Praying the Psalms

1. **The Psalms teach us to pray through imitation and response**. … Real prayer is always an answer to God's revelation. The Psalms are both prayer and revelations about God — the perfect ideal soil for learning prayer.
2. **The Psalms take us deep into our own hearts 1,000 times faster than we would ever go if left to ourselves.** … Religious/moral people tend to want to deny the rawness and reality of their own feelings, especially the darkness of them. … The secular world has almost made an idol of emotional self-expression. … But the Psalmists neither "stuff" their feelings nor "ventilate" them. They pray them — they take them into the presence of God until they change or understand them.
3. **Most importantly, the Psalms force us to deal with God as he is, not as we wish he was.** "Left to ourselves, we will pray to some god who speaks what we like hearing, or to the part of God we manage to understand. But what is critical is that we speak to the God who speaks to us, and to everything he speaks to us … the Psalms train us in that conversation" (from Eugene Peterson's *Answering God*).

Additional Note: The Imprecatory Psalms can be confusing with their cries for vengeance upon Israel's or the psalmist's enemies.

Basically, realize that calls for justice are absolutely right, and remind us how important God's holiness and justice are. But secondly, recognize that the Psalmists did not have the justice of God completely satisfied in Christ. Thus we pray for our enemies, not wish them ill. Yet we as Christians can pray these Psalms as longings for social justice and hatred against the "power and principalities" behind the world.
—from Dr Tim Keller's January 2006 MCM teaching notes, c2006, used with permission).

Suggestions

1. **Try to understand a Psalm before praying it.** A commentary is particularly helpful to understand the context of the Psalm. What was the Psalmist going through when he wrote this particular Psalm? The Psalms also point to Christ. Where might this psalm fit into his life? (see example below).

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2. **Linger over a Psalm.** Is there a particular verse that is particularly relevant to your life right now? Chew on it. Read it aloud over and over, with a different emphasis on each word. Why is this word chosen or important here? What difference would this make in my life if I believed this with all my heart? If I applied this to my life? Pray for yourself and others from it.
3. **Use the Psalms to praise God** for different aspects of his character.
4. **Use an order to guide you:** Chronological; *Book of Common Prayer* schedule (see below).

Trying it out

Try out the above suggestions. (If you want to experiment, Psalm 131 is short, yet speaks richly to New Yorkers today. Commentary notes for this Psalm are on the back). Take small steps. 15-20 minutes a day would be a great starting point. Don't rush. Don't worry about doing this perfectly, just start! Invite the Holy Spirit into these times and let his grace and truth shape your prayer and heart. Stay at it for three weeks — research shows that it takes about three weeks to build a habit. Be alert to what differences might be happening in your relationship with the Lord and your life as a result. (If helpful, go for a leisurely block of time on a Sunday! Or discuss/pray a Psalm in community.)

Psalm 131

My heart is not proud, O LORD,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
But I have stilled and quieted my soul;
like a weaned child with its mother,
like a weaned child is my soul within me.
O Israel, put your hope in the LORD
both now and forevermore.

Commentary #1: *New Bible Commentary*, 21st edition, p 575.

Psalm 131. Rest
In Psalm 130 the exhortation to hope arose from what is true of the Lord; in 131:3 it arises from what the psalmist has found to be personally true. He has taken a lowly place (1) his inner being (2) is at rest — like a child grown past the

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instinctive demands and fretfulness of infancy and now content, as a toddler, simply to be with mother. What kind of an original journey out of self-confident pride into humility and rest first prompted this beautiful psalm? We do not know, but its call to hope in the Lord links it with 130 and makes it the testimony of a sinner forgiven: humbled by the mercy of God, at peace within because at peace above.

Commentary #2: Notes on the Psalms, G Campbell Morgan, p 260.

Psalm 131: Jehovah the Satisfaction of the Pilgrim
This is a brief psalm, but it very full of beauty, as it sets forth the contentment of a restless soul in the will of God. It follows the last as an advance of experience, and as a sequence. Its peculiar note is not that of a natural contentment, but of a satisfaction won in spite of all contrary tendencies. The thought of weaning is the dominant one. That for which a child craves it at last becomes content without. So the soul of the singer, which once was ambitious and restlessly attempted to walk in ways for which it was not fitted, is with him in quietness and contentment. The secret of victory over feverish ambition is divulged in the psalmist's appeal to Israel to hope in the Lord. That, interpreted in the light of the previous psalm, means that in the gracious sense of his forgiving love is the secret of a content which puts an end to all false ambition. Redemption truly apprehended, is more than forgiveness. It is restoration to the quiet peace of being in harmony with all the forces of nature, because governed by the will of God.

From The Book of Common Prayer, 1662: Read one or more psalms selected by the schedule.

Day	***morning***	***evening***
1	*1-5*	*6-8*
2	*9-11*	*12-13*
3	*14-17*	*18*
4	*19-21*	*22-23*
5	*24-26*	*27-29*
6	*30-31*	*32-34*
7	*35-36*	*37*
8	*38-40*	*41-43*
9	*44-46*	*47-49*
10	*50-52*	*53-55*
11	*56-58*	*59-61*
12	*62-64*	*65-67*
13	*68*	*69-70*
14	*71-72*	*73-74*

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Day	*morning*	*evening*
15	*75-77*	*78*
16	*79-81*	*82-85*
17	*86-88*	*89*
18	*90-92*	*93-94*
19	*95-97*	*98-101*
20	*102-103*	*104*
21	*105*	*106*
22	*107*	*108-109*
23	*110-113*	*114-115*
24	*116-118*	*119:1-32*
25	*119:33-72*	*119:73-104*
26	*119:105-144*	*119:145-ff*
27	*120-125*	*126-131*
28	*132-135*	*136-138*
29	*139-140*	*141-143*
30	*144-146*	*147-150*

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