

Bible Study on Psalms

Penitential Psalms – Crying to the Lord for Mercy

In each of these penitential psalms, the psalmist pleads for God's forgiveness and mercy.

A few psalms that fit into this category are Psalms 6, 38, 102, and 143.

Psalm 6

Read Psalm 6 and work through these questions.

1. In Psalm 6, David expresses the hurt caused by unconfessed sin. He also cries out for God's forgiveness.
 - a. For what three or four things does David ask of God in verses 1-3?
 - b. What penalty does David deserve instead? See verse 5
 - c. David's anguish leads him to experience physical effects in his body. What are some of these (vv. 2, 6, 7)?
2. Some psalms begin with much sorrow but then end on a high note. What do verses 8-10 tell us?

Psalm 38

Read Psalm 38 and work through these questions.

3. In more powerful language than perhaps any the other penitential psalms in this study Psalm 38 describes the anguish sin causes. What are the three areas of David's life damaged by his sin?
 - a. Verses 2-10...
 - b. Verse 6...
 - c. Verses 11-12...
4. In what ways is guilt "like a burden too heavy to bear?" See verse 4
5. From what you have seen in Psalms 6 and 38, how might you more accurately define sin?
6. How does your definition and the truth of verse 4 help you better understand our Savior's promise in Matthew 11:28?

Psalm 102

Read Psalm 102 and work through these questions.

1. Psalm 102 also describes the pain caused by sin. What word pictures of the psalmist's suffering are particularly striking to you? See especially verses 3-11.
2. Verse 12 contrasts sharply with verses 1-11. What change in viewpoint seems to have caused this change?
3. Compare verses 12 and 24b-27 with verses 1-11. What contrasts does the psalmist make between God and his human creatures?
4. Hebrews 1:10-12 repeats the words of the psalmist in 102:25-27. In Hebrews, the words are applied to Jesus. Why is the fact that Jesus is eternal important as we look to him for our salvation? See also Hebrews 6:16-20.

Psalm 143

Read Psalm 143 and work through these questions.

1. Look at Psalm 143:2. How does the psalmist describe his own condition and that of all human beings?
2. Despite his unrighteousness, the psalmist confidently comes to God in prayer to ask for God's forgiveness and help.
 - a. What truths in verses 1, 5, and 8 show why the psalmist can ask for God's help and expect to receive it?
 - b. Read Romans 3:23-25a and Hebrews 10:19-23. According to these verses, why can you have the same confidence as the psalmist?
3. Reread Psalm 143:10. Besides rescue from his enemies, for what else does the psalmist ask of God?

After reading and rereading a psalm, ask yourself these questions. What words or phrases stick out to you? How do these words or phrases reveal the poet's purpose for the psalm? What effect does this psalm have on you as you meditate on it?