

MY PSALM TESTIMONY

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Preface

"My Psalm Testimony" is a revival of the ancient Hebrew tradition of giving public praise to God for His special blessings upon His people. This book is designed to prepare Christians to publicly praise God for His attributes, provisions and deliverances.

As a believer in Christ, you have no doubt accepted many blessings from Him without the opportunity to publicly thank and praise Him. With this guidebook you will learn how easy it is to share a personal experience of how your life has been changed by a special intervention from God.

This newly revived form of public worship requires no special poetic or musical talent on your part. As long as you can read and write and know a musical director or musician who is willing to provide assistance, you have all the skills necessary.

Many people have become excited to see the restoration of the ancient tradition of publicly praising God for His unmerited favor upon His children. To this end some special individuals have enthusiastically given their time, talents and encouragement. I want to express my appreciation to Gordon Borrer for suggestions on content and format, Ted Nichols for his contributions on musical accompaniment and John Bradley who first conceived of writing this guidebook and initiated the project.

During my years of teaching the Bible I have used the basic lessons in this book to prepare my students to write their own Psalm Testimony. I believe this publication will enable many of God's people to experience the excitement and joy of publicly praising God for His special blessings and interventions. It is my hope that this guide will better enable God's people to glorify the Lord through the biblical pattern of praise. Hallelujah!

CONTENTS

PREFACE	1
1. INTRODUCTION: THE CREATION OF A PSALM	3
2. GETTING INTO THE BOOK OF PRAISES	9
3. ANCIENT PATTERNS OF PRAISE	14
4. PSALM OF GOD'S ATTRIBUTES	17
5. PSALM OF GOD'S PROVISIONS	20
6. PSALM OF GOD'S DELIVERANCE	24
7. WRITING <u>YOUR</u> OWN PSALM TESTIMONY	29
8. PSALMS OF MY STUDENTS	35
9. PUTTING YOUR PSALM TO MUSIC	41
10. PRESENTING YOUR PSALM TESTIMONY	44
RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY	47

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION:

THE CREATION OF A PSALM

It was one of those "burnt toast" days for David. Nothing seemed to be going right. It all began with Saul's jealousy over the new hit song being sung throughout Israel:

"Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands!" (1 Sam. 18:17)

Sure, David had seen some great victories. His defeat of the Philistine giant Goliath was something to write home about! But David had never intended to make King Saul look bad. His goals were honest and humble. He simply wanted to exalt his mighty God! But Saul had taken it all wrong. His jealousy over David's success had turned Saul against the one who had served him so faithfully.

Knowing that his life was in grave danger if he remained in Jerusalem, David fled north to Nob (1 Samuel 21). There he received encouragement from Ahimelech, the priest. He left Nob with a provision of bread and a weapon--Goliath's sword! This mighty weapon had been in storage at the Tabernacle since Israel's victory over the Philistines. This sword served as a reminder that God's people must not rely upon horses, chariots, and weapons of war, but upon the Lord Himself.

Taking his provisions and weapon, David fled from Saul's territory and journeyed southwest toward Israel's coastal plain. He wanted to put as much distance as possible between him and his royal foe. Why David entered Philistine territory is unknown. Perhaps he thought he was safer among the Philistines than in Israel where he could be attacked by Saul.

David eventually found himself in the city of Gath (2 Sam. 21:10). Gath, located in the coastal plain about ten miles from the Mediterranean, was one of the five cities of the Philistines. The city is best remembered as the home town of the giant Goliath (1 Sam. 17:4) whom David had slain with a sling and stone in the Elah Valley.

I wish we knew what David was thinking about when he passed through the gates of the walled city of Gath. My guess is that he was thinking something like, "Maybe I'll be safe here. I just hope that no one recognizes me." Well, they might not have recognized David had he not been wearing Goliath's mighty sword!

When it became clear to David that his identity could not be concealed, he immediately realized that he was in grave danger. First Samuel 21:12 reports that David "feared Achish king of Gath." The king had David in his custody. And there was no way to escape the walled city of Gath. All the king needed to do was to issue the command and his soldiers would have David executed.

What was David to do? He could not flee. And to fight would mean certain death at the hands of the Philistines. As his mind raced over the options, David decided to take a chance. He would try play acting. Perhaps he could convince the Philistines that he was a harmless lunatic. If so, they might release him.

David began playing the part of a madman. The Philistines watched with interested as he grunted his way through the crowds toward the city gate. Picking up a dirt clod or piece of charcoal, David scribbled something incomprehensible on the large wooden doors of the gate. The Philistines no doubt mocked and laughed at Israel's great "hero." "This guy's a joke! He is out of his mind," they cried.

It was working. David decided to add a finishing touch to the effect. He put on a silly grin, letting his saliva run down onto his beard. David no longer looked like a military hero. He looked like a fool!

It was clear to king Achish that David was no threat. He rebuked his servants, "Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me?" (1 Sam. 21:14). Achish continued his rebuke by asking his servants whether he needed another madman in Gath. He had enough problems with the fools in his own ranks. He most certainly didn't need another one.

The gate of Gath was opened. David grunted, drooled, and stumbled through the crowd to freedom. Gath was no doubt far out of sight before David stopped play acting and returned to his normal demeanor. It was a close call! David had been in fear for his life! But God had answered his prayers and delivered him from his foes.

How could David best thank God for His intervention in his behalf? How could he let others know how God had delivered him? How could he encourage his fellow Israelites to share in his praise and worship of Almighty God?

David knew the answer. A psalm. A Psalm Testimony. Yes, a poetic expression of praise would be the best way to make a public statement of God's greatness in delivering His servant.

As David journeyed from Gath, his mind began to whirl with words, phrases, and images.

"How shall I begin?" he wondered. "Yes, that's it."

"I will bless Yahweh at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

"But I want to get others involved in worship," thought David. "Ah! I've got it."

"O magnify Yahweh with me,
And let us exalt His name together."

"I was so fearful and yet God met my need. He answered my prayer." "How can I put it?"

"I sought Yahweh, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears."

As David continued on his way, a Psalm Testimony came into being. We know it today as Psalm 34. It is David's personal testimony of how God delivered him from one of the most threatening and dangerous situations of his life.

Take a minute to read the full text of David's testimony found in Psalm 34.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
The humble shall hear it and rejoice.
O magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together.

I sought the LORD, and He answered me,
And delivered me from all my fears.
They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces shall never be ashamed.
This poor man cried and the LORD heard him;
And saved him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him,
And rescues them.

O taste and see that the LORD is good;
How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!
O fear the LORD, you His saints;
For those who fear Him, there is no want.
The young lions do lack and suffer hunger;
But they who seek the LORD shall not be in want of any good thing.
Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
Who is the man who desires life,
And loves length of days that he may see good?
Keep your tongue from evil,
And your lips from speaking deceit.
Depart from evil, and do good;
Seek peace, and pursue it.

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous,
And His ears are open to their cry.
The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
To cut off the memory of them from the earth.
The righteous cry and the LORD hears,
And delivers them out of all their troubles.
The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous;
But the LORD delivers him out of them all.
He keeps all His bones;
Not one of them is broken.
Evil shall slay the wicked;
And all who hate the righteous will be condemned.
The LORD redeems the soul of His servants;
And none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned. (New
American Standard Bible)

David not only benefitted from writing the psalm, but his friends benefitted from hearing it. By the time David's brothers and friends joined him at the cave of Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1), I am sure that the psalm was ready for delivery. David no doubt shared with them his story of how God had delivered him from a close encounter with death. As David shared his Psalm Testimony, God's reputation was exalted among those who heard. Not only did the psalm encourage them to worship, they gained a higher view of God having heard David's testimony.

Think with me for a moment on how impoverished the Church would have been if David had never written a Psalm Testimony. Our book of Psalms would be about half its present size. There would be no Psalm 34, Psalm 23, or Psalm 110. Not only would we be missing some great psalms, we would be missing some great hymns. For the hymns which are based on David's psalms would have never been written.

I believe that God still works in mighty ways to deliver His own. And these mighty acts of God must be declared. To keep such things to ourselves means to deprive the church of fresh opportunities to praise and worship our God. But how should we begin? How does a non-poet write a Psalm Testimony?

My goal in writing this book is to help revive the ancient Hebrew tradition of giving public praise to God for His special blessings upon His people. This book will prepare you for publicly praising God for His attributes, provisions and deliverance.

As a believer in Christ, you have enjoyed many blessings from God. There are spiritual blessings as well as acts of intervention, provision and answers to prayer. With

this guidebook, you can learn how easy it is to share a personal experience where your life has been changed by a special intervention from God. This newly revived form of public worship requires no special poetic or musical talent on your part. As long as you can read and write, you have all the skills needed.

There are just two basic essentials in preparing a Psalm Testimony. First, you need to focus on a unique blessing where God has made His presence known. Second, you need a desire to return thanks and praise God. By blending these essentials with the simple guidelines in this book, you will discover a powerful pattern of praise which will glorify the name of God and enrich the lives of God's people around you.

You may still be skeptical. Be encouraged. Others have succeeded and you can too. Remember, the Holy Spirit is capable of far surpassing your supposed limitations in creative thought and writing, especially when it comes to praising our Almighty God. We are commanded by our Lord to "let our light shine" brightly that God may be glorified (Matt. 5:16). One way you can obey that command is through writing your Psalm Testimony.

It will help to take a minute to reflect over the list below to see if any of these entries have been part of your life's experience. These and many similar blessings are worthy of public praise to God.

God's attributes which you have seen and felt:

- God's unique position above creation
- God's total forgiveness of sin
- God's masterpieces reflected in the moon and stars
- God's power projected in the oceans and rivers
- God's order demonstrated in the seasons
- God's faithfulness demonstrated in His promises

Provisions which you have accepted:

- God's provision of a life partner
- God's saving hand in an accident
- God's gift of a baby
- God's provision of your home
- God's calling you to salvation
- God's provision of your financial income

God's future deliverance which you are expecting:

- God's deliverance from a bad habit
- God's mending of shattered goals
- God's deliverance from temptation
- God's healing of emotional problems
- God's deliverance from indebtedness

God's deliverance from loneliness

Writing Psalm Testimonies has been one of the most exciting experiences of my life and career. And this is not because I have done all the writing. No, my students and parishioners have participated and as they have read their Psalm Testimonies before their classmates and congregations, God's name has been elevated! And His people have worshiped the God who acts on behalf of His own.

So join me in a spiritual adventure. Let's learn how to praise God according to this ancient, biblical pattern. It is my hope that this guidebook will help glorify God's name among His people.

CHAPTER TWO

GETTING INTO THE BOOK OF PRAISES

The Book of Psalms has been regarded by many saints as their favorite book of the Bible. It is the book we tend to turn to when we need comfort, consolation and encouragement. It is no wonder that Martin Luther, the German Reformer, spent so much time preaching the Psalms. He called Psalms "a little book for all the saints in which every man in whatever situation he may be placed, shall find sentiments which shall apply to his own case, and be the same to him as if they were for his own sake alone, so expressed as he could not express them himself, nor find, nor even wish them better than they are."

But Luther was not the first Christian to take delight in the Psalms. Athanasius, one of the early Church Fathers wrote that "the Psalms are to him who sings them, as a mirror wherein he may see himself and the motives of his soul and with like feelings utter them." Ambrose remarked, "Although all Scripture breatheth the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Psalms."

The great English preacher, C. H. Spurgeon, gave a lifetime of study to the Psalms. He wrote, "In these busy days, it would be greatly to the spiritual profit of Christians if they were more familiar with the Psalms, in which they would find a complete armory for life's battles, and a perfect supply for life's needs. For every condition there is a psalm, suitable and elevating. He who is acquainted with the marches of the Psalms-country knows that the land floweth with milk and honey, and he delights to travel therein."

The Psalms of the Bible are not merely delightful reading. They serve as an example of how to praise God and give Him true worship. It is through our study of the biblical Psalms that we will learn to write our Psalm Testimony. So let's get acquainted with this great book.

Title

The original title for the book among the Hebrews was *Sefer Tehillim* which means "Book of Praises." The English title is derived from the Greek translation *Psalmoi*, which means "songs sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument." We call the book "Psalms." The term "Psalms" refers to the entire book while the singular term "psalm" is used to refer to one of the 150 included in this collection.

Author

Many of the psalms contain a brief introduction known as the "superscription." This introduction or superscription often identifies the author and the circumstances in which the psalm was written.

J. Carl Laney

My Psalm Testimony

The superscriptions indicate that David authored more psalms than any other writer--a total of 73. These include Psalms 3-9, 11-32, 34-41, 51-65, 68-70, 86, 101, 103, 108-110, 122, 124, 131, 133, and 138-145. Asaph authored twelve psalms (50, and 73-83). The descendants of Korah wrote nine (42, 44-45, 47-49, 84-85, and 87). Two psalms were authored by Solomon (72 and 127), and one by Moses (90). Heman the Ezrahite composed Psalm 88 and Ethan the Ezrahite wrote Psalm 89. The authors of the other 51 psalms are unknown.

Date of Writing

The psalms were written over a period of about one thousand years. Psalm 90 is the earliest of the biblical psalms. It was written by Moses around 1440 B.C. The psalms of David were composed between 1020 and 975 B.C. Those authored by Asaph were written during approximately the same period. Psalms 72 and 127 date from Solomon's reign, possibly around 950 B.C. The psalms of the sons of Korah and the two Ezrahites (psalms 88 and 89) were probably written before the Babylonian Exile. Psalms 126 and 137 date from the Restoration Period after the exile. There is little evidence for dating any of the Psalms later than around 500 B.C.

Historical Setting

Thirteen of the psalms include a brief introduction giving the historical setting out of which the psalm was composed. This is customarily referred to as the "superscription" because it is above ("super") or precedes the psalm in the biblical text. The superscription is actually the first verse of the psalm in the Hebrew bible and is regarded by many scholars as part of the original composition. The following psalms contain a superscription: Psalm 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142.

There is great value in interpreting the psalms in light of their historical circumstances as indicated by their superscriptions. It is difficult to appreciate the pathos and emotion of Psalm 59 unless you realize that it was composed by David "when Saul sent men and they watched over the house in order to kill him" (cf. 1 Sam. 19:11). Psalm 51 takes on new meaning and significance when one realizes that it constitutes David's confession (cf. 2 Sam. 12:13) after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba. While the superscriptions can provide us with tremendous insight into the psalm, it is hazardous to attempt to reconstruct the historical circumstances where the Spirit of God has not clearly revealed the occasion of writing.

Purpose of Psalms

The purpose of Psalms is to give expression to the religious sentiments of God's people and ultimately praise God. The psalmists use various literary forms to accomplish that purpose--prayer, penitence, confession of faith, and instruction. But the purpose of praise remains central.

What does it mean to "praise" God? Can I do this in private or does it require a group? How is praise different from worship? In some circles it has become popular for Christians to exclaim "praise the Lord!" Is saying "praise the Lord" the same as doing it?

The book of Psalms makes a great contribution to our theology of praise. Psalm 100:4 reveals that God desires the thankful worship and praise from His people, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name." The word translated "praise" (*yadah*) in the Hebrew text literally means "to confess publicly or give public acknowledgment." It is significant that this word is never used of people. It is always used of giving public acknowledgment of God's character or activity. The word translated "bless" (*baruk*) means "to kneel before someone," and usually expresses honor or adoration.

To praise God means to confess Him publicly or give public acknowledgment concerning God's character or activity. There are basically two kinds of praise which are seen in the Psalms. Descriptive praise declares what God is like. The key word is "attributes." This kind of praise brings glory to God by describing His attributes—His holiness, sovereignty, love, mercy, long suffering, etc. Declarative praise recounts what God has done. The key word for this kind of praise is "actions." Declarative praise brings glory to God by telling of His mighty works of deliverance, answer to prayer, sovereign intervention, protection and provision.

In his classic book, Praise and Lament in the Psalms, Claus Westermann provides insight into the biblical concept of praise by contrasting praise and giving thanks:¹

1. In praise, the one being praised is elevated. In thanks, the one being thanked remains in his place.
2. Praise is directed entirely toward the one praised. In thanks I am expressing my thanks.
3. Freedom and spontaneity belong to the essence of praise. Giving thanks can become a duty.
4. Praise has a forum and always occurs in a group. Giving thanks is personal and may occur in private.
5. Praise is essentially joyful. Giving thanks can take on the character of something required.
6. Thanks occurs in speaking the words "Thank you." Praise occurs in a sentence in which the one being praised is the subject, i.e. "You have done . . ." or "You are . . ."

¹ Praise and Lament in the Psalms, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1965, 1981, p. 27.

When sharing these contrasts with my students at Western Seminary and church congregations, I have often encountered some resistance to the fourth contrast. Must praise always occur in a group? Am I not "praising the Lord" when I express my love and appreciation of God during my private devotions?

In answering that question let me emphasize that the Hebrew word for praise (*yadah*) means "to give public acknowledgment." The Hebrew word by its very nature demands a public act. Psalm 22:22 serves to illustrate this point:

"I will tell of Thy name to my brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will praise Thee."

Notice that the "brethren" who are "in the midst of the assembly" must hear the praise—the public acknowledgment of God's attributes or actions. The expressions, "tell of Thy name" and "praise Thee," are set in a parallel relationship in the Hebrew poetry of the psalm. This simply means that these phrases are approximately synonymous. They are saying virtually the same thing. Now if the word "tell" suggests a public act (and it does!), the same is true of the word "praise." And so while you can thank God for His greatness and goodness in private, you can praise Him in the biblical sense only in public.

Be assured that there is certainly a place for private expressions of devotion to God. I prefer to refer to such private times as expressions of worship and adoration. Those not familiar with the meaning of the Hebrew word *yadah* may call this "praise." But we have seen that the biblical concept of praise requires a group to hear and respond to the works being declared and the attributes being described.

My colleague and friend, Ronald Allen, has given us an excellent definition of praise:

Biblical praise is a public, vocal declaration of the wonder and majesty, the kindness and grace, the holiness and power, of the living, triune God of Scripture.²

Allen goes on to point out that such praise of God may be done in words or in song. It may be accompanied by action, posture, by clashing of cymbals, and triumphant brass. He emphasizes that biblical praise is not "a delicate little thing" done behind the doors of closed prayer closets. "It is a bold declaration in the midst of a world that may not even care that God is alive, that He is good, and that He is king."

The Place for Praise

The author of Hebrews writes to emphasize that while Christ's death was the final sacrifice for sin, there is still a place for sacrifice among God's people. He refers to the sacrifice of praise: "Through Him let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God,

² "When the psalmists say, "Praise the Lord!" Worship Leader (October/November 1992), p. 8.

that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15). The expression, "a sacrifice of praise," is explained by the words that follow—"the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." The words "give thanks" are better translated "confess" (*homologeo*). This is the Greek equivalent of the word *yadah* ("to give public acknowledgment") which we saw in Psalm 100:4. The writer of Hebrews is calling Christians to make their voices heard in bold declaration of the acts and attributes of our living God!

Blood sacrifices have been replaced under the New Covenant with sacrifices of praise. One of the greatest ways a believer can praise God is by sharing a personal testimony. "God has delivered me from my burden of sin." That is an example of "declarative" praise. "God is so very gracious." Here we have an example of descriptive" praise. But the biblical pattern of praise calls for more than simply a report. Biblical praise is an enthusiastic and jubilant declaration of God's goodness.

For the past five years I have participated each fall in a runners relay which begins on Oregon's Mt. Hood and ends at the Pacific Ocean—a distance of 191 miles. It is known as the "Hood to Coast Relay." Each of the twelve members of the team must run a distance of approximately 5 miles three times during the race. Most of the 750 teams complete the relay in about twenty-four hours.

For several years my teenage son, John, ran the race with our adult team, the "Spirit Fliers." But as a high school senior, he preferred running with his peers. So John decided to organize his own team. He recruited the runners from his cross country team. He found donors who were willing to pay the \$400.00 entrance fee. He recruited volunteers and drivers for the two vans. He organized a spaghetti dinner before the event and arranged for lodging at the beach so the team could rest after their finish.

As a father, I was concerned about the many responsibilities which rested on the shoulders of my seventeen-year-old son. I prayed that the runners would be able to finish; that they would not get lost while running at night; that they would not get injured along the way. Much to my delight, John's team, "Tech One," not only finished without any problems, they completed the course in twenty-two hours—beating my team, "The Spirit Fliers," by six hours!

When people asked me the next week about the Hood To Coast Relay, what they heard from me was the story of my son's accomplishment. I shared his victory vocally, publicly and enthusiastically. All my friends and colleagues allowed me to say, "That's my boy, and I'm proud of him."

And this is exactly what praising God is all about. Before the world we declare, "God is my Father, and I want you to know that He's great and He's good."

The Book of Psalms is written to help us as God's people give expression to the praise that our mighty God deserves. As we continue in this study, we will learn more about the biblical pattern of praise and how to participate in this exciting form of worship.

J. Carl Laney

My Psalm Testimony

CHAPTER THREE

ANCIENT PATTERNS OF PRAISE

When I moved our family into our home, both bathrooms were in serious need of repair and remodeling. I hired a contractor to do the work in the first one. Later I decided to take on the second project myself. All went well—the cabinet, sinks, painting and wallpaper. The final step was to lay the new linoleum flooring. It was a job that I dreaded.

I had worked with linoleum before. Being rather stiff, it can easily tear as you try to fit it around corners. It becomes particularly difficult to work with once you have the glue on the floor and it is drying—fast! Since linoleum was expensive, I didn't want to make any mistakes when trimming it. So I decided to make a pattern.

I bought some heavy paper and laid it out on the bathroom floor. Then I trimmed the paper to the exact size and specifications of the floor. I had created a pattern! I used the paper pattern when cutting the linoleum. Because I was careful in preparing the pattern, the linoleum fit perfectly!

My wife and daughters use a sewing pattern when making dresses. And I have never heard of a dressmaker simply taking a pair of scissors to some fabric and coming out with a nice dress. A pattern provides a guide for the dressmaker and helps avoid expensive mistakes.

We have seen that the Bible exhorts God's people to praise Him (Psa. 100:4, Heb. 13:15). But you may be wondering just how to go about it; just saying "Praise the Lord" clearly isn't doing it. Perhaps a pattern for praise would encourage the kind of worship that truly honors God. Well, I have good news for you. The patterns for praise are found in the psalms.

Discovering the Patterns

The most extensive work which has been done on the literary structure of the psalms is that of Claus Westermann in his book Praise and Lament in the Psalms.³ During World War II Westermann, a German pastor and theologian, protested the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Like many other German pastors, he was arrested and placed in a concentration camp. During his prison experience he spent time studying the Bible, particularly the book of Psalms.

In his study, Westermann began to notice certain regular structural elements or patterns in the Psalms. The patterns Westermann discovered were never so rigid as to limit spontaneity and creativity. It wasn't as if there was an outline which the psalmists

³ Translated by Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981). The book was first published in English under the title, The Praise of God in the Psalms (1965).

were forced to follow. But as the psalms were written, the successful and appreciated elements were repeated. And eventually patterns of praise were established.

Westermann's study and research eventuated in a book in which he identifies the major structure categories which are essential to a proper understanding of the Hebrew hymnal. These categories have been modified and adapted for our use in this book.

Westermann also recognized that as the psalms varied in their structure, they varied in their content. He found a number of consistent themes represented in the psalms. These include themes of God's creation, Israel's exodus from Egypt, penitence over sin, judgment on enemies, pilgrimages to Jerusalem, God's kingship, the Word of God, fear of God, and the Messiah (Christ).

From the perspective of content, the central thrust of the Creation Psalms is the creation of the physical universe (Psa. 8, 19, 33, 104, and 148). The theme of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage is the central focus of the Exodus Psalms (44, 66, 68, 74, 77, 78, 80, 81, 83, 95, 105, 106, 114, 135, and 136). The key feature of the Penitential Psalms is the psalmist's penitence over his own sins and failures (Psa. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). A prayer for judgment on the psalmist's enemies is a leading feature of the Imprecatory Psalms (Psa. 7, 35, 58, 59, 69, 83, 109, 137, and 139). The Pilgrim Psalms were probably sung by the Jewish travelers going up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts (Psa. 120-134).

The Royal Psalms emphasize the kingship of Yahweh. The psalmist sees God as reigning on His throne and declares, "Yahweh is King!" (Psa. 47, 93, and 96-99). In the Torah Psalms the Word of God is glorified and exalted (Psa. 19 and 119). The Didactic Psalms have a common emphasis on teaching truth (Psa. 78, 105, 14, 50, 52, 53, 75, 81, 95, 115 and 24). The Wisdom Psalms are a major subgroup of the Didactic Psalms and emphasize "the fear of the Lord" (Psa. 1, 37, 49, 73, 91, 112, 128, 133 and 139). The Messianic Psalms are those which predict aspects of the Person and work of Jesus Christ (Psa. 2, 8, 16, 22, 40, 41, 45, 68, 69, 72, 78, 89, 102, 109, 110, 118 and 132).

While it is helpful to be able to understand the psalms from the perspective of their content, the most helpful categories for us as potential psalm writers are those that relate to structure. In learning to write your Psalm Testimony, we must understand the major structural categories which Westermann discovered. The three main categories of the biblical psalms include the following:

1. Psalm of God's Attributes

These psalms praise God by declaring his overall attributes.

2. Psalm of God's Provisions

These psalms praise God by making known His personal provisions.

3. Psalm of God's Deliverance

These psalms praise God by expressing the believer's assurance of God's future deliverance.

Each of these categories are described in detail on the following pages. You may want to take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with these three classifications which will help you write your first Psalm Testimony.

CHAPTER FOUR

PSALM OF GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

A Psalm of God's attributes is a public confession and acknowledgment of God's greatness or goodness. In this category, the psalmist reflects on a unique occurrence in history and speaks of God's majesty and grace. At the very core of this psalm is an experience in the lives of people with their God. The psalm reviews and summarizes what has occurred and describes the divine attributes that have been evidenced.

The main elements of this psalm of praise include the following:

1. Imperative call to praise God ("Hallelujah!")
2. Reason for praise ("For . . .")
3. Descriptive praise ("God is great; God is good.")

The psalmists often found that praise of God's actions passed into praise of God's attributes. Thus, the descriptive praise of God's attributes is really grounded on praise of God's actions.

Psalms 117

Psalm 117 is the shortest psalm in the Bible. It is only two verses long. Although brief, it powerfully illustrates the use of the main elements of the Psalm of God's Attributes:

1. Imperative Call to Praise God 1

Here the psalmist declares, "Hallelujah!" This Hebrew word is in the form of an imperative. The psalmist is issuing a command. The command calls for an enthusiastic exclamation of praise to God! The final syllable of the word ("jah") is an abbreviation of the name of God, Yahweh. The psalmist is inviting "all nations" to share enthusiastically in praising God!

2. Reason for Praise 2a

The psalmist offers two reasons which call for the praise of God. First, His "lovingkindness is great toward us." The term "lovingkindness" (*hesed*) is a Hebrew word which combines the ideas of love and loyalty. It could best be translated "loyal-love." The psalmist is referring to the love and loyalty of God which is demonstrated by His covenant promise. The second reason for praise is because "the truth of the LORD is everlasting." The word "truth" might be translated "faithfulness." God's covenant loyalty and divine faithfulness call for His praise.

3. Praise of God's Attributes 2b

The psalm concludes as it began--with a call to praise--"Hallelujah!" And the people are now prepared to praise God because the reasons for praise (God's loyal-love and faithfulness) have been highlighted.

Psalm 113

Psalms 113-118 are traditionally sung in connection with the Passover. The first two are sung before the meal, and the remaining four afterward. This means that Psalm 113 was sung by Jesus and His disciples on the night of His last Passover and the Upper Room Discourse. In this psalm, the servants of God are called to praise God because He is highly exalted and condescends to exalt the lowly.

1. The Call to Praise Yahweh 1-3

The psalm begins with an imperative call to praise God (v. 1). Once again the psalmist uses the expression "Hallelujah," meaning "shout for joy because you are excited about Yahweh, your God!" The duration of such praise is indicated in verse two, "from this time forth and forever." The extent of praise is suggested by verse three, "from the rising of the sun to its setting" (i.e. from east to west).

2. The Reason for Praise 4-5a

Although the word "for" does not introduce this section, verses 4-5 clearly record the reason for praise. Yahweh is to be praised because He is exalted "above all nations" and "above the heavens." Verse 5 raises the rhetorical question, "Who is like Yahweh our God?" The implied answer: The true God is beyond comparison! No one else even comes close!

3. Praise of God's Attributes 5b-9

The second line of verse 5 and the first line of verse 6 brings us to the midpoint of the psalm. Here we find a summary statement describing the character of God. What is God like? He is supremely exalted--"enthroned on high." But His exalted nature does not mean that He is out of reach or unconcerned for mortal beings. He "humbles Himself" or condescends to consider the needs of the lowly.

Two striking instances of God's graciousness are recounted in verse 7-9. He raises up the poor from the dust and sets them in high places (vv. 7-8). And He makes the barren woman a joyful mother (v. 9). Is that not sufficient reason to get excited about God?

Attributes Worthy of Praise

What attributes of God might elicit our praise? You may want to peruse those mentioned in some of the Psalms of God's Attributes--8, 19, 33, 36, 105, 113, 117, 135, 136 and 146. I have noted the following:

Psalm 8	God's creative work in man (8:5)
Psalm 19	God's law is perfect (19:7)
Psalm 33	God's creation is unsurpassed (33:8,9)
Psalm 36	God's righteousness and loving kindness is everlasting (36:10)
Psalm 105	God's faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham (105:8,42)
Psalm 113	God's glory is above everything on earth (113:4)
Psalm 135	God's will is supreme (135:6)
Psalm 136	God's lovingkindness is everlasting (136:2)
Psalm 146	God's steadfastness is worthy of our trust (146:10)

What divine attributes would you add to this list?

CHAPTER FIVE

PSALM OF GOD'S PROVISIONS

Have you ever seen God provide exactly what you needed at exactly the right time? I recall a time when financial conditions at Western Seminary were such that I received only half a paycheck at the end of the month. And yet God met our needs in abundance! A dear friend heard about this situation and delivered a sack of groceries to our home. The sack contained many good things including some delicious steaks! We ate better with half a paycheck than we did with a whole one!

Our next psalm category provides God's people with an opportunity to praise Him for a unique provision in the life of an individual or a community. Here the worshipper reports that God has acted and met a specific need. The recipients of God's provision(s) may be one individual or a group of people which have jointly benefitted from the same gift. This group might be a family, members of a congregation, residents of an apartment building or soldiers in a platoon.

Psalm of God's Provision for the Individual (Psalm 18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 107, 116, 121, 138)

Psalms in this category are characterized by praise offered by an individual worshipper. The essential feature of this type of psalm is that the psalmist tells others what God has done for him. These psalms are often more specific than those which report God has met the need of the community. The main elements of the Psalms of God's Provision for the Individual include:

1. Proclamation of praise (cf. Psa. 30:1, 138:1)
2. Introductory summary (God's praise and deliverance summarized)
3. Looking back to the time of need
4. Report of deliverance ("I cried; He heard and delivered")
5. Vow of praise (a promise to tell others what God has done)
6. Praise of God's mighty acts

Psalm 30 illustrates the use of many of the elements of this pattern of praise.

1. Proclamation of Praise 1

The psalmist begins by proclaiming what he is about to do ("I will extol Thee, O LORD!").

2. Introductory summary 1b-3

Here the psalmist summarizes what God has done ("Thou hast lifted me up").

3. Praise of God's mighty acts 4-5

In this section the psalmist exalts God's mighty acts. This is seen in the contrast of "anger" with "favor" and "weeping" with "a shout of joy."

4. Looking back to the time of need 6-7

The psalmist reflects on the situation before God's provision ("I was dismayed").

5. Report of deliverance 10-11

This is the essence of praise--declaring to others what God has done ("Thou has turned for me my mourning into dancing").

6. Vow of praise 12

Here the psalmist promises to tell others how God has met his need ("I will give thanks [public acknowledgment] to Thee forever").

Many of God's provision for His own are highlighted in the psalms. Here is just a sampling:

Psalm 32	God's forgiveness of a specific sin (32:5)
Psalm 92	God's election of David (92:10)
Psalm 107	God's provision for the needy (107:6)
Psalm 116	God's answer to prayer (116:1)
Psalm 118	God's answer to distress (118:5)
Psalm 121	God's protection from affliction (121:7)

Can you think of how God has provided for you?

Psalm of God's Provision for the People
(67, 124 and 129)

The Psalms of God's Provision for the People report that God has acted and met a specific need of the community. In recounting God's deed of deliverance in Israel's history, report is combined with poetry to declare what God has done! Praise is expressed joyfully in response to an act of deliverance which has just occurred. Westermann has pointed out that the main theme of these psalms is that God looked down from his heights and rescued from the depths those who called to him.⁴ The main elements of the Psalm

⁴ Praise and Lament in the Psalms, p. 117.

of Provision for the People include:

1. Exhortation to Praise God
2. Introductory summary (God's praise and deliverance summarized)
3. Looking back to the time of need
4. Praise of God
5. Report of God's intervention

The main elements of this pattern of praise are illustrated in Psalm 124.

1. Exhortation to praise God 1

The psalmist begins with an exhortation to join in praising God, "Let Israel now say"

2. Introductory summary 2

The introductory summary looks back to the crisis from which the community has been delivered. The readers or listeners are encouraged to imagine what might have occurred "had it not been the LORD who was on our side"

3. Looking back to the time of need 3-5

Here the psalmist depicts through powerful poetic images the dangers that had been encountered. "Then they would have swallowed us up alive . . ."

4. Praise of God 6a

The word used here to express praise is the Hebrew *baruk*, which means "to kneel." It suggests the idea of bending the knee before a superior being in adoration or worship.

5. Report of God's intervention 6b-8

Here the psalmist reports how God has acted in behalf of the community. The theme of this psalm is captured in verse 8, "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth." The deliverance of God's people is firmly based on the reputation ("name") of their Creator.

Examples of God's provision for the needs of the community are illustrated in the following psalms:

Psalm 66	God's answer to prayer (66:19)
Psalm 67	God's plentiful blessing (67:6)

Psalm 124
Psalm 129

God's victory over death (124:6)
God's victory over enemies (129:4)

CHAPTER SIX

PSALM OF GOD'S DELIVERANCE

The Psalms of Deliverance offer praise to God for His deliverance from a very distressing situation. The situation is described in rather graphic detail as a basis for praising God.

How well I recall a chapel service many years ago when a dear friend and colleague told the seminary community of a family tragedy. Earlier that week he and his wife had been planning their daughter's funeral service. Rachel Allen had been suffering from leukemia and it looked like her end was near. Our hearts were moved by Dr. Allen's report. We had prayed for his daughter and hoped for God's healing.

Then Dr. Allen explained how early that morning they had met with Rachel's doctor. And with tears in her eyes, the doctor reported that Rachel was in remission! There was a moment of silence in the chapel and then you could actually hear the audience breathe a sigh of relief. We joined in heartfelt praise that Rachel was going to live! By telling us about planning Rachel's funeral, Dr. Allen prepared us to respond with praise for God's deliverance.

The Psalm of Deliverance can be used to describe the experience of an individual or of a community.

Deliverance of the Individual (Psalm 6, 13, 22, 102, and 142)

The Psalm of God's Deliverance of the Individual is basically a psalm of petition or supplication based on the situation of someone in distress. The distress is often described in vivid detail (cf. Psa. 102:7). The psalmists tell of their distressing circumstances in ways that might sound like complaining. But the purpose is not to complain. The "complaint" is designed to lead to praise. The psalmists are concerned not so much with the distress as such, but with taking it before God. These psalms are really expressions of praise—praise offered to God in times of His apparent absence.

The pattern of the Psalm of God's Deliverance never becomes rigid or stereotyped. The possibilities of variation are numerous. But the main elements and their usual order are as follows:

1. Introductory cry for help and/or turning to God
2. Lament (description of the distressing circumstances, often with reference to the "foes")
3. Confession of trust (often contrasted with the lament by the word "but")

4. Petition for God to be favorable ("look," "hear") and to intervene ("help," "save")
5. Statements designed to move God to intervene
6. Expression of assurance that God has heard
7. Vow of praise (a promise to tell others what God has done)
8. Praise of God (where the petition has been answered)

The main elements of the Psalm of God's Deliverance of the Individual are illustrated in Psalm 13.

1. Introductory cry for help and turning to God 1a

In the midst of distress, the psalmist turns to God and cries out with the words, "How long, O LORD?" He has waited a long time for God's help and wonders if it will ever come.

2. Lament 1b-2

David goes on to describe his predicament. It seems that the Lord has ignored or forgotten him. The fourfold repetition of the words "how long?" indicate the extremity of his misery. God has forgotten him and he finds no deliverance from the continual oppression of his "enemy."

3. Petition for God to be favorable 3a

At this point, David implores the personal name of God as pleas for Him to intervene. "Consider and answer me, O LORD, my God."

4. Statements designed to move God to intervene 3b-4

David gives God three reasons for Him to intervene in his behalf. Each of these are introduced by the word "lest." If God doesn't intervene (1) the psalmist will die, (2) his enemy will boast of victory, and (3) his adversaries will have grounds for rejoicing.

5. Confession of trust 5

In the first line of verse 5, David expresses his trust in God's loyal-love. In spite of the distressing circumstances, David is assured in his heart that God has heard and will answer his petition.

6. Vow of praise 6a

Assured that his prayer has been heard, David resolves to give public acknowledgment to the Lord. He promises to "sing" a testimony of God's deliverance. Although the vow of praise may have taken place in private, the praise must be done in public before God's people.

7. Praise of God 6b

Apparently David's petition was answered! He concludes the psalm by praising God for His bountiful dealings.

The Psalms of Deliverance give public acknowledgment to God for His saving intervention--either anticipated or accomplished. The following psalms highlight some of the main deliverances the psalmists have requested from God:

Psalm 6	Deliverance from grief (6:7)
Psalm 13	Deliverance from oppression (13:2)
Psalm 22	Deliverance from the enemy (22:20)
Psalm 102	Deliverance from affliction (102:2,3)
Psalm 142	Deliverance from trouble (142:2)

Psalm of God's Deliverance of the People (Psa. 60, 74, 79, 80)

The Psalm of God's Deliverance of an Individual is basically a petition or supplication based on the situation of someone in distress. In this next category, we see that the distress to be removed is the concern of the community. The Psalms of God's Deliverance of the People were written out of experiences of community crisis. They were associated in ancient times with days of fasting, humiliation and prayer rising from occasions of national distress. Because calamity may be a means of God's discipline for sin, an element of repentance is sometimes prominent in these psalms.

Psalms of God's Deliverance of the People often makes reference to God's saving deeds (Psa. 44:1-3, 85:1-3, 106:1-3). God's saving deeds of the past give His people confidence in present circumstances! The main elements of this category include the following:

1. Introductory cry to God for help
2. Reference to God's earlier saving deeds; past deliverances provide a basis for present hope
3. Lament or complaint, often mentioning the "foes"

4. Confession of trust, often contrasted with the lament
5. Petition for God to "hear," "save," "rescue" or "punish"
6. Statements designed to move God to intervene
7. Vow of praise (promising to tell others what God has done)

It should be noted that the Psalm of the Deliverance of the People employs the vow of praise less frequently and is less standardized in form than the Deliverance of the Individual (cf. Psa. 79:13, 44:8).

Psalm 79 is a Psalm of God's Deliverance of the People and illustrates the use of the main structural elements.

1. Introductory cry to God for help 1a

In Psalm 79, the psalmist begins by addressing God ("O God!") as an expression of his cry for help.

2. Reference to God's earlier saving deeds 1a

The allusion to God's earlier saving deeds is seen in the words "Thine inheritance." God had brought His people out of Egypt with might and miracle and established them in the Promised Land. Now that very land He had given them was under attack.

3. Lament or complaint 1b-7

The lament of the psalmist is based upon the aggressive and evil actions of his enemies. Note the repetition of the word "they" and the verbal action recorded. They have "invaded;" they have "defiled;" they have "poured out;" they have "devoured." The psalmist vividly describes the atrocities of the enemy to elicit the empathy and understanding of the reader. This will lead to heartfelt praise when the deliverance is accomplished.

4. Petition for God to hear, save and punish 8-12

On behalf of the people of Israel, the psalmist petitions God for His compassion (v. 8), help (v. 9a) and forgiveness (v. 9b).

5. Statements designed to move God to intervene 10a, 11

These statements are not designed to "twist God's arm" into granting a favor. Rather, they simply report what can be expected if God does not act.

If God does not act, the nations will say, "Where is their God?" If God does not act, His people are "doomed to die." Therefore, there is every reason for God to intervene. The psalmist knows this and expresses it before Him.

6. Confession of trust 13a

The psalmists trust in God, despite the circumstances, is seen in the words, "We Thy people and the sheep of Thy pasture . . ." The psalmist is confident that God will care for His own flock (Psa. 23:1).

7. Vow of praise 13b

Although the deliverance has not yet been realized, the psalmist promises to give public acknowledgment when God intervenes. "We . . . will give thanks [public acknowledgment] to Thee forever; to all generations we will tell of Thy praise."

There are no limits or boundaries to the deliverances that might be requested by the people of God. Examples from this category include the following:

Psalm 60	Deliverance from a defeated heart (60:11)
Psalm 74	Deliverance from the enemy (74:23)
Psalm 79	Deliverance from devastation (79:9)
Psalm 80	Deliverance from calamities (80:19)

In preparing to write a Psalm of Deliverance, take a few minutes to think of how God has delivered you. Was there a brush with death in an automobile accident? Has God healed you from a serious disease? Has God provided for your needs in an unusual way? List several examples of divine deliverance or protection in your own life.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WRITING YOUR OWN PSALM TESTIMONY

In 1994 I spent a summer sabbatical in Israel studying, excavating, and traveling with students. During the middle of the summer I enjoyed a month's visit by my family. We rented a car and traveled to all the major historical and archaeological sites in Israel. It was a great privilege to introduce my children to the Land of the Bible. They enjoyed such adventures as walking on the walls of Jerusalem, climbing the mountain fortress Masada, and swimming in the Dead Sea.

As our first week together in Israel came to a close, I wanted to somehow record our praise to God for His watch care and provision. So on Friday evening after we enjoyed our Shabbat meal, I pulled out my laptop computer. Then I invited my family to share the blessings God had granted us as a family during our week together in Israel. I typed their words as they spoke. After sharing their praises, the children went to play some games and I began to edit our psalm. On Sunday afternoon while we were eating watermelon with friends, I turned on the computer and read the psalm which the Laney family had composed!

A Psalm by the Laney Family in Israel
June 24, 1994

Praise God for His faithfulness in bringing us to Israel!

There were many obstacles along the way:

There was a long trip ahead,
Our plane was delayed,
We were getting sick,
We missed our connection in London,
We could not get in touch with Dad,
Dad didn't know what had happened or when we would arrive!

But God was behind it all, just waiting for a prayer.

And He answered our prayer:

We found a hotel to stay and rest,
We had a man who helped us with our plane,
We were able to get a bus to Heathrow,
We were able to get something good to eat,
We were able to get a flight to Israel,
And we were met by Dad when we arrived!

J. Carl Laney

My Psalm Testimony

We give public acknowledgment to the Lord for His faithfulness, answers to prayer, and many good things.

And what a week we have had in Israel!

We have seen ancient cities.
We have learned biblical history.
We have had the Bible "come alive."
We have had enjoyable weather.
We swam in the Mediterranean, the Dead Sea and fresh water pools at Ein Feshkah.
We found an Israeli Army hat for David.
We safely visited Jericho and Samaria.

With God's help we have survived a week of driving in Israel!

We have found a parking spot in Jerusalem every night!
We have found our way in and out of Jerusalem--many times!
We have been protected by God from any accidents!

We had a close call this Shabbat afternoon while returning from Samaria.
Coming into Jerusalem, Dad was looking for Jaffa Road and did not see a red light.
Suddenly he saw red--the broad side of a city bus!
He hit the brakes and skidded to a stop.
Three more feet and we would have all be in the hospital . . . or maybe worse!

Thanks be to God for protecting us in such dangerous situations.

We are rejoicing together here in Jerusalem on a Shabbat evening and celebrating God's goodness to us.

And all the people said, "AMEN!"

Three Simple Steps

Writing out your psalm testimony is one of the very best ways to praise God for what He is doing in your life. The background you have received from reading this book has prepared you to compose a psalm of praise to God following the pattern of the biblical psalms. There are three simple steps which will help you to write out your psalm testimony.

Step One: RECALL

Start with a pen and piece of paper. Or you may want to compose at your computer. Reflect on a recent experience in which God has worked in your life. Record the details of your experience as they come to mind. Don't worry about order or arrangement. Simply note what happened and the things for which you want to praise God.

Step Two: RECORD

The second step is to write out your psalm. It is time to get your thoughts and reflections on paper. You may want to use the following outline to begin arranging the material:

1. Introduction
2. Description of the Incident
3. Enlightenment, Provision or Deliverance
4. Insights
5. Conclusion

Try not to be too rigid in the use of the outline. You need not have something for every point. Remember that variety, spontaneity and creativity are essential in expressing praise.

Step Three: REFINE

The third step in writing out your psalm testimony is to select one of the three categories which best supports the content of your testimony. The basic structure of the category you select should be followed as you edit and refine your material. Don't be afraid to drop some of the material that you have written. Often, few words speak more powerfully than many. Try to condense the material and polish up the narrative. Read it aloud to other people and get their suggestions.

As the last phase of refinement, you may want to consider putting your psalm testimony to music! If you decide to do so, you are encouraged to work together with your church music or choir director. You will need someone who can read music and is familiar the keyboard, piano, guitar or any accompanying instrument.

How it All Works -- An Example

Here is an example of a process that has been useful in writing out a psalm testimony.

J. Carl Laney

My Psalm Testimony

Step One: RECALL

In step one, you write out or record your experience. For example:

I knew that I shouldn't have been out that night because of the poor road visibility and the weekend traffic, but I wanted to see my brother who lived two miles away.

It was a gasoline truck which had turned over on the road. Smoke was pouring out. I slammed on the brakes and felt the tires skid over an icy spot

They told me when I recovered that it was a miracle that I was still alive. Two cars had crashed into me from the rear and also into the truck. Several explosions had followed

Truly this was a miracle of God's intervention in my life. To Him belongs all the credit. I was really stubborn and unwise to go out that night.

Step Two: RECORD

In Step Two, you need to begin arranging your narrative into a general psalm format.

Introduction

It was a Friday night in November. I was lonely and hadn't seen my family for several weeks. During that time of year there usually is a heavy fog on the road with ice and weekend traffic.

Description of Incident

Before I could realize what happened, my car had smashed into an overturned and smoldering gasoline truck. Two cars crashed into me from behind.

Enlightenment, Provision or Deliverance

When I regained consciousness, I was in the hospital with a punctured lung, multiple bruises and lacerations. I was told that I had narrowly escaped death. The doctors used the term "lucky" but I knew better.

Insight

Looking back, I can see how God really cares for me, even though I am one of several billion people. This has given me a desire to get to know God

J. Carl Laney

My Psalm Testimony

better, for He knows and cares for me.

Conclusion

I will continue to praise God for His unique intervention in my life. Every time any of you as brothers and sisters think of me, remember that I am here because of God's grace. Let us all give praise and acknowledgement to God.

Step Three: REFINE

In Step Three, you will select the category would be most suitable for the psalm you would like to compose. Remember, there are three basic types of psalms:

1. Psalm of God's Attributes

The attributes of God are described in an overall sense.

2. Psalm of God's Provisions

The unique intervention or gift which God has provided for you is emphasized.

3. Psalm of God's Deliverance

A lament or distressful condition is emphasized with assurance of God's present or future deliverance.

Remember, the Psalm of God's Provisions and Psalm of God's Deliverance can be the experience of an individual or of a community. The category you choose will provide the basic outline as you begin to refine your testimony into a psalm.

Which category would you select for our example? The first category, which emphasizes God's attributes, would probably not be the best fit since the story of the auto accident and survival emphasize a unique experience. Looking at the second and third categories, God's Provision and God's Deliverance, we find that either one could be selected. A Psalm of God's Provisions (2) would be selected if you wanted to emphasize the specific blessing of God on you as an individual. A Psalm of God's Deliverance (3) would be selected if the distress, lament, or unfortunate circumstance is to be emphasized along with the assurance of God's concern and intervention.

For the sake of example, let's choose the second category, A Psalm of God's Provisions, in order to emphasize God's miraculous blessings on behalf of one who should have been killed in the automobile accident.

With our psalm category selected, we can begin editing and refining our testimony. You will find it helpful to follow the basic outline of the Psalm of God's Provisions (see page 21).

At this point you may want to seek the help of your church choir director or worship leader who could prepare a musical accompaniment for your psalm. This Psalm Testimony guidebook is designed to prepare you to praise God in a narrative rather than singing format. Should you wish to sing your presentation, additional preparation would be necessary.

I hope you are beginning to realize that preparing your Psalm Testimony isn't that difficult. I have written many over the years. I have found that writing a Psalm Testimony is one of the best ways to prepare myself for praising God. Think of the fulfillment and joy you and your congregation will feel when a brand new Psalm Testimony is presented in a worship service. Imagine how our Heavenly Father will be glorified as His attributes, provisions and deliverances are declared before His people. Don't hesitate. Go ahead and give it a try. Start with STEP ONE in the next chapter and let the Holy Spirit guide you. Let the mighty acts of God be praised!

CHAPTER EIGHT

PSALMS OF MY STUDENTS

One of the most exciting class assignments I have given my students at Western Seminary is that of writing their own Psalm Testimony. After introducing the Book of Psalms and Westermann's basic categories, I turn them loose to exercise their creativity in composing a psalm. After giving them a few days to edit and refine their material, we reconvene to share our Psalm Testimonies. These classes have generally been regarded as the very best of the semester! I'd like to share with you some original Psalm Testimonies created by my students for the purpose of praising God.

My Psalm Testimony (When I wounded some in my ministry)

O Lord, my Lord,
Hear my cry; see my tears.
Those whom I serve misunderstand me;
They ignore my pleas for explanation.

Since my words and actions have injured,
They will not permit me to reconcile.
As your servant, You evaluate my work.
As your son, You examine my heart.

O Lord, help them to see my heart,
Help them to know my thoughts,
Even as You know them.

Indeed, You hear my cry and see my tears.
I believe You will mend our hearts,
According to Your timing You will mend them.
Heal the wounded,
That I may praise you.
Mend our hearts,
That we may all praise you.
Reconcile us together,
That we may praise You together in the assembly.

A Student's Lament
(Written near the end of a long semester)

Oh God, I need your help now!
My professors have risen up against me.
They have laid excessive burdens upon me!

My eyes are bleary from too much reading.
My fingers are sore from too much typing.
My mind is bursting from too much studying.

Lord, have you forgotten me, Your faithful student?
No! Even in this difficult situation I am confident.
I know that you care about my personal needs.

But give me relief, O Lord, before I go bananas!
Rescue me from seminary syndrome!
Lord, if you get me through this semester, I'll give a public testimony in chapel!
If you help me get these papers written, I'll start doing daily devotions again!

Praise for Jonathan
(By our class)

Give a shout of praise to our great God!
Sing praises to the glory of His person!

Our hearts were heavy when we heard about Jonathan.
But you restored our joy.

It was early in the semester when Brent and Mary learned that their little son was ill.
He was ill with a most dreaded disease--leukemia.

Many children have died from this sickness, Lord.
Many families have suffered greatly watching a beloved child waste away.

But Lord, you intervened!
Little Jonathan's illness was discovered in time.

His cancer has gone into remission!
You, O Lord, have answered our prayer and met our need!
We give public acknowledgment of your kindness today,
For you have shown your compassion and answered our prayer.

Let's Praise God!

Join me in praising the Lord,
Let us exalt His great reputation!
God is sovereign over every detail of our lives.

He is compassionately involved in all our struggles;
His love for us endures forever.
He will never forget us or cease to meet our needs.

Isn't our Lord a great God?
YES! Indeed He is!

A Psalm of Praise (After the near death of my son)

I will sing praise to the Lord, for He is good,
His faithfulness and loyal love never end.
His might and His power transcend the heavens,
His wisdom reaches to the ends of the earth.

When I was bowed down, He comforted me.
He brought back to me the son that I love;
He brought him back from the shadows of death.

Though I walked in peace, calamity struck me.
When my eyes looked up, I saw only tragedy.
In the hospital lay my only son,
My infant son, the crown of my joy.
He heard not, saw not, knew not.
Darkness hemmed him in on every side.
Sorrows were heaped as a mountain upon my head,
My back was bent; my soul was crushed.

The Lord heard from on high and saved!
He extended His mighty hand.
He lifted me from the tormentor's hand
And covered me with His own.

Awake, my son! Arise!
The sleep of death shall not claim you.
Arise, my son and walk!
Come with me to the house of the Lord.

Come with me, for the Lord has healed you!
He has opened your eyes;
He has lifted the dark veil from you.
Your eyes see! Your ears hear! Your hands clap for joy!
You run and dance, for the Lord is with you.

Sing with me the praise of the Lord. For He is good!
He restores my soul;
He heaps blessings upon my head.
The Lord touches and heals.
He raises His children from the dust.
The Lord is mighty and true.
His faithfulness and loyal-love never end.
Let us praise the Lord together in the house of our God.
O bless the name of the Lord!

A Psalm of Praise
(Praising God for His Faithfulness)

Praise the Lord for His faithfulness,
Laud Him for His loyal-love,
For we were in dangerous traffic
And beset by our own fears.

Financial lack overwhelmed us,
Our desires misled us,
But the Lord protected us.
He calmed our fears and met our needs,
And delivered us from sinful self.

Therefore, let us praise the Lord for His sovereignty.
God sees the end from the beginning.
Let us praise Him for His covenant faithfulness.
Our God is a God of enduring love.

A Psalm of Deliverance
(Recalling my encounter with a wayward woman)

In the recesses of my chamber, in the ink of night, I cried out to thee O Lord!
My way of escape has been cut off.
I am walled in on every side.
My sanctuary has become dim with the presence of evil—
A wayward wife beset with boiling passions.

Into my room she pressed, her eyes lit with desire.
Her husband—far from home.
Her marriage covenant—forgotten.
Her dress—the robes of unrighteousness.

Drawing near the foot of my bed she called to me;
"Kiss me," she said, as she offered the forbidden fruit of her mouth.

O God, I am troubled in body and mind.
Only You, my Savior, can rescue me from the path of destruction, from the house
that sinks down to death.
With your hand, lift me up out of this pit and save me from the serpent's sting.
I can hear his hissing in the shadows as honey drips from the enchantress' lips.
Cover me, O Lord! Hide me in the cleft of the rock!
Put Thy hand over my face that I may not be consumed!
Though my flesh is weak, Thy Spirit is not willing that I should desire her beauty in
my heart.

Like a gazelle, I will flee to the heights and proclaim your glories!
No other is like Thee, who gives grace and wisdom to all who call upon Your name.
I shall announce it in the open square that there is none like Yahweh, the Deliverer
of His people.
You have rescued me and set a lamp before me on the narrow way that leads to
life.
My hands are clean and my heart is pure, for you have brought me up from certain
destruction.

Praise Him all peoples! Praise Him all the earth!
Praise the Lord

A Psalm Celebrating Jesus' Resurrection
(Written for our Easter Service)

Hallelujah! Give a joyful shout of praise to God!
For Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins.

Before we knew the Savior our lives were characterized by spiritual darkness and
despair.

We were controlled by our flesh and were in bondage to sin.
Our lives were marked by selfishness and bitterness.
But Jesus changed all that!

He obeyed His Father in dying for our sins on the cross.
He suffered willingly, becoming our sacrificial lamb.
He experienced the agony of crucifixion and the pain of death.
Although He died a criminal's death, the bonds of death did not hold Him.
God's power and love were demonstrated in the Resurrection!
The disciples felt great joy when they realized that Jesus was with them again.

Through Christ, God has given us direct access to Him.
He has redeemed us!
Now we have peace, joy and hope.
And we have victory through our Resurrected Lord!

A Psalm Before Surgery

Hear me O Lord!
The word "cancer" stirs up fear within me.
The unknown causes me great distress.
I cannot sleep; I cannot eat.
Satan causes despair within me.

But my God is a powerful God!
I will trust in His will.
God is faithful.
I thank Him for friends who prayed for me.

And now a postscript of Praise:
 The Lord has heard my prayer.
 He has delivered me safely through surgery.
The Lord is good!

CHAPTER NINE

PUTTING YOUR PSALM TO MUSIC

With your Psalm Testimony written out in narrative form, all that remains is to prepare the musical accompaniment. Now the words "musical accompaniment" may lead some of you to quit the idea of a public presentation of your Psalm Testimony. You may be thinking, "The only thing I play is the radio." Well, I have good news for you. First, this part is optional. You can present your Psalm Testimony in the pattern of biblical praise without setting your composition to music. Second, this is not something you have to do alone. If you decide to arrange musical accompaniment, I recommend that you work together with your church musician or some other qualified person to help you use music to enhance your presentation.

I was teaching a group of young people how to write their own psalm testimony. After several sessions, they wrote a Psalm of God's Provisions. One of the group members played the guitar and led in music. Using his knowledge of chords and harmonies, we soon set the psalm to music. It was such an exciting experience that they asked the pastor if they could present their psalm as a group in the evening church service. It was thrilling to be a part of this presentation! God was truly praised and the saints were encouraged.

Your Musical Psalm

After writing a few psalms, you may feel like you would like to start composing notes and rhythm. I would suggest reading any basic music theory book or take an elementary class in music theory. But remember, you don't have to become an expert at music theory to praise God with your Psalm Testimony. There are musicians who are qualified and willing to help you accomplish your goal.

The musical composition of your Psalm Testimony can be a very rewarding and joyful experience. There are several basic suggestions which will help you as a contemporary psalmist. First, in our Western civilization we are conditioned by radio, T.V., and film to respond emotionally to certain types of music. To the typical American ear, for example, a minor sound, for example, evokes sadness. Therefore, if you are going to write flowing praises to God for His great attributes, you should plan to use major chords rather than minor. If you are not familiar with these musical terms, ask your minister of music or worship leader for help. They will be able to demonstrate the differences in major and minor chords.

Second, allow the music to inform the mood of the psalm. Music is a powerful medium for effecting our emotions. Don't be afraid to let the music work with the words of the psalm to help God's people praise Him. For example, when writing of God's deliverance, you may want to start in a minor key. This would help the listeners "feel" the

emotions of the psalmist as he or she is describing a distressing situation. Then you may switch to a major key when declaring how God has answered prayer and intervened.

Third, you may need to downsize your psalm. In all probability you will find that writing out the experiences that inspired your Psalm results in too many words to fit with a musical accompaniment. To avoid boring people with too many details, you may need to do some further editing in order to be more focused in your praise. You want your psalm to propel your listeners to praise instead of dragging praise out of them.

Notes to the Musician

This guidebook has been written to assist any Christian in the public praise of God for His attributes, provisions and deliverances. This is a bold task that can only be accomplished with the encouragement and guidance of one who is gifted by God with an ear for meter and music. Only through the cooperative efforts of the Psalm Testimony writer and the musician can the goal of this book be carried out!

Although the musician's assistance is only critically important after the completion of Step Three (REFINE), experience has shown that encouragement and supervision may be needed in the earlier steps. Individuals who are unaccustomed to public appearances, creative writing or musical productions may be somewhat hesitant to compose and present their narrative of how God has intervened on their behalf. A key role for the musician is that of a motivator-encourager in addition to providing the musical background for the Psalm Testimony.

Once the Psalm Testimony has been written and is ready for musical accompaniment, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. The narrative should be arranged with 5 to 8 words per line.
2. Each line should maintain an informal sense of meter.
3. Rhyme is not recommended as it may force too much of an alteration from the original composition.
4. Final typing should be centered down the middle of the page to allow for notations on the margins. Double spacing is also recommended.

With the text completed in final typewritten form, the musician must select an appropriate musical accompaniment. Your church hymnal is an excellent source of music for accompaniment. For those who are gifted with an ability to compose music, you may decide to produce an original work. Whether you compose the music yourself or find a piece that would suit your purposes, remember that the focal point of the public presentation is on the narration, not the musical accompaniment.

When the musical accompaniment is ready, it is important to arrange several practice sessions. It may be necessary to further refine the psalm or modify the music. It is recommended that musician and reader(s) practice at least once at the location of the final presentation.

Should more than one person plan to participate in the narrative, as in a Psalm of the People, several creative approaches may be taken. The narrative can be divided among individuals and small groups. Some sections may be read by an individual; others jointly by the group. You might consider repeating a choral response at uniform intervals.

There are many ways that a Psalm Testimony can be expressed, so don't lock yourself into only one approach. Look to the Holy Spirit for a sense of divine creativity. Allow God to inspire your thoughts and music!

CHAPTER TEN

PRESENTING YOUR PSALM TESTIMONY

One spring evening several years ago I had a unique opportunity to give thanks to God. I was involved in a bicycle accident that could have ended my life. That evening I wrote a Psalm Testimony which I later presented in the Western Seminary chapel. It illustrates the kind of testimony you can compose to express your praise of God.

The Dark Night When I Was Hit by the Truck

Give a shout of praise for our great God!
I came close to injury and maybe death,
but God delivered me completely.
I was bicycling to Western
to teach the Wives' class on Monday night.
At 62nd and Stark
a truck came around the corner—fast!
The headlights were coming right toward me;
I knew they were going to hit me;
I could not get out of the way in time.
At the moment of impact
I leaped off the bicycle
and dove toward the curb.
The Lord enabled me
To clear the hood of the truck
and to avoid injury in landing.
My bicycle was smashed hard
and the truck hit the curb opposite me.
But I was safe.
My first words were,
"Thank you, Lord, for keeping me alive!"
I will give public acknowledgment
of what God has accomplished for me,
and how he delivered me from mishap!
Praise be to our great God;
He does all things well!

When I concluded my Psalm Testimony in chapel, the students broke out in spontaneous applause! Following the exhortation of Psalm 47:1, they clapped their hands for joy. As I acknowledged His intervention on my behalf, God was exalted, magnified and honored by those who heard.

Writing a Psalm Testimony can be an exciting experience. But there is nothing quite as fulfilling as sharing your psalm in a public assembly of God's people who respond to your narrative with genuine and heart-felt praise of God.

Avoiding Snags

As you prepare to share your Psalm Testimony with others, there are a few considerations which should be noted to free you from any last minute snags.

First, rehearse your Psalm Testimony with musical accompaniment several times with the musician who will accompany you. Try to arrange at least one rehearsal at the location where you will make the presentation.

Second, time your presentation and your introductory remarks. Let the pastor or worship leader know how much time should be allowed for your presentation. It is insensitive to others to use more than has been allotted to you.

Third, check to see if there is a standard dress code for those participating on the platform. Make sure that your clothing falls within these guidelines or expectations.

Fourth, if you are not asked ahead of time for some information regarding your Psalm Testimony, volunteer a few facts regarding the incident which led you to write your psalm.

Fifth, type out your Psalm Testimony so it will be easy to read should you become nervous during your presentation. This is also a good suggestion should you be asked to present your Psalm Testimony again at a later date.

Suggested Order for Your Presentation

Here is a suggested order for your Psalm Testimony presentation:

1. Your introduction by the pastor, music director or master of ceremonies.

This person should briefly highlight your background and the key events which led up to your Psalm Testimony. If the audience is unfamiliar with Psalm Testimonies, the person introducing you may comment as follows:

A Psalm Testimony is a public praise of God presented in the format of the biblical psalms.

2. Your own words of introduction, appreciation or instruction.
3. The musician's introductory music.

4. Your Psalm Testimony.
5. The pastor or music director's closing remarks.

Conclusion

Presenting your Psalm Testimony is a praise experience which prepares others to worship God. Because of what you have declared publicly about God's attributes, provisions or deliverances, those who have heard will have a greater understanding and appreciation of the character of God.

Writing your Psalm Testimony is not simply a novel expression of praise and worship. My hope and prayer is that the Psalm Testimony will become a natural pattern for your ongoing praise of God!

Hallelujah! Being translated, that means, "Give a shout of praise because you are excited about your God." Now do it!

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

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