

The Intentional Year

Praying the Psalms

Have you ever bought someone a greeting card and not written in it? Not likely. Cards from the store are wonderful ways of finding the right words for a birthday, anniversary, or graduation. They can even help us express sympathy or condolences. But we would not think about just sending the card as is.

The Psalms are like a greeting card— pre-written prayers to help us express thanks, praise, cries for help, lament, sorrow, repentance and more to God. They are like language school for our vocabulary of prayer. Since our native tongue is selfishness, if we were to “just pray from our heart”, we might be tempted to pray selfishly. The Psalms shape our prayers. More than that, they actually open us up to become aware of emotions we would rather hide or suppress. The Psalms unlock our soul and give them language.

But just like we would with a greeting card, we ought to add our own words to the Psalms— not because the Word of God is insufficient (of course not!), but because God wants us to know Him *personally*. The Psalms get us started, but the goal of praying the psalms is not just teaching us to pray and making us aware of our emotions; the goal of praying the psalms is to actually lead us to intimacy with God.

A simple way to pray the Psalms would be to pray a line or two out loud and then to pause. Rephrase the lines in your own words. Apply them to particular situations that you’re aware of in your life or in someone else’s. Then read the next few lines to loud as your prayer. Pause. Pray your words that emerge from the words of the Psalm. Keep going slowly until you’ve worked through the entire Psalm.

See below for some of our favorite resources on Psalm-praying.



RESOURCES

Answering God by Eugene Peterson

Praying the Psalms by Walter Brueggemann

Open and Unafraid by W. David O. Taylor