

# Preaching the Psalms Canonically: A Postscript

September 1, 2017

by David Schrock

Instead of a Sermon Discussion guide this week, I've written up something of a Post-Script to the Psalms, a few reflections on reading and preaching the Psalms as one unified book. For the PDFs of each book, see [Book 1](#), [Book 2](#), [Book 3](#), [Book 4](#), [Book 5](#). Hopefully, in the next few days I can publish the bibliography of resources (books, chapters, articles) that I found useful in reading the Psalms canonically.

## We Seek What We Love

There is a basic two-sided principle in learning:

Those things we love, we love to learn about.

Those things we hate, we hate to learn about.

Whether it is music, travel, history, economics, a particular nation, or the spouse whom we love—if we love something, we'll have no trouble learning about it. Or at least, the love of the subject matter drives us on to learn. Even complex subjects become (increasingly) enjoyable when love motivates our learning.

This principle applies across disciplines, but it applies especially to reading the Bible. When God regenerates a person, he implants in them a hunger for his Word. For instance, Psalm 19 speaks of God's word as sweeter than honey. To the converted man or woman, their newfound taste buds long for the pure milk of God's word (1 Peter 2:1–3). Likewise, Psalm 119 overflows with delight in the Law of God. How else could a Psalm run to 176 verses, unless the author loved the Word.

According to the Bible, when we are born again, God gives us a new appetite for himself and his word, so that Ps 111:2 rightly explains the transformation of the heart towards learning: "Great are the works of the Lord, studied (or sought out) by all who delight in them."

The point is not that when God saves a man, that man becomes an academic. But it does mean the children of God love to learn the ways of their father. And thus, like a girl who loves to read the letters of her deployed father, so too God's children earnestly seek to know him through his word.

## A Personal Word About Bible Reading and Preaching the Psalms

For me personally, that's how I came into ministry. I never set out to be a pastor. I set out to know my Father in heaven by reading his Word. And the more I read the Bible, the more captivated I became, until over time the reading turned into study; the study turned into teaching; the teaching turned into pastoring.

That's also how I approached our last series in the Psalms. Over the last few years, I have been amazed to see the order and arrangement of the Psalms. Rather than just seeing the Psalms as 150 discreet songs, the musical storyline of the Psalter has stirred my heart to great affections and amazement as God brought his Son into the world to sit on the throne of David.

For that reason, I stepped into the Psalms this summer to attempt to show how the Psalms fit together, how they recount the history of David, and how they lead to a greater David, the Lord Jesus Christ. In preaching the Psalms, it has been my prayer and aim that you would take up the Psalms and read, and that as you read, you'd see the way of God's salvation in the Psalms.

After week one, I realized that task was far bigger than could be done in five messages through the five books (Pss 1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, 107–150), but I pressed ahead with the help of Ben Purves to visualize the rise and fall of the story in five infographics. Honestly, I think his work on these visual aids has been incredibly helpful for me and others to 'see' what might take countless readings to put together otherwise. And I pray that these infographics might continue to foster interest in reading the Psalms as a soundtrack to God's plan of salvation in Scripture and song.

## **Revisiting the Sermons and Reading the Psalms**

It is a fair observation some have made: the Psalms shouldn't require such complex visual aids to understand them. Point taken, but we should not be surprised that poetry, especially songs, does show a kind of musical rise-and-fall when we read it carefully. While reading music is a dying art, musical notes do go up and down, as does life, and the movements suggested in this series have only followed that logic.

Even more, I attempted to follow the text of Scripture. In the original language, the Psalms are filled with literary devices meant to train the Hebrew reader of the message. Often, we miss these literary devices when we read the Psalms in English and in isolation. Only when we pay careful attention to repeated words across the Psalms do we begin to see how carefully they are woven together. For that reason, I believe these musical maps generally help us get a handle on what is in the Psalms, rather than adding complexity to them.

That said, let me reiterate: I don't think these infographics are infallible. Already, I'd make a few changes. But, in general, I think they are reliable guides to help you see what is in the Scripture. And that's our hope, isn't it? That is certainly a chief aim for me when I preach—to help brothers and sisters in Christ read their Bible's better. That is certainly the chief design of this blog—to explain Scripture so that we would see in Scripture the glory of God in the face of Christ.

In Scripture, we learn that God has made us to seek glory. That's why we watch things like football, attend musical symphonies, and travel to watch solar eclipses. That's why each of us have fallen prey to making created things our idols (Romans 1:21–32). In creation, we find a kind of glory. But because we are made for a greater glory—to know and enjoy God's glory—we must see his glory when we come into his Word. That is, if we only come into the Bible to look for something to do or use, we'll pile up knowledge of God, all the while seeking glory in creation.

By contrast, when we read the Bible, we must come as glory-seekers, as disciples longing to see the glory of God in the face of Christ and to reflect that glory in our own. That's how I read Scripture. I am hungry to see the triune God in Scripture and to show him to others in

that way. That's why I love the Psalms, because over 150 Psalms, we see the undulating contours of history that bring us to Christ. For me, that is glorious. And I labor, most fallibly, to preach the Scriptures so that we might do more than learn facts, but to see Christ as Scripture presents him.

Ultimately, as I look back at this summer's sermon series, that was my hope the whole time—to see in the Scriptures the glory of God which ultimately leads us to Christ and finds its greatest revelation in Christ. Perhaps, a slower series through the Psalms would have been less strenuous for all involved—hearers and preachers. Okay, no perhaps about it. Five overview sermons in a row is too much. I admit it!

That being said, I pray that the stretching exercise of going through the Psalter in five weeks, with a few resulting infographics, might help grow each us to see more clearly how the Psalms fit together. And how they prepare the way for Christ. Again, I don't think my approach or these infographics are the final word, but I believe what was presented in the messages and captured in the visual aids alerts our eyes and ears to see in the Psalms a fuller presentation of what is going on.

Therefore, as I come away from the summer, my heart is full from what I've seen in the Psalms, and can't wait to get back to a regular rhythm of reading them (one a day) and praying them. I pray the same is true for you—that reading the Psalms is a part of your private worship and that the unity, arrangement, and message of the Psalter is something that continues to spur you on as you walk in the Spirit and look to Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria, ds