

Issues, Etc.

JOURNAL



For Such a Time as This

by Matt Harrison

The Monthly Psalter

by Will Weedon

Summer—2022



Greetings in the Name of Jesus.

My generation, the Boomers, tended to reject the ideas and work of the previous generations, as do many in the Millennial and Generation X, hence the popular saying, “OK Boomer.” But what if many of the ideas and work of our forefathers are exactly what we need to face the challenges of a culture openly hostile to Christianity? Pr. Matt Harrison argues just that in his article, “For Such a Time as This.”

Also in this edition of the **Issues, Etc. Journal**, Pr. Will Weedon offers a way of making the Psalms—all of 150 of them—part of your monthly devotion and study of God’s Word.

You’ll also find a list of **Issues, Etc.** generous congregational sponsors at the end of the Journal.

Wir sind alle Bettler,

Todd Wilken, host

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For Such a Time as This

by Matt Harrison

Our Calling

When the Christian takes up his work, he does so in a Christian way; he does it after the manner of Christ. Our daily work is our sacrifice of praise, our faithful response to the free gift of salvation. Where men answer the call to shepherd, preach, and serve at the altar, they imitate and confess Christ. But our Lord models many other works as well. Where the people of God teach, wash, and tend the sick, they imitate and confess Christ. Where the people of God listen, obey, and bear burdens, they imitate and confess Christ. Where the people of God fish, plant, and build, they imitate and confess Christ.

You know what this is: the doctrine of vocation. You know it well because it is a particular insight of Martin Luther himself, and one that was desperately needed in his time. The people of God clung to this Scriptural truth. They found comfort and joy in God's assurance that their poor lives of labor pleased Him, whatever form that labor took.

The Legacy We Have Received

When the very great grandchildren of these people felt they could no longer remain where they were while remaining faithful to their Lord, they took this old understanding with them and brought it to the shores of America. They also traveled with an understanding of community that has been co-opted and corrupted in our own time. These Lutherans knew that it takes a *Gemeinschaft* to raise a Christian. Our forefathers brought forth on this continent a new church, and understood that doing so meant erecting more than buildings with crosses on top.

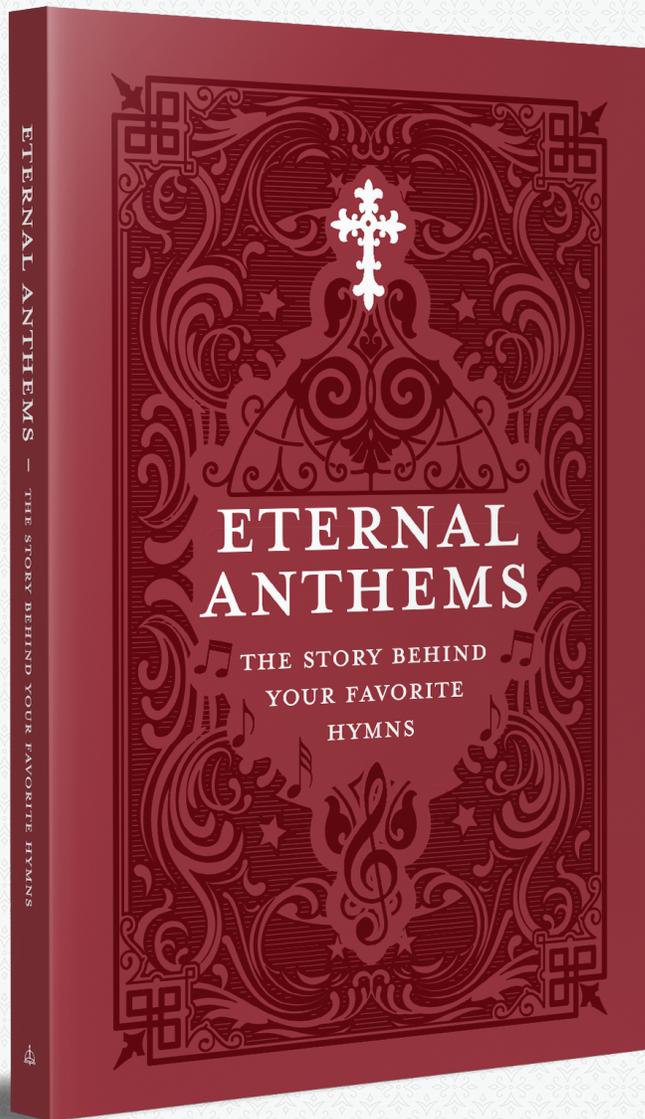
As Lutherans spread across the United States following the migrations of the 19th century, their first priority was establishing churches led by well-trained pastors. Once congregations were secure, the next order of business was building schools. In fact, there are many examples where a school building was built prior to a church building. Our fathers and mothers in the faith insisted that their children be taught by people who were formally trained in Lutheran theology. This wasn't normal American behavior. The only other Christians who had their own significant school system were Roman Catholics.

The Lutheran insistence on building their own education system in America seemed strange to the other Protestants of that time. But, after more than a century of moral and religious decay (removal of prayer from government schools, the teaching of evolution, pushing homosexual and transgender propaganda), our Lutheran forefathers have been proved right many times over. Likewise, fraternal organizations were popular around the turn of the century. They came with a variety of goals and practices, not all of which were acceptable for Christians. Rather than trying to figure out which might be OK to join, Lutherans started their own.

Another problem the old Lutherans had was that in this America, anybody could say anything. It's a great reason to move here, but it can make it hard to know which books to believe, or who shouldn't be preaching on the radio in your living room. Lutheran publishing and broadcasting meant trustworthy reading and listening, a way to keep learning, and a check on false teaching and secular ideas that made their way into the Lutheran home.

Our fathers and mothers in the faith built all of this with that famous German planning and engineering: countless day schools and preschools, seminaries, colleges and universities, a publishing house, a broadcast (and now podcast) powerhouse, etc. This is our inheritance; this is the infrastructure of ministry and outreach for such a time as this. The six thousand congregations of our Synod have freely agreed to walk together for the purpose of helping each other. We share resources and strengths, connect people with all that they need

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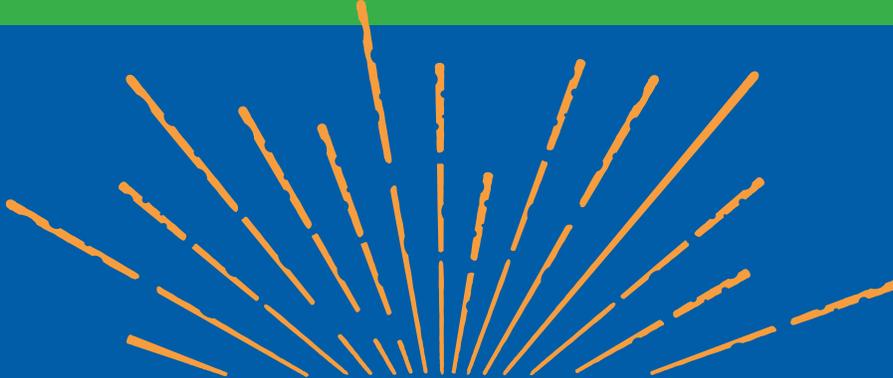
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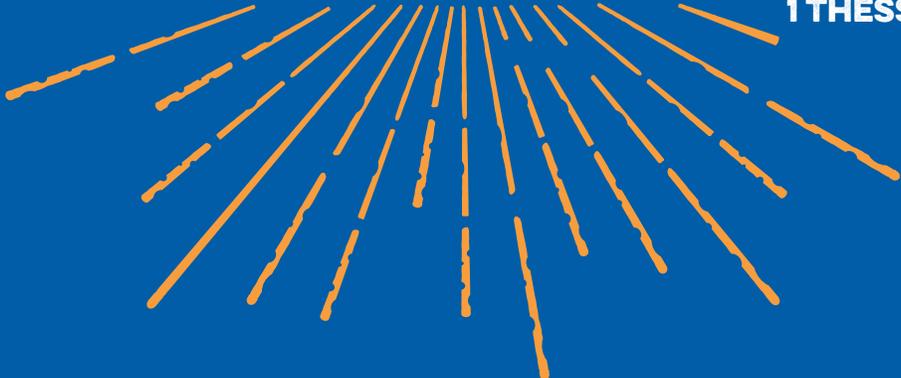
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1 THESS. 5:6



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What is a Synod?

But what exactly have they given us? What have we received? Let's start by stating clearly what this work of their hands, the Synod, is not.

Our mothers and fathers did not build us a ship in a bottle. The Synod is not a beautiful, intricate keepsake for us to put on a shelf and never touch, so that we can all admire someone else's legacy and accomplishments.

They did not build us a dollhouse, where we could play at being mommies with babies. They did not build us a model train so we could have fun pretending to be engineers and then go upstairs for a lunch someone else bought and made. Our fathers and mothers did not intend for us to have a playland that was safer and easier at the expense of being unreal.

They did not build us a monastery. Our parents' concern with passing on the faith did not include checking out of public life. They understood that Christians have a duty to society that cannot be fulfilled in isolation from society. Besides, Lutherans can't afford to spend all their time praying; they also must work. If you'll look back up to the first paragraph, you'll be reminded to rejoice in this gift.

My brothers, my sisters: *our parents did not build us a ghetto.* They loved us too much to raise walls around us that would eventually become our prison. Thank the Lord for this, as the world takes an ever greater interest in

silencing the voice of truth, and cutting off those who blaspheme its gods of pride, lust, greed, and revenge.

In the past few years, many thinking Christians have found inspiration and hope in Rod Dreher's book *The Benedict Option*. Our forefathers beat him to the punch while avoiding the pitfalls of ghetto and monastery. What exactly did our fathers and mothers give us?

They gave us an oasis where the people of God can refuel and rest so that they return to the work of evangelism and discipleship in the course of life, strong and refreshed.

They gave us a consulate to help us navigate the world where we live as aliens. The Synod is a place where people who share a language can guide each other. There are Lutherans who understand things like money, the law, medicine, trades, travel, education, government, and other aspects of life that can be hard to figure out. It is really valuable when the person helping you through whatever it is you don't know very well is a person who believes what you do.

They gave us a team. Remember when your school played Zion? Never beat 'em once. And don't even get me started on the guys from Blessed Savior! Then you go to public high school, and you hardly know anybody, but there are some kids from Zion in Biology. Suddenly you're pretty glad to see them. When the only face you recognize in your Spanish class is from Blessed Savior, at least you've got someone to ask to be your conversation partner, and he's just as relieved as you. Finally, a huge win: there are three people from your team in the same lunch. You might survive this.

Our fathers and mothers gave us a Synod. It's not a thing you run into other places, which might be why we have a hard time understanding it. Our Savior has brought each of us to Himself. What He told his apostles is true of all of us. "You did not choose me, I chose you." In bringing us to himself he has made us part of His body, the church, and that church is alive in its local

congregations where his Word is proclaimed and his people are forgiven, baptized, absolved and communed. So far as the Synod is congregations in communion with each other, it is church: The Lutheran CHURCH Missouri Synod. A Synod is also a bunch of church people who have agreed to connect themselves to each other. No one in Synod has to be here. It is voluntary. That means, diagnostically, that our disagreements about things not governed by the Word of God mean less to us than the benefits of remaining together. Among these benefits are, plain and simple, the people themselves. We have decided to formally hold on to the people who love Whom we love, for the sake of the love of Him who gave His life for us sinners.

For Such a Time as This....

I don't have to tell you that our culture grows more and more hostile to the Christian faith. You can see and feel it all around you. Every major denomination has faced declining participation and membership—the overall percentage of Americans who identify as Christian has plummeted in a generation. There are now as many people who say they have no religion as there are Evangelical Christians (23% of the population each, according to CNN). We are a minority in a hostile world.

The book of Esther is all about the Church's life in a hostile culture. The Empire is against God's people and a decree has been passed by the King for their destruction. But a faithful believer, Esther, has been raised up to the position of Queen. But what can she do? She is wavering and sends a note to her uncle, Mordecai, for advice. He tells her: "For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14, ESV)

The world is hostile, but we will not keep silent; we will not freeze in fear. We will stand with each other. We will stand with Christ. By His grace we will stand and deliver the eternally relevant and life-changing Gospel of the free

forgiveness of sins. Our forefathers have handed us a legacy **for such a time as this.**

The Synod's work is expressed and embodied in this infrastructure of ministry. And like any infrastructure it gets repaired, rearranged, and reordered with the changing times. They have always changed and we are seeing them change now. This can be difficult. It is difficult to witness, and difficult to know what decisions to make. There are many ways of approaching the day's own trouble. We should look to our forefathers for inspiration and guidance.

Well, what did they do?

They made proactive, courageous and wrenching changes, like getting on a boat and leaving the old country forever; like removing 40 professors from a faculty when the Holy Word of God was at stake.

They made hard sacrifices, working for the modest compensation of teachers who bring the Lord into classrooms where little children may come to Him, instead of being turned against Him.

They refused to follow as Christians all around them became confused and unfaithful when asked, "Did God really say?"

This can only grow out of the conviction that Christ is the world's Redeemer. That is the core of our infrastructure. The bonds of love that grow around this are fed on the visible Word, the Body and Blood of Christ. The work that grows out of that love looks different in every generation as the body moves through time and place. The time to break down and the time to build up are the same time: now. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven!

One more thing. We are not the only people lacerated and horrified by a vicious world. As threatened as we feel by those who hate the Law and hate the Gospel, we have an oasis, a consulate, a team, a Synod. And we have neighbors who are thirsty, lost, alone, shut out. People are looking for help. By the grace of God, we can offer it.

What is that help? It is making sure that Light pours out of our stained glass windows for all who are desperate to be delivered out of darkness. It is submitting with joy to the gathering work of the Holy Spirit, who calls us to the very house of God. It is telling a friend who is waiting for a Savior, “Come and see.” It is trusting that God’s Word will not return void. It is laboring under that miraculous alloy of humility and fearlessness; the mettle of every repentant sinner who knows that his Redeemer lives.

It is knowing that what every sad, scared, anxious, angry, hungry, sick, shackled, bitter, toxic person needs is Jesus, and that there aren’t any tricks to making that introduction.

Friends, we have work to do. The Lord is our strength, and He has added unto us good friends, faithful neighbors and the like. If you are not sure how to begin, I suggest that you make the sign of the holy cross and say: *In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.* Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. Then go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn, like that of the Ten Commandments, or whatever your devotion may suggest.



Pr. Matt Harrison is president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Harrison has written, translated and edited a number of books, including *Christ Have Mercy*, *A Little Book on Joy*, *At Home in the House of My Fathers*, *The Church and the Office of the Ministry* by LCMS founder C.F.W. Walther, and five volumes of essays and letters of Lutheran theologian Hermann Sasse, including *The Lonely Way* and *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*.



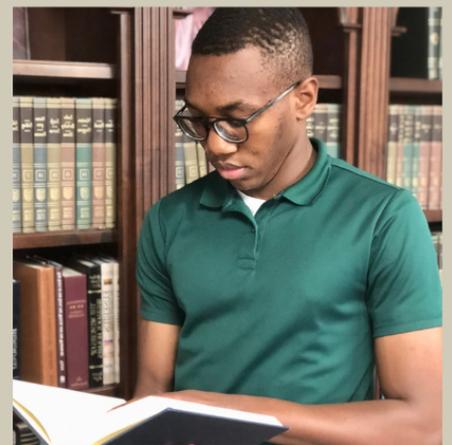
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The Monthly Psalter

by Will Weedon

The Psalter, the Book of Psalms, has always formed the basis of the Church's daily prayer services. As this gradually developed over the centuries, it was regarded as the fulfillment of Psalm 119:164: "Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments" (KJV). Thus, we had Matins (with Lauds appended) before dawn; Prime at six a.m.; Terse at 9 a.m.; Sext at noon; Nones at 3 p.m.; Vespers around 6 p.m. and Compline at 9 p.m. The biggest chunk of these daily offices was time spent chanting the Psalter. In the monasteries it might even be prayed through once a week.

These services of daily prayer were finally gathered into a collection known as the Breviary. The Breviary was usually four volumes or so, and was mega complex to use. Its pages of instruction (the so-called Pye) went on for quite a bit and were more than a little confusing. By the century of the Reformation, every priest (monastic or not!) was solemnly obligated to pray the whole of the Daily Office. Should he fall behind in any part, he needed to make it up!

Luther in particular, much as he loved the Psalter, experienced this as quite a burden! Joy came when he realized that the notion that meritorious praying of the Office was contrary to the Gospel and sinners' free justification by faith alone. The Psalms were not meant to be a burden, but a gift. If you miss a given day, you plow on with the next day without suffering scruples!

Lutherans in the 16th century simplified the Daily Office. They combined elements of Matins, Lauds, and Prime in a single morning service (still called Matins). An evening or afternoon service called Vespers combined elements of monastic Vespers and Compline. Additionally (and fatefully!) Lutherans tended

to preserve Latin as the chief language for the Daily Office. Instead of the monks singing it, they used the school boys to sing it. Thus, the Daily Office persisted in Lutheran use chiefly in the cities where parishes had their Latin schools. But sadly, it fell into disuse as Latin gradually subsided through the 18th and 19th centuries.

The general pattern in early Lutheran liturgy was that Psalms 1-109 were sung for Matins, and Psalms 110-150 for Vespers. Each Office included about three Psalms, with zero compunction to cover the Psalter entirely in a month. With this, as expected, Lutherans also retained the traditional Gregorian chants of the Daily Office for the psalm tones, responsories, canticles and so on.

Across the English Channel, things took a different route. Anglicans from the get-go put a higher valuation on the Daily Office. First, they made sure to translate it wholly into English. Second, they devised a method of chanting that worked well with English. And third, for centuries, Matins and Evensong were the chief services in any Anglican parish, rather than the Divine Service. (The Divine Service became an occasional extra until the Oxford Movement restored it, while keeping the expectation of Matins and Evensong).

At the heart of the Anglican adaptation of the Office is the monthly Psalter. This is an ingenious way of praying through the Psalms once per month. It results roughly in three Psalms in the morning and three in the evening (fewer when the Psalms are longer; more when the Psalms are shorter). The Psalter is prayed straight through. This method of praying the Psalms is provided in our *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, pages 1140-1141, or you can check out [this link](#). I should add that the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* chose to retain an older version of the Psalter than the KJV, the Coverdale translation (from Miles Coverdale's translation of 1535). Coverdale's translation persists in the *Book of Common Prayer* and is by all accounts an ingenious adaptation of the Vulgate's translation to English. It is quite beloved by our Anglican brothers and sisters.

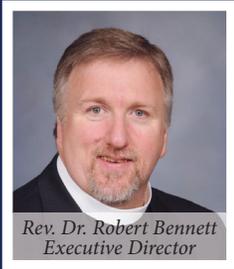
Okay, okay. Why the history lesson, Weedon? Because I think there was something very *wise* about praying through the Psalter once a month. You don't



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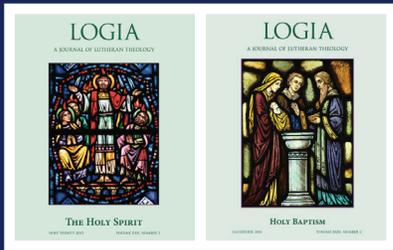
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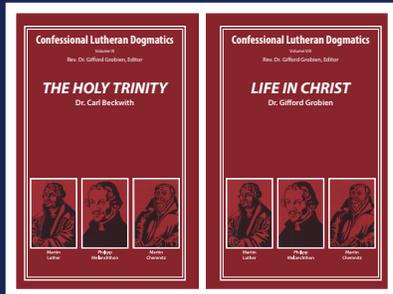
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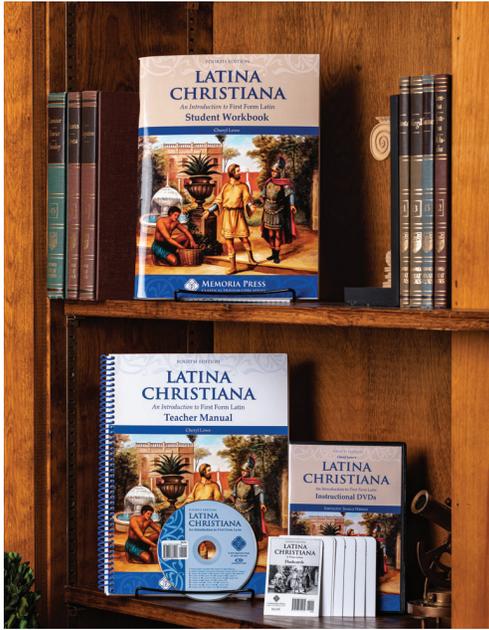
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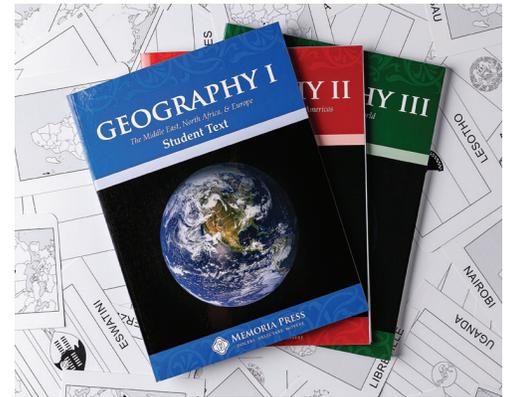
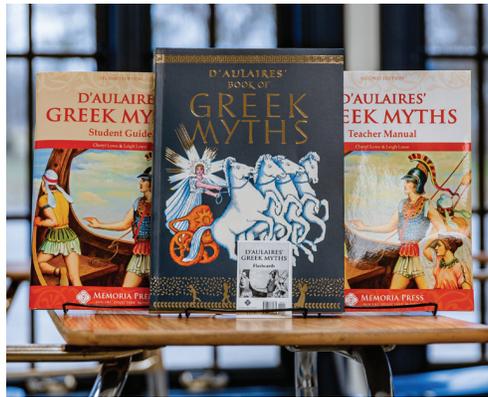
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have to be a monk to find that discipline to be a massive blessing. I've certainly found it so. No, I do not use the lovely Coverdale; I stick to my King James (I tried to use the English Standard Version. It just doesn't measure up in my opinion. Your mileage may vary!).

I pray a form of Matins and Vespers each day, and I've written the Monthly Psalter's divisions right into my KJV Bible. In the morning I have put the day of the month. Then a small dot shows where the Morning Psalms stop and the evening Psalms begin. I keep a bookmark always on the right page. Of course, as I am writing this on February 28, the problem of uneven months comes up. I simply head back on March 1st to the regular rotation, skipping the Psalms assigned to the 29th (except during a leap year) and 30th.

What do you do if there is a long month with 31 days, such as March? The solution is to repeat the Psalms of day 30 on those days. I'll add that I also read my KJV with the original schedule for morning and evening readings published with it. Sadly, it is not usually published these days. I have a spreadsheet of the readings for anyone who is interested. Just contact me!

Why pray the Psalter every month? Because, people loved by God, beyond shadow of doubt it is the center of the Bible (not just physically). You'll be amazed at how in the historical psalms you rehearse Israel's history once a month. (Sihon and Og become not obscure names but monthly companions. The Joseph cycle, the exile, David and Solomon are ever brought to mind.) I mention those first because I suspect the historical psalms are the ones that folks struggle to love. I think that's only until you throw yourself into praying them! Then you'll look forward to them each time they come up.

The psalms of comfort need hardly to be commended. Who doesn't love Psalm 23, Psalm 34 or Psalm 116 (that my mom's favorite)? The psalms of praise (particularly Psalms 145-150, but also Psalms 96, 98 and 100) teach us to glorify God by proclaiming aloud to each other the great things He has done. The imprecatory psalms are among the hardest. But when you aim them at our enemy: the devil and his demon hordes, and at hard-hearted and persistent

unbelief that persecutes God's saints, you even come to treasure those. The Psalms that sing of Zion and its beloved place in the hearts of God's people teach us how to treasure the Church and look forward to heaven. And of course, there are numerous prophecies of Christ in the Psalter. Who can possibly pray Psalm 22 and not see the image of the Crucifixion rise before one's eyes? "They pierced my hands and feet." (Ps. 22:16 KJV) Similarly with Psalm 69.

That brings me to the key beyond every key that opens up the Psalter and makes you love it so dearly: the longer you pray it, the more you realize that you're praying the psalms along WITH Jesus. He's taking you along with Him in His prayers. Have you ever wondered when Jesus spent a night in prayer *what* He was praying? I wouldn't be the least bit surprised if His prayers in those lonely Galilean starlit nights were largely the singing of the Psalms! And is it not striking that from His cross, He prays the opening words of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" AND Psalm 31:5 at the close: "into Thine hand I commit my spirit." I have wondered if the Lord Jesus spent His time upon the cross praying His way from Psalm 22 to Psalm 31? It's a possibility!

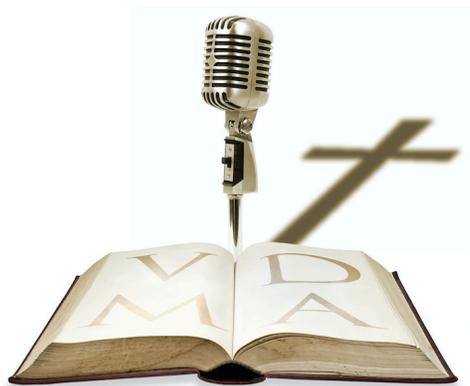
Many people ask of a Psalm, "How does this speak to me? How does it apply to me?" Do you see that this is missing the boat by a mile? The first question ought always to be, "What does this say of Jesus? What does it give me of my Savior?" Then the Psalter's inner light glows brightly. It will fill you with both joy and amazement.

Let me give you an example: Take the Psalms of confession of sin. Can these be heard in Christ? How could HE pray Psalm 51 "In sin did my mother conceive me?" We know that's not true of Christ. But I think even that can be lifted in Christ when you remember that He came among us to bear our sin. St. Paul most daringly put it, "to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21). Again, in Galatians, Jesus was "being made a curse for us." (Gal 3:13) The whole point is that Jesus prays those Psalms because He is determined to stand with us in our sin. He joins us under God's righteous wrath so that wrath would not destroy us. Jesus

owns our sins as His, and invites us to shelter beneath His cross so that His righteousness might be forked over to us.

Similarly, then, we encounter in the Psalms the claim of personal innocence, of righteousness, such as in Psalm 18:24: “Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight.” Such a prayer is ONLY possible in Christ. His Father joyfully credits Jesus’ flawless obedience to the Law to you and me.

People loved by God, here’s my plea: if we have time to mindlessly scan some Facebook feed; if we can while away two or three hours watching TV each day; surely, surely we have the time in our lives to pick up the Psalter and to pray it with Jesus. The monthly Psalter makes it a snap. You do this and it will lead you into your Bible in a new and deeper way. I think anyone who picks up the practice for any amount of time will agree: those old Anglicans were ingenious! What a joyous way to pray each day with Christ and in Him. You give it a whirl and I am certain you will find it so.



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