How familiar are you with your bible? The blessings that come when our bibles are a part of our daily make up are endless. So to be clear, the message of today’s sermon, based on the Psalms, is to **get to know your bible better**. Touch it, open it, read it, write in it, put notes in it. Keep it handy, the way we used to keep dictionaries and thesauruses next to our desks.

When I asked Ryan if there was one message he wanted to make sure that I conveyed pertaining to the Psalms overall, it was that the Psalms can be considered our guide for relating to God. When these lyrics become a part of our make-up, familiar in a way that we begin using them as an expression that reaches out to God, instead of exasperation shared aloud with no expectation.

Christ quotes more from the Psalms than anywhere else in the Old Testament.

Learning to cry out in joy, or pain, or celebration or trial, it doesn’t matter, if we know how to call out to our God and Father.

When I think about music and how readily we respond to a song or lyric, and how those songs and lyrics follow us through our lives, I wonder what it was like 3000 years ago, when Psalms were being sung, from one generation to the next. When they didn’t have books, or CDs, or notepads, or hymnals. Singing was not only a way to communication with the Father, it was a way to keep the word alive for the next generation. Oral history brought alive in song.

I got to thinking about music and song has impacted my life. You may or may not have noticed, I am not musically inclined to the point I do not even know how to read music. Nonetheless, I love to sing.

Last week I was innocently showering and had my music player on. I had just finished belting out an obnoxious ACDC tune when the first few piano notes of the next song stopped me dead in my tracks. Restless by Audrey Assad had started to play. All that came out of my mouth was, “no, not now.” This was the song I played when we laid my mom’s ashes to rest last December. I don’t think I had heard it since that day. I was not prepared for the wave of emotion and weight on my heart to flood over me.

I had a similar experience with music during Ryan ordination in Bozeman. We were with his family at his home church. All ordained elders and deacons had been invited forward for the laying on of hands. It was a powerful moment for many that were present, many who had walked alongside Ryan his lifelong. For John and I, it was the culmination of the work of the session and the PNC. For me, it was a stepping point in my walk of faith. I knew I had been a part of something that was God’s calling. Maybe for the first time in my life, I had gotten out of my own way and allowed God and the Spirit to work with and through me. When we sat down and sang, “Here I am Lord” I sobbed uncontrollably. I could feel the spirit within me, joining my soul singing out. To this day, I don’t usually get through it without tears. Mostly tears of gratitu.de, though I would be lying if I didn’t admit that sometimes they were tears of fear about what he might have in store for me.

I share this with you because songs resonate in us and the Psalms – which are songs - are just another of God’s gifts to us. One more tool for the toolbox if you will. One more place to go when you at your wits end, at your lowest point or even when you are jubilant and want … need … to share it with the Almighty. What we may read to us as poetry, were actually songs intended to be sung. And you read over and over again as you work your way through the Psalms, that we are all to sing and that music is indeed a cornerstone of worship.

And how blessed we are today to have Juan joining us … sharing his gift with all of us. Thank you Juan.

Including scripture as a part of our daily bread is but another was of feeding our soul. Being able to draw on that scripture is a way to acknowledge who God is in our lives. Memorizing scripture is an exercise to the Christian akin to practicing layups and free throws for the basketball player. The time we spend at it, the more readily new can draw on knowledge when the need arises. Last year I started memorizing scripture in a Sunday school A, B, C fashion … or perhaps an acrostic method as Ryan would say …

A – As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

B – Be kind to one another. Build each other up.

C – Create in me a clean heart, O God. And renew a right spirit in me.

Etc…

This memorization came about as a part of my studies in the Psalms. I was drawn into the Psalms a couple years ago, when my stepmother was planning my Dad’s memorial service. She sent me an email asking if I wanted to read this particular Psalm, since it was my favorite. I don’t remember what Psalm she referenced, primarily because *I did not have a favorite Psalm*. I was not steeped well enough in the Psalms to have a favorite. But, as so many things do, it felt like a nudge to dig deeper. For Dad’s service, I settled on Psalm 100 because it embodied my Dad’s core beliefs. It was a short reading and I will share it with you now.

Psalm 100

Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;

Give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Dad and I often talked about faith and our relationship with God. His mantra, during most every discussion we had was always grounded in life’s purpose – knowing, loving and serving the Lord. This is one of the earliest catechisms we were taught and he took it very seriously.

Though my walk would take me down a different road, now an ordained elder in the Presbyterian faith, we had much common ground and where we saw things differently he never once tried to persuade me or suggest that my viewpoint was wrong, rather that we had different understandings. We would talk about our faith and how it applied to the headlines in the news. Hot topics such as abortion and a woman’s right to choose, evangelism, homosexuality, women in the priesthood. And literalism – who lookout, that was always an impassioned discussion. And while we often had vastly different viewpoints, we both came back to that same foundation; that the Lord is God. It was **He who made us** and we are his as the Psalm said, **the sheep of his pasture**. And that **knowing him, loving him and serving him** is our greatest privilege and highest calling.

Folks, we have been saved to serve. My dad lived that. It was in his living it out that I learned more than any lecture, class or study could ever have taught me.

We still talk. I just don’t get the same feedback. But I can still hear his voice and for that and so many other things, I will **Shout for Joy to the Lord, all the earth**.

I found great comfort in the words of Psalm 100. It made me feel more connected not only to my Dad but to the Father Almighty. In order for us to find comfort, we have to know where to look. So I hope that today and next Sunday, I could encourage you to spend some time in the Psalms, believing that as I did, these ancient holy songs, may lift you up when you are down or the next time you Shout for Joy, that you shout it to the Lord and think of Psalm 100.

So if you are inclined, please pick up one of the bibles in the seat backs.

As best you can, open it to the Center.

The Psalms are at the center of the bible, with respect to chapter count.

* Often cited as the longest book of the bible, it’s actually the 3rd longest by word count, following Genesis and Jeremiah.
* There are 150 chapters or Psalms in the collection.
* The word “Selah” is found 71 times. In Hebrew, it means “think about that.” It is a signal to pause and reflect.
* Written by several authors, spanning from 1440BC when Moses was in the wilderness to 4th century BC – near 1,000 years. They remain to this day a part of both Christian and Jewish worship.
* Jesus used quotes from the book of Psalms more than anywhere else in the Old Testament, including his final words on the cross, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me – found in Psalm 22 and Matthew 27.
* The Psalms are laid out into five uniquely themed book, each mirroring the messages of the Pentateuch – or the fist five books of the Old Testament.
	+ Book One Ps 1-41 corresp to Genesis and the message of Humanity
	+ Book Two Ps 42-72 corresp to Exodus and Deliverance
	+ Book Three Ps 73-89 speaking to the formal worship found in Leviticus and sanctuary, God’s dwelling place
	+ Book Four Ps 90-106 corresp to Numbers and God’s righteous reign over all the earth
	+ Book Five Ps 1107-150 corresp to Deuteronomy and the Revelation of God through his works and his word

Somewhere in Psalm 118 is the center verse or verses. There seems to be a little discrepancy that I didn’t think made a big difference in today’s message.

Just before 118, Psalm 117 is the shortest of the songs. Let’s look at it together, on page 436 in most of your bibles. Let’s read it together.

 Praise the Lord, all you nations;

 Extol him, all you peoples.

 For great is his love toward us,

 And the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

 Praise the Lord.

No imagine it being sung. This is the song that was sung after the Last Supper before Jesus went to the Garden of Gesthsemane. Think about Jesus and his disciples singing this hours before he was turned over to the guards.

On the other side of Psalm 118, at the center of the bible, is Psalm 119, the longest of the Psalms. We will spend some time in that particular Psalm next week.

At the entryway of the church, there are a stack of Emergency Numbers. Where you would normally find the numbers for Poison Control and the Fire Department, there are scripture passages listed in conjunction with differing needs. Several of them are Psalms. For example:

When you are lonely or fearful – Psalm 23 is most everyone’s go to.

What about for when you have sinned? Psalm 51

 It starts out, “Have mercy on me. O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” I suspect that if each of us read through this, or better yet committed it to memory, by the time we got to verse 19, we would be feeling some peace.

Listen to Psalm 91 in its entirety. It’s the one to call on when you are in danger.

###  Psalm 91

**1**Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
    will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+91&version=NIV#fen-NIV-15397a)]
**2**I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress,
    my God, in whom I trust.”

**3**Surely he will save you
    from the fowler’s snare
    and from the deadly pestilence.
**4**He will cover you with his feathers,
    and under his wings you will find refuge;
    his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
**5**You will not fear the terror of night,
    nor the arrow that flies by day,
**6**nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
    nor the plague that destroys at midday.
**7**A thousand may fall at your side,
    ten thousand at your right hand,
    but it will not come near you.
**8**You will only observe with your eyes
    and see the punishment of the wicked.

**9**If you say, “The Lord is my refuge,”
    and you make the Most High your dwelling,
**10**no harm will overtake you,
    no disaster will come near your tent.
**11**For he will command his angels concerning you
    to guard you in all your ways;
**12**they will lift you up in their hands,
    so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.
**13**You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
    you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

**14**“Because he[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+91&version=NIV#fen-NIV-15410b)] loves me,” says the Lord, “I will rescue him;
    I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
**15**He will call on me, and I will answer him;
    I will be with him in trouble,
    I will deliver him and honor him.
**16**With long life I will satisfy him
    and show him my salvation.”

Those last four verses are soaked in the promise of a loving God. While he acknowledges that trouble will come, there is no need to walk through it alone.

Psalm 27 for when others fail you. It starts out …

 The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?

 The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?

 When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh,

 When my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.

 Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;

 Though was break out against me, even when I am confident.

Can you hear the trust that comes from God’s commitment?

Psalm 121 – for when you have to leave home to labor or travel – It’s not too long, I’ll read it in full:

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
    where does my help come from?
**2**My help comes from the Lord,
    the Maker of heaven and earth.

**3**He will not let your foot slip—
    he who watches over you will not slumber;
**4**indeed, he who watches over Israel
    will neither slumber nor sleep.

**5**The Lord watches over you—
    the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
**6**the sun will not harm you by day,
    nor the moon by night.

**7**The Lord will keep you from all harm—
    he will watch over your life;
**8**the Lord will watch over your coming and going
    both now and forevermore.

The list goes on, and you are welcomed to take one of the cards as you leave today.

There is Psalm 139 for when God seems far away

Psalm 70 for when the world seems bigger than God.

And Psalm 67 for when your prayers grow selfish.

When I started I told you my goal this week was to encourage you to become more intimate with your bible, specifically with the Psalms. Read them. Commit them to memory. Not all of them, but certainly there will be one or another that speaks into your innermost being. Call upon them and share them. Let them become so familiar to your heart that when the circumstances, you lean into them and let their song bring you comfort as quickly as hearing the Village People sing YMCA brings me to my feet and my arms into the air.

Use Psalm 150 for Charge and Benediction