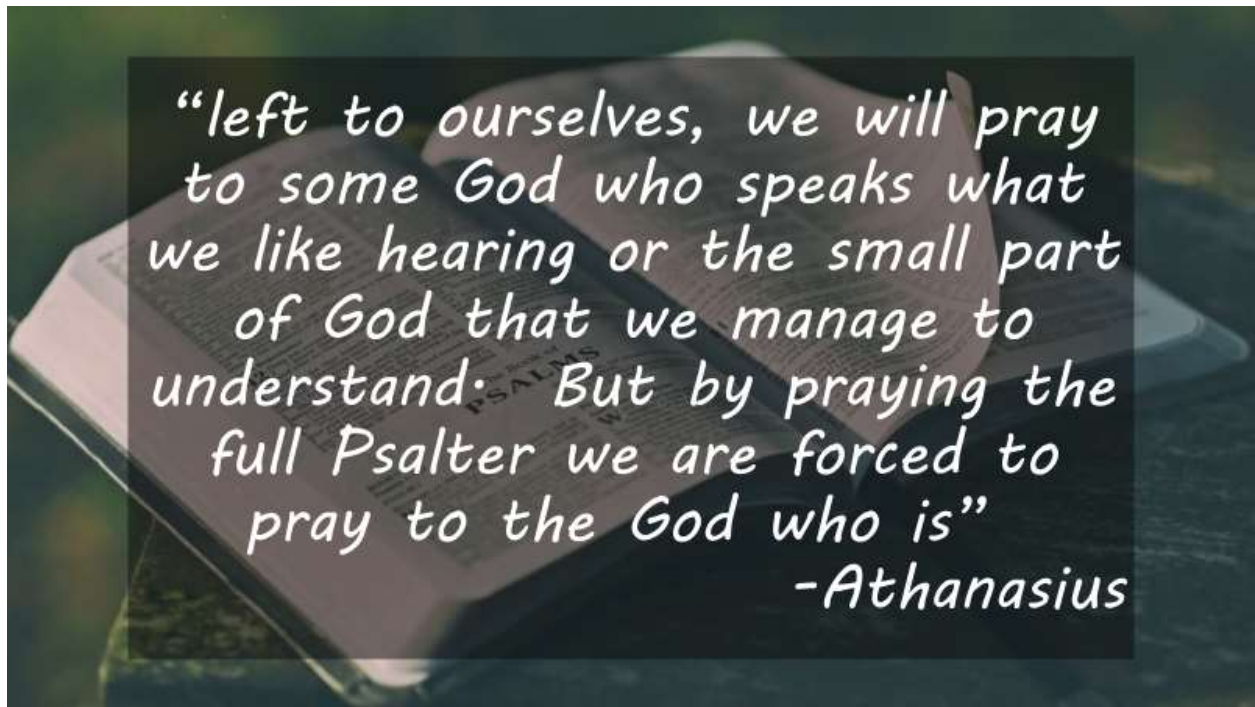




This is a huge question and there are too many answers to cover tonight so I'll focus on just a few.

First, Every reputable Theologian that has ever lived has recommended the Psalms be not only part of every Christian's diet, but that they also be the center of Christian personal and communal worship.

Athanasius in 300 AD said Praying the Psalms was the only way we could guarantee that we were praying to God as He is. He said, ...



Thomas Aquinas believed the Psalms to be essential because theology was an academic exercise involving mostly the intellect and when the Christian prayed and sang the Psalms the emotions were engaged, and the Believer found access to wisdom rather than mere knowledge.

Luther declared that every Psalm be used in regular Christian worship.

Calvin went so far as to say the Psalter should be the primary source for all Christian worship. He said, "It was

the design of the Holy Spirit to provide for the Church a common form for Prayer and Worship.”

C.S. Lewis believed worship to be an innate human behavior, so we will worship something, and the Psalms offer us the means, possibly the only means, to Worship the way we were designed to worship.

Until the Modern Era, the Psalms was likely the only part of the Bible most Christians owned.

So the first reason we focus on the Psalms, and I admit this is probably the shallowest reason, is because every generation of Christian thinker over the past 2,000 years has recognized the Psalms being central to the Christian’s spiritual health.

The second reason that we are focusing on this book is because this book would have been central to the life of Jesus and the Apostles. You can not understand Jesus and the writers of the New Testament outside of an understanding of the Psalms. Jesus quoted the Psalms more than any other book in the Tanakh. He understood his own identity through the Psalms and even sang their words as he hung on the cross. The preachers in the Book of Acts quoted the Psalms. Paul later quoted the

Book in his letters. Most first Century Jews would have the book of Psalms memorized not necessarily out of some religious discipline, but because this was the music they would have sang throughout their lives. These are the tunes that would get stuck in their heads.

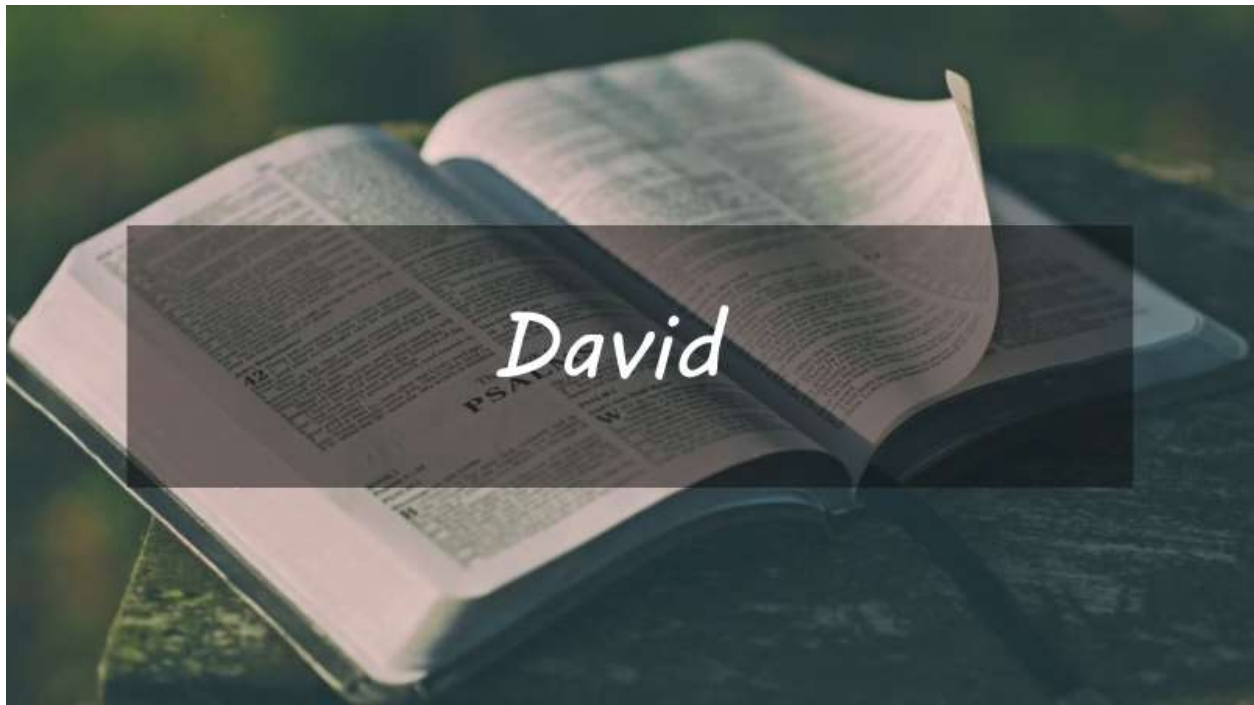
These are the songs they sang when they went to festivals and worship services.

These songs and prayers would have shaped their imaginations and helped to define their pain when they were hurt and their celebrations when they were joyful.

I don't think you can understand life in the 1960s apart from the music that was helping to shape that generation. Same with the 1980s, which was the pinnacle of good music and therefore society as a whole. Likewise, you can't understand the life of a first century Jew without an understanding of the music that shaped their culture.

So we study the Psalms because every Christian ever has thought it was important to do so, and because these are the songs that shaped our savior, but for our study this summer, there is an even stronger reason that we are digging into this book and that has to do with where

these songs come from and more specifically, the author of the Psalms that we'll be digging into.



David is maybe the most famous figure in the Jewish faith behind Moses. His life is so thoroughly laid out in Scripture for us to examine that he becomes one of the most talked about figures in both the Jewish and Christian faiths.

David was raised poor. In every interaction we have with Jesse, the evidence is that David's family lived in poverty. When Samuel shows up, there is no evidence that Jesse has any servants or farm hands. His youngest son does

menial labor which was a sign of poverty. When David went to work for King Saul, Jesse sent gifts to the king of a Donkey load of bread, a single skin of wine and one baby goat. Scholars and historians say that this size gift would be an insult from anyone but the very poor. Probably a huge sacrifice for Jesse, but not at all impressive to a king. But even more important, this poverty wasn't just a reality but it was also shaped David's psyche. Later in David's story, when King Saul was offering his daughter's hand in marriage and everyone was recommending David, David refused because he was poor and didn't deserve to be wed to royalty. So David wasn't just poor, he started out with a poverty mindset.

But, right in the midst of these humble beginnings, David was anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the future king. This is crazy meaningful to anyone who has ever had God speak something into your heart that just doesn't seem to be happening, because it will be years before this prophecy will do anything but make David's life harder. And, we tend to think that from this day onward, David knew he would be king but in 1 Samuel 27, David says that he knows that someday Saul is going to kill him. David lives a big part of his life in the tension

of knowing what God has said but also knowing what lies right in front of him and he bounces back and forth between which one he believed.

He slays Goliath and skyrockets into fame. Everyone is super familiar with this story. David gets hired by the King as a minstrel. Whenever King Saul was experiencing spiritual torment, David was able to play his guitar and calm the King down. I think this is huge because we are going to study Psalms where David is able to change emotional states halfway through the Psalm with such rapidity that it almost feels Bipolar, but I personally think that David, in his time playing guitar for Saul learn how to use worship to not only turn Saul's emotions but to also chase off his own demons.

Anyway, David also becomes Saul's armor bearer. Most would assume that this is step number one to fulfilling Samuel's prophecy. David gets in good with the Royal family by making a best friend in Jonathan, the King's son. He gets some fame, the ladies of Israel start to sing about him, but the King, the very guy who seems to be his meal ticket, decides to kill him.

So David goes on the run, feeling cheated and unjustly punished. He is not only homeless, but must relocate his

parents and they don't seem to appreciate the hassle. David knows it's not his fault but when has this ever made someone feel less responsible for causing their parents grief?

David continues to do good, but his exile only gets worse. There comes a point where he actually leaves the country and finds himself living with the Philistines who were the enemy and what makes it worse, he actually gets along better with the enemy than he does with the people in Israel whom he loves.

Eventually, Saul dies, and David becomes King. He tries to do something good for God and for the People of God by bringing the Ark of the Covenant back into the central worship life of the Nation, but he messes it up and someone dies. During this era, he's victorious in battle and grows to be the most powerful person in the region but all he really wants to do is build a Temple for God which he isn't allowed to do. David also learns during this time that he will have a messianic heir who will eventually take his throne.

Then, after a life that has been nothing but hard work from childhood, he drops his guard to relax for a second and falls head first into sinful failure which he then has to



compound to get out of. Despite a seemingly successful coverup, God finds him out and sends a prophet to confront him. David repents and finds forgiveness but isn't able to escape the consequences. He suffers from depression that leads to a passivity which is out of character for him. This passivity eventually leads to his family falling completely apart. The family drama gets so bad that one of his sons overthrows his kingdom and steals the throne. David now years older, finds himself in exile yet again. After a short civil war, David is finally restored to his throne, and he comes to grips with the reality that everything he has accomplished in his whole life is in the hands of both his immediate heir as well as his eventual prophesied heir.

David lives the ultimate rags to riches story. He experiences just about everything someone can experience. He plays the cheated and the cheater. He is lonely and yet seems loved by everyone who ever meets him. He feels responsible for the fate of his soldiers, his parents and he even struggles with the vague moral culpability for the fate of a group of priests who are killed for helping him. He did nothing wrong in the story, it was Saul who killed them, yet he knows that his success happened at the expense of others. David has marital

issues, Family issues, and self-esteem issues. He experiences wealth and leisure and though they create the space whereby he sins, he is also able to amass the wealth needed for his son to build the Temple which will bless the entire nation. David experienced it all and the most beautiful part of his story, to me, is the fact that at every stage of his life, David recorded what was going on in his head and heart, in his art. In David we have more than just a narrative, we have a record of how David maintained and expressed his relationship to God throughout that narrative.

Athanasius said, "Whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book (the Psalms), you can select a form of words to fit it. You can find a way to remedy your ills."

So here's how we are going to handle this study. David's long life can most easily be divided into five Epics.



# *David's Life*

- 1. The Early Years*
- 2. The Exile*
- 3. The Royal Years*
- 4. The Moral Failures*
- 5. The Final Years*

So what we hope to do in this study is to spend about five weeks on each of these Epics and we'll look at the Psalms that David wrote in each of the five phases of his life and how they compare to what was going on in his life.

So during David's early years we'll read about his relationship to nature and how he finds God constantly revealing himself in creation. We'll also hear from a young man who owns nothing but who barely feels the lack because God is all he needs. We'll focus on the innocence and purity of these psalms and how they reveal the character of young David.

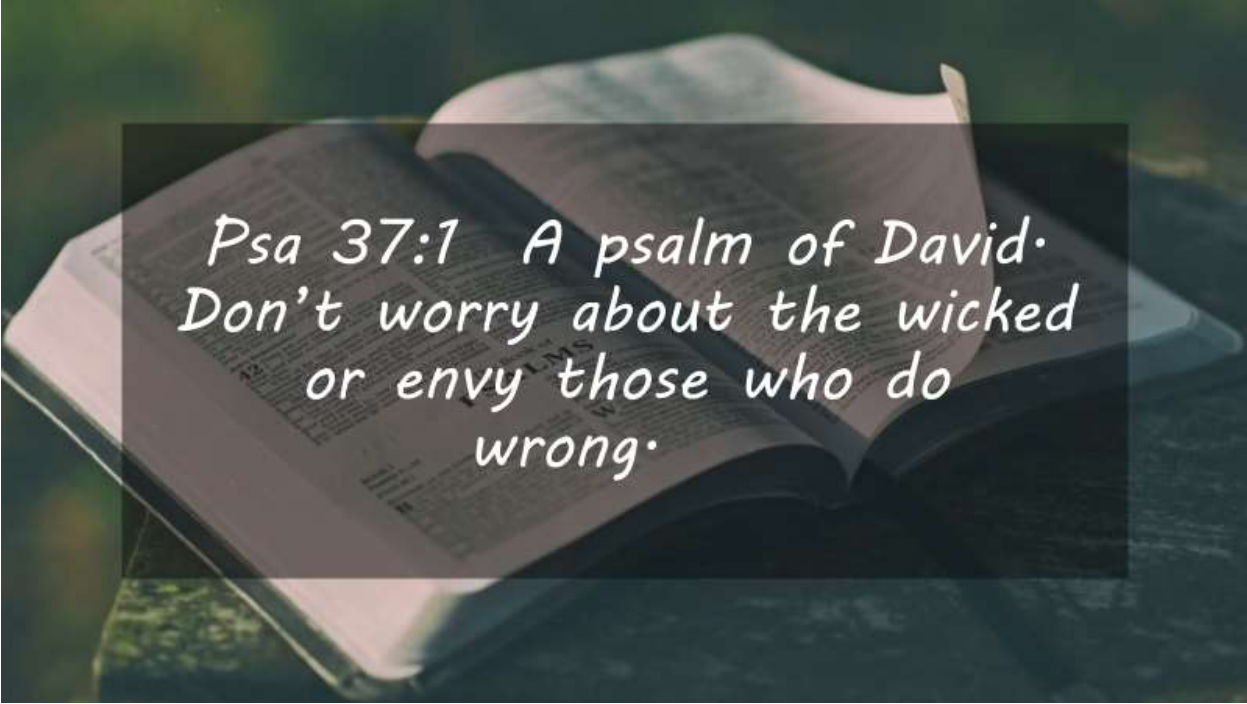
During the Exile we'll experience David's strong distaste of injustice. We'll hear this young refugee boldly declare his innocence. These can actually be Psalms that we struggle with because David will go so far as to declare himself sinless and unless we understand that he is referring to his persecution from Saul, we might get confused in our theology about sin. We'll get to see David's confusion and inner turmoil as nothing seems to be going the way he thought it should. We'll get to watch his first bursts of frustration with God and how David expresses these feelings.

Once he's King, we'll see David start to write his first choral Psalms to be sung in public worship services after he brings the Ark back into public life, so we'll look at some of the earliest corporate worship music. We'll also get to hear David as a brand-new king expressing his desire to be the altruistic ruler of God's people. Also, in this time period, once Nathan tells him about how someone from his house will sit on his throne forever, we'll get to see David write poetry about his future Messianic heir coming to rule.

Then, in the next epic, maybe most beautifully we get to hear David's heart as he repents for sin and then we'll get to hear him sing with Joy as he experiences the

forgiveness of God. But we also get to watch David struggle with the consequences of his sin as he falls into depression and almost a leadership paralysis, as his family crumbles and he writes music about what it's like to be overwhelmed with sickness and suspicion.

Finally, as his kingdom is overthrown by his son, David, on the run again, remembers God's early faithfulness. How he, David, has been here before and God took care of him. We'll read psalms that are very similar to those of his first exile only these lack all of the declarations of innocence. David has learned the hard way that he is certainly not sinless. Finally, we'll work our way full circle back to these words, written by David when he was old and able to look back over his long life. Maybe just imagine the man who lived through all of the ups and downs of his long story sharing some final advise with us tonight...



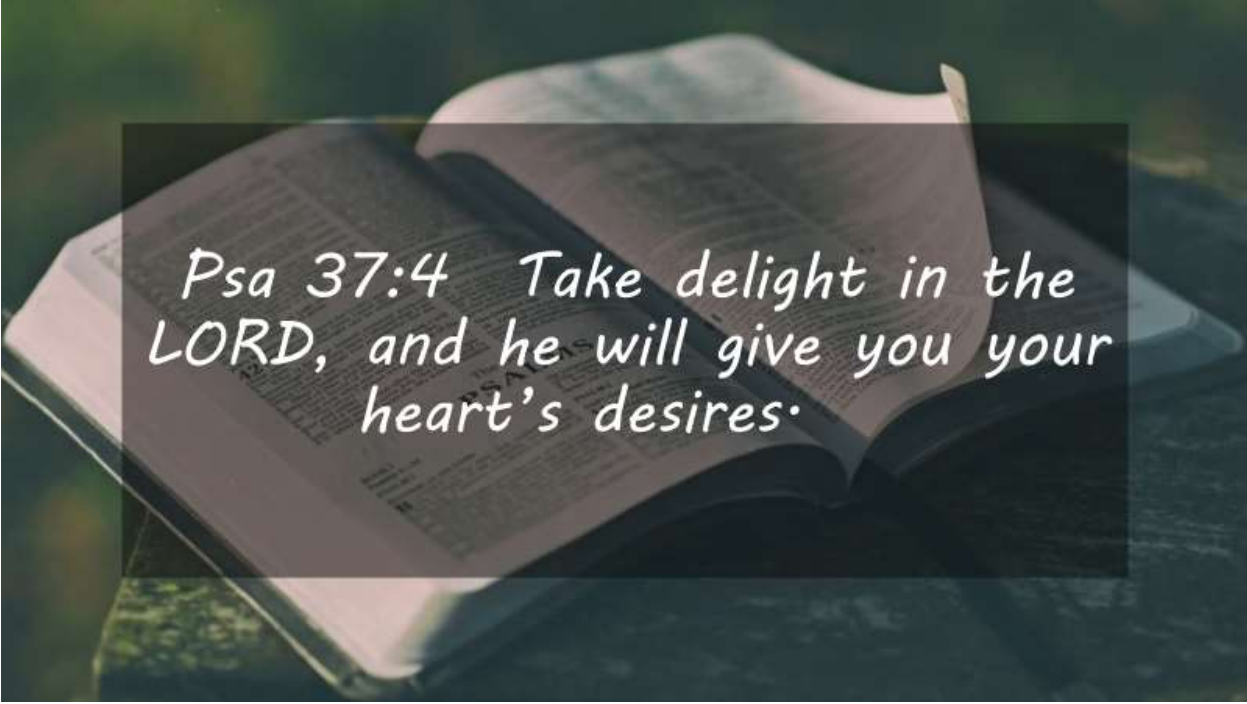
*Psa 37:1 A psalm of David.  
Don't worry about the wicked  
or envy those who do  
wrong.*




*Psa 37:2 For like grass, they  
soon fade away. Like spring  
flowers, they soon wither.*



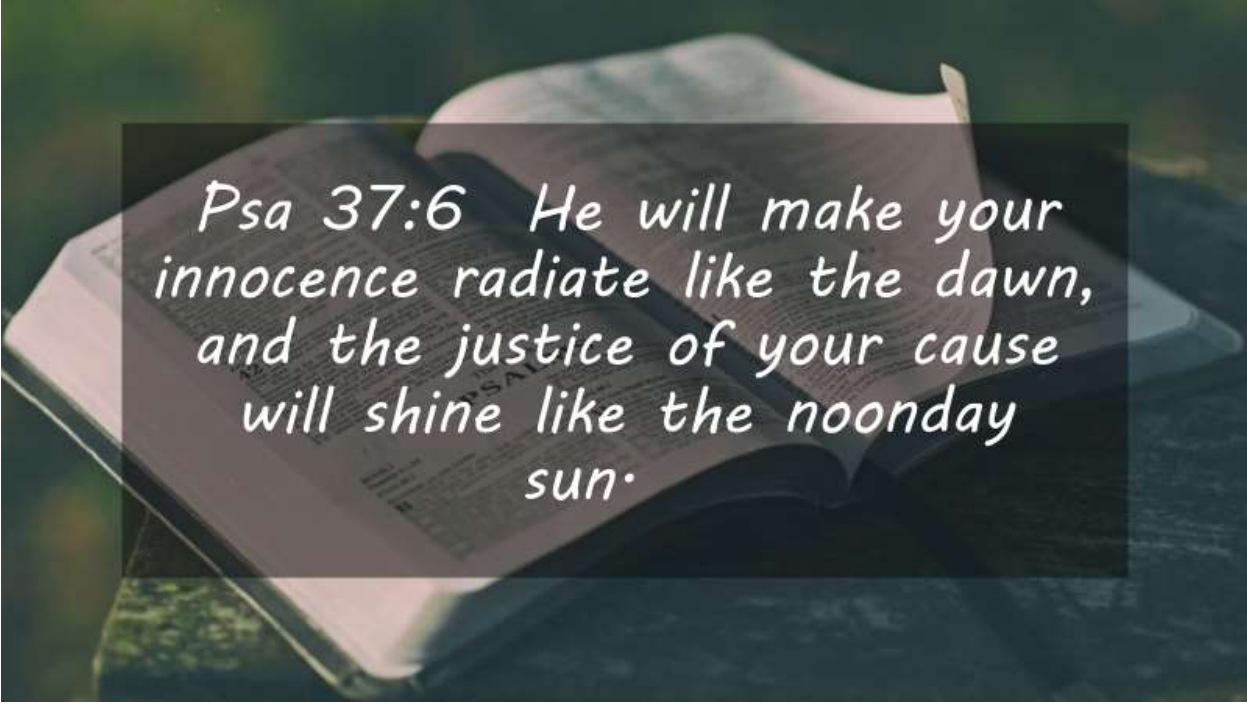
*Psa 37:3 Trust in the LORD  
and do good. Then you will live  
safely in the land and prosper.*



*Psa 37:4 Take delight in the  
LORD, and he will give you your  
heart's desires.*

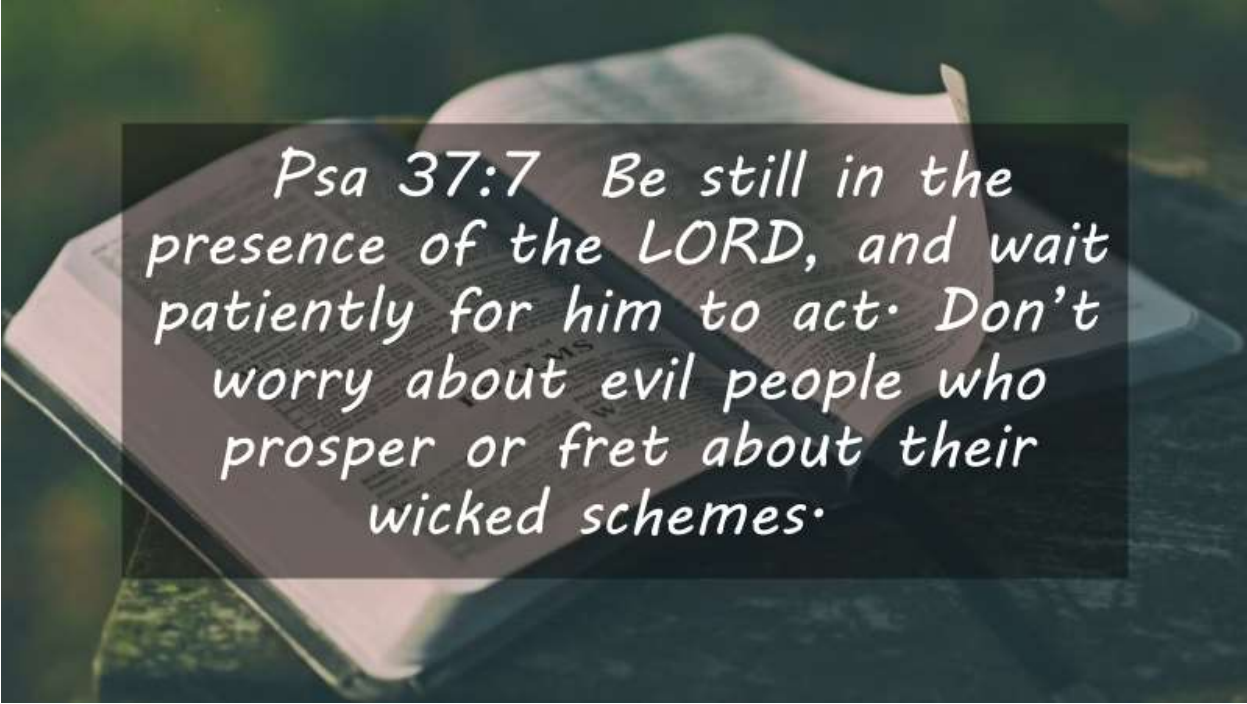


*Psa 37:5 Commit everything  
you do to the LORD. Trust  
him, and he will help you.*



*Psa 37:6 He will make your  
innocence radiate like the dawn,  
and the justice of your cause  
will shine like the noonday  
sun.*







*Psa 37:7 Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes.*



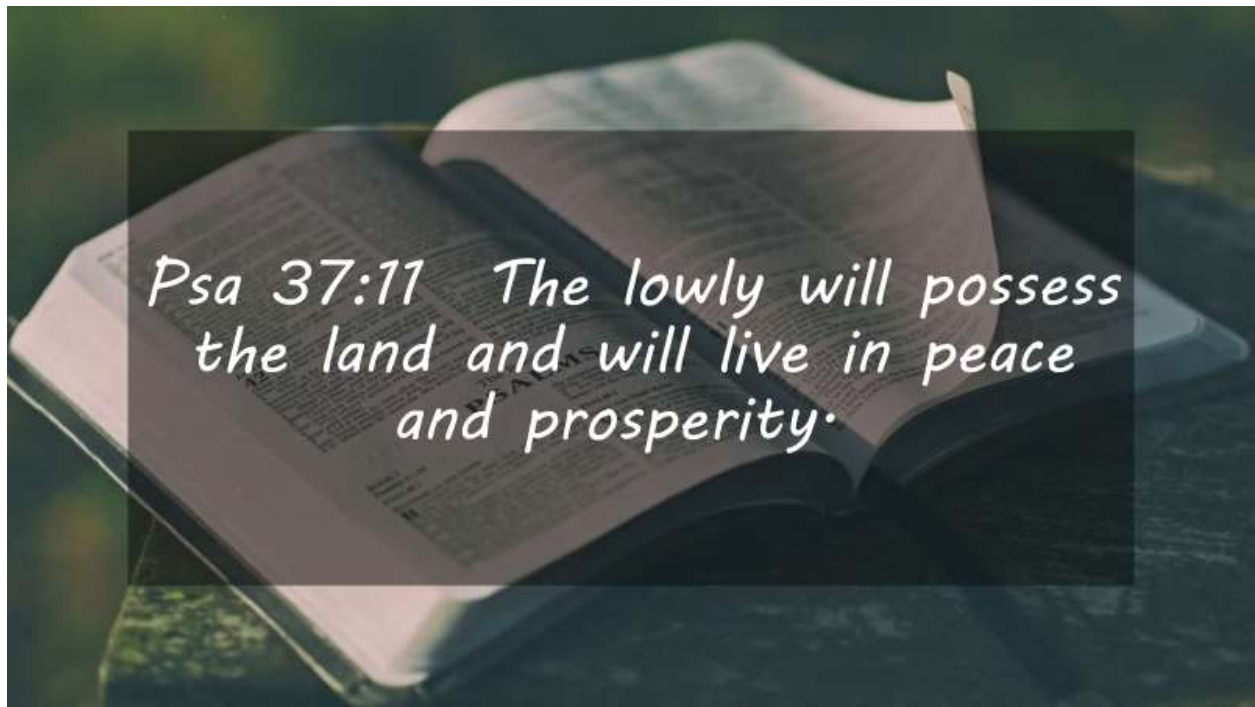
*Psa 37:8 Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper—it only leads to harm.*

An open book is shown from a high angle, resting on a dark, textured surface. The pages are slightly aged and the text is faint. A semi-transparent dark rectangle is overlaid on the center of the book, containing white text. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

*Psa 37:9 For the wicked will be  
destroyed, but those who trust  
in the LORD will possess the  
land.*

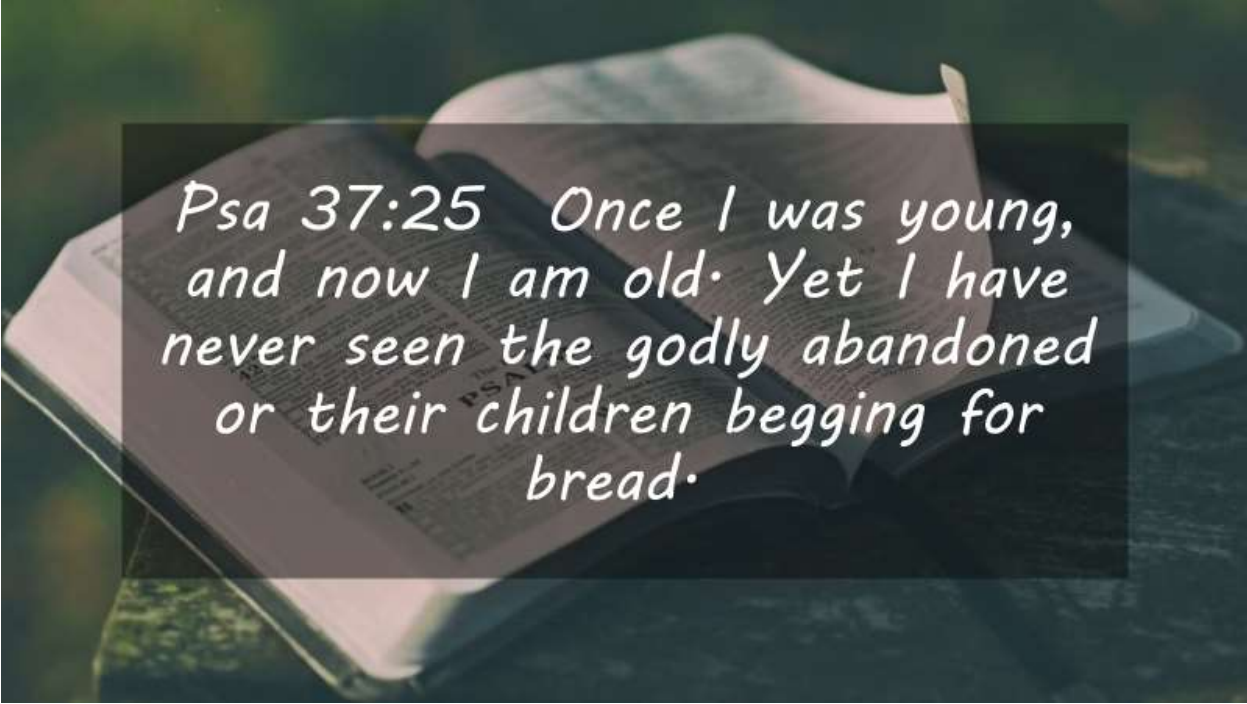
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*Psa 37:10 Soon the wicked will  
disappear. Though you look for  
them, they will be gone.*



*Psa 37:11 The lowly will possess  
the land and will live in peace  
and prosperity.*

The Psalm continues to pour sage advise on us but verse 25 confirms for us that these are not just the wishful musings of young David, but the mature advice of a man who has been through the passions and frustrations of youth, the fatigue of middle age and is now able to see life through a little wider lense...



*Psa 37:25 Once I was young,  
and now I am old. Yet I have  
never seen the godly abandoned  
or their children begging for  
bread.*



*So how do we  
respond to this?*

David's life as revealed in his art has blessed 3,000 years of God's people. Countless believers have used them to find God and to share their hearts with the God they find.

But David didn't sit down to write good art. David lived. David grew up tending sheep, struggling to get out from under his older brothers' shadows even as he annoyed those brothers like only a little brother can. He faced fears, he was proud, he was indignant toward injustice. He lost his temper, he fell in love, he lusted. He was petty. He was both conniving and often altruistic. He knew rich relationships but also struggled with his family and friends. And through all of this and so much more, David clung to God and shared all of it with his creator.

So, more than anything else, I hope David will serve as an example to us. Our faith in Jesus is so much more than a religion. It's a life. It has ups and downs. It often doubles back on itself and like David's second exile we find ourselves seemingly back where we started. We should sometimes sing and sometimes scream and sometimes shout for joy, and sometimes cry and sometimes sit in silence going, "selah".

I hope in response to this message and this study that we might learn to share ourselves, our real and beautiful and complicated selves with God and with His people. David

shared his guts with us for our benefit. God grant that we might learn to do the same.

So I hope above all else that we not just study the Psalms, but actually “DO” the Psalms. So when David says in Psalms 139, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.” we wouldn’t just marvel that David invited such an inspection, but I would hope we would pray those words with David and use the words of the Sweet Psalmist of Israel to go deeper into our relationship with God.

So there are a few things that I would love for us to do over the next 27 weeks (25 week study with two family services).

First, read the Psalms. I’m going to be issuing a couple reading plans to get us through David’s Psalms over the summer. I’ll probably have a heavy reader version and a light reader.

But second, for those on Social Media, we’re going to try something new. I would love for you to post

Psalms that jump out at you as well as your thoughts on the Psalms with the hashtag **#dothepsalms**

We may also try to do a discussion group on Facebook but for now, start reading and start posting.