

The psalms often work in the manner I have suggested above. This is what makes them so enigmatic. Personally, I believe that in their writing, the songwriters of the psalms knew that they had to generalise the themes with which they worked and whilst sometimes, incidents in the life of David or Moses are spoken of, most of the psalms are so generalised that their origins are quite hidden from our sight, and scholars rarely find common ground when debating what the origins of each psalm are! The result of the work of the songwriters, however, is that they produced a considerable range of songs and hymns that have stood the test of time as an expression of human feelings and attitudes to God. This is their glory and the reason why they 'bridge' the gap between the New and the Old Testaments.

#### Ideas for discipleship programme

- Read through one or two other psalms and see whether you can spot this process of generalisation. The psalm seems to come from some time in the past, and yet it also speaks about you and your experiences! Remember to read the psalms in this way to gain the most from them.
- Write down some thoughts about what verse 10 means to you, or how you react to what it says. If you are a speaker or preacher, then use these thoughts as the basis for a sermon or a talk.

## Final Prayer

Eternal and every loving God, You have been the help and refuge of Your people for generations. May we live in Your presence, love all that is good and true, and serve you in every part of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

## Prayer

Dear Lord God, Your gifts to us are beyond compare. How can we measure the immense value of all You have done for us in sending Jesus to be our Saviour? We thank You and we praise You, and we offer You our lives to You in response to Your gift of Jesus Christ. May we live according to His example and His guidance, and so inherit with Him the gift of eternal life: All praise and thanks be to You, Lord God, ALLELUIA!

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: The Coming Year

It is common for people to celebrate the New Year, often by making promises to do better. Pray that the Lord will guide you as you reflect on last year and plan for the next.

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks for God's blessings for you and your family in 2008
- Pray for people who work hard in shops over Christmas time
- Pray for all those whose work is to maintain essential services

## Meditation

Give thanks for days of happiness;  
when the Lord gives us blessings despite all our problems:

Give thanks for the joy of love;  
when those who are close give us happiness by what they do:

Give thanks for the peace of security;  
when our bodies, souls and spirits have rest, and fear nothing:

Give thanks for moments of satisfaction;  
when the work we have done is successful and bears fruit:

Give thanks for the stability of true faith;  
when by trusting the Lord we stand firm, whilst all else fails:

Give thanks for the salvation we have in Christ;  
for without this we have nothing; but in Him we have all!

## Bible Study - Psalm 111

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD.

*I will give thanks to the LORD with all  
my heart;  
in the company of true friends and  
in the assembly.*

<sup>2</sup> Great are the deeds of the LORD;  
they are consulted by all who  
delight in them.

<sup>3</sup> His work is glorious and majestic,  
and His righteousness stands for  
ever.

<sup>4</sup> He has made a memorial of His  
incredible deeds;  
the LORD is gracious and merciful.

<sup>5</sup> He provides food for those who fear  
Him;  
he remembers his covenant  
forever.

<sup>6</sup> He has shown His people the power  
of His deeds,  
In giving them the inheritance of  
the nations.

- <sup>7</sup> *The works of His hands are faithful  
and just;  
everything He has set up is  
trustworthy.*
- <sup>8</sup> *They are steadfast forever and ever,  
and done in truth and uprightness.*
- <sup>9</sup> *He sent redemption for His people;  
He ordained His covenant for ever*
- holy and awesome is His name.*
- <sup>10</sup> *The fear of the LORD is the beginning  
of wisdom;  
all who live by it have good  
understanding.  
To Him belongs eternal praise.*

### Review

This is a lovely psalm with an appealing testimony of thanksgiving to Almighty God. Thanksgiving is offered for the glory and majesty of God and all His incredible works and deeds (111:3f.) and the other things mentioned in the thanksgivings range from food to the redeeming love of the Almighty. The last verse is a fascinating appeal to the reader (or hearer) to fear the Lord and live by His wisdom (111:10).

The psalm is also interesting because of a number of other features. Firstly, it is one of a number of psalms which are headed with the word we transliterate as 'Hallelujah', meaning 'Praise the Lord!' (111:1); at a glance you will find that the same is true of psalms 104, 106, and 112, for example. It is generally reckoned that these psalms played an important part in the pilgrimage of Israelite and Judean people to Jerusalem when regular worship at the Temple was at its height, though it is not easy to work out exactly how these psalms were used. They have a general feel of hopefulness, and a positive attitude which is appealing even to this day. In addition to this, psalm 111 is characterised by being an 'acrostic' in Hebrew. You will not be able to spot this, but the Hebrew reader will quickly see that each half verse of the psalm (each 'line') begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Such techniques were used in poetry to help ordinary people memorise the text, and this adds to the idea that the psalm was intended to be chanted or sung by groups of people on pilgrimage, most likely to Jerusalem.

**The introduction** After the 'Hallelujah' at the beginning, verses one and two give a general introduction to the psalm. It features a sense of fellowship and heartfelt religious zeal; 'I will give thanks to the Lord ... in the company of true friends and in the assembly'. You will find that the words here are translated differently in various Bible versions, but two particular Hebrew words are used (111:1), one which expresses the idea of a close knit group of friends ('the company of true friends'), and the other to a wider group of people bound by a common purpose ('the assembly'). This group or band of friends, part of a larger group, had a common purpose in recalling the famous deeds of God ('the deeds of the Lord' – 111:2), and they were keen to encourage people to know their holy stories well and learn to take pleasure in the heritage of faith in which they stood. All of this, of course, contains wise advice, and it is applicable even to us today.

**Thanks to the Lord** The central verses of the psalm are those from verses 3 to 9. The main focus of the thanksgiving is on God's great deeds of deliverance performed in the past. None of the great events of Israel's past are mentioned, not even the Exodus, but it is hard to read the psalm and not hear echoes of that great event when God's 'glory' and 'majesty' were displayed as Pharaoh's horses and chariots were defeated by nothing more than the obedience of God's people to their Lord (Exodus 12-14). One of the great features of what happened after the people of Israel went through the Red Sea was God's provision of food and water in the midst of the desert (Exodus 16,17), and this seems to be alluded to in verse 5; 'He provides food for those who fear Him.' The proviso was, of course, that to receive the benefits of the 'manna from heaven', those who picked it from the desert floor had to be totally compliant to instructions they probably did not understand (see Exodus

16:11f.). Those who did not 'fear the Lord' (111:5) and do what was instructed soon found out that the manna proved inedible!

**Remembrance of great things** Of course, whilst in the desert, the people made their 'covenant' with God (see 111:5,9), having been 'redeemed' (111:9) by the Lord and led to Mount Sinai. There, they received the 10 Commandments as God's gift of law for the governance of the community, and the evidence of God's faithful love to His people. Despite troubles on the way, the people of Israel eventually came to the Promised Land, and there received the 'inheritance of the nations' (which means that they took possession of the land from other nations, albeit by force). As I write this, you will find that there are many points of contact between this great story of the Israelite people and this psalm. Why, though, did the psalmist not make the connections clearer? The answer is straightforward. In common with many of the psalms, it speaks in generalities which, if you understand the context, you can imagine a particular setting. However, because the psalm itself is entirely general, people can begin to apply the text to their own life stories and settings. It is a remarkable feature of the psalms that they encourage both our remembrance of the past great deeds of God and also help us to see how God is working in our own lives today!

**Psalm 11 and us** For example, although the parallel is not exact, we who have just celebrated Christmas, can recall God's 'glorious and majestic' (111:3) work in sending Jesus as a baby to Bethlehem. The celebration of that has become a 'memorial' (111:4) for us in the annual celebration of Christmas time. The wonder of Christmas is that God has not forgotten His people; He has acted in power and in fulfilment of His Old Testament covenant promises to bring redemption into the world (111:9). Everything He has done in sending His Saviour into the world is 'faithful, upright and true (111:8). The whole psalm can be used in a variety of ways to celebrate God's goodness and His deeds for the redemption of humanity; it is indeed, a truly versatile psalm!

The last verse, (111:10) is a strong hint to us that the generalisation of the Exodus theme has been done on purpose. What happened in Moses' day has proved throughout history to be generally true of people's experience of God. He is awesome! He does fulfil His promises, He does 'feed the poor' (when we do His will), He is trustworthy (when we have understood Him properly), and His purpose is indeed to bring in the rule of His Kingdom. It is true wisdom to understand that God does things consistently and faithfully, and if we live according to the revelation of God we already possess without trying to find something new all the time (as the world suggests we do), then we will not be disappointed. To hold the Lord God in such awe that we truly believe Him when He says that the baby in Bethlehem will be our Saviour, is indeed the beginning of true 'wisdom'. Why? Because it is the truth!

### Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Can you apply this psalm to some instance in your own life, where God has worked in power to help you?
2. How does the Exodus story help us understand the redeeming work of God through Jesus Christ?
3. How do we go about doing the things of God, and are they 'glorious and majestic'? Should they be 'glorious and majestic'?

### Discipleship

#### Personal comment: