

WORSHIP AND THE PSALMS

Sample Lesson



Psalm 23



This sample lesson is from the Level 3 course **Worship and the Psalms.**

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Introduction

Our Open Learning courses are designed to help you learn by means of:



Home Study

This course is made up of **10 Blocks** and each Block has **four lessons**. If you have about $\frac{3}{4}$ hr to spare (very roughly), you can complete one lesson. These lessons require you to read and interact with the course material as well as with your Bible.

Each lesson is **programmed** to help you check your progress as you work through. To get the maximum benefit it is important that you use the course in the way it was intended:

1. Read section 1 (often referred to by the technical term 'frame' 1).
2. Make the response required, if there is one.
3. Check that your answer corresponds with the feedback given in the 'feedback' section at the end. (Wherever feedback is given, it is marked with a raven).
4. Proceed to section 2.



Note that the **course** is programmed—**you** are **not** being programmed! The aim of programming is that:

1. you can check frequently that you have understood the material presented;
2. you are stimulated to active and critical thinking;
3. you reinforce what you learn and are better able to remember it.

Sometimes, discussion frames are given. These are clearly indicated by a heading 'For Discussion' and box. Here you should answer the question in your own words and come to the meeting prepared to discuss the question as indicated.

At the end of each lesson, we encourage you to spend some time in reflection on how what you have learnt applies to you in the situation where God has placed you.

Group Meeting

Regular group meetings take place (normally fortnightly) where you will have the opportunity to discuss points of interest that have arisen and think through with others how your learning may be applied. At the end of each block of home study, you will also normally be given a five-minute quiz.

The group meetings give the opportunity for you to clarify ideas and to share your own thoughts and to listen to the ideas of others. The process of learning from the Bible in a group is an essential part of the programme. It is here that you are able to think through areas of application and to pray and support each other in your studies.

Practical Application

Built into our courses are questions that encourage you to apply the message of the Bible to daily life. You are also encouraged to think through how your studies relate to your own discipleship and the mission and ministry of the local church.

Block 2 Lesson 1

The Hymn or Descriptive Psalm of Praise



Preparing for this lesson:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take a moment to pray that God will help you as you consider different 'types' of Psalms.• Remember to keep a notebook handy to note down any questions or issues for discussion.
Objectives	<p>At the end of this lesson you will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. define the word 'hymn', as a technical term used in the study of the Psalms;2. name the two main elements in this type of Psalm and identify them in selected Psalms;3. given various subjects or attributes, write a 'hymn'.

1. We have noted that there are several different types of Psalms: some are happy, some sad; some are general, some refer to particular events; some are individual, some communal, etc.

In the study of the Psalms this word 'type' has acquired a special sense and the Psalter has been divided into several distinct types. The type which occurs most frequently is called the 'hymn'. If I tell you that it is not used in our ordinary sense, have a guess at the definition given to this type of Psalm.

- a. A religious poem intended to be sung.
- b. A psalm of praise.
- c. A song with at least two verses.



2. It is not very satisfactory to have a term used in different ways like this, and Westermann has proposed the term 'descriptive praise'.

This is because the main element in the Psalm of praise is a _____ of what God is _____ and what God has _____ (Insert: done, description, like)





3. Look for example at **Ps 103:3-5** and write down the main points in the description of God.

- | | | | | | |
|----|----|-------|----|----|-----|
| 3a | He | _____ | 3b | He | ___ |
| 4a | He | _____ | 4b | He | ___ |
| 5a | He | _____ | 5b | He | ___ |



4. There is another fairly important element in the 'hymn' or 'Descriptive Psalm of Praise', and that is the **call to worship** - though this is not always present.

The term 'Call to worship' is probably self-explanatory: it indicates a summons or exhortation to one's fellow worshippers to worship God. Look at the following references and say whether each one is a call to worship or not.

(Note that '1f.' means '1 and the next verse; i.e. 1 and 2'. Many books also use, for example, '1ff.' meaning verse 1 plus two or more verses following.)

- a. Ps 105:1-6
- b. 31:1f.
- c. 29: 1f.
- d. 33: 1-3
- e. 47:1



5. Summarizing, we can say that there are many Psalms which belong to the type 'hymn' or 'Descriptive Psalm of Praise'. These Psalms usually have two basic elements:

- a. (Often but not always present) _____
- b. (Always present) _____




6. Here are some typical 'hymns' in the Psalter. Write down in the appropriate column the verses which are 'call to worship' and those which are 'descriptive'.

Psalm	Call to worship	Descriptive
29	_____	_____
33:1-7	_____	_____
47	_____	_____
105:1-11	_____	_____



7. In looking at actual Psalms we are interested in a number of skills. We need to develop:
- familiarity with some Psalms so that we may be able to select an appropriate one for a service of worship (in church or home) or for private devotions;
 - the ability to analyse a Psalm, grasp its message and enter its spirit;
 - resulting from this, the ability to write our own Psalms (for expressing our own thoughts and for use in service, to say or sing together).

Or more briefly; familiarity, analysis, do-it-yourself. Which of these have we dealt with so far today? _____ 


8. In the remaining days of this week we shall be looking at some of the best known 'hymns' in the Psalter. Let us look first at some of the attributes and acts of God that are mentioned many times in the Psalms. Write down the words which describe what God is like in these verses. (It's best if you use your own words.)


Ps 96:4-6 _____

Ps 99:1-4 _____


Ps 136 (every verse) _____ 

9. Have a glance at Pss 105-107. They contain mainly what?

- a. Thanksgiving and praise
- b. The recital of God's acts in the history of Israel
- c. Exhortation and warning 

10. Mentioning God's acts does of course imply indirectly a. and c. The recital of God's acts is another way of saying 'what _____', 

11. As you probably know, the Israelites often recalled what God had done in history. In fact the whole religion of Israel was based on God's acts in history. What other religion is based on what God has done?

(Easy)._____ 

12. It may have occurred to you to ask, 'Why descriptive praise? Is there any other type of praise?' The answer is, 'Yes'. There is what Westermann calls 'declarative praise'. Here the emphasis is upon **what God has done in the life of the Psalmist**. Associated with this are:

- thanksgiving
- declaration before others in the congregation (witness, testimony). See for example, Ps 116.

Vv. 1-11 tell of the Lord's deliverance

Vv. 12-19 speak about making this known to the rest of the congregation.

Note the phrase 'sacrifice of thanksgiving' in v. 17.

We shall deal with 'declarative praise' later in our course. I mention it here simply to make the point that while 'declarative praise' refers to a particular act of God in the life of the worshipper, 'descriptive praise'

usually concerns more g_____ acts of God in the life of the psalmist and other worshippers.



13. We may now sum up.

Westermann's term for 'the hymn' is .

What are the two main elements found in this type of Psalm?



14. We'd now like you to write a little Psalm for a service of worship and hand it in to your GOLD Leader at the meeting. **A mark will be awarded for this.**

The theme of the service is '**God's power to bring good out of every situation.**' Here is a list of some of God's attributes or qualities. Underline those which you think will be most appropriate for the service mentioned above. Faithfulness, power, might, love, wrath, holiness, majesty, glory, dominion.



For Discussion

What other qualities would you want to include?



15. Note that these words overlap in meaning, so write down what **you** mean when you use them. I will give suggestions below the line but don't worry if your answers do not agree. You might like to use a dictionary or a thesaurus to give you ideas.

power _____

light _____

majesty _____

dominion _____



16. Now try and think of some of the things which God has done in history which illustrate these qualities. The more they have in common with your own situation, the better. Use the following categories, if you like. (If you use up the space before you use up your ideas, get another sheet of paper!)

- a. In the history of Israel _____

- b. In the life of Jesus _____

- c. In the early church _____

- d. In church history _____

- e. In bringing the Gospel to your own country _____

- f. In the history of your own church _____



17.



Activity

Obviously you cannot use all this. Select what you think is most relevant and write your Psalm with this in mind.

First do the call to worship. e.g. 'Come and praise the Lord our king. Sing aloud to the God of all the earth'. Emphasize even here the attributes of God that we have noted. For some ideas you could consult Ps 29, 33, 47, 66, 81, 95, 96, 98, 100. Use your own paper. Make it the sort of length your own congregation would appreciate.

You might like to consider what sort of language is appropriate for your own setting. For example, you might go for a more modern idiom, as in 'Hey, Guys, let's worship our amazing God' or something much more traditional such as 'O come all ye faithful ... join ye me in worship'. Personally I would go for something between these two.

[Incidentally, in my current setting 'guys' seems to be acceptable to both men and women (of a certain age, anyway) but 'dolls' is acceptable to no-one.]

18. For Discussion**Activity**

Now do the rest: the description of (a.) what God is like and (b.) what he has done.

You could consult the following passages for ideas:

- a. Pss 2; 9; 19:1-6; 46;48.
- b. Pss 105-107; 1 Peter 1; Eph 1:3-4.

Remember that our situation today is very different from that of the Psalmists; we should not repeat what they said. The expression should be our own, fresh and individual, and different from the Psalms of the past or of other people.

Note: This exercise has been done in the first lesson to give you time to revise your work. It has been done with a view to saying the Psalm but you could if you like give some thought to how it might be set to music. Anglicans can easily chant it – well, some Anglicans could. You might modify the words to form a metrical Psalm; don't worry about getting it to rhyme. We shall return to this later; the suggestion is made now for those who want to get started immediately. As noted above, a mark will be given for the Psalm if it is submitted at this week's group meeting.

Review

20. In review:



- a. State the phrase which we have used to describe the 'hymn'

- b. Name the two main elements, and say whether they are always present or not.

Reflecting on this lesson

Note down in your notebook anything from today's lesson:



- that you want to discuss in your group meeting;
- that is significant for your own personal faith;
- that is significant for explaining the Old Testament to others.

Spend some time in prayer asking God to help to put into practice what you have learnt.



Feedback: Block 2 Lesson 1: The Hymn or Descriptive Psalm of Praise

2.1.1	b. (a. is what we normally mean by a hymn today, e.g. 'There is a green hill far away'; c. is sometimes used to distinguish hymns and songs today. No doubt there are other variations on these usages.)
2.1.2	description : like : done
2.1.3	3a forgives iniquity : 3b heals disease : 4a saves from death ('the Pit') : 4b shows steadfast love and mercy : 5a satisfies with good things : 5b gives fresh strength (or similar)
2.1.4	a., c., d. and e. are; b. is not.
2.1.5	Call to worship : Description of what God is like and what he has done
2.1.6	Call to worship : 29:1f. : 33:1-3; 47:1, 6, 7b : 105:1-6 Descriptive 29:3-11 : 33:4-7 : 47:2-5, 7a, 8f. : 105:7-11 (In RSV, 29:11 is actually a prayer)
2.1.7	analysis, and, to some extent, familiarity
2.1.8	Your words, e.g. Ps 96 great, to be praised, creator of heavens, honour, majesty, strength, beauty; Ps 99 King, great, exalted, terrible (i.e. inspiring terror and awe), mighty, just and righteous; Ps 136 steadfast love ('chesed' is the Hebrew word, as some who have done other courses will already know; pronounce the 'ch' as in 'loch'.)
2.1.9	b.
2.1.10	God has done.
2.1.11	Christianity (Some would also say Islam. What do you think?)
2.1.12	general
2.1.13	descriptive Psalm of praise : call to worship : description of what God is like and what God has done
2.1.14	Probably 'power, might, majesty, dominion', but others are also relevant, and there is no 'correct answer' in creating a Psalm. : Your answer. Compare notes in your group meeting.
2.1.15	a. He can do anything, change people's hearts, kill or bring to life, control the earth - storms, earthquakes etc. : b. Very similar to power but perhaps more visible, e.g. the might of an army : c. At the sight of him you are filled with awe and feel your own weakness. : d. He controls everything; nothing gets out of control - even when it looks like it.
2.1.16	Just a few suggestions: a. Call of Abraham from idolatry; plagues and exodus, conquest of Canaan, destruction of Assyrian armies besieging Jerusalem (Gen 12, Ex 7-15, Jos 1-12, 2 Kings 18-19). b. Almost everything! Escape (Lk 4), healings and especially the resurrection c. Conversions at Pentecost, escapes from goal, Ananias and Sapphira, Conversion of Saul, firmness in persecution, etc (Acts 2, 4, 5, 7-8, 9) d. Strength given to those being persecuted, deliverance from enemies etc. You might know about eg. Polycarp, Wycliffe, Luther, Cranmer (a weak man who recanted, and then repented and burnt the hand that had signed the recantation), Martin Luther King, modern sufferers like Wurmbbrand, Solzhenitsyn, and many others. e. and f. depend on where you are and in what congregation etc.
2.1.20	Check your own answers.

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