

Psalm Categories

Psalms can be broadly categorised as poetry or songs. But we can also break down the psalms into 7 more specific categories: complaint, thanksgiving, hymns, remembrance, confidence, wisdom, and kingship. However, not all psalms fit neatly into these categories because each individual psalm is unique in itself. Therefore psalms will sometimes fit into 2 or more different categories. These categories are just a tool to help us understand and use the psalms in our prayers.

Category	Detail	Hot Tip	Useful for...
Complaint	Psalms of Complaint or lament cry out for help in a situation of distress or frustration. Psalmists often protest their innocence or confess their sins. They often vow to praise God and give thanks for deliverance. Such psalms show prayer as an honest communication with God in life's worst situations.	Look for language of despair and frustration	A good psalm to pray when you're feeling down, when life is hard, when you're suffering, when you feel like God is distant, or under God's judgement...
Thanksgiving	Psalms of thanksgiving often describe a situation of distress and how God delivered the psalmist. The psalmist often promises to fulfil vows made to God during the distress and often invites the congregation to join in thanksgiving and praise to God. These psalms show us our need to acknowledge God's work in times of trouble or joy, and to witness to others of what God has done for us.	Look for the turning point in the psalm where the psalmist talks of God's salvation.	A good psalm to pray when you want to thank God for pulling you through a tough time.
Hymns	Hymns focus the reader on praising God. They often describe God's greatness and majesty. In the hymn, the psalmist often invites others to praise God as well, and provides reasons for praising him.	Look for the invitation to praise God with the psalmist <i>"praise him all you peoples"</i> .	A good psalm to pray when you're full of praise for God and you want the whole world to know how great he is!
Remembrance	Psalms of remembrance are those in which God's past acts of redemption are the focus of attention.	Look for a bible story or historical events about what God has done that the psalmist is remembering.	A good psalm to pray when you remember all the great things God has done. Or you need to remember all the great things he has done.
Confidence	Psalms of confidence express trust in God's care for and leadership of His people. Often they express the Heavenly Kingship of God <i>"the Lord reigns!"</i> .	Look for language that talks of God's faithfulness to his people. Look for language that helps you feel secure with God.	A good psalm to pray when you feel like you're doubting God's goodness, mercy, or justice etc.
Wisdom	Wisdom psalms often include observations on the world, creation, human actions & consequences. They often probe the mysteries of life in order to help the reader reflect on their relationship with God in the context of the world he created.	Look for observations on life situations, and things like <i>"the wicked will perish but the faithful will endure"</i> .	A good psalm to pray when you feel like a fool for thinking that following God is the way to life.
Kingship	Kingship psalms detail the role of the human king in God's rule over His people. They also point ahead to the Messiah/Christ/anointed one, who would introduce God's eternal kingdom. <i>It's worth noting that there are also Psalms that are directly about God's Heavenly Kingship – see Confidence Psalms.</i>	Look for royal language like <i>"king, anointed one, God's anointed, Messiah"</i> etc, and references to king David.	A good psalm to pray when you want to thank God for Jesus, and when you want to reflect on what a great king he is.