

Psalms: Experience God Project

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We've had a couple of our recent greeters talk about their challenge to spend time with God regularly. As a new father, I can relate.

I had to change Grace in the middle of the night after a "blowout." She's crying because she's hungry and messy. I have just enough wipes, I think. I set a change of clothes beside her, take off her dirty pajamas and diaper. I use the last wipe cleaning her up.

- All that's left is putting on a new diaper.

Something about the cold air must have stimulated her bladder. Now she's wet, cold, and hungry and she's screaming. Meanwhile, I have to find a refill pack for the wipes, clean her again, find clean clothes and then dress her.

- I should have put the new diaper on first, right?

TRYING TO CONNECT WITH GOD

I love being a father, but everything is more complicated and stressful. "Sleeping in" now means 7:00 am, if we're lucky. Mornings aren't not peaceful anymore and by we're exhausted.

- Quiet times I can't relax and just enjoy time with God.
- As a pastor, I read my Bible for "work."
- After a while, I find myself feeling disconnected from God.

I have found help reconnecting in a book that I used to avoid: Psalms.

"SQUISHY" PSALMS

Have you ever walked through a quiet pasture on a country farm? Maybe it's a pleasant spring day, the grass is green and pasture is bordered by a lush forest. In the distance are snowcapped mountains. You breathe in fresh air, feel a warm breeze, listen to the birds chirp as you walk along.

- Then you step in something "squishy."

That's how I've felt as I read through the Psalms. I have always had a love/hate relationship with them. I can be caught up in reading:

The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. The

heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. *Psalm 97:1-2; 5-66 NIV*

Psalms like this have the power to capture our imagination and inspire worship. But then I'll step into Psalm 137:

O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us – he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.
Psalm 137:8-9 NIV

- That's uplifting!
- We like to pretend these passages don't exist, but there they are.
- So we just avoid it – how many sermons have you heard on psalm 137?

PROFESSOR BROYLES

Help came from the last place I expected: a graduate-level course on OT liturgy. In that class I met Professor Broyles. Broyles looked the part of an OT scholar: curly, graying hair, a beard, and glasses. He always wore a sweater and he spoke softly, slowly and contemplatively.

- Broyles helped me get over my fear of Psalms and actually enjoy them..
- He taught me why psalms like psalm 137 were written.
- He showed me how they could help me fall more in love with my God.

I am going to share some of his secrets with you. I want to help you enjoy the Psalm, even the ones that go “squish.” I hope that you will incorporate the Psalms into your times with God, because they are one the best place to get to know Him personally.

- The NT letters, (like Philippians) teach us about God.
- The history books (like Genesis and) teach us what God has done.
- Broyles showed us that the psalms do something special; they invite us to experience God.

The book of Psalms was simply a hymnbook, Israel's God-ordained hymnbook, a collection of 150 songs and poems, written by several authors over about seven hundred years. These psalms were written by people just like you and me, who wanted to express their love for God.

- The biggest difference is that they helped write the Bible – something not on my résumé.

FINDING GOD IN THE PSALMS

Everyday life can make me feel so distant from God. I get caught up in the nightly routine of: change the baby, put her in pajamas, swaddled her, put her in her crib, tuck her in, wind up the mobile, kiss her goodnight, fill up the humidifier, turn it on, feed the cat so I can lure her into the office, lock her in the office so it can't smother Grace (which I know is a myth but better-safe-than-sorry), check the doors, set the house alarm, turn off the lights, brush my teeth, check the alarm clock, then climb into bed.

We all have these routines. The problem comes when our time with God become a routine instead of relationship. Psalms helps me break through these routines. They help me gain a fresh appreciation of God, focus on His greatness, and be drawn into worship again.

- They invite me to step along side the psalmists.
- Their worship becomes my worship.
- In the middle of all of my activities, I find myself experiencing God.

I read:

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Psalm 63:1 NIV

I find myself longing for God in a way that a sermon couldn't bring about. I read:

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. Psalm 29:2-4 NIV

I find myself worshiping a majestic God. I read:

Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD. Psalm 25:6-7 NIV

I experience His love and acceptance, no matter what I have done.

LEGITIMATE LAMENTS

So what about the "dashing the kids upon the rocks"? Professor Broyles taught us that 47% of the psalms fall into a category known as "laments." True to their name, laments are filled with pain and grief, and even accusation against God.

- The Israelites knew that they could pour out their frustration and anger to God.

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Psalm 13:1-2 NIV

- They also knew that they could also trust Him in the midst of their pain.

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. Psalm 13:5 NIV

- Laments almost invariably end in a statement of praise, before the solution came.

I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me. Psalm 13:6 NIV

I believe God put the laments in the Bible to show us it's okay to hurt and be angry with Him. But laments also teach us to keep a perspective of trust and worship even in the midst of pain.

Imagine that you are a Jew in concentration camp. The Nazis have slaughtered everyone close to you; you are almost dead from starvation and abuse. I cannot imagine that pain, but I can imagine saying:

...happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us—he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks. Psalm 137:8-9 NIV

This is exactly the situation the psalmist was in. He had watched his friends, his family, his nation be destroyed by the Babylonians. Is this a righteous desire? No, but it is better to allow those in agony to honestly express and process their pain than correct how they express it.

- By including this in Psalms, God lets us know it's okay to express our pain, even to this extent.

TYPES OF PSALMS

I hope that you have been encouraged to read the Psalms, without fear of stepping in something "squishy." In order to help you use the Psalms in your time with God, we're handing out a list of the different types of psalms and where you can find them.

- Keep this list in your Bible, in the book of Psalms.
1. *Songs of praise* invite us to worship God.
 2. *Songs of lament* help us express our pain and cry out to God for help.
 3. *Songs of wisdom* call us to godly living.
 4. *Songs of thanksgivings and trust* are testimonies to God's goodness.
 5. *Songs used in the temple* invite us to examine ourselves and enter His Presence.
 6. *Prayers for the king* show God's faithfulness to His servants.

THIS WEEKS PROJECT

Here is a little project for you this week: Use this list to find one psalm that fits your situation and take a couple of minutes to read and dwell on it.

- If you want to push your comfort level a little, read it out loud as your prayer of worship.
- If you want to try something new, memorize a meaningful verse or two and speak them to God next time Ken leads us in a time of worship response.

You will find that this little project will help you experience God in a deeper, and more meaningful and personal way.