

# WHAT IS A PSALM?

## A PSALM IS A SONG

Are they poems? Yes. Are they prayers? Yes. Are they meditations? Yes. They are all of these things (and more!), but they were written and composed to be sung. Why does that matter? Because songs are meant to help us express our innermost feelings. They help us find the words to make sense of experiences and feelings that can often be difficult to describe.

Think of it like an orchestra with each instrument representing a different emotion or experience. Imagine what it would sound like if they didn't have sheet music or a conductor. It would be a big noisy mess! The Psalms are like being given sheet music and a conductor, to guide and make sense of our emotions in beautiful song.

## A PSALM IS A SONG TO BE SUNG WITH OTHER PEOPLE

Also like an orchestra, one musician isn't enough. We need the full sound of many instruments to produce the music the conductor has for us. It's the same with us. In order to make sense of God and the world around us, we need to harmonize our emotions and experiences with other believers. So while we may often read the psalms in our lonely quiet times with God, we should never forget that they were meant to be read, prayed, and—yes—sung together.

## A PSALM IS A MODEL SONG

Have you ever found it difficult to know what to pray? I know I have! The psalms give us models (or examples) of what to say and sing. And the words found in them are often far more beautiful and meaningful than anything you and I could express, connecting us deeper with our emotions and God's truth.

## A PSALM IS A SONG FOR ANY EXPERIENCE OR EMOTION

In music we have a thing called *genre*—like pop music, rock, or R&B. The psalms have genres too. But where our modern music genres describe the style and sound of the song, the genres of the psalms describe the experience or emotion described in the song. There are...

- **PSALMS OF LAMENT** for times when we're looking for hope in the midst of sorrow
- **PSALMS OF THANKSGIVING** for when we want to thank God for what he's done
- **PSALMS OF PRAISE** for when we want to praise God for who he is
- **PSALMS OF TRUST** for when we need to lean on God in times of hardship
- **ROYAL PSALMS** for when we need to be reminded that there is a King who rules justly
- **WISDOM PSALMS** for when we desire to obey God's law and follow his truth
- **OTHER PSALMS** that don't fit neatly into any one genre