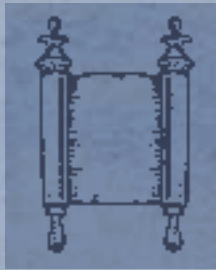


More Precious



Than GOLD

50 DAILY MEDITATIONS
on the Psalms

SAM STORMS

More Precious Than Gold: 50 Daily Meditations on the Psalms

Copyright © 2008 by Enjoying God Ministries

Published by Crossway Books

a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Design and typesetting: Lakeside Design Plus

Cover design: Jon McGrath

Cover illustration: iStock

First printing 2008

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*[®], copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked NIV are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*[®]. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from *The New American Standard Bible*[®]. Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-0261-3

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-0561-4

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-0562-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Storms, C. Samuel, 1951–

More precious than gold : 50 daily meditations on the Psalms / Sam Storms.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-4335-0261-3 (tpb)

1. Bible. O.T. Psalms—Meditations. I. Title.

BS1430.54.S76 2008

242'.2—dc22

2008038696

VP 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Acknowledgments	12
Preface: First among Equals	16
Part 1: Psalms 1–19 from Book 1 of the Psalter	
1. God’s Prescription for Happiness (1:1–3)	21
2. Read to Rejoice (1:1–3)	25
3. The Lifter of My Head (3:3)	29
4. More Joy (4:7)	34
5. What Makes God Smile? (5)	38
6. Enough! (10)	42
7. How Long, O Lord? Part 1 (13)	47
8. How Long, O Lord? Part 2 (13)	51
9. The Rewards of Integrity (15)	54
10. Satisfaction (16)	59
11. Look Up and Listen (19:1–6)	63
12. Drippings of the Honeycomb (19:7–14)	68
Part 2: Psalms 22–37 from Book 1 of the Psalter	
13. The Agony and the Ecstasy (22)	75
14. God’s Aim Is the Fame of His Name (23:3)	79
15. The Good Shepherd and the Gracious Host (23)	84

Contents

16. One Thing, Once More (27:4)	88
17. The Blessedness of Forgiveness (32)	92
18. The Stability of His Steadfast Love (33)	97
19. Pursuing God (34)	103
20. Those Troubling Psalms of Imprecation: Part 1 (35, etc.)	108
21. Those Troubling Psalms of Imprecation: Part 2 (35, etc.)	112
22. Those Troubling Psalms of Imprecation: Part 3 (35, etc.)	117
23. Delight Yourself in the Lord (37:4)	122

Part 3: Psalms 42–63 from Book 2 of the Psalter

24. Preaching to Your Soul (42–43)	129
25. A Mighty Fortress Is Our God (46)	134
26. When Mercy Scrubs Clean the Soul: Part 1 (51)	138
27. When Mercy Scrubs Clean the Soul: Part 2 (51)	143
28. I Will Lift Up My Hands (63:4)	148

Part 4: Psalms 73–88 from Book 3 of the Psalter

29. It's All a Matter of Perspective (73)	155
30. Our Lack, His Supply (84)	160
31. Reaching God's Ear (86)	164
32. Darkness, My Only Companion (88)	168

Part 5: Psalms 91–104 from Book 4 of the Psalter

33. Hiding Place (91)	175
34. Worship That Pleases God (92–98)	180
35. The Fragrance of Gratitude (100)	185
36. Before the Throne of God Above (103:10–12)	190
37. God's Compassion for "Dust" (103:14)	194
38. Lord of the Stork and the Rock Badger (104)	198

Part 6: Psalms 115–150 from Book 5 of the Psalter

39. How's Your Aim? (115)	205
40. Now to Him Who Is Able (115:3)	209
41. Sweeter than Honey to My Mouth (119)	213
42. Forgiveness: The Foundation for Fear (130:3–4)	218
43. Omniscient (139:1–6)	222

Contents

44. Omnipresent (139:7–12)	227
45. Omnipotent (139:13–18)	233
46. Finding God in the Cave (142)	239
47. No One Cares for My Soul (142)	243
48. The Unsearchable Splendor of God (145)	247
49. Lord of the Stars, Healer of Hearts (147)	252
50. Praise Him! Praise Him! (148–150)	256
Appendix: Understanding the Psalms	260
Notes	276

Preface

First among Equals

Confidence, or assurance, most often comes in degrees, which is another way of saying that I'm not as certain about some things as I am about others. I say this only to point out that few things are more settled and assured in my soul than the immeasurable value and life-changing power of the written Word of God. That alone accounts for why I have written this series of meditations on the book of Psalms.

There is a measure of satisfaction that comes from reading and deciphering a John le Carré spy novel or, for some (not me), tracking with J. K. Rowling and the many exploits of Harry Potter. But the Word of God is unparalleled and unsurpassed in its capacity to enthrall, empower, and enlighten the mind concerning those truths on which I have built my life and staked my eternal destiny.

The psalmists themselves undoubtedly concur. On numerous occasions they affirm without hesitation the priceless and incomparable value of God's inspired Word. "In the way of your testimonies," wrote David, "I delight as much as in all riches" (Ps. 119:14). If that language isn't sufficiently exalted, he goes on to declare that "the law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and

silver pieces” (v. 72), and again, “I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold” (v. 127). The written rules and precepts of the Lord are more desirable “than gold, even much fine gold” (Ps. 19:10a). Or if you prefer an even more tangible image, David insists that God’s words are “sweeter . . . than honey and drippings of the honeycomb” (v. 10b).

This is perhaps the principal reason why, if you were to ask a typical group of Christians what their favorite book of the Bible is, I suspect more than half would cite the Psalms. While happily confessing that all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for our lives, there’s something special about the Psalter that makes it the *first among equals* in the biblical canon.

Perhaps it’s the fact that no one struggles to find the Psalms relevant. There is something here for everyone in whatever walk of life, however old or young one may be, regardless of circumstance, whether in triumph or trial, joy or sadness. Rarely will you hear someone say, after reading the Psalter, “I just can’t identify with this. It doesn’t speak to me where I am in life right now.”


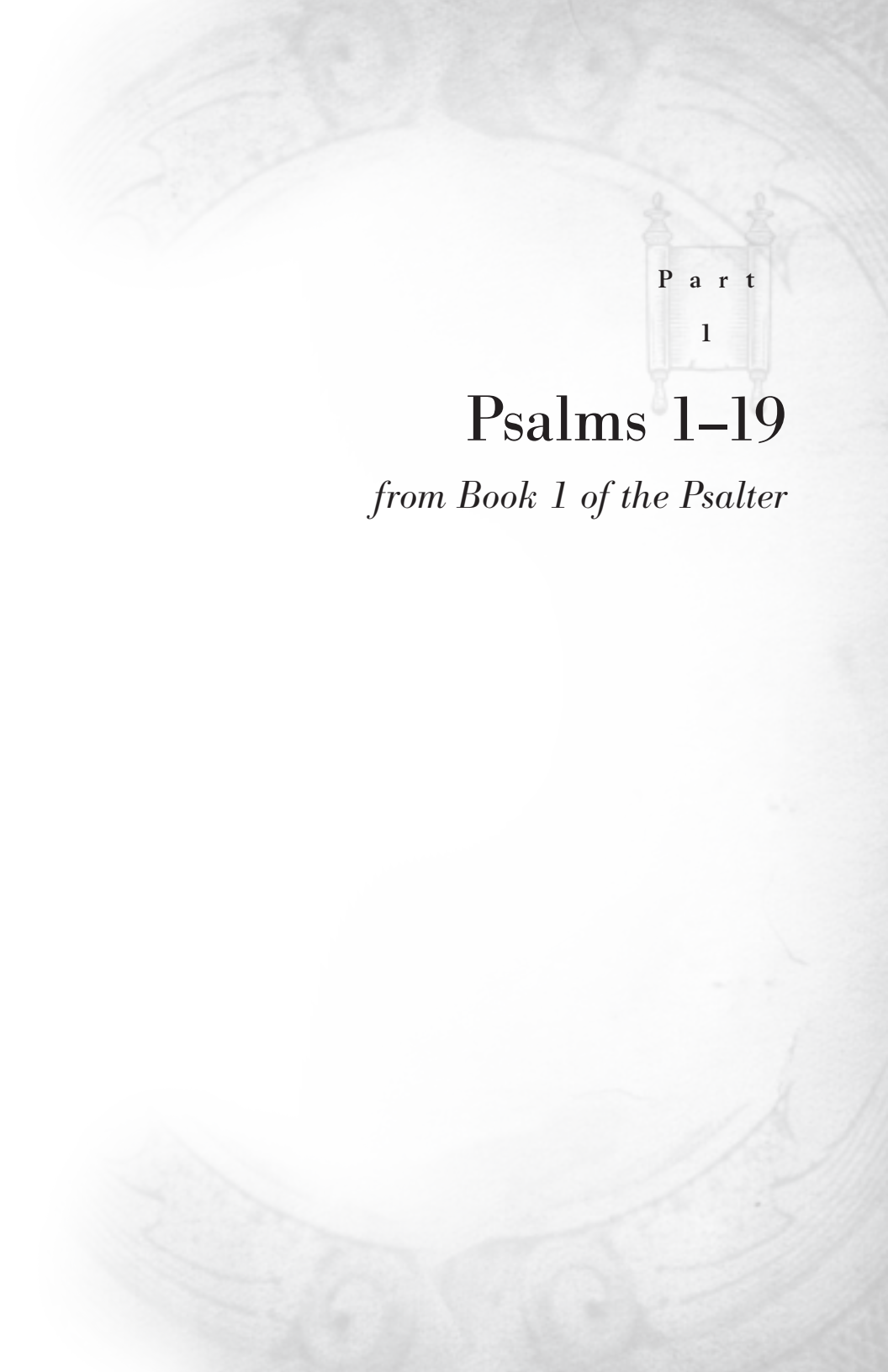
Among countless other characteristics of the Psalter, many would point to the fact that whereas most of Scripture speaks *to* us, the Psalms also speak *for* us. In the Psalms we find inspired examples of what we can and should and must say to God. They are a perpetual reminder that God welcomes our deepest desires, our most unnerving of fears, our anxiety and adoration, our celebration, and our confusion.

Some point to the passion of the psalmists, or their praise, or their brutal and sometimes painful honesty as they wrestle through the confusion and loss and disappointment that life so often casts our way. As Don Williams put it, “The full range of human emotions is displayed in these living prayers, without the hypocrisy and pretense so often characteristic of the modern church.”¹

The Psalter is also undeniably God-centered. When I asked my wife, Ann, what impressed her most about the Psalms and how she might put this in one simple statement, she replied, “Woe is me! Wow is Thee!” I couldn’t agree more. Human beings in all their weakness and misery and sin are here confronted with the wonder and mercy and splendor of God.

Preface

Well, that's enough, lest I delay any longer your exploration of this marvelous collection of prayer, praise, and passion. I have kept these meditations brief. Each can be read in five to ten minutes. I encourage you to first read the biblical text itself, slowly meditate upon it, perhaps even memorize portions of it, and only then turn to my comments. I trust that in doing so you, too, will find God's words to be more precious than gold and sweeter than honey.



P a r t

1

Psalms 1–19

from Book 1 of the Psalter

1

God's Prescription for Happiness

Psalm 1:1–3

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

—Psalm 1:1–3

In most instances I like to leave myself a little theological wiggle room, a loophole, if you will, a measure of flexibility that affords me the opportunity of qualifying some statement that I've made. In fact, it's often the failure to provide nuance and clarification to our declarations that gets us in trouble or boxes us in to a position that

on more mature reflection clearly calls for less inflammatory language or more charity to those who might take a different stance.

I say this only to prepare you for something Jonathan Edwards declared in a remarkable sermon entitled, “Nothing upon Earth Can Represent the Glories of Heaven.” It is utterly lacking in nuance. Its boldness is breathtaking and its ramifications are profound. And it provides a perfect introduction to our series of meditations on selected psalms. Said Edwards, “God created man for nothing else but happiness. He created him only that he might communicate happiness to him.”¹

Would you have preferred that he not say “nothing else” but happiness? Or would it have been easier to swallow had he chosen a word other than “only”? Well, that’s Edwards for you.

I’m convinced that once we understand what Edwards meant by “happiness” and how our experience of it relates to the glory of God, objections will cease. By “happiness” Edwards didn’t mean giddiness or frivolity or fame or fortune. Few of the things that constitute happiness for people today were in view when Edwards wrote and preached this sermon.

Let me define the term by appealing to what I wrote in chapter 1 of my book *One Thing*.²

When I speak of human happiness I’m not talking about physical comfort or a six-figure salary or emotional stability or the absence of conflict or sexual gratification or any such earthly or temporal achievement. That’s not to say such things are inherently wrong. In their proper place they may well be expressions of divine benevolence. But we greatly err if they become foundational to human happiness. We should be grateful for them, but happiness is still within our grasp despite their absence.

The happiness for which we are eternally destined is a state of soul in which we experience and express optimum ecstasy in God. Happiness is the whole soul resting in God and rejoicing that so beautiful and glorious a Being is ours. Happiness, as John Piper says, is the privilege of being enabled by God’s grace to enjoy making much of him forever. I’m talking about the ineffable and unending pleasure of blissful union with and the joyful celebration of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a joy of such transcendent quality that

no persecution or pain or deprivation can diminish, nor wealth or success or prosperity can enhance. It's what Paul had in mind in Philippians 4:11 when he spoke of a satisfaction in Christ that was beyond the reach of either adversity or abundance.

In another of Edwards's sermons (actually, the first formal sermon he ever preached), he put it this way:

The pleasures of loving and obeying, loving and adoring, blessing and praising the Infinite Being, the Best of Beings, the Eternal Jehovah; the pleasures of trusting in Jesus Christ, in contemplating his beauties, excellencies, and glories; in contemplating his love to mankind and to us, in contemplating his infinite goodness and astonishing loving-kindness; the pleasures of [the] communion of the Holy Ghost in conversing with God, the maker and governor of the world; the pleasure that results from the doing of our duty, in acting worthily and excellently; . . . these are the pleasures that are worthy of so noble a creature as a man is.³

I've gone to the trouble of making this point because I believe this is what the psalmist had in mind when he wrote of being "blessed" (Ps. 1:1a), a word that occurs twenty-six times in the Psalter. In fact, Psalm 1 begins with the word *blessed* and God's prescription for its attainment.

Believe it or not, happiness or blessedness *can* be found in something negative! There *is* joy in saying *no*. But to whom or what do we respond with a resolute *no*? According to the psalmist, it is to the counsel of the wicked (a reference to what we believe), the way of sinners (a reference to the way we behave), and the seat of scoffers (a reference to the place we belong).

The psalmist speaks of the "counsel" of the wicked, not of their "error" or "falsehood." "The wicked" are often careful to cast their system of thought and their advice for life in ways that initially appear wise and coherent. But there is a fundamental flaw in their thinking, and their values are warped. Happiness is contingent, therefore, on discernment.

Sinners have a "way" that, again, often appears clever and insightful on first glance. Rarely do the wicked exert an influence by taking on the overt barbarism of a Jeffrey Dahmer or a Saddam Hussein.

More often they are quietly pragmatic in their methods, morally slippery in their lifestyle, and cool rather than openly resistant toward any notion of biblical authority.

Yes, there are those who are more explicit and unashamed in their denial of the faith. These are the “scoffers,” the “mockers,” seen most recently in the brazen atheism of Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*; and Sam Harris, author of *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*.

The psalmist is not suggesting that we cease to engage “the wicked” in dialogue, far less that we decline to pray for their conversion. But beware of too close association with such folk. Be wary of lingering long in their presence. Don’t be a party to their parties.

But simply saying *no* to the ways of this world is only half the prescription for happiness, and not even the better half. When our *no* stands alone and isolated, our resolve to rejoice in God will gradually erode under the incessant force of temptation and trial. God’s prescription for our happiness, to his glory, is dependent on a *yes* to the beauty and splendor of his Word.

We can’t afford to stop with detesting the ways of the world. We must “delight” in the “law of the Lord”! Refusing to eat the food of folly and wickedness will not in itself fill our spiritual bellies. We need the meat of God’s Word, the balanced diet of the whole counsel of God. That feast awaits us in the next meditation.

Discover and delight in the treasures of Psalms like never before

“The book of Psalms is green pastures and still waters for real people in hard times. *More Precious Than Gold* provides what no money can buy—direct, personal access to the refreshment God gives only through his Word.”

Ray Ortlund Jr., *Pastor, Immanuel Church, Nashville, Tennessee*

“Sam Storms lays the pieces of our contemporary world down on the template of the Psalms, and the result is what it has always been: the power of the Psalms to illumine, interpret, and direct our lives in the ways of the Lord. This book is a particularly insightful exposure of that power.”

C. Hassell Bullock, *Franklin S. Dyrness Professor of Bible Studies, Wheaton College*

SAM STORMS (PhD, University of Texas) is founder of Enjoying God Ministries, which provides biblical and theological resources to the body of Christ. He is also the senior pastor of Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City and is a former professor. Storms is the author of several books, including the first two books in this series, *The Hope of Glory: 100 Daily Meditations on Colossians* and *To the One Who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2–3*.

INSPIRATIONAL / DEVOTIONAL

CROSSWAY
www.crossway.org

