



Shaped by God

*thinking & feeling
in tune with the Psalms*

JOHN PIPER

Shaped by God: Thinking and Feeling in Tune with the Psalms

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PSALM 1

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

1

Songs That Shape the Heart and Mind

PSALM 1

As we examine how we can learn to think and feel in tune with the Psalms, and come to be shaped by God, there are three things we should know about the Psalms: they are instructive, they are poems, and they are from God.

Psalms Are Instructive

First, the Psalms are meant to be instructive about God and human nature and life. When we read the Psalms, we are meant to learn things about God, and about human nature, and about how life is to be lived. Some poetry makes no claim to instruct the mind, but the Psalms do.

One of the pointers to this instruction (among many pointers, including the doctrinal use made of the Psalms in the New Testament) is that Psalm 1 introduces the whole book of Psalms. The book begins, in a sense, in Psalm 1:2, “His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law

he meditates day and night.” The word for law is *torah*, and the general meaning for *torah* is instruction. In other words, the Psalms cover the whole range of God’s instruction, not just legal ordinances. The entire book of Psalms is introduced by a call to meditate on God’s instruction.

Furthermore, consider the way the book of Psalms is structured. It is divided into five books that begin with Psalms 1, 42, 73, 90, and 107. Each collection of psalms ends with a kind of special doxology that marks the end of each book. From the earliest times, these five divisions have been seen as a conscious effort to make the Psalms parallel to the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), which are usually called the “law” books.¹

So when Psalm 1 introduces all five books in the Psalter by saying that the righteous person meditates on the law of the Lord day and night, it probably means that these five books of Psalms, not just the five books of Moses, are the law of the Lord—the instruction of the Lord—that we should meditate on day and night. Therefore, for this reason and others, the Psalms are meant to be instructive about God and human nature and life.

Psalms Are Poems

The second thing we should know about the Psalms is that they are poems. That’s what *psalm* means. They are meant to be read or sung as poetry or songs. The point of this observation is that poetry or singing is intended to stir up and carry the affections of the heart. So the Psalms are not just about thinking, but also feeling.

If you read the Psalms only for doctrine, you’re not

reading them for what they are. They are psalms, songs, poetry. They're musical, and the reason that human beings express truth with music and poetry is to awaken and express emotions that fit the truth.

One of the reasons the Psalms are deeply loved by so many Christians is that they give expression to an amazing array of emotions, including:

Loneliness: "I am lonely and afflicted"
(Psalm 25:16).

Love: "I love you, O LORD, my strength"
(Psalm 18:1).

Awe: "Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!" (Psalm 33:8).

Sorrow: "My life is spent with sorrow" (Psalm 31:10).

Regret: "I am sorry for my sin" (Psalm 38:18).

Contrition: "A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

Discouragement and turmoil: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" (Psalm 42:5).

Shame: "Shame has covered my face" (Psalm 44:15).

Exultation: "In your salvation how greatly he exults!"
(Psalm 21:1).

Marveling: "This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:23).

Delight: "His delight is in the law of the LORD"
(Psalm 1:2).

Joy: “You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound” (Psalm 4:7).

Gladness: “I will be glad and exult in you” (Psalm 9:2).

Fear: “Serve the LORD with fear” (Psalm 2:11).

Anger: “Be angry, and do not sin” (Psalm 4:4).

Peace: “In peace I will both lie down and sleep” (Psalm 4:8).

Grief: “My eye wastes away because of grief” (Psalm 6:7).

Desire: “O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted” (Psalm 10:17).

Hope: “Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you” (Psalm 33:22).

Brokenheartedness: “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18).

Gratitude: “I will thank you in the great congregation” (Psalm 35:18).

Zeal: “Zeal for your house has consumed me” (Psalm 69:9).

Pain: “I am afflicted and in pain” (Psalm 69:29).

Confidence: “Though war arise against me, yet I will be confident” (Psalm 27:3).

More explicitly than all the other books in the Bible, the Psalms are designed to awaken and shape our emotions as they provide instruction. When you read and sing the

Psalms the way they are intended to be read and sung, your emotions and your mind are shaped by their words.

Psalms Are from God

One last important point to know about the Psalms, by way of introduction, is that they are inspired by God. They are not merely the words of man but also the words of God. That means that God guided what was written and arranged them such that the Psalms teach the truth and, when properly understood, give the right direction to the emotions.

One of the reasons that we believe that the Psalms are divinely inspired and trustworthy is that Jesus does. In Mark 12:36, Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1, saying, “David himself, in [or by] the Holy Spirit, declared, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.’” Jesus believes that David spoke *by the Holy Spirit* (see Acts 4:25; 2 Peter 1:21). In John 10:35, he quotes Psalm 82:6 and says, “Scripture cannot be broken.” And in John 13:18 he quotes Psalm 41:9 and says, “The Scripture will be fulfilled.” Jesus believes in the reliability of the Psalms.

Therefore, the Psalms are both man’s words and God’s words. What man expresses through each poem, God also expresses for his purposes. When we read and sing the Psalms, our minds and hearts—our thinking and feeling—are being shaped by God.

Shaping Power of the Psalms

The miracle of the new birth shows us that the Holy Spirit raises the spiritually dead by giving them new minds and

hearts that together believe the gospel, love God, and want to be conformed to Christ. And yet, born-again people are not perfected. They are truly new, truly alive, truly spiritual, but in many ways unformed and immature—just like newborns in our families.

So the question for the early Christians—and for us—is this: How does the new mind and the new heart, full of imperfect thinking and feeling, pursue the fullness of right-thinking and the fullness of holy affections?

One of the main answers of early church believers was to immerse themselves in the Psalms. Psalms is the most often-quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. It was the songbook, poetry book, and meditation book of the church. Alongside the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, Psalms was the book that shaped the thinking and feeling of the first disciples more than any other.

It is this shaping power of the Psalms that gets at my aim in this short book. My hope is to simply jump-start, or deepen, that kind of Psalms legacy in your life. I pray for God-centered, Christ-exalting, Psalms-saturated thinking and feeling—because I believe that this kind of thinking and feeling will bear fruit in the kind of living that cares for people and magnifies Christ.

Three Questions on Psalm 1

As we take a closer look at Psalm 1, we will see both of our themes—thinking and feeling. Let's consider three observations that come from three questions.

1. Why Does the Psalmist Begin the Way He Does?

Why does the psalmist begin, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers” (v.1)? Why not just say, “Don’t be wicked, don’t sin, and don’t scoff”? Why draw attention to the wicked, the sinner, and the scoffer? Why focus on where we look for influence? Why repeat the warnings: “Don’t be influenced by the wicked. Don’t be influenced by the sinner. Don’t be influenced by the scoffer”?

The reason is that the contrast he wants to draw is not wickedness versus righteousness, but influence from one place versus influence from another. The contrast is about being shaped in one way versus being shaped in another. Will we be shaped in our thinking and feeling by the wicked, the sinner, and the scoffer? Or will we be shaped by the instruction of the Lord?

So the psalmist sets up verse 1 the way he does to prepare for the contrast in verse 2. Don’t give your attention to the world (the wicked, the sinner, the scoffer) so that you start to delight in their ways. Rather, speaking of the blessed man in verse 2, “his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”

Nobody walks in the way of the wicked out of duty. Nobody stands in the way of sinners out of duty. Nobody sits in the seat of scoffers out of duty. We walk and stand and sit in their ways because that is what we want. And we want their ways because we have been watching them so intently that what they do has become attractive. We have, in one sense, meditated on them, and now we delight in them. We are shaped. That is how worldliness happens.

You start by looking at the stuff of the world and its

ways. You chase the distractions and hear the empty promises. But then you look at them and begin to think about them so much that you desire their ways, and therefore you find yourself walking and standing and sitting in their counsel, their ways, and their seats. Eventually you wake up to realize that you are dangerously similar to them.

That's why the contrast in verse 2 refers not to duty and obedience, but to delight and meditation. The point is that the only hope against the fleeting pleasure of the world is the lasting pleasure of God's truth. Just as the pleasures of the world are awakened by looking at them long enough, so the pleasures of God's truth are awakened in the born-again soul by fixing our hearts and mind on Scripture—day and night.

Meditate day and night on the instruction of God in the Psalms, the psalmist tells us, and delight will be awakened. That is what the Psalms are designed to do: *inform your thinking in a way that delights your heart*. Meditating day and night on God's truth leads to delighting, which then frees us from the fleeting pleasures of the wicked, the sinner and the scoffer.

So the very first two verses in the entire book of Psalms confirm what we have seen: this book is designed to shape our thinking through meditation, and shape our feeling through delight.

2. Why Does Verse 3 Read Like It Does?

Now here is the second question for Psalm 1 that turns up our second observation about this psalm. Why doesn't verse 3 say: "And when you meditate on God's instruction in the Psalms and delight in what you see, then you will not act wickedly and you will not act sinfully, and you will not scoff"? That would have rounded things out nicely with verse 1.

The answer is that the psalmist wants us to see that the life of the godly is like a tree bearing fruit, not like a laborer picking fruit. To use Paul's language, the Christian life is the fruit of the Spirit, not the works of the law. Verse 3 tells us, "He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."

Here is the picture of the Christian life: streams of water. The life of God flows through the Word of God, the Psalms, and God's sovereign grace plants you by these streams (see Matthew 15:13). Your roots reach deep into the water of life. Your leaves are green during the drought, and your life is fruitful when others' lives are barren.

The root system is not mechanical or automatic. The roots work by meditation—when you give focused attention and thought to the Psalms. That is where the roots meet the water. The result is delight—spiritual pleasure in what we see of God and his ways—and from this delight comes all kinds of transformed attitudes and behaviors. This is how we are changed.

The battle to avoid the counsel of the wicked and the way of the sinner and the seat of the scoffer—the battle to be righteous and holy and humble—is a fight that is won by delight. And that delight is nourished through meditating on God's instruction in the Psalms day and night.²

3. How Does Psalm 1 Lead Us to the Messiah?

One final question to ask of Psalm 1 is what it tells us about Jesus. How does this psalm lead us to the Messiah?

Right away, the word *righteous* in verse 6 presses us forward to Christ as our righteousness. "The LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will

perish.” Only the righteous will survive the judgment in the end. So our question becomes: Who is righteous?

Psalm 14:3 tells us, “They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.” Psalm 130:3 asks rhetorically, “If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” Then there is Psalm 32:2, “Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity.”

So “the righteous” are the sinful who can somehow be counted as righteous when they are not righteous in themselves. How can this be? How can a holy and righteous God *not* mark iniquity? How can a holy and righteous God *not* count sin? How can he *not* require perfect righteousness for his perfect heaven?

The answer is that God *does* mark iniquity, and he *does* count sin, and he *does* require perfect righteousness. And that is why this psalm, with all the Psalms, leads to Jesus who “was pierced for our transgressions; [and] crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5). God *did* count our sin, and he punished it in Christ. He *did* require righteousness, and he manifested it in Christ. Romans 10:4 tells us that the goal of the law [the goal of the Psalms] is Christ, “for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

This gospel truth is central to the living water that flows into the roots of our lives. This truth is what we meditate on day and night when we read and sing the Psalms. This is the source of our sweetest delight.

Embrace This Gospel River

I urge you to embrace this gospel as the river of your life, and I invite you to use this book as a means to learn with

me how to think and feel in tune with the Psalms. May God shape us—our thinking and our feeling—so that we bear the fruit of Christ-exalting love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

PSALM 42

To the choirmaster. A maskil of the sons of Korah.

As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
while they say to me all the day long,
“Where is your God?”
These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I would go with the throng
and lead them in procession to the house of God
with glad shouts and songs of praise,
a multitude keeping festival.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.
Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves
have gone over me.

By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.
I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me?

Why do I go mourning
because of the oppression of the enemy?”
As with a deadly wound in my bones,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me all the day long,
“Where is your God?”

Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation and my God.

2

Spiritual Depression

PSALM 42

The heading of this psalm reads: “To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the sons of Korah.”

The sons of Korah were a group of priests who were charged with the ministry of singing. Second Chronicles 20:19 describes them in action: “The Korahites, stood up to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.”

The heading of Psalm 42, therefore, implies that this psalm was probably sung in public worship. This is in line with what we saw in the introduction. The Psalms are songs. They are poems. They are written to awaken and express and shape the emotional life of God’s people. Poetry and singing exist because God made us with emotions, not just thoughts. So our emotions are massively important.

The second thing to notice in the heading is that the psalm is called a *maskil*. It’s not entirely clear what this word means, which is why most Bible translations simply

use the transliteration of the Hebrew. *Maskil* comes from a Hebrew verb that means “to make someone wise,” or “to instruct.” When applied to the Psalms, it may mean a song that instructs, or a song that is wisely crafted. This idea of instruction is also in line with what we saw in the introduction. The Psalms are not only for the mind, but also for the heart. The Psalms intend to instruct, and instruction is ultimately a matter of the heart—the organ of delight. “Blessed is the man... [whose] *delight* is in the [instruction] of the LORD, and on his [instruction] he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1–2).

So this superscript, “To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah,” reiterates what we’ve already seen. The Psalms are instruction *and* songs. They are instruction and songs that have been inspired by God, intending to shape what the mind thinks and what the heart feels. When we immerse ourselves in the Psalms, we are being shaped by God.

Psalm 42: Fighting for Hope in God

The godly man of Psalm 42 is in the middle of unspecified oppressing circumstances. Verse 3 says that his enemies “say to me all the day long, ‘Where is your God?’” And verse 10 says the same thing, only it describes the effect as a deadly wound: “As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, ‘Where is your God?’” This taunt affirms the overall tone of the psalm that something has gone terribly wrong—so wrong that the taunters believe that the psalmist has been abandoned by God.

This apparent abandonment describes the external condition of the psalmist, but his internal emotional condition is no better. The psalmist is depressed and full of turmoil. In verses 5 and 11, he describes himself as “cast down” and “in turmoil.” In verse 3, he says, “My tears have been my food day and night.” He is discouraged to the point of continual crying. In verse 7, he says that he feels as if he were drowning: “All your breakers and your waves have gone over me.”

In all of this, though, the psalmist is fighting for hope. Twice in this psalm, in the middle (v. 5) and in the conclusion (v. 11), he encourages himself using precisely the same language: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.” He is not surrendering to the emotions of discouragement. He is fighting back.

I cannot tell you how many hundreds of times in my pastoral ministry at Bethlehem Baptist Church I had to fight back the heaviness of discouragement with these very words: “Hope in God, John. Hope in God. You will again praise him.” These verses were so central to our way of thinking and talking in the early 1980s that we put a huge “Hope in God” sign on the outside wall of the old sanctuary. We became known around the neighborhood as the “Hope in God” church, and to this very day, forty years later, these three words are used as our website URL.

Bittersweet Ending

The psalmist’s external circumstances are oppressive, and his internal emotional condition is depressed and full of

turmoil. But he is fighting for hope. And the truly remarkable thing, as we have just seen, is that at the end of the psalm he is still fighting for hope and not yet where he wants to be.

Is that a happy ending?

Like most things in this life, the conclusion is mixed. The faith of the psalmist is amazing, and his fight is valiant. But, then again, he is not where he wants to be in hope and peace and praise. Now, this psalm is in the Bible by God's design. Therefore, I assume that if we listen carefully, if we watch this psalmist struggle, if we meditate on this instruction day and night, then our *thoughts* about God and life, on the one hand, and our *emotions*, on the other hand, will be shaped by God. We will become more like a tree that bears fruit and whose leaves don't wither when the drought of oppression and discouragement and turmoil comes (Psalm 1:3). Examine with me the psalmist's responses to his inner turmoil.

How the Psalmist Responds to Discouragement

There are six ways the psalmist responds to the discouragement and turmoil that has come upon him. I'll list them in an order that they might have happened, though they surely overlap and repeat themselves.³ These six things show us what a godly person does in the midst of spiritual depression, and I think they are meant to shape how we deal with our own seasons of darkness.

1. He Asks God Why

*I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of
the enemy?" (Psalm 42:9)*

First, the psalmist responds to his circumstances at one point by asking God, "Why?" In this verse, *forgotten* is an overstatement, and the psalmist knows it. He has just said in the previous verse, "By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me" (v. 8).

What he means is that it *looks* like God has forgotten him. It *feels* as if God has forgotten him. If God hasn't forgotten him, he wonders, why aren't these enemies driven back and consumed? It would be good if all of us were so composed and careful in the expression of our discouragements that we never said anything amiss, but that is not the way we are. At least, that is not how it usually goes. In the tumult of our emotions, we are not careful with our words.

Early in my preaching ministry, when I preached through the book of Job, this truth came home to us as a church. For years afterward we developed a category for hearing the words of a suffering person, rooted in the words of Job 6:26, "Do you think that you can reprove words, when the speech of a despairing man is wind?" We called this category "words for the wind"—which means, don't jump on the words of despairing people. Let it go. They are in pain. Their words are often uncensored emotions. There will be ample time to discern the deeper convictions of the heart. Let the wind blow away the ill-chosen words. They are words for the wind.

So the psalmist asks, "Why?"—and it's a legitimate question. He may not have asked the question with theo-

logical or linguistic precision, but if he understands in time that he did not literally mean that God had forgotten him, we will let those words go. They will prove to be words for the wind.

2. He Affirms God's Sovereign Love

By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. (Psalm 42:8)

Second, in the midst of the psalmist's discouragement, he affirms God's sovereign love for him. In verses 5 and 11, he calls God "my salvation and my God." And even though he says that it looks as if God has forgotten him, he never stops believing in the absolute sovereignty of God over all his adversity. So at the end of verse 7, he says, "All your breakers and your waves have gone over me." *Your* breakers and *your* waves have gone over me.

In other words, all the tumultuous, oppressing, and discouraging circumstances are the waves *of God*. The psalmist never loses this grip on the great truths about God. They are the ballast in his little boat of faith. They keep him from capsizing in the chaos of his emotions, and there are many who know this to be true in their own lives. Many Christians have learned that relief in the midst of suffering is nowhere to be found if God does not rule the wind and the waves. The psalmist affirms God's sovereign love for him in and through all the troubles.

3. He Sings!

By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. (Psalm 42:8)

Third, the psalmist sings to the Lord at night, pleading for his life. This is not a song of jubilant hope. The psalmist doesn't feel jubilant right now. He is *seeking* jubilant hope. This is a prayer song and pleading song—a song “to the God of my life.” That is, a song pleading for his life.

But isn't it amazing that he is *singing* his prayer? My guess is that this is where Psalm 42 came from. This very psalm may be that nighttime prayer song. Not many of us can compose songs when we are discouraged and weeping day and night. That's why a singable psalter is good to keep around, or perhaps a hymnbook full of gospel truths. For example, Isaac Watts wrote these verses to be sung:

How long wilt Thou conceal Thy face?
 My God, how long delay?
 When shall I feel those heav'nly rays
 That chase my fears away?
 How long shall my poor laboring soul
 Wrestle and toil in vain?
 Thy word can all my foes control
 And ease my raging pain.
 (Watts, “Psalm 13”)

The Psalter of 1912 contains these verses to be sung the way the psalmist of Psalm 42 sang at night:

How long wilt Thou forget me,

O Lord, Thou God of grace?
 How long shall fears beset me
 While darkness hides Thy face?

How long shall griefs distress me
 And turn my day to night?
 How long shall foes oppress me
 And triumph in their might?

O Lord my God, behold me
 And hear mine earnest cries;
 Lest sleep of death enfold me,
 Enlighten Thou mine eyes;

Lest now my foe insulting
 Should boast of his success,
 And enemies exulting
 Rejoice in my distress.

(The Psalter, "Psalm 22")

These are not jubilant songs, but they are songs! And they are songs of faith. They are shaped by thinking and feeling with God in the Psalms.

4. He Preaches to His Own Soul

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

(Psalm 42:5)

Fourth, the psalmist preaches to his own soul. This is so crucial in the fight of faith. We must learn to preach the truth to ourselves. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,

Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man's treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, "Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you."⁴

On this side of the cross, we know the greatest ground for our hope: Jesus Christ crucified for our sins and triumphant over death. So the main thing we must learn is to preach this gospel to ourselves:

Listen, self: If God is for you, who can be against you? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for you, how will he not also with him graciously give you all things? Who shall bring any charge against you as God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for you. Who shall separate you from the love of Christ? (Romans 8:31–35, paraphrased)

If this psalmist were living after Jesus's death and resurrection, he would have said something like this. Let us learn with the psalmist to preach the gospel to ourselves.

5. He Remembers Past Experiences

These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival. (Psalm 42:4)

Fifth, the psalmist remembers. He calls past experiences to mind. He remembers past corporate worship experiences.

This speaks volumes about the importance of corporate worship in our lives. Don't take the significance of those times lightly. What we do in corporate worship with other Christians is a real transaction with the living God. God means for these encounters with him in corporate worship to preserve our faith now, in a way that we will remember later. If corporate worship were not a real supernatural work of God, it would be pure sentimentalism for the psalmist to remember his experiences. He is not engaging in nostalgia. He is confirming his faith in the midst of turmoil and discouragement by remembering how real God was in corporate worship.

6. He Thirsts for God

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1-2)

Finally, the psalmist thirsts for God like a deer pants for the stream. What makes this activity so beautiful, and so crucial for us, is that he is not thirsting mainly for relief from his threatening circumstances. He is not thirsting mainly for escape from his enemies or for their destruction.

It's not wrong to want relief and to pray for it, and it is sometimes right to pray for the defeat of enemies, but more important than any of that is God himself. When we think and feel with God in the Psalms, this is the main result: we come to love God. We want to see God, and be with God, and be satisfied in admiring and exulting in God.

That is my ultimate hope and prayer for you in this short book. My aim is that God would be revealed, and that you would want to know him.

See God's Face in Christ's Gospel

A likely translation of the end of verse 2 is: "When will I come and see the face of God?" The final answer to that question was given in John 14:9 and 2 Corinthians 4:4. Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). And Paul said that when we are converted to Christ we see "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

When we see the face of Christ, we see the face of God—and we see the glory of his face when we hear the story of the gospel of his death and resurrection. It is "the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

May God increase our hunger and thirst to see his face. And may he grant our desire to be fulfilled through the gospel of the glory of his Son, who is the image of God.