

Psalm 1
Small Group Notes for the Facilitator

Opener: Do you have a favourite Psalm? Share which one and why with the group (and let Steve know to be sure we cover it).

Q. What do you know about the Psalms? Answer as many of these questions as you can:

Who wrote them? David wrote a bunch as did one of his worship leaders (Asaph).

Who were they written to? They are written to Yahweh (God's covenant name).

What are the different kinds of Psalms? According to Hermann Gunkell: Lament (individual and corporate), Thanksgiving, Hymn, Royal (Messianic).

What do you know about parallelism? Parallelism is a way of repeating a thought to raise the intensity. Hebrew poetry almost always uses it. There are various kinds (with various names) but the main three are *affirming* (the second line repeats the first line but in different words); *opposing* (the two lines are often separated by "but"); *advancing* (the second line gives us more information than the first).

How many books are the Psalm broken into and what is the focus of each book? Five: The first two are Davidic, book three is on the verge of exile, book four *in* exile and calling out to Yahweh for return, and book five is after return from exile.

Read Psalm 1.

Q. Note the parallelism each time - there's only 6 verses can you identify which kind of parallelism is used each time?

A. For example (vv 1-2 do the rest yourself):

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners, [affirming]
nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [affirming]
but his delight is in the law of the Lord, [opposing]
and on his law he meditates day and night [advancing]

Knowing the kind of Psalm and the kind of parallelism helps us understand what the Psalm is really about.

Q. Note in these two verses the progression of the imagery - walks -> stands -> sits and the and the different words used for the unrighteous - wicked -> sinners -> scoffers. Does this tell you anything?

A. These things aren't usually by coincidence - there's usually a message - quite possibly it's alluding to a specific group of people each time or maybe it's just an image of all-inclusiveness? Walking, standing and sitting are our daily positions so maybe the Psalmist is saying, "all day long surrounded by evil but doing nothing about it."

Q. Of course poetry uses tons of imagery. In verses 3 and 4 the images are of a tree and chaff. What does the Psalmist tell us with these images?

A. The righteous man is like a well nourished tree - producing fruit in season and prospering. This is probably a call to Deut 28 - the blessings for obeying the law - that God would prosper Israel if they were faithful. The image of the chaff is from harvest when the grain is beaten and thrown in the air the chaff gets blown away by the wind and all that falls is the grain. The unrighteous person is like the chaff - a fleeting memory.

Q. So then how does the Psalmist employ this imagery to explain what happens in the judgement (vv5-6)?

A. First of all judgement is inevitable. The Psalmist explains that the righteous will continue to stand despite the judgement where-as the wicked will perish in judgement. It's an interesting turn of events but we're not told specifically how it will work out as that's not the point. Some could use it to point to annihilationism (that God will destroy the wicked as opposed to condemning them to a conscious eternal suffering). However we understand it, it has to be in the context of what was intended by the author and understood by the original audience.

Q. The Psalmist uses a word where most translations use "meditate." This word is probably better translated as "mutter" except that would give us a different understanding. What would verse 2 mean to you if "meditate" was replaced by "mutter"?

A. To me it suggests a welling up - that the goodness of the relationship (law = covenant) overflows within the person who is conscious of his or her relationship with God all day long (night and day).

Close: Remembering that the Psalms were written before Jesus, how does our relationship with Jesus reflect the sentiments of the Psalm? OR how does the Psalm reflect our relationship with Jesus?