

Psalms: Prayers for Healing

A talk given at the Twelveacres 2017 Annual Meeting by Madelon Maupin

(Bible citations are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted. Words bolded within Bible citations are words emphasized by the speaker.)

Thank you for the opportunity to share a little about one of the most loved books of the Bible, the Psalms, and why they are such an effective source for healing. My hope is that you'll find fresh inspiration to encourage your own further digging. To do that, we'll focus on three areas:

- 1) The Psalms themselves, including a little about their background, structure, and type.
- 2) God's laws and how they appear throughout the Psalms
- 3) Examples of how God's laws in the Psalms bring healing

I. The Psalms

Our English word "Psalms" means "hymn" or "song" in Hebrew and "song of praise" in Greek. Our book of Psalms is a collection of 150 Hebrew poems and hymns written throughout Israel's history, from the days of King David's court, around 1000 BC. Then, during the 1st century AD, an editor took a number of ancient Hebrew hymnals and organized smaller collections into one grand book, which today we call the Psalter—our book of Psalms. This editor divided his collection into five parts, then added bookends—a beginning Psalm (Ps. 1) and an ending one (Ps. 150). The result? A collection that is the book of Psalms, which we know and love today.

In the 3,000-plus years since the Psalms were written, they have served at the heart of both prayer and worship services—whether in Jerusalem's ancient Temple or the earliest Coptic Christian churches of Egypt; through centuries of German Lutherans, Presbyterians in Scotland, Calvinists in Switzerland, Anglicans in England, and Congregationalists in New England; for the millions of new Christians in China; for Pentecostals in Africa and Latin America; in synagogues and Christian Science churches worldwide. In every case, the Psalms have been, and are, key parts of Sabbath services for centuries. How remarkable that poetry written 3,000–4,000 years ago can travel through the centuries across so many cultures, languages, and denominations.

Why are the Psalms so popular and enduring? One reason is the way they reveal God's forever-love for all—a holy idea captured in the Hebrew word, *Hesed*; an idea which appears throughout many of the 150 Psalms, such as Ps. 118: "Let those who fear the Lord say, His steadfast love endures forever" (English Standard Version, Ps. 118:4).

The Psalms also help us to feel God's presence, Her "tender mercies"—whether it's being comforted, dispelling fear, or any of the needs we bring to the altar for healing. "Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving kindnesses; for they have been ever of old" (Ps. 25:6). Perhaps it is also the intimacy of the Psalms that cause so many to turn to them in need—an intimacy derived from the implied or direct use of the second-person pronoun "you." For example, "Save me O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul" (Ps 69:1) is really saying "YOU save me O God. . . ." The writer is talking directly to God and letting us in on it. His ancient prayer becomes our prayer, with the Psalms literally teaching us how to talk with God, how to pray.

These innermost prayers appear in different types of Psalms. There are:

- Psalms of nature, describing when even "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1).
- Psalms of Thanksgiving, such as Ps. 30: "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, to the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever" (New King James Version, Ps. 30:11-12).
- Psalms that are hymns of blessing, such as Ps. 103: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Ps. 103:1).
- Pilgrim Psalms, sung as the Jews traveled to Jerusalem, such as Ps. 121: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help" (Ps. 121:1).
- Psalms of lament—prayers that help us recover our sense of God's presence when we're in great need or we fear that healing isn't coming. These come from the deepest places of the heart. Jesus quoted from the cross ". . . my God, why have you forsaken me?" (English Standard Version, Ps. 22:1).

Yet, even in their darkest hour, these laments always have a “but”—a critical turning point in prayer, the moment when the mourning stops and the conviction of God’s healing presence returns. Ps. 22 “turns” on verse 19 and is perhaps the signal Jesus was conveying, turning thought to the resurrection from the crucifixion: “But be not thou far from me, O Lord” (Ps. 22:19). It would go on to declare: “The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live forever” (Ps. 22:26).

How many of you can remember praying with a Psalm during a crisis? Psalm 23 was our family’s favorite, which Mom had us memorize. That paid off as we shouted it above tornados speeding through our neighborhood in Oklahoma while growing up. We crouched in the hallway, declaring its loved verses above the freight train sounds of the wind, and knowing we were safe.

The early Christian community, many of them from a Jewish background, embraced the Psalms especially, because they found the Messiah prophesied in so many of them. Wherever a Psalm spoke of the coming Savior and described what he would experience, they saw the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. As a result, it was understandable why the New Testament quotes the Psalms over 90 times—more than any other book from the Old Testament and why Christians often refer to them as “The Fifth Gospel.”

II. God’s Laws

The Psalms are such effective prayers because they are built on God’s laws. First, a word about law. Today we think of law as rules of conduct recognized and enforced, such as the policeman who pulls someone over for speeding. Biblical law has God as the authority, and codes such as the Ten Commandments teach the people what God requires.

Psalm 1 reveals the Hebrew sense of law—not as anything negative or corrective, but as instruction for how to lead a successful life, a God-centered life. Psalm 1 acts as an introduction to the whole Psalter, to explain this central idea of obedience to the law in order to prosper and thrive:

¹ Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
² But his delight is in **the law of the Lord**,
And in his law he meditates day and night.
³ He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water, [endless supply]
That brings forth its fruit in its season, [productivity]
Whose leaf also shall not wither; [endurance]
And whatever he does shall prosper. [prosperity]
(New King James Version, Ps. 1:1-3)

This opening Psalm lays the groundwork for following God’s law and is the instruction handbook for developing habits for life that make us like mighty oaks planted by an endless stream of inspiration. Just in case we think this can happen in a passive way, the Psalmist tells us to meditate on God’s law. That’s a Hebrew verb meaning “to chew on”—the same word used to describe a lion happily ingesting its prey. Psalm 1 tells us that we are to chew on and digest with great pleasure God’s laws for our lives.

III. Divine Law and Christ Jesus

Christ Jesus was raised on this Hebrew idea of the law as instruction for living. Yet Jesus lifted law above moral guidelines to the expression of divine Love’s unchanging nature, to absolute rules independent of matter and its limiting claims; laws available 24/7; accessible by any child, man or woman; independent of age, race or background; laws that never wear out; laws that transform, uplift, redeem, restore, heal, as they did for the woman who touched the hem of Christ’s robe. Jesus proved over and over that these divine laws are reliable under every circumstance—whether on a stormy sea or a dusty road, in a modest home or a temple, or even a tomb.

IV. Divine Law and Christian Science

Why is the concept of divine law so important to the student of Christian Science? Because it takes prayer out of the realm of hope and faith and into the authority of demonstration. Just as a pilot depends on the law of gravity to launch a massive 747 into the sky—not sometimes, but every time—so the student of the Bible and Mary Baker Eddy’s writings understands that spiritual laws are always in operation.

Praying to understand divine law unmasks and destroys the deceptive so-called laws of matter, breaking their mesmeric grip that claims incurability, deformity, or disfigurement. Mary Baker Eddy writes, “Inasmuch as God is good and the fount of all being, He does not produce moral or physical deformity; therefore such deformity is not real, but is illusion, the mirage of error” (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, 243:32-3).

It is divinely unjust that even one of God’s little ones should be limited or deficient in any way. It took the intrepid commitment of Mary Baker Eddy to illumine these spiritual laws after a lifetime of study and prayer in her Bible. When asked, “How would you define Christian Science?” Mrs. Eddy answered, “As the law of God, the law of good, interpreting and demonstrating the divine Principle and rule of universal harmony” (*Rudimental Divine Science*, 1:1-4). Psalm 107:20 embodies this sense of the healing power of God’s law: “He sent his word [His law], and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.”

1. God’s Law of Redemption

² Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

³ Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

⁴ Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;
(Ps. 103:2-4)

The simple Biblical meaning of “redemption” is to “buy back”; also to “rescue” or “liberate.” A redeemer buys back or rescues slaves, such as in the book of Exodus. So, to redeem someone is to free them from captivity or bondage, which is why Christ is called our Redeemer, rescuing us from a sense of man as material instead of spiritual. The Psalms direct our prayers to redeem anyone who crosses our path from the claim of mental or physical impairment. Whether attributed to biological, hereditary, or environmental factors, God’s law of redemption liberates each of God’s loved children from limiting labels and reveals man’s natural immunity from false identification. No fetal disorders, for example, can attach themselves to “man as the offspring of God, as the idea of Spirit . . . the immortal evidence that Spirit is harmonious and man eternal” (*Science and Health*, 29:30-32).

Our prayer applying God’s law of redemption helps us jettison the upside-down view of others as limited, deficient, or held back in any way, for the unfettered view that sees all God’s children as capable, complete, and free. Mrs. Eddy explains how God’s law of redemption, based on the divine Principle, Love, works: “Jesus aided in reconciling man to God by giving man a truer sense of Love, the divine Principle of Jesus’ teachings, and this truer sense of Love redeems man from the law of matter, sin, and death by the law of Spirit, — the law of divine Love” (*Science and Health*, 19:6)

A Christian Science practitioner proved God’s law of redemption can heal claims of birth defects. She was called by the parents of a young girl with a disfiguring birthmark covering most of her face and neck. The practitioner knew this was the deceptive “mark of the beast,” as explained in the book of Revelation, and not part of this child’s original and unchangeable spiritual identity. She redeemed, or “bought back,” from the so-called laws of physical birth, of the lie of life born into matter, this child’s unchanging selfhood as the expression of Soul, Spirit, of flawless, eternal beauty. The birthmark quickly faded and the child’s skin was smooth and flawless. Such healing prayers buy back or redeem man’s original purity and harmony.

2. God’s Law of Protection

The way redemption frees one from bondage *covers* or *shields* one from danger or injury. God’s law of protection is seen throughout the Psalms (New Living Translation, Ps. 91:3-4):

³ For he will rescue you from every trap
and protect you from deadly disease.

⁴ He will cover you with his feathers.
He will shelter you with his wings.
His faithful promises are your armor and **protection**.

Here is the safety and security of God's sheltering love. God's law of protection applies to claims that involve physical safety, such as accidents, abuse, or bullying. This divine law also applies to the mental traps of entrenched beliefs, discouragement, or the tyranny of time as a factor in healing. As Christian Scientists, we're needed to challenge the medical model so dominant today, which says that for every child, man and woman who claims identity is forever trapped in a biological entity, governed by material law. Mrs. Eddy writes of this need for watchfulness: "When the condition is present which you say induces disease, whether it be air, exercise, heredity, contagion, or accident, then perform your office as porter and shut out these unhealthy thoughts and fears" (*Science and Health*, 392:27-30).

My mother and I saw this divine law of protection when my brother was serving as a Marine at the Air Ground Combat Center in 29 Palms, California. We were notified that he had been in a severe automobile accident and medivacked to Balboa Naval Hospital's trauma unit. The medical prognosis was that he wouldn't make it through the night and thus there was no need to fly across the country to try and see him. That was the first medical prediction overturned, and out we went.

Mom and I had turned immediately to the 91st Psalm, knowing he was forever "in the secret place of the most high" (Ps. 91:1), never subject to accident, never beyond the reach of Love's shepherding care. There were three long days and nights of an avalanche of dire medical predictions, including that if he did survive, he would never be normal. But we stayed with not medical so-called laws but the divine law of protection: that his original, upright, and whole identity had never been subverted or compromised. Then one afternoon the doctors were amazed to find that his spinal cord, which had been almost severed, had fused back perfectly. The scheduled surgery was cancelled. Then many other claims were overturned, and my brother walked out of that hospital 28 days later, returning to serve in the Marine Forces Reserves for a number of years. The most lasting outcome of this proof of God's care was his return to the study and practice of Christian Science, which he knew had healed him where medical laws said it was impossible.

3. God's Law of Adjustment

One of the most loved articles published by the Christian Science Publishing Society is surely Adam Dickey's "God's Law of Adjustment" in the January 1916 issue of *The Christian Science Journal*. What a clear sense of God's law he had: "Man lives by divine decree. He is created, governed, supported, and controlled in accord with the law of God. . . . The efficiency of law rests entirely in the power that enforces it. . . . God is the only creator, the only lawmaker. All the power, action, intelligence, life, and government in the universe belong to God and have always belonged to Him."

People may not be familiar with a quote attributed to Eddy but difficult to confirm, that perhaps inspired Dickey's article. "Today divine Mind adjusts me to my work and adjusts my work to me. Under the law of adjustment, God's law, my work must be successful." What we see here is that our Leader understood all right activity is under the government of Principle, governed by divine law. This is seen in many Psalms, such as Psalm 8:

⁴ What is man that You are mindful of him? . . .

⁵ . . . You have crowned him with glory and honor.

⁶ You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet.

(New King James Version, Ps. 8: 4-6).

As the expression of infinite intelligence, crowned with glory and honor, each one of God's children has a right sense of activity, a sense of contribution. God's law of adjustment enables every individual to adapt to the needs of living arrangements with others—for example, arranging for new friendships and caregivers when family members are unable to be nearby. This divine law of adjustment applies to this loving organization of Twelveacres, ensuring the right resources are always available—in staff, board members, and supporters. Whatever the need is, for individuals or the organization, God's loving law of adjustment is at the helm, directing every detail in a timely, perfect way.

To conclude, we've seen three divine laws throughout the Psalms that are the basis of healing prayers: God's laws of redemption, of protection, and of adjustment. There are many more—such as God's law of mercy, of immediacy, of restoration, of supply—that are awaiting our discovery and application. For this we say a prayer of thanksgiving: "O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me" (Ps. 30:2).