

**The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript****Episode 4****What the Psalms can teach us about doubt, faith, and prayer****March 6, 2023****Teacher: Matthew Halsted****Episode Summary:**

In this episode, Matthew offers some quick thoughts on Psalms. How can reading the psalms teach us to pray? What can we learn from them about faith and doubt? Is it ever okay to share our doubts with God, even if they're about him? What about the imprecatory psalms -- should we pray them, too? What do they reveal about humanity, and what can they teach us about God?

If you like this podcast, consider subscribing and sharing with your friends.

+ + +

If you like this podcast, consider becoming a Patreon supporter. You can do so by visiting: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted>

Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast and share it with others!

[www.matthewhalsted.com](http://www.matthewhalsted.com)

**Transcript:**

0:00 Hey everybody! Welcome to the podcast! My name is Matthew Halsted. Thank you for tuning in. This podcast is all about engaging the bible. While every episode is different, the goal is always the same: learn more about scripture and how to interpret it. So sit back, grab your favorite beverage, and enjoy the show.

0:35 So many of you are familiar with the book of Psalms and I thought maybe it would be fun to talk about it today. This is something I've thought about for a while, and I've blogged about it before, so I thought it would be fun to turn it into a podcast episode. Let's talk about the psalms. One purpose of the psalms, I think at least, is to liberate us from the lie that says that we as people of faith can never ask God the tough questions. The truth is that our praying, our faith-filled praying isn't characterized by ignoring the reality of our pains, or our fears, our questions, or our doubts. I guess what I mean by that is that a faithful prayer life is one that acknowledges our questions, fears, and doubts – not covers them up. I think that's an important thing that as Christians we should consider. Think about it like this: having faith in God isn't about running from your questions. It's not about pretending that your doubts don't exist. It's actually about running to God in and with your doubts and questions. Even when those doubts and questions concern Him. Think about that great prayer in the New Testament, *"I believe, help my unbelief."* See, in the Bible belief, or faith, is more than merely some exercise of mind. It's not about thinking positively. It's not about just believing a certain set of doctrinal truths. No, no, no! Faith, or belief, in the Bible at least, is more of an activity of your entire soul; of your entire being. It's actually about your posture. It's about the posturing of yourself, doubts and all, before your Lord and your Creator.

2:30 Listen to Psalm 13:1-2. This comes from the New Revised Standard Version,

**1** How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? **2** How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

3:00 So here's the deal. If you have to choose between sounding pious in your prayers, or just being honest, always go with being honest. This is something Eugene Peterson talked about quite a bit. This way of praying is messier, but it is healthier. How so? Well, because faith in God without honest engagement with God, is dead faith. See faith works. Faith engages God. Faith begs you, it pushes you, and pulls you (really) to a face to face relationship with God. No matter how messy that relationship might be. So, you know this, I know this...prayer on some days feels like wrestling with God, right? It's like in the Old Testament one of the Jewish patriarchs wrestling with God. And of course after wrestling with God, he walks away with a limp. And that's actually a really good point that I want to end with here. See, it's better to walk away from prayer with a limp, than to dance away from the altar of self-deception. In other words, it's okay to be honest with God. He can handle your fears. He can handle your questions. He can handle your doubts. He can handle the messiness of your life. So, I think what we take away from this is simple. Give yourself permission to really pray. And if you need help crafting your prayers, run to the psalms, they will offer you great script.

4:36 But let me offer an important qualification to what I just said. When I say that the psalms could offer a script for how we form our own prayers, I don't mean that every psalm should be read, interpreted, or applied in exactly the same way. In other words, while I do believe that every psalm can help shape our prayer life, I don't think every psalm should shape our prayer life in the same manner. So let me unpack this a little bit further. Some psalms can be quite nasty. And of course I'm referring to the so-called imprecatory psalms. These are the psalms which call down curses upon people. They are prayers that are sometimes so filled with hurt and rage that they sometimes go well beyond a plea for justice and they enter into the sphere of extended hatred. Even hatred toward the innocent. One example might be verses in Psalm 109 where the psalmist seems to call for the suffering of his enemy's children. And if that's what is indeed going on there, then this psalmist's prayer would not be consistent with the character of God that we see fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Not only would Jesus not want us to call for, and find satisfaction in the suffering of our enemy's children, but he would not want us to call for and find satisfaction in even the suffering of our enemies. Our prayers for our enemies should be saturated in truth, we should always name their sin for what it is, call it out, (of course), but we always do so in the context of praying for our enemy's repentance so that hopefully one day they would receive mercy.

So what about these sorts of prayers? These imprecatory psalms that we find in this book? The book of Psalms. Are they also useful scripts for crafting our own prayers? Well, yes and no. We should not use them as word for word models for our own prayers. But we can use them to help us become more reflective in the crafting of our prayers. So let's go down this road. Let's unpack that further. When we read these imprecatory psalms, I think they should cause us to stop in our tracks. They should give us deep pause. They should give us contemplative pause. The reason is because they open up a window of sorts into the depths of depravity that characterize the human heart at times. These imprecatory psalms are often formed in the womb of deep pain and suffering. Think of the context of Psalm 109 and maybe even Psalm 137, another imprecatory psalm. And yet, even though the psalmist that might be experiencing deep pain as they are praying, their prayers – as I mentioned a moment ago - sometimes their prayers take on characteristics of vengeance and hatred. And in some ways, I think the psalmists even begin to look like some of the things they are denouncing. And I think this reveals something deeply disturbing about the human heart. It is so easy for us humans to fall into the trap of hate. Sometimes our sincere prayers to a Holy God are not always holy. The human heart can hurt so much that its cries for justice sometimes cross over into sinful desire. Sometimes the pain can run so deep that we become blinded to the reality of the evil that seeks to hijack our prayers for its own purposes. In this way the imprecatory psalms can give us insight. A window of sorts into the human heart – how it hurts, how it suffers, how even good people can fall into sin. And in this was they teach us to be careful and reflective in our praying. They teach us to be humble when we pray to God. And I think they serve a solemn reminder that even in sincere prayer, our lives can be so incredibly messy. So when you craft your prayers, do so reflectively. Do so meditatively in humility.

8:30 The imprecatory psalms can do something else as well. They act as a window not only into the human heart but to the heart of God. God is very kind. He is very patient, and merciful. He is so merciful, in fact, that He is willing to enter into our mess. I'm convinced that God doesn't always like to hear the sorts of prayers that we pray. Sometimes our prayers are antithetical to the crucified God. And yet, He still listens. He does, because He knows that it is often the case that our messy prayers are baptized into the waters of deep suffering. Our messy prayers come from that reality of living life on this crazy earth. He knows that life can be tumultuous. He knows that it can be brutal, harsh, brutal, and nasty. And so He listens. He may not always agree with our prayers. And He may not always agree to answer them in the way that we wish, but He always agrees to hear us out. He is a good listener. A faithful companion on our long journey home.

So how these imprecatory psalms help you craft your own prayers? Well, okay...they are not teaching you to call down curses on your enemies – or anyone else, for that matter. But they do teach you that God is big enough to handle your mess. God can handle our crap. And our curses. As one theologian put it, *“God has always been the God who bears at the sin of His people.”* He bears up the curses, too. And we see this most in Jesus who is the complete picture of what God is like. Jesus carries our burdens. He carries our cries, our curses. He carries our curses on the cross. He soaks them up in His body and in doing so He reveals to us a profound truth. And that profound truth is this: that even though we are messy creatures, we are deeply loved. Perhaps we should learn to love others like that as well.

10:43 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a patreon member. Go to: <httpsalm://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.