

## Not Alone: God's Relentless Pursuit Psalms

Emerson Kennedy  
June 14, 2026

A little over a year ago, I saw the movie *Sing Sing*. It's about inmates going through the prison's "Rehabilitation through the Arts" program. One of the characters, Divine G., loves the arts. For him, they're therapeutic. Poetry, theater, etc., resonate with his soul. As an actor, he has great emotional depth and talent. As the group prepares for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, along comes a man nicknamed Divine Eye. Divine Eye is rough. For him, acting is dumb and pointless. To spite the others, he auditions for the Prince Hamlet role—and he gets it.

Over the following weeks, the inmates engage in acting exercises led by their director, designed to help them tap into their emotions. Divine G. excels; Divine Eye struggles. He's unable to connect with what's inside him. However, after a heart-to-heart conversation in which the two open up about their personal lives, Divine Eye begins to take the program more seriously. Gradually, he improves. The art and the theater help him. And not only him, but all the inmates. Through it, he (and they) get in touch with their humanity.

Today, we are in our **NOT ALONE** series and are looking at the songbook / poetry book of God's people, the Psalms. The reason I started with the *Sing Sing* illustration is that many times when it comes to the poetry and songs in the Psalms, we can feel a little like Divine Eye, unable to connect. Some of us immediately latch onto the language, metaphor, and style. Others of us struggle. That's how I was growing up. But now, I love the Psalms! As we go through this sermon, I hope you'll see why!

What are the Psalms about? Well, let's use our outline to find LIFE in the Psalms.

- L → Literal—What is the original meaning/message of the book?
- I → Incarnational—How is Jesus reflected in the book?
- F → Formational—How does the book apply to our lives?
- E → Eternal—How does the book point us to heaven and eternity?

### LITERAL

#### The Psalms Are About God's House

All of us have an aim in life, a direction, a *telos*, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. The Psalms direct us to the aim we were made for: God + God's house.

How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young—a place near your altar, Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house.... (Psalm 84:1-4)

Why? Because he knows that "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere..." (Psalm 84:10).

The Psalms direct us towards our home, God's house.

## **The Psalms Are About God's Law**

Think of when the Psalmist acknowledges, "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes" (Psalm 19:7-8).

In other words, not only do the Psalms direct our hearts towards our true home, but they also teach us how to get to our true home: by following God's law!

## **The Psalms Are About God's Deeds.**

For this one, I could give you many examples, but here's one: Psalm 77. Listen to how it starts: "I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me" (Psalm 77:1).

Like many of the Psalms, this poet is hurting and upset and it's not getting better. He begins questioning God's faithfulness, asking, "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" (Psalm 77:7-9).

But then he remembers. "Then I thought, 'To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand. I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds'" (Psalm 77:10-12).

You see how he remembers God's deeds? Over and over again, the Psalms recount the wonderful deeds of God!

## **The Psalms Are for God's People**

When Ash and I started dating, I went to great lengths to tell her how I felt about her. I texted her, I wrote her little notes, I told her in person. Here's one example: "Dear Ash...." Yeah right. Not sharing that! But here's what I will share: my speech was an outworking of how I felt. In a similar way, the Psalms are the outworkings of how people really felt about life, about God, and about how God and life intertwine.

Consider the following.

- "Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race. Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips / but harbor deception in their hearts" (Psalm 12:1-2). Here the Psalmist laments. He's lamenting the state of sin around him, so he brings that to God.
- "Be merciful to me, my God, for my enemies are in hot pursuit; all day long they press their attack. My adversaries pursue me all day long; in their pride many are attacking me" (Psalm 56:1-2). Here the Psalmist gives his personal struggles to God.
- "I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever" (Psalm 145:1-2). Here the Psalmist gives his praise to God.

In other words, the Psalms are *real*. Real people wrestling. Real people praising. Real people remembering. Real people delighting in God.

A couple weeks ago, I put my shoes on, got up from my couch, and walked out my front door. I was full of all kinds of emotions. Sitting around rehearsing things over and over in my head wasn't helping, so I

started walking. As I walked, I began praying. As I was praying to God, I began to journal in my phone the essence of what I was praying. Here's what I wrote:

“Lord, I’m feeling...drained.”

“Lord, I feel lost...”

“Lord, I feel insecure...”

“Lord, I feel temptation...”

“Lord, I’m doubtful. I’m doubtful that You’ll provide.”

Honestly, giving that stuff to God was exactly what I needed. I was able to express my feelings and then go, “But what do I know about God?” Then I took what I knew about God and prayed into that. “Lord, give me strength. Lord, as long as I’m with you, I’m not lost; I’m right where I need to be. Lord, you are my stronghold; with you I’m secure. Lord, lead me not into temptation. Lord, you are Provider.”

What gave me the confidence to pray like that? The Psalms!

What the Psalms do is teach us how people interacted with God *then* so that we can learn how *we* can interact with God *now*! In other words, the Psalms show us *how* to have a personal relationship with God!

## **INCARNATIONAL**

That's the Psalms on a literal level, but how are they incarnational? How do they point us to Jesus? Well, not only do the Psalms teach us about God's house, God's law, God's deeds, and not only are they for God's people, but they also direct us to look at God's King!

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, “Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.” The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, “I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.” I will proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me, “You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery. Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:1-12)

You know who this is about? God's true King is none other than God's own Son, Jesus. He is the King who leads us to God's house, who alone follows God's law perfectly, who puts God's ultimate deed of resurrection on display! It's Jesus! He's the one God has enthroned. He's the one who rules the nations. He's the one who rules with iron scepter. He's the one who scatters his enemies. He's the one who is to be kissed and revered. He's the one whose wrath we tremble before. He's the one we take refuge in! The Psalms point us to God's King, Jesus!

## **FORMATIONAL**

That's the Psalms at the literal level and the incarnational level. But what about the formational level? How do the Psalms apply to our lives??

Several weeks ago, I was at a luncheon featuring our mission partner TCM International. One of TCM's professors, an ethicist named Dr. Meego, told us about his country, Estonia. It is a small country that was

held captive under Communist Russia for many years. One of the ways the people held onto their identity, their heritage, was through singing. Estonia was under Russian occupation, but the people would gather together and sing as a form of nonviolent resistance. They'd gather and sing banned national songs!

Dr. Meego told us that it was funny to watch because the Russians couldn't do anything about it! One or two or ten or twenty people they could arrest, but how could they arrest the hundreds or thousands who gathered? As much as the Russians wanted to control it all, they had to let it happen! Today, that singing is remembered through a festival held every five years in Tallinn to recall and remember who they are! The festival features over 30,000 singers performing to 80,000+ spectators.

Just as the Estonian national songs helped the people maintain their identity *then*, it's God's songbook (the Psalms) which help us to maintain our identity *now*. The Psalms train us to see things the way God does.

With all that in mind, here are three quick application points:

1. **Start the Psalms.** The famous pastor/writer Timothy Keller would read all the Psalms every month—five per day, every day. In doing so, he transformed his imagination to see the world, to see people, to see God's presence as it truly is!
2. **Pray the Psalms.** In other words, don't just read them. Utilize the Psalms and make them yours. Don't just read, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"; pray, "Lord, you are my shepherd, with you I lack nothing!" As Bishop Westcott wrote, "One way to pray more effectively is to echo God's Word back to Him as you pray. We align our hearts with His heart as we pray His words from our hearts"
3. **Steep yourself in the Psalms.** In other words, dwell on the language. For example, Psalm 18:2 says, "The Lord is my rock." When the Psalmist says this, he doesn't mean that God is *literally* a stone. When he calls God "my rock," what he's doing is saying there is something so solid, so stable, so firm, so sure that the only thing in human language comparable is a rock! But even the language falls short because God is *more* solid, *more* stable, *more* firm, *more* sure than any rock could ever hope to be! As Peter Leithart says, "God is not a rock—not because he bears no resemblance to a rock, but because his rockiness is so infinitely realized that no created rock or collection of rocks can fully express his eternal rockiness." Isn't that amazing? That's the kind of thing steeping yourself in the Psalms helps you realize. It's only by steeping yourself in the Psalms that you take the idea of God's rockiness and begin to feel God's rockiness in your everyday life.

## ETERNAL

Now as we end, let's look at the Psalms from an eternal perspective. How do the Psalms point us to our future in heaven with the Lord?

When I do funerals, I always go to Psalm 23. Why Psalm 23? Because it's well-known. Why is it well-known? Because it's tried and true. Why is it tried and true? Because not only does it show us that we're not alone, but it also points us to heaven. Take a listen:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23)

Yes, the Psalms are about God's house, God's law, and God's deeds, and they are for God's people, and they are about God's King—but they also point us heavenward.

The Psalms direct our vision to the end of our existence: God's people with God. Yes, God is with us now walking with us through the darkest valleys. But God has also prepared a table for you and me. He has anointed our heads with oil. Eternal goodness and love is on offer. Dwelling with God is the goal of our lives! This is what the Psalms point us to!