

CHRISTIAN APPROACHES TO SUPPORTING RESILIENCE: PRAYING THE PSALMS

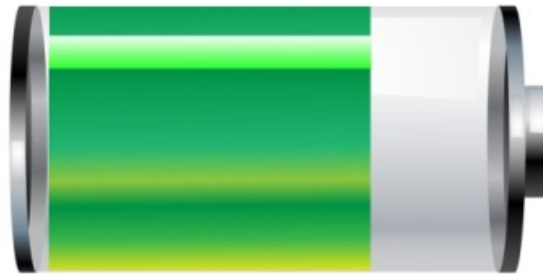
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RESILIENCE

The capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity and to bounce back from setbacks, trauma and high stress.



Resilience Factors

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. | Realistic Optimism | Resilient Role Models | 6. |
| 2. | Facing Fear | Physical Fitness | 7. |
| 3. | Moral Compass | Brain Fitness | 8. |
| 4. | Religion and Spirituality | Cognitive and Emotional Flexibility | 9. |
| 5. | Social Support | Meaning and Purpose | 10. |

Adapted from Southwick and Charney: Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges (Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 13)

SOUTHWICK-CHARNEY RESILIENCE FACTORS AND CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN VIRTUES



Resilience Factor	Classical Christian Virtue
1. Realistic optimism	Hope
2. Facing fear	Fortitude/Courage
3. A moral compass	Justice
4. Religion and spirituality	Faith
5. Social support	Love
6. Role models	Prudence
7. Fitness training	Fortitude
8. Brain fitness	Prudence
9. Cognitive and emotional flexibility	Prudence
10. Finding meaning in adversity	Faith

THE CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

- 1. Faith
 - 2. Hope
 - 3. Love
- } Theological Virtues

- 4. Prudence (practical wisdom)
 - 5. Justice
 - 6. Fortitude
 - 7. Temperance
- } Cardinal Virtues



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Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation
and Prescriptive Agenda for Research
on Mindfulness and Meditation

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Abstract

During the past two decades, mindfulness meditation has gone from being a fringe topic of scientific investigation to being an occasional replacement for psychotherapy, tool of corporate well-being, widely implemented educational practice, and “key to building more resilient soldiers.” Yet the mindfulness movement and empirical evidence supporting it have not gone without criticism. Misinformation and poor methodology associated with past studies of mindfulness may lead public consumers to be harmed, misled, and disappointed. Addressing such concerns, the present article discusses the difficulties of *defining* mindfulness, delineates the proper scope of research into mindfulness practices, and explicates crucial *methodological* issues for interpreting results from investigations of mindfulness. For doing so, the authors draw on their diverse areas of expertise to review the present state of mindfulness research, comprehensively summarizing what we do and do not know, while providing a prescriptive agenda for contemplative science, with a particular focus on assessment, mindfulness training, possible adverse effects, and intersection with brain imaging. Our goals are to inform interested scientists, the news media, and the public, to minimize harm, curb poor research practices, and staunch the flow of misinformation about the benefits, costs, and future prospects of mindfulness meditation.

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Layout

THE POTENTIAL EFFECT OF TRAUMA ON WORLDVIEW



“Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim’s faith in natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.”

Trauma and Recovery, Judith Lewis Herman (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 51



PRAYING THE PSALMS

Christian use of Psalms as personal prayers:

1. Psalms are the second most quoted/referred to Old Testament book in the New Testament (Isaiah is first)
2. The ancient Jews prayed the Psalms
3. The early church prayed the Psalms
4. Jesus prayed the Psalms





Jesus on the cross prayed -

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1)

Psalm 22 continues:

Why are you so far from saving me?

Why are you so far from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but

you do not answer,

and by night, but I find no rest (vv.1b- 2).



Later on the cross, Jesus prayed Psalm 31:5: “Into your hands I commend my spirit...”

Context:

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
Let me never be put to shame;
Deliver me in your righteousness.

Incline your ear to me;
Make haste to deliver me.

Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe,
For you are my crag and my stronghold;
For the sake of your Name, lead me and guide me

Take me out of the net that they have secretly
set for me,
For you are my tower of strength

Into your hands I commend my spirit

For you have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of
truth.

PSALMS IS THE PRAYER BOOK OF THE BIBLE - DIETRICH BONHOEFFER (1906-1945)

The book of Psalms is distinguished from all other books of the Bible by the fact that it contains only prayers... Are these prayers to God also God's own word? That seems rather difficult to understand. We grasp it only when we remember that we can learn true prayer only from Jesus Christ, from the word of the Son of God, who lives with us men, to God the father, who lives in eternity.... All prayers of the Bible are such prayers which we pray together with Jesus Christ in which he accompanies us..."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible (1970) pp. 13-14



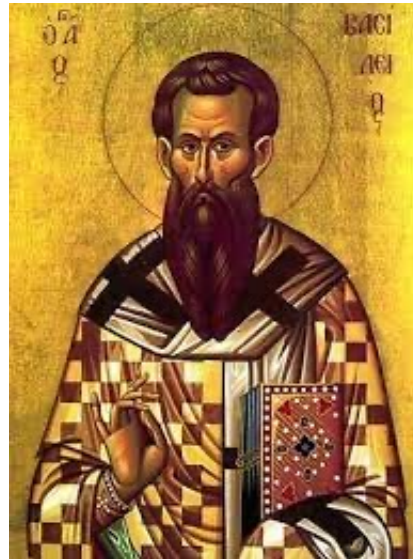
HOW DO CHRISTIANS PRAY PSALMS WITH THEIR CURSES, AND THEIR SEEMING FOCUS ON DAVID AND THE LIFE OF ISRAEL?

“When we... delve deeper into what lies behind the literal sense of the words [of the Psalms] we bring to light a new spiritual meaning which is the full depth of what, . . . lies buried under the surface meaning of the text. This deeper, holier meaning can be discovered in the period after Christ because in his light the text takes on an altogether new perspective....it is the new dimension which has been added to the development of the history of redemption by the coming of Christ....When we explain the Psalms in this way we come at once into immediate living contact with revelation.

- From, Pius Drijvers, The Psalms: Their Structure And Meaning (Montréal: Palm Publishers, 1965), pages 12-13.



THE CHURCH PRAYS THE PSALMS



When other passages of Scripture are used in the church, the words are drowned in the noise of talking, but when the Psalter is read, all are dumb. . . . Anyone possessed of his five wits should blush with shame if he did not begin the day with the psalm, since even the tiniest birds open and close the day with sweet Psalms of holy devotion. -- Ambrose of Milan (c 339-397)

Of other Scriptures most men know nothing, but the Psalms are repeated in private houses, in streets, and marketplaces, by those who have learned them by heart, and feel the soothing power of their divine melodies." -- Theodore of Mopsuestia (360-428)

3 WAYS PSALMS CAN SUPPORT RESILIENCE.

1. Religion and Spirituality: By providing a means of connecting “the Transcendent” – with God - by giving voice to the experience of extreme stress and providing a way of channeling these thoughts toward God.
2. Gratitude: By (ultimately) pointing us toward a hopeful outlook and providing appropriate expressions of thankfulness to God.
3. Meaning Finding: By showing us how to identify meaning in adversity



Psalm 38

I am like a deaf man; I do not hear,
like a mute man who does
not open his mouth.

I have become like a man who does not hear
and in whose mouth are no rebukes (Psalm 38: 13-14).



Psalm 39

I was mute and silent;
I held my peace to no avail,
and my distress grew worse.
My heart became hot within me.
As I mused, the fire burned . . .
O Lord, make me know my end
and what is the measure of my days . . . (Psalm 39: 2-3a, 4).



THE PSALMS ARE A MIRROR OF THE SOUL

ST ATHANASIUS (295-373)



... After the prophecies about the Savior and the nations, he who recites the Psalms is uttering the rest as his own words, and each sings them as if they were written concerning him, and he accepts them and recites them not as if another were speaking, nor as if speaking about someone else. **But he handles them as if he is speaking about himself . And the things spoken are such that he lifts them up to God as himself, acting and speaking them from himself....**

And it seems to me that these words become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself in the emotions of his soul, and thus affected, he might recite them....



(St. Athanasius, The Letter to Marcellinus tr. Robert C. Gregg [Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980], pp. 110-111)

Psalm 69

Reproaches have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.

I looked for pity, but there was none,
and for comforters, but I found none (v. 20).

For the Lord hears the needy
and does not despise
his own who are prisoners (v. 33).



THE SPIRIT OF GOD OFFERS COMFORT THROUGH THE PSALMS ST AUGUSTINE (354-430)

"The Psalm grieves with you and questions with you, but not because it does not know. Rather does it ask with you the question to which it knows the answer, so that in it you may find that which you did not know. Anyone who wants to console someone else acts like this: unless he grieves with the other, he cannot lift him up. First of all he grieves with him, and then he strengthens him with a consoling word ... So too the psalm and indeed the Spirit of God, though knowing everything, asks questions with you, as though giving expression to your own words."

From Augustine - Exposition on Psalm 93:9



Psalm 88

O Lord, why do you cast my soul away?

Why do you hide your face from me? (Psalm 88: 14).



ATHANASIOS TO MARCELLINUS

- “In the Psalter...you learn about yourself. You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its change, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you do not merely hear and then pass on but learn the way to remedy your ill.”

St. Athanasius (ca. AD 295-373)



VOICING THE UNUTTERABLE

Psalm 102

For you have taken me up
And thrown me down (v. 10)

My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass (v. 11).

I lie awake;
I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop (v. 7).

But you, O Lord, are
enthroned forever,
and you are remembered
throughout all generations (v. 12).

You will arise and have pity on Zion;
It is the time to favor her;
The appointed time has come (v. 13).

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will perish, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You will change them like a robe, and they will pass
away,
but you are the same, and your years have no end.
The children of your servants
shall dwell secure;
their offspring shall be
established before you (vv. 25-28).



INSPIRED WORD TO VOICE FEELINGS OF ABANDONMENT: WHERE IS GOD?



Psalm 13

²How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

³How long must I bear grief in my soul,
have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy prevail over me?

⁴Look, answer me, LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes lest I fall asleep in death;

•

⁵lest my enemy say, “I have overcome him”;
lest my foes rejoice when they see me fall.

⁶As for me, I trust in your merciful love.
Let my heart rejoice in your salvation.

⁷I will sing to the LORD who has been bountiful with me.
I will sing Psalms to the name of the LORD Most High.

GRATITUDE DURING DISTRESS

Psalm 42

²Like the deer that yearns
for running streams,
so my soul is yearning
for you, my God.

³My soul is thirsting for God,
the living God;
when can I enter and appear
before the face of God?

⁴My tears have become my bread,
by day, by night,
as they say to me all the day long,
“Where is your God?”

⁵These things will I remember
as I pour out my soul:
for I would go to the place
of your wondrous tent,
all the way to the house of God,
amid cries of gladness and thanksgiving,
the throng keeping joyful festival.





If we are free to delete all inconvenient data we shall certainly have no theological difficulties; but for the same reason no solutions and no progress. The very writers of [detective stories], not to mention the scientists, know better. The troublesome fact, ***the apparent absurdity which can't be fitted into any synthesis we have yet made, is precisely the one we must not ignore.*** Ten to one, it's in that covert the fox is lurking. There is always hope if we keep an unsolved problem fairly in view; there's none if we pretend it's not there.

TRANSFORMATION OF DISASTER IN PSALM 44

Psalm 44

- We have heard with our ears, O God;
 - our fathers have told us
 - what you did in their days,
 - in days long ago (v. 1, NIV).
-
- It was not by their sword that they won the land,
 - nor did their arm bring them victory;
 - it was your right hand, your arm
 - and the light of your face, for you loved them (v. 3).



TRANSFORMATION OF DISASTER IN PSALM 44

Yet for your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself and do not reject us forever.

Why do you hide your face?

Why do you forget our misery and oppression? (vv. 22-24).



TRANSFORMATION OF DISASTER IN PSALM 44



Paul exemplifies the use of the psalm for Christians in Romans 8:

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? . . . (31b-32)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness or danger, or sword? (v. 35)

As it is written [Psalm 44],
for your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. (v. 36)

TRANSFORMATION OF DISASTER IN PSALM 44

Psalm 44 continues: “Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord?” (v. 23).

But Paul Romans 8 continues:

No; in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (vv. 37-38).



USE KNOWLEDGE OF THE PSALMS TO APPROPRIATE THEM TO PRAYERS

Think about what it **meant**

Think about what it **means**

First line – Often a clue to the content of the rest of the psalm

Chiastic structure – Helps with remembering the psalm

Alphabetical – May explain groupings of verses

Messianic – think of the King as Jesus, think about “Son of David”

Historical - think about salvation history

Israel – God's people

Imprecatory Psalms - Pray Against the Forces of Evil



Psalms give us words of praise

Psalm 19

2 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands.

3 Day unto day conveys the message,
and night unto night imparts the knowledge.

4 No speech, no word, whose voice goes unheeded;

5 their sound goes forth through all the earth,
their message to the utmost bounds of the world.

6 There he has placed a tent for the sun;
it comes forth like a bridegroom coming from his tent,
rejoices like a champion to run his course.

7 At one end of the heavens is the rising of the sun;
to its furthest end it runs its course.

There is nothing concealed from its burning heat.



8 The law of the LORD is perfect;
it revives the soul.
The decrees of the LORD are steadfast;
they give wisdom to the simple.

9 The precepts of the LORD are right;
they gladden the heart.
The command of the LORD is clear;
it gives light to the eyes.

10 The fear of the LORD is pure,
abiding forever.
The judgments of the LORD are true;
they are, all of them, just.

11 They are more to be desired than gold,
than quantities of gold.
And sweeter are they than honey,
than honey flowing from the comb.

12 So in them your servant finds instruction;
great reward is in their keeping.



13 But who can detect their own errors?
From hidden faults acquit me.
14 From presumption restrain your servant;
may it not rule me.
Then shall I be blameless,
clean from grave sin.
15 May the spoken words of my mouth,
the thoughts of my heart,
win favor in your sight, O LORD,
my rock and my redeemer!



PRAISE, RESILIENCE, ENDURANCE, AND THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM
PSALM 145

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

14 The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.



SUMMARY: PRAYING THE PSALMS CAN STRENGTHEN OUR PRAYER LIFE



- They shape our thoughts
- They shape our vision
- They shape us spiritually
- They point us to the right way to live
- A way of understanding that despite tragedy and extreme stress, we are not alone in this world though it can seem like it for a long time: God is with us