

THE USE OF PSALMS IN COUNSELING

In a major city on the West Coast, one out of every three people knows CPR. Many heart attack victims have been saved because people know what to do in an emergency. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that all scripture is God-breathed and it is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness so that every believer may be equipped for good works.

Every believer at some time in his life will meet someone who has an emotional need. That emotional need may stem from the death of a loved one, a wayward spouse or child, discouragement at work, a serious illness, depression, an unjust situation or many other reasons. Paul exhorted the believers at Thessalonica to encourage, comfort and admonish one another. But what do you say to someone who is really hurting emotionally? Sometimes you say nothing -- just be there. At other times the Psalms can be used effectively in emotional circumstances because they have some special features.

I. Since the psalms are songs they express intense emotions

People can identify with the emotions of others. Having seen someone else express feeling, a person may say "That's the way I feel also."

The Psalmists expressed the following intense emotions:

Ps 56:5 All day long they distort my words, all their thoughts against me are evil.

Ps 55:2ff Give heed to me and answer me, I am restless in my complaint and am sorely distracted ... my heart is in anguish ... fear and trembling come upon me.

Ps 69:1-3 Save me O God, for waters have come up to my soul. I have sunk in deep mire and there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters and a flood overflows me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes fail while I wait for God.

As a person reads Psalms emotional outbursts are found frequently. Outbursts of joy, sorrow, hurt, anger, grief, depression, praise, gratitude, and others. There are times when people say "No one understands how I feel, not even God!"

When a person sees that the people in the Bible have expressed similar emotions and God saw fit to record them in His Word for all generations to read, then maybe the person will realize that God does understand emotions and He has something to say to help.

II. The psalms have a strong emphasis on the character and works of God

Many Christian counseling manuals tell of the importance of building hope in a person. The word "HOPE" as it is used in the Bible means "confident assurance" and generally refers to the future. Hope is built through studying the character and greatness of God.

Ps 36:5-9 speaks of the love and mercy of God.

Ps 25:8 Good and upright is the Lord.

Ps 40:1-5 God does good things for His people.

Ps 103:lff Don't forget the benefits of the Lord

Ps 107 There are four different groups of people who were in some sort of trouble and God saved them.

Ps 121 My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. (If God can do that, then God can help you)

Hope is certainty of the future. People wonder if it is possible to get out of the pit of misery, depression, habits, fear, disappointment, failure and interpersonal problems. It is possible because God understands and He is powerful to work on our behalf. Our hope (confidence) must be in Him though and not simply the repair of our problem.

III. **The psalms show the human response of trust in God**

The Psalmists have a reason for remembering God's work and character. It is always to inspire trust in God for the outworking of difficulties.

Ps 42:5 Why are you in despair O my soul--Hope in God for I shall again praise Him.

Ps 55:16 I shall call on God and He will save me.

Ps 55:22 Cast your burden upon the Lord

Ps 56:3-4 When I am afraid I will put my trust in Thee.

Why is trust so important? It means you rely on what God said as being truth and your reliance is demonstrated in your obedience toward God's Word. One of the saddest things in counseling is to go through steps one and two, come to step three and have the person say "I don't believe it will work" and not obey God's solution. Time is necessary for obedience to be shown and for God to work in circumstances and in us.

With the following page you can be better equipped to help people as well as yourself when you go through difficulties.

Identify the problem
Inspire hope in God
Trust and obey

Psalms

Benedictions	20,32:10-11,115:16-18,128,134,135:19-21
Broken Relationships	27:10,81
Changing Thinking Patterns / Correcting Perspectives (the wicked get by with everything)	10,15,26,40,42,73,75,77,123,141,143
Children/Generations	127,128,145
Comfort	16,34,46,64,68:19,71,86,116,117,124:6-8
Discouragement	3,4,77
Depression	22,25:16ff,30,31:7-10,42,43,77,102
Encouragement	18,20,21,27,40,62,66,68,74,81,92,102,110,111,138
Envy (Jealousy)	73
Fear	23,27
Forgiveness/Confession	19,32,51,65,85,86,103,130
Funeral Passages	16,49,89,90
God's Faithfulness	61,72,78,89,102,103,105,106,117,132,136
Grateful/Praise	21,20,61,65,66,67,68,75,92,93, 95:1-7,96,98,100,104,106,111,113, 114,116,117,126,135:1-7,138,145,146,147,148,149,150
Guilt	31:9-10,-103:12,139
Heartache	6,31,38,41,55,142
Happiness	1,9,66,98,144:12&15
Hope	25,28,62,65,66,130,146
Idolatry	81,97,115,135:15-18
Injustice (Responding to)	7,10,26,34:11ff,37,54,55,64,75,94,140
Joy	16:11,20,21,33:18-21,59:16-17,66,96,98,100,126
Justice (Vindication)	7,9,17,24,64,68,75,82,89,94,140
Loneliness	68,88,94:9

Missions 9,11,96:3
 Old Age 71,92
 Physical/Emotional Problems 31,32,38,41,76,88,102
 Poor & Needy (Widows & Orphans) 68:5,72:12ff,68:5,70:5,72,82:3-4,113:7-9,140,146,147
 Prisoners 68:6,69:33
 Protection (Asking for) 5,10,28,34,44,70,71,94,97,124:1-5,144:1,2,10,11
 Salvation (price) or steps of 14:23-no one who does good,146
 Seeking God 42,44,61,63,80,86,105,143
 Security (Trust) 2,4,9:7-10,16:7ff,20,23,27,31:14ff,33:16-22,34,36,46(not in riches) 62,71,86,91,121,125,131,139
 Self-esteem 8,33:15ff,139
 Sorrow (trouble) 13,25,55,74,88,126:5-6,142
 Success (Stability Guidance) 1,15,19,32,34,48:14,101,126
 Unity (Peace) 133
 Victory 8,27,33:16ff,34,76,108,126
 Warnings 78,95:8-11
 Wealth 49,52,63,
 Worry (Anxiety) 94:19