

Like as the hart for water-brooks
in thirst doth pant and bray;
So pants my longing soul, O God,
that come to thee I may.

Psalm 42:1
The Psalms of David in Metre

The Great Joy of Singing Psalms

Learn to Sing Any Psalm to Common Hymn
Tunes

Benjamin Leonard

**To my parents Carl and Peggy
who were the primary instruments
used by the Holy Spirit to instill
the love of God in my heart**

Copyright © 2023 by Benjamin Leonard

All rights reserved.

The pdf version of this book may be freely distributed but not sold. In all other formats this book may not be reproduced without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

150Songs.com

Resources for psalm singers

Christian Books and Publishing

All works may be downloaded for free from 150songs.com

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Getting Started | 1 |
| 2. Godly Men on the Psalms | 9 |
| 3. Benefits of Psalm Singing | 23 |
| 4. Approaches to Psalm Singing | 29 |
| 5. Psalters: Paper and App | 33 |
| 6. Musical Meters | 39 |
| 7. Learning a New Tune for Psalm Singing | 47 |
| 8. Selecting Psalms to Sing | 53 |
| 9. Introducing a Psalm | 67 |
| 10. Memorizing Psalms for Singing | 71 |
| 11. Solo Acapella Singing | 79 |
| 12. Psalm Singing in My Life | 83 |
| 13. Closing Thoughts | 89 |

Chapter One

Getting Started

Sing Your First Psalm

Today we read psalms, but this is a historical aberration. Since they were written, the psalms have mostly been thought of as songs, not prose, and were primarily sung or chanted. Throughout history, Christians have been far more likely to sing psalms than modern worship songs. We are missing out by viewing the psalms as only holy poems and not singing them.

Singing a psalm is not complicated, so before doing anything else, let's sing your first psalm. This is not difficult, but if you would prefer to have video aids, visit my website (150songs.com).

The psalm will be sung to the tune of Amazing Grace. First, review the tune for Amazing Grace by singing the beginning stanzas.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;

Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
 And grace my fears relieved;
 How precious did that grace appear
 The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
 I have already come;
 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
 And grace will lead me home.

Now sing Psalm 126 to the tune of Amazing Grace. Pretend that it is just four more stanzas of the song:

When Sion's bondage God turn'd back,
 as men that dream'd were we.
 Then fill'd with laughter was our mouth,
 our tongue with melody:

They 'mong the heathen said, The Lord
 great things for them hath wrought.
 The Lord hath done great things for us,
 whence joy to us is brought.

As streams of water in the south,
 our bondage, Lord, recall.
 Who sow in tears, a reaping time
 of joy enjoy they shall.

That man who, bearing precious seed,

in going forth doth mourn,
He doubtless, bringing back his sheaves,
rejoicing shall return.

That wasn't too difficult although you may need to sing it a few times before it becomes smooth. Singing Psalm 126 to the tune of Amazing Grace is possible because this is a translation from *The Psalms of David in Metre*, frequently referred to as *The 1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter*, which has an arrangement of every psalm in common meter. Because Amazing Grace is in common meter, any psalm from *The Psalms of David in Metre* can be sung to its tune. Now sing some of Psalm 32 to see that this is the case. It is a longer psalm, so there is no need to sing the entire song.

O blessed is the man to whom
is freely pardoned
All the transgression he hath done,
whose sin is covered.

Bless'd is the man to whom the Lord
imputeth not his sin,
And in whose sp'rit there is no guile,
nor fraud is found therein.

When as I did refrain my speech,
and silent was my tongue,
My bones then waxed old, because
I roared all day long.

For upon me both day and night

thine hand did heavy lie,
So that my moisture turned is
in summer's drought thereby.

I thereupon have unto thee
my sin acknowledged,
And likewise mine iniquity
I have not covered:

I will confess unto the Lord
my trespasses, said I;
And of my sin thou freely didst
forgive th' iniquity.

For this shall ev'ry godly one
his prayer make to thee;
In such a time he shall thee seek,
as found thou mayest be.

Surely, when floods of waters great
do swell up to the brim,
They shall not overwhelm his soul,
nor once come near to him.

Thou art my hiding-place, thou shalt
from trouble keep me free:
Thou with songs of deliverance
about shalt compass me.

I will instruct thee, and thee teach
the way that thou shalt go;
And, with mine eye upon thee set,

I will direction show.

Then be not like the horse or mule,
which do not understand;
Whose mouth, lest they come near to thee,
a bridle must command.

Unto the man that wicked is
his sorrows shall abound;
But him that trusteth in the Lord
mercy shall compass round.

Ye righteous, in the Lord be glad,
in him do ye rejoice:
All ye that upright are in heart,
for joy lift up your voice.

Congratulations, you now know enough to sing any psalm from the 1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter to the tune of Amazing Grace. This is just scratching the surface, so keep working through this book to go deeper.

Poor Singers Wanted

People frequently decline to sing the psalms because they claim to be bad singers, tone deaf, unable to hold a tune, or something similar. Being a poor singer is no reason to avoid singing the psalms: I am not a good singer. Although I've gotten a lot better over time just by singing more, I am still not a "good" singer. That does not prevent me from enjoying or learning from singing the psalms.

The biggest reason why singing skill is unimportant is that there is no need to sing for other people. Sing by yourself, inside your head, or with a safe group of friends.

The primary audience when singing psalms is God. He looks at the heart while men look at external appearances. This is why God passed by David's tall and handsome older brothers and chose the young shepherd boy.

But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.
(1 Samuel 16:7)

Similarly, in the story of the widow's mite, Jesus says that a widow who gave two small coins to God gave more than the wealthy donors because she gave out of her poverty.

And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had. (Luke 21:1-4)

We can infer that God takes more pleasure in an unskilled singer who sings to the best of his ability than in a highly skilled singer who does not sing from the heart. Remember that you are singing to God and not man. Sing psalms to Him no matter your ability.

The Two-Month Challenge

After resolving to pursue the benefits of psalm singing on October 22, 2022, I made a point to learn about the psalms and sing them every day. Some days it was practicing hymn tunes, other days it was singing psalms, many days there was also informational reading. Changes in my attitude, outlook, and thoughts probably started happening immediately, but by Christmas that year the changes were impossible to ignore.

Because of the joy, strengthening, growth, and learning I experienced, I think you will benefit greatly from working on singing the psalms daily for the next two months. It only takes a few minutes each day. In my experience, daily psalm singing is far more beneficial than weekly psalm singing. Search for times of the day when you typically have a few minutes free and use them to sing. It can be walking in the park, driving in the car, or washing the dishes. Sing a memorized psalm or pull out your psalm book and start singing.

Get a copy of *The 1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter* to sing from my website (150songs.com). More tools and instruction will be provided in this book, but start now in your current condition. Walk before running and don't let perfect be the enemy of good enough. Begin practicing now and add complexity over time instead of later trying to implement everything at once.

Chapter Two

Godly Men on the Psalms

Before spending a lot of effort learning to sing the psalms, it is good to step back and look at the big picture. Why should we sing psalms? Psalm singing is not an amusing parlor trick but a powerful spiritual weapon. This chapter will present thoughts by Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Roy Blackwood on the psalms. The full sources referenced here can be found on my website (150songs.com).

Martin Luther

Martin Luther loved the psalms and believed them to be extremely important. Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller posted Luther's *Introduction to the Psalms* on his website and it contains many insightful passages.

Luther mentions that in his day, as in ours, far more effort is put into inspirational works and histories than understanding the psalms. However, despite this neglect, the psalms are still very useful in the walk of a Christian.

So many legends of saints have been circulated in former days, and so many histories of sufferings and of works for our imitation written, that the psalms at one time were quite neglected; they were involved in too much obscurity that scarcely one psalm was properly understood, and yet they afforded such preeminent consolation as, even in their badly understood state, to influence and to strengthen the hearts of the pious and the devout.

Luther says that the psalms are a small Bible by showing how to act in all circumstances and explaining the ministry of Christ the psalms also provide a beautiful compendium of scripture's teachings.

We learn how we are to conduct ourselves with respect to God, to our friends, and to our foes, and how we are to act in all cases of danger and uncertainty. But the psalms are especially dear and valuable from their detailing to us, so clearly and prophetically, the death and resurrection of Christ; and so declaring his kingdom, and the state and spirit of Christianity, that they may be fairly called a little Bible, in which everything that is in the whole Bible is contained in a beautiful and compendious manner; and they may be considered, therefore, a preparatory vade mecum or hand-book to it. It would seem to me as if the Holy Ghost had inspired the composer with the idea of a small Bible, or of an epitome of Christianity and godly men, so that

those who have not the means of reading the whole Bible may find the summary and sense condensed in a small volume.

The psalms let us peer inside the minds of holy men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We see their thoughts and words which should serve as a guide for our thoughts and words.

The psalms do more. They give us not only the daily but the best language of holy men, the language which they used in their applications to and intercourse with God, corresponding both with the gravity of the case and the seriousness of the subject. By these means, we have not only laid open to us their words and their works, but their very heart — the vital treasure of the soul — so that we can look into the ground and foundation of their words and works, that is into their hearts. We know the thoughts they have entertained, the resolutions they have formed, and the conduct they have pursued in every state of doubt, danger, and difficulty.

But the psalms in this respect are copious since they give us the certainty of knowing both how holy men thought and how they addressed their words toward God and towards man.

Consequently, Luther believes that there is no small book better suited for any religious man under any circumstance. It is impossible to devise a better one.

Hence it arises that the psalms are a book for all religious men, and that every reader, under every circumstance of life, meets with words which apply to his own situation, and which seem so adapted to his case that he could neither compose, discover, or desire anything which so little required alteration or improvement.

John Calvin

John Calvin wrote a commentary on the Book of Psalms and the introduction to it is a treasure trove of information. He discusses his unexpected joy when expounding on the psalms, how they cover every human emotion, how the psalms explain the relationship between God and his church, and how he only truly understood David and his Psalms after undergoing suffering himself.

Calvin says that he accidentally stumbled upon the beauty of the psalms and was surprised by the great success he found in studying this book.

Suddenly, and contrary to my first design, it occurred to me, by what impulse I know not, to compose in Latin, only as it were in the way of trial, an exposition of one psalm. When I found that my success corresponded to my desire far beyond what I had ventured to anticipate.

Calvin describes how the psalms cover every human emotion and allows us to see our emotions as if in a mirror.

I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;” for there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.

He says there is no other book of the Bible that describes the acts of God toward the Church in such splendid dictation, perfect truth, and so inspirational a manner.

There is no other book in which there is to be found more express and magnificent commendations, both of the unparalleled liberality of God towards his Church, and of all his works; there is no other book in which there is recorded so many deliverances nor one in which the evidences and experiences of the fatherly providence and solicitude which God exercises towards us are celebrated with such splendor of diction, and yet with the strictest adherence to truth, in short, there is no other book in which we are more perfectly taught the right manner of praising God, or in which we

are more powerfully stirred up to the performance of this religious exercise.

David, like most Godly leaders, was not appreciated by the people he served. Calvin found help during his trials in Geneva by meditating on what David had described enduring in the psalms.

But since the condition of David was such, that though he had deserved well of his own people, he was nevertheless bitterly hated by many without a cause, as he complains in 69:4, "I restored that which I took not away," it afforded me no small consolation when I was groundlessly assailed by the hatred of those who ought to have assisted and solaced me, to conform myself to the example of so great and so excellent a person. This knowledge and experience have been of much service in enabling me to understand The Psalms, so that in my meditations upon them, I did not wander, as it were, in an unknown region.

John Calvin also wrote about the importance of psalm singing in the introduction to *The Genevan Psalter of 1543*. In this passage, he is not speaking as much about the content of the psalms as about the power of our music. Calvin states that music is one of mankind's chief pleasures.

Among all the other things that are proper for the recreation of man and for giving him pleasure, mu-

sic, if not the first, is among the most important; and we must consider it a gift from God expressly made for that purpose.

Music is also spiritual dynamite capable of bending us morally, so we must carefully consider to which songs we will listen.

But more than this, there is hardly anything in the world that has greater power to bend the morals of men this way or that, as Plato has wisely observed. And in fact we find from experience that it has an insidious and well-nigh incredible power to move us wither it will. And for this reason we must be all the more diligent to control music in such a way that it will serve us for good and in no way harm us.

It is true, as St. Paul says, that all evil words will pervert good morals. But when melody goes with them, they will pierce the heart much more strongly and enter within.

Knowing the importance of music and song, Calvin says that we should search diligently for the best music and the psalms are that music.

So what are we to do? We should have songs that are not only upright but holy, that will spur us to pray to God and praise Him, to meditate on His works so as to love Him, to fear Him, to honor

Him, and glorify Him. For what St. Augustine said is true, that one can sing nothing worthy of God save what one has received from Him. Wherefore though we look far and wide we will find no better songs nor songs more suitable to that purpose than the Psalms of David.

Roy Blackwood

Roy Blackwood has had a significant effect on me even though I have never met him. He passed away recently in 2019 but had a profound effect on many people's lives during his time as a minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. The last two lectures in his Medieval Church History Class (CH222 and CH223, available on Sermon Audio) provide insight into the importance of singing psalms. The lectures were so helpful to me that I decided to include quotations in this chapter.

Dr. Blackwood says that memorizing scripture to music helps one remember the passage as well as increasing its impact on our lives. We need to be changed by scripture.

Memorizing something to music helps people remember and come to the standard God wants them to...God says that it will be necessary for you to sing some things that you really don't want to hear. I don't know if you ever find something in your study of the Bible you don't want to find, well let me tell you something if the only thing you find when you read the Bible is something that praises you for

what you are and never corrects you for something you shouldn't be that you are, then you are getting the Bible to tell you what you want to hear and not what God is really saying. That's true where singing is concerned.

Dr. Blackwood believes that the Bible shows that singing was very important in Ancient Israel.

Singing and prophesy were closely related and there is evidence the prophets knew how to sing. There is good evidence that the Israelites had a reputation for singing, such as in Psalm 137 where the Israelites were asked to sing. They were known for their singing and as musicians...David and Solomon really developed singing and a music school. They developed a choir of 4000 people made of families to instruct the nation in singing.

Dr. Blackwood ties the faithfulness of Israel to its singing of the psalms. Thoughtfully singing God's Word makes it impossible to worship idols. You can only do one or the other. The Psalter was not present in its current form back during the Kingdom of Israel, but many psalms that we have today were written early in Israel's history and there were almost certainly other inspired psalms that God chose not to preserve for inclusion in the Book of Psalms.

Every reformation of Israel brought a renewal of that choir and of music, an example is Hezeki-

ah...Every time the Jews got away from singing they fell into decadence. Every time they came back to God there was a renewal of singing. I don't think it is possible to sing those songs with thought and keep going on worshipping dumb idols. When you stop singing the psalms you start worshipping dumb idols. When you start singing the psalms you stop worshipping dumb idols. It is hard to tell which is the cause and which is the effect... The psalms have a way of getting into peoples' hearts.

Roy Blackwood's discussions with people who did not sing psalms led him to believe that many of today's spiritual and worship problems arise from false doctrines in our worship songs.

I hear people complaining about their situations in worship and when I get into it I find that the very things they are complaining about are being taught in their hymn books. It's not the psalms getting them into those problems. It is the other things they're singing getting them into those problems.

Are we trying to change God or are we trying to have God change us? If it is the latter, we need to use His songs--the psalms.

God said to his people don't try to sculpt me, don't try to wittle me, just sing to me. And furthermore, I'll give you some help. I'll give you the words to

sing to me....When the Israelites repented. The things they repented of were the things the psalms were telling them not to do.

The psalms were written before Jesus lived, but they look forward to Him. They show how He thought, they prophesy of Him, and He knew them and quoted from them.

Sing the psalms with Jesus in mind and think what Jesus would have thought...Jesus knew the psalms. He quoted from the Book of Psalms more often than any other book... "My God my God why have you forsaken me" is from the twenty-second psalm. He was thinking these thoughts as he drifted in and out of consciousness just before He gave up His spirit.

Dr. Blackwood discussed what he learned from Dr. Richard Ganz and how the psalms address mental health.

Rich Ganz is a psychologist and has taught at medical schools in America and Europe. He became a Christian and went on to become a pastor. Now he is writing a ten-volume set on the Book of Psalms. He says that in those psalms God has prescribed the remedy for every malfunction of the mind every depression and every problem that a person can face. In the psalms you not only find the diagnosis but you find God's answer to the diagnosis. It goes right to the depths but then brings

a person back up again. It doesn't just leave them down there discovering what the problem is. God's solution is to show them what balanced thinking is and what healed proper thinking is. That's the purpose of the psalms.

Dr. Blackwood discussed the importance of psalm singing in the early church, although it seems only Presbyters were required to memorize the entire Psalter, not all officers.

For about the first six hundred years, the psalms were about the only music in the church...In the early days of the church, no one could be elected to a church office until he had memorized the entire Book of Psalms.

Dr. Blackwood advocates memorizing the psalms but says you won't get the full benefit unless you memorize psalms as a whole.

The time I have spent memorizing psalms has been the most profitable memorizing I have ever done. You can't just memorize them by the verse, it must be by the chapter.

He says that singing and expositing the psalms was a major and popular part of St. Augustine's services.

In each service, they would sing one psalm and Augustine always explained the psalm that they were going to sing. He gave a running commentary called a Narration and that was the high point in the worship service. As people were describing his worship services they say that sometimes he spends so much time explaining the psalm that he doesn't get to the sermon. He published more on the psalms than anything else and I think that is because his rolling commentaries kept growing and developing.

The Psalter is truly a remarkable book of the Bible. It is the only book that gives God's words for us to sing back to Him. I do not think there is any way to sing the psalms without your faith growing. Luther, Calvin, and Dr. Blackwood all believed strongly in the importance of the psalms.

Chapter Three

Benefits of Psalm Singing

Why sing the Psalms? Here are a few reasons:

- There are many ways to entertain yourself while glorifying God. Many of them require money (sometimes a lot), but none are less expensive than singing psalms. Today all that is needed is a free phone app or an inexpensive book.
- When singing the psalms, you are singing along with the heroes of the faith such as Moses, David, and Solomon. They cried to God to express their joy, fear, faith, or sense of abandonment. You can sing those same thoughts with them today.
- Jesus sang the psalms and quoted from them more than any other book in the Old Testament. The psalms were on His mind as He suffered on the cross. They should be on your mind whether you are suffering or rejoicing.
- The psalms change your attitude. These inspired songs meet you where you are mentally, emotionally, and spir-

itually. As you sing they bring you into a right attitude toward and relationship with Christ.

- The psalms help us to convey emotions to God which are difficult to express righteously. Have you ever felt abandoned by God? Do you see God allowing the wicked to flourish while the righteous suffer? Have you felt hopeless due to life's circumstances? It is not easy to righteously present these feelings to God without blemishing His character. The psalms give us God's own words to express these emotions.
- According to Christian Psychologist Richard Ganz, the psalms describe every mental disorder and its remedy. He has an interesting book, *Psychobabble* which is available for free in audiobook form on SermonAudio.com.
- The psalms give you the confidence to face the world. God uses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; he uses the weak things of the world to shame the strong. It takes faith and confidence in God to confront the world in a manner that appears weak and foolish to your human nature. The psalms give you the emotional strength to fight battles that appear unwinnable from the human perspective.
- Long-time psalm singers have told me that our worship songs give us our intuitive and emotional understanding of God while the sermons we hear give us our intellectual understanding of God. Singing the psalms subconsciously builds a proper intuitive and emotional knowledge of God.
- You are communicating to God using the words He has

given us to use when addressing Him. The other books of the Bible contain God's words to man, but the psalms contain God's words for man to sing to Him.

- The psalms show you how to repent when you feel guilt or shame.
- The psalms promote unity within the Church. Every denomination of Christians has its own worship songs and doctrinal distinctives. The psalms are a collection of songs that all Christians can agree upon. No Christian can disagree with the theology of the psalms or impugn their authors.
- Scientists say singing improves your lung health, reduces stress, and reduces pain. What better way to reap these health benefits than by singing psalms?
- Singing improves your voice and singing ability. Like running or reading, one of the best ways to improve at something is by doing it. You can take lessons to improve more quickly, but you will get better just by singing.

I advocate the simple metrical approach to psalm singing which allows all psalms to be sung to a few common tunes. While there are other philosophies, the metrical approach has many strengths.

- It is simple and quick. Almost everyone can learn to sing psalms in a few minutes using the instructions on the first pages of this book. Once the method has been learned, any psalm can be sung.
- It is within essentially anyone's capabilities. I am not a skilled singer and I easily learned this method. A friend

told me to get a copy of *The 1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter*, download the 1650 Psalter app, and use the tune of Amazing Grace. It was straightforward from there. If I can do it, you can do it.

- Singing songs is fun, most people already know several hymn tunes, so a good time can be had without any additional study.
- How many songs do you know? With this approach, everyone automatically knows 150 songs (the 150 psalms). That is going from zero to full speed in a few minutes.
- This approach makes it possible to meditate on God throughout the day by singing memorized psalms. I have tried several times without success to keep my mind focused on God throughout the day. However, once I learned metrical psalm singing my mind ended up being on God for large portions of the day while I sang. You can still sing from your phone or a psalter at any time even if you haven't memorized any psalms.
- This method is simple but provides enough room for anyone to grow. Memorize more psalms, learn more tunes, or learn about how the psalms are structured. There are endless ways to grow.

For most of history, people have enjoyed singing and sung a lot. As recently as the 1920s Americans would sing in the car while driving. That ended with the radio and singing lost even more popularity with the proliferation of pocket-sized music players. Singing has grown steadily less popular over the last century. This is apparent in my own family. My parents told me about

how they sang around campfires with their friends as children. When I was a child, I disliked singing and didn't sing unless it was required. When I was a child many people had campfires but no one sang around them.

People no longer sing, but they are always listening to music. The music industry pumps out songs glorifying drugs, drunkenness, fornication, and violence. Since we listen to those types of songs it is not surprising that our country is filled with those behaviors. Is it any wonder there is an epidemic of depression today?

You will be happier, more confident, and more optimistic if you start singing the God-given psalms instead of listening to the latest billboard hits. Keep pouring God's inerrant word into your soul. Christians have every reason to be optimistic because Christ has already won the victory.

Chapter Four

Approaches to Psalm Singing

There are two basic approaches to psalm singing. One focuses on simplicity and ease of use. The second focuses on musical excellence. The second is far more commonly used in church services. However, the first is better for most people to use in their daily life. It is easy to shift in the direction of musical sophistication with more experience.

The first approach is older and less polished; it is commonly referred to as “metrical psalmody.” When a psalm is translated into the common tongue in a specified musical meter, the metrical translation of the psalm can then be sung with any tune in the specified meter. When all the psalms are translated into the specified meter, only a single tune must be learned to allow every psalm to be sung. Historically in the English-speaking world, a congregation or family would only learn a few tunes and be able to sing any psalm. The most common psalm arrangements were in common meter.

A musical meter is a regularly repeating rhythmic pattern. Each repetition of the pattern is a stanza. For example, common

meter has a repeating pattern of four lines each with specified numbers of syllables or beats: eight beats, six beats, eight beats, and six beats (8.6.8.6.). Words can be written to fit a meter and tunes can be composed to fit a meter. If the words and music fit the same metrical pattern, the words can be sung to the musical tune. The standard musical meters for psalmody are common meter (8.6.8.6.), long meter (8.8.8.8.), and short meter (6.6.8.6.).

In psalm books written using the simpler approach, no musical score is printed because the singer chooses the tune. It is expected that many different tunes will be used with any psalm arrangement. A tune is not married to a given psalm setting.

The second school of psalm singing is more polished but also more complex. It is my understanding that this approach was always more popular in the non-English speaking world. However, in the English-speaking world, the simple singing style was more widespread for a long time due to the popular 1650 Scottish Psalter. As time progressed after the Reformation, church music became more polished and specialized. Lyrics were paired with specific tunes, and a wider variety of musical meters were employed. The music and words came to be married together as a single unit and were no longer used interchangeably.

This more complex approach sets the composer at liberty by permitting the use of a wide variety of musical meters. It allows a closer fit between the mood of the music and the text of the song. Using a larger number of musical meters also allows for musical diversity. The artistic quality of music is much higher using this philosophy.

The downside of the second approach is the need to learn the unique tune for any psalm arrangement before singing it. Each

psalm or song must be learned individually. I believe in the long run this will lead to requiring musical accompaniment because the number of tunes goes up exponentially making it impossible for anyone to know all of them. If you are in a church and there is an organ or worship band, this is not a significant limitation. The worship team can learn any tunes necessary before the service, and the congregation only needs to sing along with the praise band. However, it becomes difficult to sing alone or with one's family. A modern hymnal contains a vast number of unique tunes and many musical meters. To sing all 150 psalms would require learning more than 150 different songs because each arrangement has its own tune and many psalms are long enough to require several arrangements.

The older approach of having all psalms arranged in standard meters and singing them to a few common tunes makes it more difficult to sing any particular song but easier to sing all of them. A tune must be learned well before any psalm can be sung to it, and that requires practice. However, once the tune is learned, all of the psalms can be sung to it.

I experienced the drawbacks of the second school in my early years of psalm singing. I first learned about singing psalms while attending a church where the second approach was practiced. I could sing the psalms when I was with other people from the church—which was pretty much the only time I was singing psalms at that point. However, I then moved to a new city and decided that I wanted to do psalm singing in my apartment by myself. I found that I couldn't sing most of the arrangements in the Psalter. There were only a few that I knew well enough to sing acapella.

Chapter Five

Psalters: Paper and App

A psalter or psalm book is a hymn book containing psalms. It is distinguished from a hymnal because a psalter contains only psalms (inspired by God) while a hymnal contains man-made songs and possibly some psalms or songs inspired by psalms. The following psalm books and psalm singing apps are ones that I use or am familiar with and think could be useful to a beginning psalm singer.

Many of these psalters are derived from *The Songs of David in Metre*. This book was originally compiled by a committee of the Westminster Assembly, which wrote the Westminster Confession of Faith and Westminster Catechisms. The Scottish delegation to the Westminster Convention took the psalter back to Scotland and distributed it among Scottish pastors and laymen. These men reviewed the book looking for ways to make the translation simpler and more faithful to scripture. After extensive work, the Church of Scotland approved it for use by the church in 1650. This led to it being referred to as the Scottish Psalter of 1650. It is still widely used today. Since *The Psalms of David in Metre* is in the public domain and well known, there are many versions of it available.

The Songs of David in Metre, published by the Trinitarian Bible Society.

The best currently available edition of *The Psalms of David in Metre* to carry around and sing from is produced by the Trinitarian Bible Society. It is a thin black hardcover book that comes in three sizes the only difference between them is the text size. The larger versions cost more than the smaller versions, but all versions cost less than ten dollars at the time of writing. With its small size, uncluttered pages, low price, and hardcover, there is nothing that beats this as a pocket psalter. It can also be purchased from the Trinitarian Bible Society website and several other online outlets.

The Songs of Christ: The 1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter++ with Brief Comments

This is another version of *The Psalms of David in Metre*. If the Trinitarian Bible Society version is a no-frills pocket psalter, this is an in-depth study psalter. It was put together by Pastor JJ Lim a reformed pastor in Singapore and its design and content show his extensive experience with psalm singing. In my opinion, the book is not well formatted for day-to-day singing, but a lot of helpful information. It contains several useful indexes and introductory sections:

- A forward telling about the singing of psalms in worship
- A preface explaining how to use the Psalter and its notations
- Subject matter classifications of the psalms

- Recommended tunes for psalms
- List of psalms applicable to various situations in life
- A subject index

There is additional information printed beside each psalm in the book:

- Title
- The Psalmist's editorial comments
- Musical meter
- Suggested tunes
- Psalm outline with verses and a two or three-word title for each section
- Common partitions showing how a longer psalm is typically divided up into sections for singing
- A commentary on the psalm as a whole

The Psalms of David in Metre, 150 Songs Edition

This edition of the 1650 Scottish Psalter was created in conjunction with this book. It has notes at the beginning to aid in psalm-singing, but the pages are uncluttered for ease in singing. The meter and suggested tunes are listed at the beginning of each psalm arrangement. The book number is listed at the top of each page (The book of Psalms is divided into five books, each with a different theme), I put this edition together because it is what I would have liked to have had when I was beginning to sing the psalms.

The 1650 Psalter App

This free app is an extremely useful tool for anyone who uses *The Psalms of David in Metre*. It provides portability and helps with the musical aspects of psalm singing. There are other free apps based on the 1650 Psalter, but this can be distinguished by its logo which is an orange circle with a white 1650 written in the middle of it. The text underneath the logo says Psalter.

In this app, the psalm and music are selected independently and appear above one another on the screen. The musical score for the tune appears at the top of the screen, and the words to the psalm appear at the bottom of the screen. There is a small blue arrow in the bottom right corner of the screen which will play the selected tune on a loop. A large number of tunes are available in the app and can be selected from an alphabetical list that includes the meter of each tune.

The bottom of the screen has three tabs. The first shows the text of the selected psalm. The second shows suggested tunes for the selected psalm from *The FCC Split Leaf Psalter* and *The Comprehensive Psalter*. Any of these tunes can be played directly from the list. At the bottom of the list is a recording of a congregation singing the psalm. The third tab provides a commentary on the psalm by John Brown of Haddington.

The 1912 Psalter App

The 1912 United Presbyterian Church Psalter was the last great psalter created by the reformed churches in America and is still being used by some denominations today. Its logo is a yellow P on a small blue rectangle on top of a white circle. The word

Psalter appears beneath the logo. Hard copies of this psalter can also be purchased.

The 1912 UPC Psalter is a different and newer translation than the 1650 Scottish Psalter and takes the modern approach of pairing tunes with psalms rather than having the tune and words be independent. There are several arrangements for each psalm which together cover the entire psalm. A wide variety of musical meters are also employed.

The app allows the psalms to be searched by psalter page number, lyrics, or psalm number. Each psalm can be displayed in metrical format or with the musical score. The app will play the tune for each psalm.

Because this psalter was developed with paired psalms and tunes and uses a wide variety of meters, it will be difficult to use the approach taught in this book. However, if you just want to be able to sing psalms without too much effort, it will work wonderfully.

Sing Psalms App

Sing Psalms is a 2003 publication of the Free Church of Scotland. It is based on the 1650 Scottish Psalter but the psalms have updated vocabulary and grammar making it easier to understand. The psalter app is free and a high-quality paper psalter can also be purchased. The logo is a light blue leaf on a dark blue background.

The app displays the psalm arrangements in metrical format. The psalm number and meter are listed in the title, and the specified tune can be played for each selection. In this psalter

the psalms are not translated as a whole but as several separate arrangements which when combined should cover every portion of each psalm at least once.

Chapter Six

Musical Meters

The meter of a song is the repeating rhythmical pattern to which it is set. Each repetition of the pattern is a stanza. Within the stanza are a set number of lines each with a specified number of beats. When words are fit to this meter, each syllable counts as a beat. Metrical psalters most commonly use three different meters: common meter, long meter, and short meter.

Common Meter

The Psalms of David in Metre or *The 1650 Scottish Psalter* has every psalm except for 136 arranged in common meter. It is by far the most important meter for psalm-singing and is referred to in shorthand as CM or 8.6.8.6. Each verse has four lines: the first line has eight beats, the second line has six beats, the third line has eight beats and the fourth line has six beats. To see this illustrated we can look at the first stanza of Psalm 1:

That man hath perfect blessedness,
who walketh not astray
In counsel of ungodly men,
nor stands in sinners' way,

Each syllable is marked out below to show how it adheres to the 8-6-8-6 pattern:

(1)That (2)man (3)hath (4)per (5)fect (6)bles (7)sed
 (8)ness,
 (1)who (2)walk (3)eth (4)not (5)a (6)stray
 (1)In (2)coun (3)sel (4)of (5)un (6)god (7)ly (8)men,
 (1)nor (2)stands (3)in (4)sin (5)ners' (6)way,

Words in these older metrical psalms are frequently broken into syllables differently than in modern spoken English. This may be confusing the first time through a psalm, so it is helpful to sing through a memorized song silently while first reading through an unfamiliar psalm before starting to sing it. This preparation clarifies how the words match the rhythm.

In common meter, the first pair and second pair of lines are typically linked. The six-syllable to eight-syllable transition is more readily picked up by the ear as a slight break making this a good division place in the stanza.

Common meter doubled, abbreviated as CMD, is a longer version of common meter. These tunes have eight lines instead of four lines, hence the double. The second four lines follow the same rhythmic pattern as the first four, so the lines will be 8-6-8-6-8-6-8-6. The added length makes the tune harder to memorize, but on the other hand, there are half as many verses when singing to a CMD tune.

In most modern hymns the song is married to a tune, but the song (lyrics) and the tune still have separate names. It is helpful to know the name of the tune for favorite hymns, and as time

progresses the tune names will become more familiar. Now I only remember the name of the tunes and not the names of the hymns with which I originally identified them. Here are some common meter hymn-tune pairs:

- Amazing Grace – New Britain
- O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing – Azmon
- The Lord is My Shepherd (Psalm 23) – Crimond
- This is the Day the Lord has Made – Arlington
- Alas and Did My Savior Bleed – Martyrdom
- City of God – Richmond
- O God Our Help in Ages Pate – St. Anne
- O Little Town of Bethlehem – St. Louis
- While Shepherds Watch their Flocks by Night – Winchester Old
- How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place (Psalm 84) – Harington
- It Came Upon a Midnight Clear – Carol

There are also well-known songs written in common meter. Psalms can be sung to these song tunes, although I have not personally memorized psalms to non-hymn tunes.

- The theme song to Gilligan's Island
- America the Beautiful
- House of the Rising Sun

- Yankee Doodle
- Most of the Rime of the Ancient Mariner
- The Yellow Rose of Texas
- O Danny Boy

Long Meter

In *The Psalms of David in Metre* several psalms are arranged in long meter: 6, 100, 102, and 145. Long meter is abbreviated as LM and has verses with four lines each containing eight beats. This can be seen in the first stanza of Psalm 100:

All people that on earth do dwell,
 Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.
 Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell,
 Come ye before him and rejoice.

Each syllable is marked out below to show how it follows the 8-8-8-8 pattern:

(1)All (2)peo (3)ple (4)that (5)on (6)earth (7)do
 (8) dwell,
 (1)Sing (2)to (3)the (4)Lord (5)with (6)cheer (7)ful
 (8) voice.
 (1)Him (2)serve (3)with (4)mirth, (5)his (6)praise
 (7)forth (8)tell,
 (1)Come (2)ye (3)be (4)fore (5)him (6)and (7)re
 (8)joice.

Long meter doubled, abbreviated as LMD, has eight lines instead of four lines, hence the double. The second four lines follow the same rhythmic pattern as the first four, so the lines are 8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8. This makes the tune about twice as hard to memorize, but there are only half as many verses. This can make long psalms less repetitive.

There are many hymns written in long meter, but not as many popular ones as in common meter. Here are three well-known long meter hymn-tune pairings:

- I Know That My Redeemer Lives – Duke Street
- When I Survey the Rugged Cross – Hamburg
- All People That On Earth Do Dwell (100) – Old 100th

A common convention in long meter is to make the last syllable of each line rhyme.

Short Meter

In *The Psalms of David in Metre* several psalms are arranged in short meter: 25, 45, 50, 67, and 70. Short Meter is abbreviated as SM, and each verse has four lines with six syllables in lines one, two, and four while there are eight syllables in line three. This is illustrated by the first stanza of Psalm 70:

Lord, haste me to deliver;
 with speed, Lord, succor me.
 Let them that for my soul do seek
 shamed and confounded be:

Each syllable is marked out below to illustrate that it follows the 6-6-8-6 pattern:

(1)Lord, (2)haste (3)me (4)to (5)de (6)liver;
 (1)with (2)speed, (3)Lord, (4)suc (5)cor (6)me.
 (1)Let (2)them (3)that (4)for (5)my (6)soul (7)do
 (8)seek
 (1)shamed (2)and (3)con (4)found (5)ed (6)be:

Short meter doubled, abbreviated as SMD is twice as long as short meter. It has eight lines instead of four, and the second four lines follow the same rhythmic pattern as the first four, so the lines are 6-6-8-6-6-6-8-6. The longer stanza length makes this ideal for longer psalms.

There are many hymns written in short meter whose tunes can be used for psalm-singing. Several well-known short meter hymn-tune pairs are listed below:

- Crown Him With Many Crowns – Diademata
- This is My Father’s World – Terra Beata
- Breath on Me Breath of God – Trentham

Peculiar, Irregular, and Complicated Meters

Although most psalm arrangements in *The Psalms of David in Metre* are in long, short, or common meter a few are not. However, in a modern hymnal or psalter, most of the arrangements are not in one of those three meters.

In earlier times when a larger percentage of music was written in one of the big three meters, additional meters could be referred to as peculiar meters. These could also be thought of as complicated or complex meters because the rhythmic pattern is not as simple. An example is *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*; its meter is 8.7.8.7.6.6.6.7.

There are also irregular meters. This music is written with inconsistent numbers of syllables per line or varying numbers of lines per stanza. The stanzas within a song could also be written in several different meters.

The Index of Tunes by Meter in the back of modern hymnals will list a large number of meters under many of which only a few hymns are included. The wide variety of meters adds musical spice but also makes singing at home more complicated.

The Psalms of David in Metre has four arrangements not in long, short, or common meter. Psalm 124 is in 10.10.10.10.10.: five lines with ten syllables each. This is an arrangement from Calvin's *Genevan Psalter*, and the most common tune for it is *Old 124th*.

Psalm 136 is arranged in 6.6.6.6.8.8. This can be sung to a tune called *Darwall* which is used for the hymn *Rejoice, the Lord is King*. Psalm 136 is also arranged in 8.7.8.7. The second and fourth lines are only one syllable off from common meter (six syllables), so this could be sung to a common meter tune by slurring two of the syllables together on the second and fourth lines. This is easier than it sounds because those lines are the same throughout the psalm. Psalm 136 in the 8.7.8.7. arrangement could also be sung to the tune of *Vesper Hymn* used for the hymn *Take Me, O My Father, Take Me*.

Psalm 143 is in 6.6.6.6. This psalm can be sung to the tune of *St. Cecilia* which is used for the hymn *Thy Kingdom Come, O God*.

These peculiar psalm arrangements can be ignored because there are so few of them. It is more efficient to learn mostly common meter tunes along with a few long and short tunes.

Chapter Seven

Learning a New Tune for Psalm Singing

The first lesson of this book was how to sing a psalm to the tune of *New Britain* (the tune of *Amazing Grace*). Psalm singing is more enjoyable when using a wide variety of tunes, so thankfully, learning a new tune is a straightforward process.

This chapter will first explain the process I initially used to learn a new tune. The second part of the chapter will cover my current process for learning a new tune. Over time I have become more efficient, so the newer method is quicker; however, the earlier method is a good fallback when difficulties arise.

The first method:

1. Pick a favorite hymn or song in your desired meter and select the associated tune. Three useful resources can aid in finding a song-tune combination.
 - The first way is to use a hymnal. At the back, an index of tunes or hymns will list all of the hymns or tunes arranged by meter. Look at the tunes in the desired meter, then look up the hymns listed for that

tune. That song-tune combination will be the starting point.

- The second way is with an online search of a hymn website. Look through their indexes or search for a particular song or meter. There are two especially useful hymn websites:
 - The Cyber Hymnal: HymnTime.com. On this website, there is a section called “Tunes by Meter.” Select the meter of interest and the site will provide a list of tunes in that meter. Select a tune name and the website will provide an audio file for downloading in *.mihi format. Go through them until one strikes your interest. Then go to the section on the website called “Tunes by Name,” look up the selected tune, and look through the hymns which use the tune.
 - Hymnary.org is another great website. Search this site for favorite hymns. On the hymn page, there is a list of tunes used with the hymn and the hymn's musical meter.
 - A third way is to use a Hymn or Psalter app and scroll through its tunes playing them until a favorite is found. Next visit The Cyber Hymnal (hymntime.com) and go to the section “Tunes by Name” and look up the tune. On the right side of the table will be a list of the hymns that use the tune. Review them and choose one.
2. Find a video of the hymn being sung with the words shown on the screen; YouTube is a good resource here.

Watch the video, and then sing along with the video until you are comfortable singing the hymn. There is no reason to sing more than the first stanza or two because the goal is to learn the tune, not the hymn.

3. Get an audio file of the tune without singing. It can be from a psalter or hymn app, YouTube, or an mp3 file from the internet. The Cyber Hymnal or Hymnary.org will allow you to download a *.midi file of most tunes.
4. Find sheet music for the hymn. Good sources are The Cyber Hymnal or Hymnary.org.
5. Sing the hymn while playing your audio file looking at the sheet music from the previous steps. This is more difficult because there are no longer accompanying singers.
6. Remember the tune in your head and use the notes on the page to sing from the sheet music without the audio file. If unfamiliar with reading sheet music, look at the top row of musical notes: when they move up, the notes go higher; and when they move down, the notes go lower.
7. Sing the hymn in metrical format. Both The Cyber Hymnal and Hymnary.org will have the words of the hymn written in metrical format (a series of short lines divided into paragraphs). Sing the song while playing the audio file of the tune and looking at the words in metrical format.
8. Sing the hymn looking at the words in metrical format and without playing the tune. If this is difficult, only play

the first line of music.

9. Place the metrical psalm and metrical hymn next to each other. Compare the words: each syllable on the line matches a beat in the music. Sing the hymn while following the metrical psalm text to see how the words line up between the two songs and the tune.
10. Play the audio file to the tune while singing the metrical psalm. If necessary start singing the hymn and then switch over to the psalm after a few words.
11. Keep practicing. When it is possible to sing the psalm smoothly with music, start singing it without playing the music.

Now I use a more efficient process for learning new tunes. It is the result of a slow evolution from my initial strategy. This method can be done using only the 1650 Psalter App, so I usually work on memorizing psalms during my lunch break.

1. Select a psalm–tune pair. Decide on the tune to learn and then choose a psalm with which to learn it. If there are any difficulties, use the resources in the procedure above.
2. Memorize the words of the first stanza of the psalm.
3. Play the audio file of the tune a couple of times.
4. Sing the first stanza of the psalm to the music while looking at the words a couple of times.
5. Sing the first stanza of the psalm to the music while not looking at the words (note: the words must be memo-

rized).

6. Sing the psalm while looking at the musical score of the tune (not at the words and not listening to the music). This step helps find errors in your understanding of the tune. Linger on this step to ensure the intricacies of the tune are understood.
7. Sing the psalm without looking at the musical score or the words or listening to the music.
8. Memorize the rest of the stanzas in the psalm and then practice singing them to the tune.

Chapter Eight

Selecting Psalms to Sing

Now it's time to dive into learning psalms and tunes; however, there are 150 of them, many of which are quite long. Where is the best place to start? In what order should they be sung? Which are the most important?

At the time of writing, I have used two approaches, both of which work well. The structure of the Books of Psalms and the characteristics of individual psalms make several more ways of singing through the psalms look attractive. *The Flow of the Psalms* by O. Palmer Robertson has been a great source of information about the structure of the Psalter and one of the primary resources for this chapter.

The Psalms in Order

The psalms were not randomly ordered but were purposefully arranged by editors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Psalms was edited into its final form during the Babylonian captivity of Judah. The exact reasons for the psalms being set in their present order are unclear, but scholars are making advances in their understanding of the structure.

Singing through the Book of the Psalms in order takes one through them as they were intended to be sung. A singer will benefit from paying attention to each psalm in the context of the surrounding psalms. This plan is simple, but it takes a while to complete. However, many Christians, such as medieval monks, have sung through the entire Psalter on a regular basis.

Memorized Psalms in Order

This is a strategy for people who are memorizing psalms. Sing through all your memorized psalms in order by number. After memorizing a new psalm, insert it in its proper position. This is an easy way to review memorized psalms which is necessary to retain them in memory.

Sing these psalms throughout the day either under your breath or softly out loud. There is no need to set aside time at home for memory review; instead, do it while shopping, driving, or washing the dishes. This approach focuses the mind on God throughout the day.

The Books of the Psalter

The Psalter or Book of Psalms is divided into five “books”—isn't that confusing? Understanding the themes of the five books is probably the single most useful step in understanding the structure of the Psalter. When singing or studying a psalm or grouping of psalms, always check the book in which it or they are located.

1. The first book contains Psalms 1 through 41 and its theme is **confrontation**. Almost all the psalms are composed by David and deal with his struggle to establish an

earthly kingdom while being opposed by many enemies. David is a type of Christ, so these psalms can also be understood as describing Jesus's fight to establish His heavenly kingdom. There is constant struggle, but the psalmist remains confident in victory. In the first book, we see that a nation is always identified with its leader. The fortunes of the ancient Israelites rose and fell with King David and with the subsequent kings. Ours rise and fall with Christ.

2. The theme of the second book is **communication** and it contains Psalms 42 to 72. The first third of the book is written by the Sons of Korah and Asaph while the last two-thirds is written by David. There is a progression from the first book: now David has been established as king and has a kingdom after being delivered from Saul and other enemies. However, the struggle is not over. In the first book, the psalmist was generally communicating to God about a struggle between "us" and "them" (third person). In the second book, the psalmist has shifted to talking to his enemies. He is telling them to repent and seek after God.
3. The third book's theme is **devastation** and it contains Psalms 73 through 89. Many of the psalms talk about the defeat and destruction of God's people by foreigners. The first two-thirds of the book was written by Asaph while the last third was written by the Sons of Korah. It appears that both Asaph and the Sons of Korah refer to offices that were held over generations. Asaph and the Sons of Korah both worked with King David, but some of the events in their psalms happened 300 to 400 years after David's life. The mood sinks downward

from the second book and parallels Israel's falling away from God and being judged under wicked kings after the high point of David and Solomon's reigns. The psalms tend to be corporate, not individualistic: in the voice of the congregation not a single person. The third book is filled with pain, sorrow, and distress, but does end with muffled hope.

4. The fourth book includes Psalms 90 through 106 and its theme is **maturation**. Moses is the author of Psalm 90 which is considered to be the "heart of the psalms" and begins the third book. Up until Psalm 90, King David has been the primary focus of the psalms. After Psalm 90 the focus shifts to the coming Messiah, who David foreshadowed. This book represents Israel's time of exile in Babylon. The calamitous fall of the kingdom is over, now the people are in a foreign land coming to terms with God's plan. The exile focused Israel on the reality that God himself is His people's dwelling place (not a specific geographic location) and king (not a human ruler). Removal from the promised land also helped Israel start to understand the planned merger of God's throne with David's throne in the person of Christ. Exile was painful, but it did produce maturity in the same way that trials in our own lives lead to growth. This book in exile is more upbeat than the third book while Israel was still in the promised land and rebelling.
5. The fifth book's theme is **consummation** and it contains Psalms 107 through 150. It expresses the climactic praise of God's people as God's kingdom is established. Historically this represents the nation's return to the promised land, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the

resumption of Temple worship. The book has a complex structure and contains many groupings including some Davidic Psalms, the Psalms of Ascent, and the Hallelujah Psalms. The Psalms of Ascent were sung when the Israelites would walk up to Jerusalem for a religious festival. This is the most upbeat of the five books.

Sets of Psalms for Study and Singing

While the five books of the psalms are the major God-inspired and explicitly marked-out divisions in the Psalter, other collections of psalms have been recognized by human scholars. I have separated these collections into three categories:

- **Author:** Some psalms have their author listed in the editorial notes at the beginning of the psalm while others are anonymous.
- **Genre:** These are literary styles and members of a family may appear scattered throughout the psalter.
- **Spatial:** These psalms are grouped sequentially within the psalter. They may or may not have a common author or genre, but are located next to one another and have a common theme.

Any of these sets can be sung through or studied together. These groupings can be gone through more quickly than one of the five books.

Sing the Psalms by an Author

The Bible attributes the authorship of many individual psalms to named men and groups of men while others are left anonymous. An interesting approach to studying and singing psalms is to go through all of the psalms by a particular author.

The first and primary author is David. The psalms are frequently even referred to as the Psalms of David. He wrote so many that it is better to look at a subset of his psalms rather than his entire collection. Most Davidic psalms have an editorial comment noting his authorship at their beginning; however, two psalms are attributed to David elsewhere in the bible: Psalm 2 is mentioned in Acts 4:25 and Psalm 95 is mentioned in Hebrews 4:7.

- Book 1: 2-41 (with the exceptions of 10 and 33)
- Book 2: 51-70 (except for 66 and 67)
- Books 3 and 4: 86, 95, 101, 103
- Book 5: 108-110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138-145

Asaph was a musician who headed the service of music during the reigns of Solomon and David. He served as a prophet and a poet and led worship. His sons worked under him in this job and likely his descendants continued to compose psalms under his name after he passed away. Asaph was assigned to minister regularly before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. He is the author of Psalms 50 (Book 2) and 73-83 (Book 3). All his psalms have to do with the judgment of God and many involve the prayers of people undergoing a particular event.

The Sons of Korah authored many psalms. Korah, a Levite, was swallowed by the earth in Numbers 16 due to his rebellion against Moses; however, his sons were spared. These sons and

their descendants did not follow in their father's footsteps but served God faithfully; they were assigned to be doorkeepers and custodians of the Tabernacle. The Prophet Samuel was a son of Korah. During David's reign, they became leaders of choral and orchestral music in the Tabernacle. Heman was the chief singer among the Korahites at the time of David. The sons of Korah authored Psalms 42, 44-49 (Book 2); 84-85, 87-88 (book 3). Their psalms characteristically express a spirit of gratitude and humility to God.

There are several more psalms with attributed authorship as well as 48 psalms where the author is not mentioned. The small collection of psalms with named authors other than the ones listed previously can be considered a group.

- Solomon: 72 and 127
- Moses: 90
- Ethan the Ezrahite: 89
- Heman: 88. This psalm is written by the Sons of Korah, but is the only one attributed specifically to Heman.

Psalms by Genre

In **psalms of lament**, the author calls upon God in distress. He is in anguish due to overwhelming problems and cries out to God for help. These psalms have a basic structure:

- Invocation – God is called to help
- Description of the suffering or distress
- Petition for help

- Reasons for God to help
- A promise of thanks for the help
- Expression of confidence in God.

Laments can be individual (by a single person about his own problems) or corporate (dealing with a whole nation or community). Imprecatory psalms are a controversial subcategory of laments in which the enemies of God and His people are cursed. Penitential psalms are another subcategory where the psalmist is confessing and expressing sorrow for his sins.

Examples:

- Individual laments: ¶12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129
- Community laments: 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 28, 31, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 120, 139, 141, 142
- Imprecatory: 35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140
- Penitential: 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143

Hymns are psalms of praise to God. The psalmist calls on the congregation to praise God for deeds He has done or attributes of His character. The structure of a hymn is as follows:

1. Call to worship God
2. Reasons for praising God
3. A reiteration of the call to worship

Psalms of Thanksgiving are a sub-genre of Hymns thanking God for answered prayers or sung in anticipation of Him answering prayers. Thanksgiving psalms, like laments, can be individual or corporate.

Examples:

- Hymns: 33, 66, 95, 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150
- Community Thanksgiving: 75, 107, 124
- Individual Thanksgiving: 18, 21, 30, 34, 92, 116, 118, 138

Psalms of Remembrance tell the history of God's acts and remind us of key events in Israel's history. Remembering these mighty acts should give us confidence in God as well as an understanding of how God views these historical events.

Examples: 8, 78, 105, 106, 135, 136, 137

Psalms of Confidence or Trust are statements of our trust in God to deliver us from danger and difficult circumstances. These psalms express our joy in God and help build our confidence in Him. They have the following structure:

1. A declaration of trust in God
2. A description of how the psalmist views God
3. Statement of disregard for his enemies
4. Expression of joy and gratitude
5. Expression of hope that the relationship with God will continue

Examples: 11, 16, 23, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131

Wisdom psalms are similar to the Book of Proverbs. They draw a contrast between the way of the Godly and the way of the Wicked and provide instruction on how to live a godly life.

Examples: 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133

Acrostic psalms follow the Hebrew alphabet and have a section for each letter. The length of the segment for each letter varies; it can be a large section or only a partial verse. There are also quasi-acrostic psalms with 22 verses that correspond to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, but whose verses do not begin with their respective letter in the Hebrew alphabet. This is a genre based on literary style, not a theme.

Acrostic psalms: 9/10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145

Quasi-acrostic psalms: 33, 38, 103

While Christ is found throughout the scriptures and psalms, there are several **Focal Messianic Psalms** with a distinctive focus on Christ and his fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. These psalms are positioned at pivotal points in the structure of the psalms.

Focal Messianic Psalms: 2, 18, 22, 69, 72, 80, 110, 118.

God's law was a blessing given to Israel by God through Moses. God intended that the law would teach His people to follow Him. The Torah was not supposed to be used legalistically but was to teach Israel how to live a wholesome life. **Torah psalms** discuss the law and its relation to God's people. There are three Torah psalms, and they are placed next to focal messianic psalms.

Torah Psalms: 1, 19, and 119.

Introductory and concluding psalms begin and end the five books of the psalms. The psalms at the beginning of a book introduce the theme of the book and are critical for understanding it. The psalms closing out a book are also key for drawing conclusions and understanding the meaning of that collection of psalms.

- Book 1 introduction: 1 and 2
- Book 1 conclusion: 41
- Book 2 introduction: 42-44
- Book 2 conclusion: 72
- Book 3 introduction: 73-74
- Book 3 conclusion: 89
- Book 4 introduction: 90-91
- Book 4 conclusion: 103-106
- Book 5 introduction: 107
- Book 5 conclusion: 146-150

Short psalms are not actually a genre, but they are a useful grouping of psalms. A short psalm is easier to sing in one sitting, memorize, and understand as a whole.

The following psalms have five stanzas or less in *The Scottish Psalter of 1650*: 3, 23, 67, 70, 87, 93, 100, 117, 120, 121, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 133, 134, 150

Spatial Collections

Poetic pyramids are groupings of psalms with a common theme. The number of psalms can vary between 5 and 15 in number. They are arranged symmetrically around a central pinnacle psalm. There are at least five pyramids in the Book of Psalms:

- Psalms 20-24: Kingship psalms
- Psalms 77-83: The devastations and deliverances of Israel
- Psalms 92-100: Jubilant outbursts, the Jehovah-Malak psalms
- Psalms 111-117: Psalms of celebration, Hallelujah Psalms
- Psalms 120-134: The Psalms of Ascent

Psalms 20-24 are known as **Kingship Psalms**. This group follows directly after the Messianic-Torah psalm coupling of Psalms 18 and 19. The first two psalms present the Messiah's kingship, and the last two celebrate Jehovah's kingship. The middle psalm discusses both kingships. This collection is located in book one.

Psalms 53-60 are a collection addressing the **enemies of God**. The first in this collection of Davidic Psalms, 53, is addressed to "the fool," a term used throughout scripture to refer to someone who is opposed to God. The rest of the psalms are directed at others who opposed David: Ziphites, close friends, Philistines, Saul, unjust rulers, Saul's henchmen, and enemies in distant countries. This collection is located in book two.

This is followed by another grouping of Psalms 61-68 which is known as the **Dialogue Between the Two Kings**. The first four psalms are the cry of the Messianic King (David) calling on God to intervene to aid him as he struggles to establish a kingdom for God. Then God responds in the following four psalms affirming David as the Messianic King and assuring him that he is fully empowered to carry out his tasks. This collection is located in book two.

Psalms 77-83 are a collection of psalms describing the **devastation and deliverance of Israel**. This collection covers the devastation that Israel experienced during the fall of Israel and Judah to foreign enemies which led to its exile from the promised land. This collection also touches on earlier themes in Israel's history going back to the deliverance from Egypt and deliverance by Messianic figures. This collection is located in book three.

Jehovah-Malak means "the Lord is King" and it only appears as an independent phrase in book four of the psalms. This grouping of Psalms 92-100 all contain the term Jehovah-Malak. These psalms are associated with David bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. No other grouping of psalms so directly calls God's people to worship and praise Him. This collection is located in book five.

Psalms 111-117 are a set of **Hallelujah psalms**. All the psalms in this grouping except the central one (114) contain the term Hallelujah. This is the first of two collections of Hallelujah psalms in Book Five and offers many reasons for the congregation to worship God. It leads up to a pair of messianic and Torah psalms (118 and 119). This collection is located in book four.

Psalms 120-134 are the **Psalms of Ascent** or **Psalms of Degrees**. This collection was sung by pilgrims walking to Jerusalem (Zion) following Israel's return from exile. These psalms are short, so they are also good for memorization. The Psalms of Ascent are suitable for pilgrims of all ages: David's, Jesus's, or ours. This collection is located in book five.

Psalms 146-150 are a grand finale of the **Hallelujah Psalms**. Each begins and ends with Hallelujah and presents a crescendo of praise looking forward to God's eternal reign as king of all the earth. This collection is located in book five.

Chapter Nine

Introducing a Psalm

One of the primary benefits of psalm singing is edification: instruction leading to moral improvement. Due to their divine inspiration, psalms are more emotionally and intellectually complex than either traditional hymns or modern worship songs. Edification through psalm singing is not magic and it requires intellectual effort. Learning about a psalm through an introductory statement before singing it is a good way to accomplish this.

An introductory statement also helps overcome a weakness of singing: it is slower than reading or speaking. Since words only stay in our short-term memory briefly, processing words more quickly allows the mind to comprehend more words at a time. A greater number of words being perceived at once allows the mind to more fully understand a passage of text. Singing's slow speed makes it more difficult to understand the overall meaning of a song.

One example of this is that reading at a faster rate improves comprehension because more words are being held in short-term memory simultaneously. Another example occurs when learning a foreign language. When I was learning foreign languages, I often understood every word in a sentence but not

the sentence as a whole because it took so long to read the entire sentence. The initial words in the sentence were forgotten by the time the last words were reached.

As a result, the slow speed of singing makes it more difficult to grasp the "big picture" of a psalm. However, with an understanding of what is being sung before beginning to sing, the mind can understand the broader meaning of the words being sung as they are being sung. Without the "big picture," it is difficult to comprehend the words slowly passing through the mind. Repeated singing of a single psalm can also help with this issue.

Roy Blackwood, at some point in his course on Early and Medieval Church History, discussed the importance of introductory statements. He said that because psalms are complex and difficult to understand, a congregation will not comprehend them well without them being introduced. If a congregation does not understand the psalms it is singing, it will eventually stop singing psalms and begin singing other songs of human origin that can be readily understood. Introductory statements are key for a group of people to continue singing the psalms long term.

This book is focused on individual singing not congregational singing, but the principle is the same. An introductory statement instructs the individuals in the congregation about the psalm to be sung and prepares their minds for it. An individual that briefly reads about a psalm before singing it will understand it more deeply.

A few minutes of preparation can add greatly to the understanding of a psalm being sung. The key is to keep the preparation down to only a minute or two. Spending 5 to 10 minutes studying before singing a psalm will take much of the pleasure out of

singing. One is no longer "singing" but "studying," and the goal is to sing psalms not have an additional Bible study. Using a reference can make the preview short and painless. Here are three options:

- Use a Study Bible with footnotes and commentary. Choose the Study Bible carefully; it should be published by a trusted organization or author.
- Use the commentary by John Brown of Haddington. He was a shepherd in 18th-century Scotland who self-educated himself through diligent study and became a pastor and seminary professor. John Brown knew ten languages and authored many books. His commentary is included in the 1650 Psalter app and can be found free online in pdf format.
- Use *The Songs of Christ* (The 1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter with commentary by JJ Lim). It is the Study Bible version of the 1650 Scottish Psalter. I don't sing from it, but I use it as a reference.

Taking one or two minutes with a reference before singing a psalm will greatly improve the experience. Remember that for the reference to be useful, it must be present when and where the psalms will be sung. It may be worthwhile to use something electronic or preposition a reference book.

While preparing to sing a psalm, there are several important questions to consider.

- What is the overall meaning of the psalm? What lesson is it trying to teach?
- How are ideas, emotions, and actions progressing

through the psalm? What is taking place? How is the mood shifting? Where does the psalm lead the singer?

- How is the psalm structured? Can it be outlined? Does it naturally divide into sections?
- Are there any editorial comments before the psalm? Who is the author? If it is anonymous, what can be known about the author? When and in what circumstances was it written?
- What are the key verses? Is there any line that encapsulates the message of the psalm as a whole?
- Does this psalm reference other scripture passages? Is it cited by other scripture passages?

Hopefully, a reference guide can help answer some of these questions. Keep those questions in mind while singing.

It is better to sing psalms without introductory statements than to not sing psalms with them, so don't let perfect be the enemy of the good. Still, introductory statements will greatly increase to your edification while psalm singing.

Chapter Ten

Memorizing Psalms for Singing

One common motivation for singing psalms today is as a memorization aid. Some people have set individual psalms and other scripture verses to music to help them memorize the passages. This approach comes to the same endpoint as mine but from a different direction. I am interested in memorizing psalms to sing them more easily. However, this illustrates that singing and memory go hand in hand.

Roy Blackwood said that he gained more from memorizing the psalms than from memorizing any other part of scripture. However, he did warn that an entire psalm must be memorized to gain this benefit. Memorizing just a few verses of a psalm lost the benefit.

After a psalm has been memorized, it can be sung while walking through the neighborhood and admiring God's creation. While singing an unmemorized psalm, the eyes are focused on the psalter and not the joy of whatever is going on nearby.

There is no need to have a phone or psalter about while singing a memorized psalm. A memorized psalm can be sung while shopping, driving, doing laundry, working in the yard, or anything else. It can even be sung silently in areas where silence is required or preferred. The only times I am unable to sing memorized psalms are when I am sleeping, doing mental work, or mentally exhausted.

Memorization also helps in learning new tunes. Now I consciously use the memorization process to add new tunes to my library. Memorization as a song focuses the mind on sections of the tune and psalm that are not well understood and would be missed or glossed over otherwise. A memorized psalm provides an easy way to recall a tune to memory.

Stages in Memorization

I am not a memorization expert, but I have become proficient at the practice and have applied my experience to develop a system for memorizing psalms for singing. Four years ago in 2019, I did not think I was capable of memorizing anything, but through various circumstances, I learned to memorize long passages of scripture and then later learned the Navigator's Topical Memory System. My system for memorizing psalms works but is still being refined.

There are several subtasks in the process of memorizing a metrical psalm for singing. The actual words must be learned along with the stanza and line breaks. The tune must be learned and matched with the words. Finally, the complete unit must be locked as a single piece into memory so that it can be recalled at will in the future. Because of these requirements, a four-stage

process seems to work best. An overview of these stages will be provided before explaining the details of the process.

1. First, memorize the words of the psalm without any music. This doesn't have to be perfectly memorized or the entire psalm. The first stanza is all that needs to be fixed in memory initially. However, all parts of the psalm should be memorized without music before being memorized with music. I have tried skipping this step, but it never worked out well due to issues with long-term recall and with failing to understand the logical structure of the psalm. I have always ended up returning to this step if I skipped it.
2. Next, sing the psalm to the tune. Initially sing the song while playing the tune on a phone or computer and looking at the words. Looking at the words will be necessary at first because there are so many things going on at once it will not be possible to remember the words rapidly enough. Because the words are already memorized, this stage where it is necessary to look at the words will be brief. After that sing the psalm to the music being played without looking at the words.
3. Sing the psalm while looking at the sheet music. This is how all details about the interface of the words with the musical notes become firmly fixed in the mind. The mind and mouth will learn to hit the notes—this doesn't always happen when singing along to audible music. Once all the details of the tune have been learned, it is far more difficult to skip a word without noticing it. Familiarity with the words also increases during this stage.
4. Sing the psalm without listening to music, looking at

the words, or looking at the sheet music. Simply stop looking at the music as the need for it decreases. This is the final state. Once this can be done the metrical psalm is truly memorized.

How to Memorize

The process of locking desired words, thoughts, and ideas into your memory is difficult. The brain gets tired. After really hammering the memorization of a verse or psalm, my brain feels like my muscles would after a hard workout. It aches and wants to take it easy for a while.

Experts on memorization say that there is no work-free method of memorization. Many methods work and each of them has strengths and weaknesses, but all of them require effort. There is no secret trick to get things to stay in one's memory, although it does become easier as the brain gets "in shape" and develops proficiency. To continue the exercise analogy, working out will always require energy, but it will be easier when the body is conditioned.

My experience with memorization and some reading on the subject has helped me discern several principles of memorization. Working in this framework has made it possible for me to memorize psalms and scripture verses.

- Memorization is learning to pull information from long-term memory into short-term memory on command. Supposedly nothing is ever forgotten, but memories can become lost or inaccessible. Something unexpected can pull these long-forgotten memories out of the crevices of the mind, but our goal is to pull them

out on command. Memorizing is creating the mental infrastructure to quickly pull an item from long-term memory at will.

- The ability to pull an item out of long-term memory is strengthened by repeatedly pulling it out of long-term memory. Keeping an item in short-term memory for a long time is not that helpful, although being able to hold an entire passage in short-term memory at once is a big step along the path of memorization.
- It is helpful to memorize many small bytes of information and then link them together. It is also most efficient to memorize two bytes of information simultaneously. Since memorization happens by repeatedly pulling items out of long-term memory, this pulling must be done as frequently as possible. Memorizing Byte A pushes Byte B out of short-term memory. Now Byte B can be pulled out of long-term memory again. Pulling Byte B out of long-term memory then pushes Byte A out of short-term memory. The cycle can then go back and forth between Bytes A and B. As the cycle continues it will become easier and easier to pull Bytes A and B out of memory. At first, a reference sheet may be required but later it will not. Bytes A and B can then be combined into a single byte and the process can be repeated with another piece of information as Byte C.
 - Memorize Byte A the first time
 - Memorize Byte B the first time
 - Recall Byte A from memory--use reference

- Recall Byte B from memory--use reference
 - Recall Byte A from memory--no reference necessary?
 - Recall Byte B from memory--no reference necessary?
 - Repeat this until it is easy.
 - Now say Byte AB (both bytes together). This is a bigger byte for the next stage.
- To apply this process to metrical psalms, review the composition of a stanza. In long meter, short meter, or common meter each stanza will have four lines each with six or eight syllables. Each line is one byte: Line 1 is A, line 2 is B, line 3 is C, and Line 4 is D. Using the process in the previous bullet memorize bytes A and B, creating byte AB. Then use the process to memorize bytes C and D, creating byte CD. Then use that process to memorize bytes AB and CD to make byte ABCD which is the entire stanza.
 - Repeat this pattern to memorize all stanzas in the psalm. Next, memorize the first words of the psalm stanzas to help recall each psalm stanza in the proper order.
 - Being able to say the passage from memory is a great accomplishment, but it is only the first step. It must be fixed in place so that the psalm can be recalled months or years into the future. In the Navigator Topical Memory System verses are repeated daily for a few months and then on a less regular basis after that. Start by singing a psalm every day. As more psalms are memorized,

reviewing all of the psalms will become more time-consuming, so it can be reduced to once or twice per week. Whatever the method, keep reviewing memorized passages regularly.

- Memorization proceeds more quickly with many small chunks of time than with one long study session. In my experience, it is best to start with a longer session where the entire passage is memorized as a whole for the first time. After that have many shorter sessions where the passage is reviewed.
- Carrying a memorization aid allows small sessions to be conducted throughout the day. The 1650 Psalter App works excellently, but carrying a notecard will also do the trick. Consider photographing the passage with a smartphone in place of a notecard.

Reviewing prose scripture verses throughout the day always seems to drain my energy. I feel tired after pulling so many verses out of my memory bank. However, when I sing psalms from memory, it has the opposite effect. I have more energy and am recharged. I don't know the reason for this difference, but I have noticed it over an extended time frame. Consequently, I review my prose scripture verses first and then get to the fun part of the day when I sing my memorized psalms.

Chapter Eleven

Solo Acapella Singing

Acapella means “of the chapel,” it was the original style of singing in churches: without instruments. Acapella singing is more challenging than singing with musical accompaniment. In the past, I attended an RPCNA (Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America) church, a denomination that practices exclusive acapella psalmody. One pastor told me that a church doing acapella singing is forced to be entirely dependent on the Holy Spirit. The musical team can't adjust factors such as the volume and speed of the music or introduce a new song to create a mood in the congregation. Worship depends solely upon the Holy Spirit working in people's hearts. Since my time attending exclusive acapella churches, I have always enjoyed the times in worship service when the music has been turned off and the only sound was the congregation singing.

A brief internet search indicates that with conventional acapella singing the biggest difficulty is getting everyone right on key, hitting the pitch correctly without the help of instruments. For our purposes, singing by oneself or in a small group, this is not an issue. Being slightly offkey is not a problem when singing alone on a walk or after dinner with family.

The primary difficulty in my experience with acapella metrical psalm singing is knowing the tunes well enough to sing them without hearing the music. This is a different issue.

After starting to learn metrical psalms, I discovered that I knew common hymn tunes less well than I had assumed. I had *Amazing Grace* down cold, most Americans probably do. However, other tunes such as *Oh For a Thousand Tongues to Sing* (Azmon) and *Oh God Our Help in Ages Past* (St. Anne) were fuzzy after the first line or two. These tunes needed to be learned or re-learned before it was possible to use them for acapella psalm singing.

With a large group of people, knowledge of the tune can be crowdsourced. Several people will be able to carry the group through any tricky spots. When everyone's minds are put together someone knows every part of the whole tune. There will also be several people in the crowd who are expert musicians. However, when singing alone, it is not possible to rely on anyone else.

The solution to this problem is memorization. Psalms that are memorized can be sung at any time. Because each psalm is memorized to a specific tune, the memorized psalm can allow other unmemorized psalms to be sung to the tune of the memorized psalm. The memorized psalm is an aid to allow the unmemorized psalm to be sung.

Most of the time simply having the tune internalized from memorizing the other psalm is enough, but this is not always the case. Here is my procedure:

1. Begin by just singing the first stanza of the memorized psalm. This may bring the tune into mind enough for the psalm to be sung.

2. Sing the first stanza of the memorized psalm while reading the words of the new psalm.
3. Take it line by line. Sing the first line of the memorized psalm then sing the first line of the new psalm. Go back and forth until the first line of the new psalm can be sung smoothly. Repeat this process with the second through fourth lines.

After the first stanza of the new psalm has been sung to the new tune, the rest of the stanzas generally go smoothly except for places where the wording is tricky.

There are a few instances where knowing how to sing acapella is very useful.

- It is impossible or at least very difficult to sing a psalm silently without being able to sing it out loud acapella. Silent singing is more challenging than singing out loud because the feedback from hearing is lost.
- When singing silently it is common to have interruptions or for the mind to wander temporarily. When this happens, the song must be resumed mid-stanza or at the beginning of a stanza in the middle of the psalm. To do this the psalm and tune must be known well.
- The ability to sing solo acapella is required to sing a psalm while taking a walk outside. Always looking down at a book or phone kills the mood.

In my opinion, solo or small group acapella psalm singing is the pinnacle of the metrical psalm singing experience. Increasing your ability in this area will make your psalm singing more rewarding and enjoyable.

Chapter Twelve

Psalm Singing in My Life

I did not grow up singing the psalms. The church my family attended initially sang hymns and gradually transitioned to singing worship songs as I grew up. The churches I attended as an adult after leaving home sang conventional praise songs.

Singing in church was never a high point of the service for me, and over time doubts started surfacing about the worship songs used by the churches I attended. While singing praise songs, “Is that true?” would start floating through my mind. As the congregation sang through a song I would say to myself “Yes, no, maybe, yes—probably, absolutely not, maybe, no, yes, yes...” regarding whether what had just been sung was true. It bothered me. Why couldn’t the church have more accurate and faithful songs to sing?

The volume of the worship music also bothered me. Sometimes I would take a break from singing and realize that it wasn't possible to hear any of the people around me over the sound system. Frequently I could barely hear myself singing. It got to be depressing.

At this time, I didn’t even know it was possible to sing the psalms. Of course, the psalms had been sung in ancient Israel, but it

didn't seem possible today. Even the first step in beginning to do so was unclear to me.

For several reasons, I began looking for a new church in 2012 and ended up joining a congregation in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (frequently called Reformed Presbyterian or RPCNA). This is an exclusive psalmody, acapella denomination. The first service there was my introduction to psalm singing without musical accompaniment. It was refreshing to sing psalms because the words were trustworthy. The acapella aspect was also pleasant because you heard the sound of singing, not the sound system. All of the unique factors made it a serious service; the atmosphere was different. Following the service, the people I spoke with knew their beliefs better than in any other church I had visited.

The congregation's high level of Biblical knowledge led me to ask several people about how this wide base of knowledge was developed. The common response included two things: psalm singing and church discipline. Congregants felt that when one of those is lost, a church will start to go downhill. People had many Biblical arguments for why only the psalms should be sung in church, but I was more interested in the practical results. What real-world easily observable changes would be brought about by psalm singing? What would be lost if the psalms were not sung? One answer that stuck with me was that sermons give us our intellectual understanding of God, but the songs we sing in church determine our emotional and intuitive understanding of God. Singing the psalms corrects errors in one's subconscious attitude toward and beliefs about God.

The next two years were spent at that church before moving to the Chicago area. There was one RPCNA church in the Chicago

area which I attended for a few years, but the length of the drive became too much for me, so I transferred to a non-exclusive psalmody church closer to my home. While living in the Chicago area, I experimented with singing psalms at home. It was difficult for me when not singing with other people. I did not know most of the psalm arrangements well enough to sing alone. There were a few that I knew well enough but most I did not.

The psalm book I was using, *The Book of Psalms for Worship*, had several arrangements of most psalms every one having its own tune, similar to most hymnals. Without knowing the tune or being able to play an instrument, it was hard to sing a psalm. It would probably have been possible to look up all the tunes on the internet, but that seemed like a lot of work. Over time my psalm singing atrophied into a fond memory.

Things started to change in 2019 when I began serving in jail ministry. Starting sometime in 2020 going through the end of 2021, I had the opportunity to lead my own class. At some point, the men in my class mentioned that they enjoyed singing in a different class. That gave me the idea to introduce psalm singing to my class. It was a rough start as our singing was very poor initially (to human ears, not God's ears), and it took time for our voices and ability to follow the music to improve. I would download videos from YouTube of a congregation singing a psalm where the words were displayed on the screen, put them on a flash drive, and play them at the beginning of the class period. We gathered around the TV and sang along with the video. This was my favorite part of the class.

During the time I had my own class in jail, I got to know Brett Mahlen, a pastor involved in jail ministry, and he suggested using *The Scottish Metrical Psalter of 1650*. He said that something

newer isn't necessarily better, and many of the "improvements" made to psalm singing over time had just made it more complicated not better. This was my first time hearing of the metrical psalms, so I ordered a psalm book from the Trinitarian Bible Society, downloaded the 1650 Psalter App, and after trying it thought it was a great idea. However, I did not think the class's musical skill was high enough to stop using the videos.

My class came to an end on Christmas 2021. This saddened me for many reasons, one of them was that my psalm-singing crew was now dispersed. In 2022 without a class to lead, I stopped psalm singing but started looking for opportunities to put together a group of people to sing the psalms, without any success.

Due to unrelated circumstances, I started thinking and talking about evangelism with several people in my church. These conversations led me to remember Roy Blackwood. I never met him, but I had heard about him while attending Reformed Presbyterian churches. From what people said he was the critical person behind the growth of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Indiana. Researching him led me to an article on his life and his talks on SermonAudio.com. Among these were a series of lectures from classes Dr. Blackwood had taught on early church history, medieval church history, and reformation church history. He incorporated the singing of psalms into his lessons and frequently discussed psalm singing during lectures. A few of the classes were almost entirely devoted to discussing the psalms. Hearing this information stirred up the desire in me to learn more about psalm singing and practice it.

On October 22, 2022, my men's small group had a prayer retreat. During that prayer retreat, I prayed about ways in which I could

show people about psalm singing and find places to sing psalms. Meditating on this made me realize that I was hypocritical. If psalm singing was so great and beneficial, why wasn't I singing psalms, even if no one else was interested? There was no excuse. I now knew about metrical psalmody and could sing the psalms to my heart's content at home. How could I tell other people that they should sing psalms when I was not? My primary goal for the coming quarter would be to learn about metrical psalm singing and to sing the psalms regularly.

The next few months were spent reading books on psalms, finding hymn tunes for singing the psalms, learning hymn tunes, and singing psalms. I worked on the psalms every day. It was slow work as my vocal cords strengthened, the tunes became familiar to me, and my mind grasped the concepts of psalm singing. It was difficult going step by step through all the things that had to be learned, but little by little it came to be fun. In retrospect by the time Thanksgiving rolled around, I was feeling better about the project, and by Christmas, I was enthusiastic about it.

When 2023 began, I was enthusiastically looking for places to start sharing my new source of joy. No good place presented itself, but I had signed up for a class by Allan Stevo (realstevo.com) on starting a business. I initially decided to make my business teaching class instructing people on metrical psalm singing. However, as I worked on the project, I realized that writing this book was a better initial goal.

Chapter Thirteen

Closing Thoughts

Hopefully, this has been an enjoyable introduction to metrical psalm singing and you are currently singing psalms. Although the idea of being able to sing any psalm to familiar hymn tunes sounds like a lot at first glance, it is not difficult once the system is understood. I hope you were surprised by your success. I know I was.

Getting started is fast and easy, but gaining proficiency and skill requires continued effort and focus. The approach is straightforward, but as the old saying goes, "Simple is not easy." The rewards may be slow to show themselves, but will soon become undeniable, so keep working on the two-month challenge.