

# Praying With The Psalmists: A Study in the Psalms, Psalm 1, Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008

## Intro:

Prayer seems hard for us to do, especially when we need it most. God seems so distant when our life appears to be in a hopeless turmoil. There are reasons for this for sure. First, we live our lives as functional atheists; we turn to other gods. To this author/theologian James Houston writes, *"It is easy to succumb to the secular spirit when we have such faith in technology, such hope in pragmatism, and such love of human intellect"* Secondly, we are reminded that our prayers can be hindered because of unrepentant sin (**Isaiah 59:1-2; 1 Peter 3:7**). Thirdly, our prayers can be hindered because even when we pray, we lavish our prayers on our self-centered motives (**James 4:3**). Fourthly, and most often, we "Feel" far from God, because of our finiteness. This is why He gives us His Spirit to intercede on our behalf (**Romans 8:26**), and why His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray (**Luke 11:1**). Simply praying reminds us that we need someone. The Psalms remind us of that, and bring us back to the only hope we have in our pain.

Psalms is a collection of prayers, thanksgiving, praise, lament and concern for real life. There are many themes, but a few stand out. The Psalms remind us of God's presence, the need for thanksgiving, personal communion with God, remembering God's presence in history, and deliverance from enemies. *"This book demonstrates sin, grace, hurt, pain, anger, fear, depression, praise, glory, hatred, love, confusion, justice, mercy, forgiveness, repentance, and so many more human emotions as it dissects the human condition like no other. I believe that this book's purpose is to show us God, as he is, and the confusion that this can sometime create, yet always pushing us back to that same God in our joy and pain. He alone is worthy of praise (Psalm 18:3), and "It is good to praise the Lord" (Psalm 147:1)."*<sup>1</sup> The Psalms gives us God, and as Thomas Merton reminds us they *"Reveal to us God as the 'Treasure' whom we love because He has first loved us, and to hide us, heart and soul, in the depths of His infinite light."*

I pray that as we go through the Psalms, you will see God as your only treasure.

## From the Head...

What happens when human expansion begins to destroy natural animal habitats and wetlands? Well if you answered the "Environments" for animal life to exist will be destroyed you would be right. God has created this planet with amazing balance and it appears that most if not all of this planet's creatures have their place in the bio-system known as earth. When God created, He created man to flourish; He gave them what they needed for life to exist on this planet, and to prosper in the land. Man had enough food, clean water, animal harmony, needed companionship, and most of all; he had a clear relationship with His creator, whom he/she were made in His image. It appeared that everything was in its place, flourishing in their created environments, full of life and wholeness psychologically, ecologically, sociologically and theologically. But, as we can read in scriptures, something happened. God had given humanity one parameter; let God decide what good and evil is, and trust in Him for those matters. It was the fencing that God placed for the "Shalom" of His creation to flourish. Everything was ours, except for one thing; the right to be God! In our passage today, we are reminded of the environment that God has given us in order to be re-connected with Him through a steady diet of delight in Him, and His word.

## ...to the Heart

Happiness and joy is often elusive. Life dominates our thinking, and we simply do not have enough time for God, but this Psalm reminds us that our happiness is not a result of neglecting God, but is found in God as our prize. What are the idols in your life that keep you from meditation on God and His ways? Maybe this is precisely what you need to spend your week doing this week? Take time to pray the Psalms, and spend some time with Yahweh, the creator of the universe this week?

**Books for Further Study:** Baker Commentary on the Old testament, Wisdom and Psalms, *Psalms Vol. 1-2, John Goldingay*; *Answering God: The Psalms As Tools For Prayer, Eugene Peterson*; *The Message of the Psalms: A theological Commentary, Walter Brueggemann*, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible, Dietrich Bonhoeffer*; *Praying the Psalms, Thomas Merton*; *Bread in the Wilderness, Thomas Merton*

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<sup>1</sup> From the booklet.