



Tim Pauley
PO Box 58403, Charleston, WV 25358
304.767.8430
tim.pauley@capitolcom.org

David's Psalms: Thinking & Feeling with God

Our lives are full of joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies, victories and defeats. With this range of experiences comes a wide range of feelings and emotions. We often go through these experiences and the accompanying emotions without considering how they affect our relationship with God, what God has to do with them, and what we can learn from them. We learn a lot from David as we see him experience the highs and the lows in his life. We learn even more when we read the Psalms he wrote during those experiences. The Psalms are really songs or poems. Music and poetry are intended to stir up and direct the emotions of our heart. Times of victory and blessing bring joy and thanksgiving that should be directed to the Lord. Times of trials, tragedy, or suffering bring sorrow, doubt, and questioning that should also be taken to the Lord. God gave us the Psalms to change our thinking about God as they instruct us about Himself, about us, and about life. God also wants to use the Psalms to direct our emotions ("affections") in keeping with the instruction they give. We can hardly study the life of David without considering the Psalms that he wrote. These Psalms were given to us to help change our thinking and feeling about God! ¹

The Highs and Lows of David's Life

When we read the account of David's life in 1 & 2 Samuel, we are struck by the tremendous range of experiences He faced. He had the great victory over Goliath. Then, though he faithfully served King Saul, in pride and jealousy Saul tried to kill David (1 Samuel 19:10), spending several years pursuing him, forcing him to hide in caves and enemy lands. David experienced the death of Saul and Saul's son Jonathan, his closest friend (1 Sam. 31; 2 Sam. 1). David became king over the southern part of Israel (2 Sam. 2), eventually coming to reign over the entire nation (2 Sam. 5). David had great victories leading his men into battle (2 Sam. 8). Yet he made sinful decisions as a leader that lead to the deaths of many of his people (2 Sam. 24). David fell into great sin, committing adultery, deceit, and murder (2 Sam. 11). Though he repented and found forgiveness, his actions still led to serious consequences. His infant son died. His own adult son Absalom rebelled against him bringing Israel revolt and civil war (2 Sam. 15). His closest advisors betrayed him. He grieved bitterly at the death of Absalom. David experiences the joys of success, victory, and great worship of God. He also knew pain, suffering, discouragement and depression.

Through many of these events in David's life, he wrote poems and songs that dealt with the feelings he experienced as a result. One of the reasons the Psalms

are deeply loved by so many Christians is that they give expression to such an amazing array of emotions:¹

1. Loneliness: "I am *lonely* and afflicted" ([Psalms 25:16](#)).
2. Love: "I *love* you, O Lord, my strength" ([Psalms 18:1](#)).
3. Awe: "Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in *awe* of him" ([Psalms 33:8](#)).
4. Sorrow: "My life is spent with *sorrow*" ([Psalms 31:10](#)).
5. Regret: "I am *sorry* for my sin" ([Psalms 38:18](#)).
6. Contrition: "A broken and *contrite* heart, O God, you will not despise" ([Psalms 51:17](#)).
7. Discouragement and turmoil: "Why are you *cast down*, O my soul, and why are you *in turmoil* within me" ([Psalms 42:5](#))?
8. Shame: "*Shame* has covered my face" ([Psalms 44:15](#)).
9. Exultation: "In your salvation how greatly he *exults*" ([Psalms 21:1](#)).
10. Marveling: "This is the Lord's doing; it is *marvelous* in our eyes" ([Psalms 118:23](#)).
11. Delight: "His *delight* is in the law of the Lord" ([Psalms 1:2](#)).
12. Joy: "You have put more *joy* in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound" ([Psalms 4:7](#)).
13. Gladness: "I will *be glad* and exult in you" ([Psalms 9:2](#)).

14. Fear: "Serve the Lord with *fear*" (Psalms 2:11).
15. Anger: "Be *angry*, and do not sin" (Psalms 4:4).
16. Peace: "In *peace* I will both lie down and sleep" (Psalms 4:8).
17. Grief: "My eye wastes away because of *grief*" (Psalms 6:7).
18. Desire: "O Lord, you hear the *desire* of the afflicted" (Psalms 10:17).
19. Hope: "Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we *hope* in you" (Psalms 33:22).
20. Brokenheartedness: "The Lord is near to the *brokenhearted* and saves the crushed in spirit" (Psalms 34:18).
21. Gratitude: "I will *thank* you in the great congregation" (Psalms 35:18).
22. Zeal: "*Zeal* for your house has consumed me" (Psalms 69:9).
23. Pain: "I am afflicted and in *pain*" (Psalms 69:29).
24. Confidence: "Though war arise against me, yet I will be *confident*" (Psalms 27:3).

We love the Psalms because they deal with all the same emotions we face!

Changing our Thinking and Feeling about God

The Psalms are the inspired Word of God! They are not only the thoughts and words of men, they are the very words of God to us. While the Psalms are songs or poems written by people who were dealing with the issues of life, God guided and directed those writers so that the Psalms teach us God's truth and properly direct our feelings towards Him. They instruct us much about God, His ways, and about ourselves. We learn about God's glory and majesty. We learn much about God's holiness and our sinfulness. We are instructed about God's anger and wrath towards sinners. We also learn of His mercy and grace. Most encouraging is what we learn of His faithfulness and love for us even in the midst of the most difficult situations. Let's read just one brief example:

Psalm 13

Prayer for Help in Trouble

For the choir director. A Psalm of David

1 How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever?
 How long will You hide Your face from me?
 2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul,
 Having sorrow in my heart all the day?
 How long will my enemy be exalted over me?
 3 Consider and answer me, O Lord my God;
 Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
 4 And my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"
 And my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken.
 5 But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness;
 My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.

6 I will sing to the Lord,
 Because He has dealt bountifully with me.

We do not know the specific circumstances written about here. We see the sorrow, fear, and doubt caused by the difficult situation. Yet we are reminded about God's lovingkindness, His salvation, and how He has dealt bountifully with His children. When we remember those things about God, then we can rejoice and sing to the Lord, even in the midst of the challenging circumstances.

The Characteristics of One after God's Own Heart

As we read the Psalms, we find in David and the other writers the marks or characteristics of a truly godly person, one who is after God's own heart:³

Praise-giving: A truly godly life is characterized by the giving of praise. Ps. 145

Honesty: David was brutally honest and open about his struggles, even his sin. As Christians we should honestly express suffering and distress in our lives.

Remembering: We can rejoice in trials when we remember God's blessing, particularly our salvation through Christ.

Morality: The godly person will heed God's commands, something clearly express throughout the Psalms.

Change & Growth: Many Psalms express the desire for change, especially the penitential Psalms (songs of repentance: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).

Trusting & Faith: The godly person will trust God and His Word.

Thanksgiving: We see throughout the Psalms examples of thanks for what God had done and provided.

We may face many challenges and trials in our lives. When we remember that God loved us so much He provided His Son to live a perfect life and then suffer and die so that our sins can be forgiven and Christ's righteousness given to us, then indeed we can rejoice and trust Him no matter what difficulties we face!

¹Material for this study was adapted from a sermon by John Piper. *Songs that Shape the Heart and Mind*. May 25, 2008.

www.desiringgod.org.

² Ibid.

³Dever, Mark. *The Message of the Old Testament*. Crossway Books. Kindle Edition. P. 485.

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