# The Healing Power of Psalms:
# Utilizing Psalms and Music in Pastoral Care

Carlie Weisbrod Daniels

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Advisors: Rabbi Kim Geringer and Rabbi Andrea Weiss, PhD

## Introduction

The *mitzvah* of visiting the sick, *bikur cholim,* is a long-standing Jewish value and a practice written about in many texts and sources from the *Tanakh* to the *Tur*. This focus on providing care and support to those who are ill and suffering indicates the importance in Judaism of communal contact during such times. The *mitzvah* of visiting the sick is obligatory for all Jews, and the training and work of professional pastoral caregivers is not meant to remove this communal responsibility. Rather, as with other *mitzvot,* such as the *brit milah,* professional pastoral caregivers serve as "trained people who provide leadership in these *mitzvot*."[1]

A pastoral caregiver can offer comfort, opportunity for theological reflection, and a safe space to explore emotions at a time of major life change, illness, or other crisis. Rev. Dr. Willard W.C. Ashley, psychotherapist and professor of pastoral theology, defines pastoral care as relationships, presence, and storytelling. Ashley explains the role of pastoral counselor as a listener, stating, "We are to allow space for both terror and triumph; hell and holiness; divine and demonic; pain and pleasure; satisfaction and shame; ritual and rebellion; morality and meaning; miracles and messiness."[2]

The art of pastoral care requires study, training and practice. The many books, journals, and studies devoted to the research and practice of pastoral care technique and theory are evidence of the growing importance of this field, not only within religious

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[1]Dayle A. Friedman, introduction to J*ewish Pastoral Care, 2nd Edition: A Practical Handbook from Traditional & Contemporary Sources,* ed. Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010), Kindle Edition.

[2]Rev. Dr. Willard W.C. Ashely, Sr., "Counseling and Interventions," in *Professional Spiritual and Pastoral Care: A Practical Clergy and Chaplains Handbook,* ed. Rabbi Stephen B. Roberts (Woodstock: SkyLight Paths, 2011), 120.

institutions, but also among medical professionals. Further, the development of organizations for training and certification of pastoral caregivers has only increased the credibility of this profession. While Christian communities were early adopters of pastoral care as a professionalized institution, over the past 25 years, Jewish seminaries and institutions have also come to appreciate the benefits of pastoral education and training for their clergy and other Jewish professionals. The growth of this and evidence of the effectiveness of spiritual care and counseling in the acute and congregational settings contribute to and allow for continued study and expansion of the field.

There are many practices and interventions that a pastoral caregiver may employ while working with a patient including conversation, text study, prayer, reflection, music, and meditation. What distinguishes the work of the pastoral caregiver from that of other helping professionals is the opportunity to engage the patient theologically and spiritually. As such, the use of sacred texts, such as psalms, in pastoral care, is one technique that can be employed to explore a patient's experience and to encourage conversation about moments of both suffering and joy.

The psalms speak to the human experience, encompassing the range of human emotions from despair to exaltation. Psalms, therefore, are particularly well-suited to helping the listener to engage with her own emotions as well as explore her relationship with God. The psalms, a genre of biblical poetry, use metaphor, parallelism, key words, and other rhetorical devices which make the reading and message of the psalms captivating. Although some of the language and imagery may seem foreign at first, once a person has the opportunity to learn about and interpret the psalms, they can be a powerful means of reflection and self-discovery.

Music is another art form that connects people to other people as well as to their own feelings; neurologically, music has been shown to impact all areas of the brain. Music can also create powerful psychological and physiological responses and even trigger memory. For these reasons, music is a medium that can be beneficial in pastoral work, impacting as it does the psychological, neurological, physiological and spiritual self.

A combination of reading psalms and offering music to patients offers pastoral caregivers a variety of methods to encourage self-reflection and discovery.

**Intention and Overview**

In Chapter 1, I analyze five psalms - 16, 30, 41, 121, and 130. For each psalm, I present a wide range of scholarly opinion regarding how one should classify the genre and identify the structure of each psalm. I also provide a literary analysis in which I identify the main messages, themes and rhetorical devices of each psalm. Understanding how biblical scholars classify and identify these sacred works of poetry provides background for the analysis and application sections in the following chapters.

In Chapter 2, I describe the use of psalms in pastoral care from historical and contemporary frameworks. I begin with a brief overview of the use of psalms for pastoral purposes including the cultic use of psalms in the Temple, honoring the dead, and Rabbi Nachman of Breslov's ten psalms of healing. The chapter continues with contemporary uses of the psalms in pastoral care and the role of language, structure, metaphor, and parallelism in developing effective practices for using psalms as a helpful resource in pastoral interactions.

In Chapter 3, I describe the transformative power of music in pastoral care, specifically, the psychological and spiritual benefits of music. I discuss research on music and cognitive functioning. I then show some of the similarities between psalms and music including rhetorical and musical structures. The final portion of this chapter addresses the use of music in pastoral care settings, showing two current models for using music (and psalms) in pastoral care.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I offer suggestions for using the five psalms analyzed in Chapter One in the pastoral setting.

# Chapter 1

## Psalms Analysis

### Introduction to Psalms

The book of Psalms, found in the third section of the Hebrew Bible, contains 150 poetic compositions. The book can be further subdivided into five smaller books: Psalms 1-41, Psalms 42-72, Psalms 73-89, Psalms 90-106, and Psalms 107-150. Each of the first four subdivisions concludes with a short blessing or doxology, beginning with "Blessed" and ending with "Amen." Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger explain: "The language of the Psalms is liturgical language, reflecting actual worship practice."[1] Psalms are often used during worship, which may be the only interaction many people have with these beautiful texts.

In the book *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, David M. Howard discusses the study of Psalms and the ongoing changes and improvements in this field of study. Howard explains that the methods of studying the Psalter have changed significantly over the years, as modern scholars take a more integrated approach and examine the Psalter as a structural whole. The two major avenues of this new approach center around a macrostructural approach, "overarching patterns and themes," and a microstructural approach, "connections among smaller groupings of psalms."[2]

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[1]Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, *Psalms* (New York: Cambridge

[2]David M. Howard Jr., "The Psalms and Current Study," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, eds. David Firth and Phillip S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 24.

Brueggemann and Bellinger note that Hermann Gunkel was the first scholar to "analyze the psalms according to type."[3] The primary categories of psalms include: individual and community laments, hymns of praise, individual and community thanksgiving psalms, royal psalms, and wisdom psalms.[4] Gunkel categorized the Psalms based on language, structure, and religious tone;[5] and he attempted to identify the context of usage, or the *Sitz im Leben*, of each psalm. The identification and study of Psalm genres served as a cornerstone for many works on Psalms in the twentieth century. Brueggemann and Bellinger explain: "Gunkel's work provides a way to organize one's study of the Psalter and a comparative basis for studying individual psalms as part of a category."[6]

While Gunkel's approach neatly packs the psalms into categories, some have characterized his form critical analysis for overlooking some characteristics of the psalms. For example, Robert Alter points out the limits of this type of research: "Though these generic categories are sometimes useful for understanding the thrust of a particular text, there is more fluidity of genre than they allow, with many psalms being hybrids or switching genre in mid-course."[7] Alter emphasizes that the classification of genres within the Psalter is complicated and requires more flexibility than a fixed system may allow. Alter acknowledges the cultic nature of some psalms and recognizes the liturgical function of the psalms; but he warns not to assume that all the psalms were only intended

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[3]Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.
[4]Ibid.
[5]Ibid.
[6]Ibid.
[7]Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2007), Kindle Edition.

for Temple use, noting that some psalms were meant for individual prayer and to celebrate other life occurrences such as military victories.[8]

William P. Brown refers to the individual or community lament psalms as complaint psalms, and teaches that "this category comprises the largest group of psalms in the Bible, more than one-third of the Psalter."[9] According to Brown, the general structure of this psalm includes an invocation, complaint, petition, and finally, an affirmation of trust or praise.[10] In this type of psalm, the poet demands God's intervention and explains that if God does not act, the poet will surely die, or just as catastrophic, his enemies will be victorious. Brown clarifies the difference between a communal and individual lament by explaining that in a communal lament, the speaker is an entire people, whereas in an individual lament, the speaker is a single individual.[11]

Brown identifies twenty-eight praise psalms in the Psalter. Unlike lament psalms, which typically begin with a complaint and end with praise, praise psalms begin and end with praise to God. Another unique characteristic of praise psalms is the inclusion of a call to worship that often brackets words of praise. In some cases, Brown points out, "the call to praise dominates."[12]

Compared to psalms of lament and psalms of praise, thanksgiving psalms usually fall in the middle of the spectrum, offering characteristics of both complaint and praise. The unique structure of thanksgiving psalms includes: praise, recollection of the petition, recollection of rescue, and thanksgiving. Thanksgiving psalms are the testimony of the

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[8] Ibid.
[9] William P. Brown, *Psalms: Interpreting Biblical Texts Series* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 43.
[10] Ibid., 44.
[11] Ibid., 46.
[12] Ibid., 52.

speaker emerging out of a difficult time: "Recalling a past crisis, thanksgiving psalms testify to answered petition."[13] Therefore, thanksgiving psalms recollect a time of despair and complaint, and praise God for acting on behalf of the individual or community. Another type of psalm related to the thanksgiving psalm is the trust psalm. According to Brueggemann, the difference between trust and thanksgiving psalms is that trust songs are "more distanced from the crisis and reflective."[14]

Unlike the psalms of praise, thanksgiving and lament psalms, there are two major categories of psalms in which the included psalms are not bound by fixed literary pattern, but rather by theme. The first are called royal psalms, a category of psalms that all mention an earthly king. A subcategory of royal psalms is enthronement psalms, which discuss God's kingship. Another subcategory within royal psalms is songs of Zion. "In Zion psalms," teaches Brown, "Zion is celebrated as the habitat for divinity, the place of God's holy abode, protected from raging enemies."[15] The last major category of psalms, which also are not identified by a set form, are Wisdom Psalms, a grouping that offer a didactic message, usually a teaching about God or how to live one's life.[16]

Brueggemann views the form critical approach from a different perspective, one that takes into account the uncertainty of human life. He categorizes the psalms as psalms of orientation, psalms of disorientation, and psalms of reorientation. He suggests that grouping the psalms in this manner represents the "realities of human life"[17] or the ongoing shift between the moments of feeling securely orientation, painfully

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[13] Ibid., 54.
[14] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 152.
[15] Brown, 56-7.
[16] Ibid., 58.
[17] Brueggemann, 18.

disorientated, and surprisingly reoriented. Brueggemann characterizes the hymn of praise as reflecting a state of equilibrium, when one feels "well-settled, knowing that life makes sense and God is well-placed in heaven, presiding but not bothering."[18] He describes a lament as "the eloquent, passionate songs and prayers of people who are at the desperate edge of their lives" and experiencing times of "chaos, disorder, disorientation."[19] He classifies the thanksgiving psalm as expressing the gratitude evoked by the surprising move from disorientation, or a time of trouble, to a new orientation, as defined by God's rescue and intervention to bring for the psalmist from the "pit." of despair.[20] Brueggemann explains that his interpretation of the psalms is meant to combine the "personal dimension of experience, and our most sophisticated analysis."[21] Brueggemann's classification of the psalms acknowledges the various kinds of human experiences portrayed in the Psalter, which can be very helpful when considering the pastoral use of the psalms.

[18] Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 3.
[19] Ibid., 9-10.
[20] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms,* 18; *Praying the Psalms*, 11.
[21] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms,* 21.

**Psalm 16**

1. A David *michtam*.[22]
Guard me, O God,
for I shelter in You.
2. I said to the LORD,
"My Master You are.
My good is only through You."
3. As to holy ones in the land
and the mighty who were all my desire,
4. let their sorrows abound—
another did they betroth.
I will not pour their libations of blood,
I will not bear their names on my lips.
5. The LORD is my portion and lot,
it is You Who sustain my fate.
6. An inheritance fell to me with delight,
my estate, too, is lovely to me.
7. I shall bless the LORD Who gave me counsel
through the nights that my conscience would lash me.
8. I set the LORD always before me,
on my right hand, that I not stumble.
9. So my heart rejoices and my pulse beats with joy,
my whole body abides secure.
10. For You will not forsake my life to,
You won't let Your faithful one see the Pit.
11. Make me know the path of life.
Joys overflow in Your presence,
delights in Your right hand forever.

**Introduction**

Psalm 16, like other psalms in the first book of the Psalter,[23] expresses the theme of refuge.[24] Psalm 16 begins with a prayer for God to protect the speaker, followed by a

[22] Alter, Kindle Edition.

declaration of loyalty to God. The psalmist then denounces the worship of other gods and vows not to "bear their names on my lips" (v. 4). The psalmist declares faith and loyalty to God, vowing to "set the Lord always before me… so that I may not stumble" (v. 8). The psalmist proclaims he is happy because his whole body is secure, as he knows that God will not let God's "faithful one see the pit" (v. 10). The psalm concludes with the psalmist declaring confidence in God's presence and protection.

**Genre**

Commentators express a wide variety of opinions as to the genre of Psalm 16. Brueggemann and Bellinger classify Psalm 16 as an individual lament.[25] Kraus argues that "elements of the lament cannot be established"; therefore, he classifies Psalm 16 as a prayer psalm.[26] In contrast, Van Horn and Strawn identify the psalm as a song of trust. [27] Brown explains that the song of trust is related to the thanksgiving psalm, but songs of trust (like Psalm 23) focus on the psalmist's confidence in God rather than the moment of rescue. Although Psalm 16 does not fit neatly within the identified elements of a lament psalm, its content and structure suggest that Psalm 16 may be read as a lament psalm. The

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[23] Brueggemann and Bellinger note that Psalms 5, 7, 11, and 15 also emphasize the theme of refuge, Kindle Edition.
[24] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*: *A Commentary*, trans. by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1993), 235.
[27] Roger Van Harn and Brent A. Strawn, "Psalms and Their Types," *Psalms for Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), xxv.

psalm begins with the psalmist's address and plea to God, then recounts God's action on the speaker's behalf, and concludes with a message of trust.[28]

**Structure**

Segal notes that the majority of commentators, including Hakham, agree that the psalm should be divided into four sections: address and plea (v. 1b); confession of trust and rejection of those who worship idols (vv. 2-4); thanksgiving (vv. 5-8); and assurance and refuge (vv. 9-11).[29] Brueggemann and Bellinger identify vv.1-4 as the first section of the psalm and then divide the second half of the psalm into two sections, vv. 5-8 in which the psalmist expresses praise and loyalty to God, and vv. 9-11, a confession and vow of confidence in God's protection and shelter. It is likely that the difficulty in translating and understanding vv. 2-4 contribute to the differing opinions on how to properly identify those verses.

**Literary Analysis**

The psalm opens with an address and request to God from the speaker: "Guard me O God, for I shelter in you," (v. 1b). Brueggemann and Bellinger write, "The opening verse suggests that the speaker has an intimate relationship with the God of ancient Israel and so pleads with God for protection."[30] The psalmist initially asks God for protection. This metaphor of God as "shelter" appears repeatedly in Psalms, including in Pss. 5:12,

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[28] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.
[29] Benjamin J. Segal, *A New Psalm: A Guide to Psalms as Literature* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2013), 68.
[30] Brueggemann Bellinger, Kindle Edition.

7: 2, and 11:1. The idea of God as refuge corresponds with the psalmist's faith that God will protect him.

The second section of the psalm (vv. 2-4) transitions to a statement of loyalty and the psalmist's denouncement of idolatry. The second verse sets forth the psalmist's declaration of God's importance in the psalmist's life. Alter comments on the difficulty of properly translating and understanding vv. 2-4, explaining in reference to v. 2 that "the textual difficulties of the whole psalm begin here."[31] The statement of faith in v. 2 is followed by the condemnation of the idol worshippers in vv. 3-4. Brueggemann and Bellinger interpret vv. 2–3 as words of the syncretists, those with mixed loyalties who "affirm God and still delight in other gods, 'the holy ones' of verse 3," in contrast with the psalmist's confessions of trust and loyalty in Israel's God.[32] According to Alter, the reference in verse 3 to the "holy ones in the land" may refer to "local deities... or they might indicate Canaanite potentates who were idol worshippers."[33] Schaefer and Segal comment on the possibility that v. 4 indicates that the psalmist once was an idol worshiper but is now a converted worshipper who declares trust in God and condemns those who worship other gods. Schaefer, on the other hand, argues that "the poet is innocent of sacrificing and praying to...false gods."[34]

Segal identifies the third section, vv. 5-8, as "grateful acknowledgement."[35] In v. 5, the psalmist proclaims, "The LORD is my portion and lot," and within vv. 5-6 there are several references to allocation of land. The words c*helek* ("lot"), *nachalah*

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[31] Alter, Kindle Edition.
[32] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.
[33] Alter, Kindle Edition.
[34] Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms - Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1996), 38.
[35] Segal, 69.

("inheritance"), *and chevel* ("portion") are synonyms and also sound similar. The same words appear in Numbers 18:20, when God tells the Levites that they will have no territorial inheritance; rather God says, "I am your portion." Further, in Psalm 142:5, the psalmist calls out to God, "You are my shelter, my lot in the land of the living," using the words *machsi* ("shelter") and *chelki* ("my lot"). For the psalmists in Psalm 16 and Psalm 142, God is the inheritance that provides shelter and refuge for them. Alter explains that the "inheritance" in v. 6 is most likely not a reference to real estate, but to the psalmist "being happy in his sense of sustaining connection with the God of Israel."[36]

In v. 7, the psalmist celebrates his sustained connection with God, "the one who gave me counsel through the nights that my conscience would lash me." Schaefer identifies God as counselor and explains that "'night' could mean nights of prayer or it could be a metaphor for sickness, loneliness, or life threatening experiences."[37] This section of "grateful acknowledgement" ends with the psalmist's claim that he will seek the presence of God: "I set the Lord always before me, on my right hand, that I may not stumble."[38] The idiom "right hand" symbolizes God's protection, power, and rescue, and appears elsewhere in the Psalms (17:7, 78:54, 98:1, 118:15, 16). In Psalms 108:7 and 138:7, the image of God's right hand is used to represent protection from a source of danger. The expression of not stumbling is found in various psalms, including Psalms 17:5, 26:1, 30:7, and 37:31. In these examples, the metaphor suggests that it is God's protection that prevents the psalmist's foot from slipping. This idiom is not read literally, but rather as a metaphor for a person who experiences a lack of stability or safety, or a

[36] Alter, Kindle Edition.
[37] Schaefer, 38.
[38] Kraus, 239.

person in a difficult circumstance in a particular moment in life. Psalm 121 (vv. 3, 5) utilizes both of these idioms to reveal that God serves as protector for the psalmist.

The final section (vv. 9-11) ends with the joyful assurance and promise of security. Verse 9 tells of the jubilant embodied experience of security the psalmist feels. The motif of body language emerges in this verse. Schaefer comments on the full body experience of verse 9: "The whole person participates in this security as trust and joy permeate 'heart' (*lev*), 'soul' (*kabod*, 'liver,' the spiritual aspect of the person), and 'body' (*basar*, the physical aspect). Death includes the loss of the divine presence and joy."[39] Verse 10 refers to Sheol and "the Pit," a place distant from God and life, where the psalmist is unable to praise God or dwell in God's presence. This stands in stark contrast to the images of closeness and safety in the previous section. The repetition of "joy" (vv. 9, 11), "right hand" (vv. 8,11), and "delight" (vv. 6, 11) express the theme of delight in God's presence in the last section of the psalm.

**Concluding Observations**

In Psalm 16, the psalmist calls out for God to be his shelter and protection in life, denounces idolatry, and realizes that his life is a result of an intimate connection with God. It is the psalmist's inheritance, the promise of dwelling in God's shelter, which brings the psalmist assurance of God's protection. The psalmist expresses feelings of confidence and joy (v. 11) in God and his current situation. The pleasure of the psalmist at the end of the poem sends a clear message of hope and certainty in God to the listener.

[39] Schaefer, 38.

**Psalm 30**

1. A psalm for the dedication for the house, for David.[40]
2. I shall exalt You, LORD, for You drew me up,
and You gave no joy to my enemies.
3. LORD, my God,
I cried to You and You healed me.
4. LORD, You brought me up from Sheol,
gave me life from those gone down to the Pit.
5. Hymn to the LORD, O his faithful,
acclaim his holy name.
6. But a moment in His wrath,
life in His pleasure.
At evening one beds down weeping,
and in the morning, glad song.
7. As for me, I thought in my quiet days,
"Never will I stumble." LORD, in your pleasure
8. You made me stand mountain-strong.
—When You hid Your face, I was stricken.
9. To You, O LORD, I call,
and to the Master I plead.
10. "What profit in my blood,
in my going down deathward?
Will dust acclaim You,
will it tell Your truth?"
11. Hear, LORD, and grant me grace.
LORD, become helper to me.
12. You have turned my dirge to a dance for me,
undone my sackcloth and bound me with joy.
13. O, let my heart hymn You and be not still,
LORD, my God, for all time I acclaim You.

**Introduction**

Psalm 30 begins in the present as the psalmist sings praises to God. Typical of a thanksgiving psalm, the psalmist then transitions to the past, giving examples of when the psalmist cried out to God and was healed. Recalling his memories of rescue, the psalmist lobbies others to join him in offering words of praise and thanksgiving. The speaker in

[40] Alter, Kindle Edition.

Psalm 30 reflects on a time of distress with the fond memory of God being the active power that led the psalmist out of his horrible situation. The memory of being rescued motivates his words of thanksgiving and praise to God, and his call to others to do the same.

**Genre**

Psalm 30 is an individual psalm of thanksgiving, with an emphasis on the recovery from an illness. The psalmist speaks words of gratitude and praise while recalling God's saving power in moments of distress. Brueggemann, citing Claus Westermann, explains that this psalm "tells the story of *going into trouble and coming out of the trouble*."[41] According to Brown, psalms of thanksgiving offer "concrete testimony to answered prayer and display unwavering confidence in God's care and power to deliver."[42] Characteristic of thanksgiving psalms, Psalm 30 contains both complaint and praise. The recollection of complaint serves as testimony to God's power and becomes the reason for praise.

One defining feature of the thanksgiving genre is that praise and gratitude are expressed through the testimony of the rescue. This is illustrated in verses 2-4, with a personal statement of praise: "I shall exalt you, Lord," which is followed by the psalmist recalling the deliverance: "For you drew me up, and you gave no joy to my enemies." The element of thanksgiving is communicated through the psalmist's reflection on his previous complaints and answered petitions.

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[41] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 126.
[42] Brown, 54.

**Structure**

Brueggemann and Brown divide Psalm 30 into four sections.[43] The first section (verses 2-4) begins with an individual invocation and a recollection of moments of trouble when God intervened. In the second section (verses 5-6), the psalmist invites the "faithful ones" to share in the praise of God (v. 5), and he offers an observation about what it means to live in God's favor or disfavor (v. 6). The third section (verses 7-11) transitions back to the psalmist's testimony of disorientation, which results in complaint and petition for God's help. The concluding section (verses 12-13) expresses the result of the plea for help that God has turned the poet's misfortune from mourning to joy, and ends with praise and thanksgiving because of this transformation.

**Literary Analysis**

The first section of the psalm (verses 2-4) begins with the psalmist's praise to God ("I extol you") and the reason for that praise ("for You drew me up"). The psalmist remembers his time of need (v. 3), "I cried to You," and then states the outcome, "and You healed me," which indicates that illness is the reason for the psalmist's distress. In verse 4, the psalmist recalls being in "the Pit" and is thankful for God's rescue. Alter comments on the physical implications of these introductory words, which indicate a loftiness and lowliness that fit the sharp contrasts of high exaltation and deep despair exhibited throughout the psalm. He notes that the Hebrew verb in *delatani* ("You drew me up") is used for drawing up water from a well. To this end, he explains, "Death, then,

[43] Hakham, 221. Hakham also divides the text in four sections, but he views v. 11 as part of the fourth part (vv. 11-3).

is imagined as a deep pit from which the speaker had been drawn up by God."[44] Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler teach that this metaphor of being brought out of "the Pit" represents recovery from an illness rather than resurrection from death. "The Pit" and Sheol (the place for the dead) are synonyms; and often the words appear together in a parallel structure, as seen in Pss. 16:10, 88:45, and Is. 14:15. Here, the terms convey the psalmist's battle with a life threatening illness, which is counteracted by the life affirming actions of God who rescues the psalmist from such a fate.

In the second section (verses 5-6), the imperative verbs *zamru* ("Hymn to") and *hodu* ("acclaim") in v. 5 emphasize the main message of this psalm. The speaker gives thanks for the way God delivered him, as described in in verse 4. Another way to understand the use of the words *zamru* and *hodu* is to see that the mere acknowledgement of the struggle, that is, saying it aloud, becomes an act of praise, which in turn becomes a form of healing. As Brueggemann affirms, "Thanks is more than just being grateful. It is a confessional statement, in some sense relying upon and committing oneself to the other. To thank is to make a commitment."[45] Thus, in verses 5-6, the recollection of illness results in a message of praise. In verse six, the psalmist expresses that God's wrath only lasts a moment, but that God's presence as a life sustaining force lasts a lifetime. The use of the merism, "At evening one beds down weeping, and in the morning, glad song," helps to communicate the magnitude and breadth of God's saving power by showing how quickly God can change the course of one's life. This is one of many contrasts that appear in the psalm. Segal points out several additional contrasts: a moment and lifetime (v. 6), weeping and glad song (v. 6), and wrath and pleasure (v. 6), as well as mountain

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[44] Alter, Kindle Edition.
[45] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 127.

strong and stricken (v. 8); these contrasts culminate in the opposition between mourning and dancing, sackcloth of mourning and bound with joy in v. 12.[46]

The third section (verses 7-11), tells of a time when the psalmist was untroubled and thought, “Never will I stumble.” He expresses his prior feeling of confidence and security when he states that God made him “stand mountain strong” (v. 8). However, he soon experienced some sort of crisis, likely the illness referred to in verse 3. The psalmist characterized that time of trouble as feeling like God was not present, or that God hid God’s face (v. 8b). This image occurs frequently in the Bible, such as in Psalm 44:25, when the psalmist asks, “Why do You hide Your face, forget our affliction, our oppression?” The absence of God’s presence for the psalmist implies rejection and signifies the lack of protection, security, and God’s life saving power.

The feelings of rejection and lack of security that the psalmist once felt result in the psalmist’s renewed vow to praise God. The psalmist recalls his petition to God in v. 9, “To You, O Lord, I call," and this use of the first person results in alliteration which draws the eye and the ear to this verse. The list of rhetorical questions that follow in verse 10, “What profit in my blood, in my going down deathward? Will dust acclaim You, will it tell your truth?” show how the psalmist attempted to reason with God, providing a rationale as to why God should save him from what seems to be a deadly condition. Alter summarizes this argument, also found in other psalms (Pss. 6:5-6, 88:4-6, 11-13, 115:7, and 118:17), when he writes, “Man cannot fulfill his vocation of celebrating God if he is engulfed by death.”[47] Here, the relationship with God is reciprocal: the poet needs God for life and God needs the poet for praise.

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[46] Segal, Kindle Edition.
[47] Alter, 103.

The final verse of the recollection of the plea, in verse 11, begins with *sh'ma* ("Hear") and *honaini* ("grant me grace"). These verbs are commonly used in laments, or in this case the testimony of the complaint, to call out to God when the poet is in troubled.[48] Kraus comments, "The petitioner prays to be heard (*sh'ma*) and for clemency (*hanan*). He summons Yahweh as his helper (*ozeir*). But this reminder of the coming of calamity and of the lament is immediately eclipsed again by God's act of turning to the rescue (v. 12)."[49]

In the final two verses, (12-13), the use of the word *hafachta* ("you have turned") indicates a complete reversal: because of God's intervention, the poet is now in a better place, and in a position to give praise and thanks. According to Brueggemann, the action verbs of verses 2-4 and 12-13 -- "You drew me up" (v. 2) and "you turned" (v. 12), "you healed me" (v. 3) and "undone my sackcloth" (v.12), and "gave me life" and "bound me with joy" (v. 11) -- all represent the life changing acts of God.[50] Schaefer notes that the contrasts that appear throughout the psalm represent the struggle between life and death.[51] The opposites that appear in v. 12, mourning and dance and sackcloth and joy, represent the reversal of the psalmist's near death experience. Brueggemann explains that "the purpose of the Psalm appears to keep that memory alive, so that the occasion of transformation is kept alive. In that movement of transformation are found both the power to life and the passion for praise of God."[52] The journey of the psalmist from despair to praise explores the nature of the relationship between the poet and a God who delivers and saves, serving as a reminder of transformative power of God.

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[48] See Psalms 27:7, 28:2.
[49] Kraus, 356.
[50] Brueggemann, *Message of the Psalms*, 128.
[51] Schaefer, 75.
[52] Ibid.

**Concluding Observations**

Psalm 30 is an individual psalm of thanksgiving that recalls moments of distress and the psalmist's realization that God is the sustaining life force. From a place of security, the poet describes moving from a place of distress, and then emerging from illness to utter praise and thanksgiving for his rescue. The psalmist looks back on moments of distress with understanding that it is God's presence in the poet's life that is essential to the poet's existence, and in the end, expresses joy and thanksgiving for God's favor.

**Psalm 41**

1. To the lead player. A David psalm.[53]
2. Happy who looks to the poor.
On the day of evil may the LORD make him safe.
3. May the LORD guard him and keep him alive.
May he be called happy in the land.
And do not deliver him to his enemies' maw.
4. May the LORD sustain him on the couch of pain.
—You transformed his whole bed of illness.
5. I said, "LORD, grant me grace,
heal me, though I offended You."
6. My enemies said evil of me:
"When will he die and his name be lost?"
7. And should one come to visit,
his heart spoke a lie.
He gathered up mischief, went out, spoke abroad.
8. One and all my foes whispered against me,
against me plotted my harm:
9. "Some nasty thing is lodged in him.
As he lies down, he will not rise again."
10. Even my confidant, in whom I did trust,
who ate my bread,
was utterly devious with me.
11. And You, O LORD, grant me grace, raise me up,
that I may pay them back.
12 In this I shall know You desire me—
that my enemy not trumpet his conquest of me.
13. And I, in my innocence, You sustained me
and made me stand before You forever.
14. Blessed is the LORD God of Israel
forever and forever,
amen and amen.

[53] Alter, Kindle Edition.

## Introduction

Psalm 41 begins with a description of illness, distress, and isolation, but ultimately becomes a prayer of thanksgiving and praise. The poet begins with an instructive introduction regarding God's power and protection of those who care for those in need. The psalmist recalls his plea to God for healing despite his sins. Following the recollection of the plea, the psalmist presents a narrative account of what occurred when he was ill. Specifically, he notes that his supposed friends and enemies "spoke lies" (v. 7) about his impending death. The final verses of the psalm express the psalmist's thanks for God's protection and for sustaining him throughout his illness. Verses 12-13 reaffirm the psalmist's assurance and gratitude for God's saving presence.

## Genre

Schaefer categorizes this as a psalm of "thanksgiving for relief from an illness."[54] Johnston observes that in both lament and thanksgiving psalms, the response to distress may be joyful or more subdued; however, Psalm 41 contains both types of responses to the crisis, making it difficult to categorize.[55] Brueggemann and Bellinger categorize Psalm 41 as an individual thanksgiving psalm,[56] while others, such as Van Horn and Strawn, label Psalm 41 as an individual lament.[57] The discrepancy lies in the

[54] Schaefer,102.
[55] Philip S. Johnston, "The Psalms and Distress" in *Interpreting the Psalms*: *Issues and Approaches*, eds. David Firth and Phillip S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2005), 82.
[56] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.
[57] Van Harn and Strawn, xxvi.

interpretation of whether verses 5-10 should be voiced in the present or in the past as a recollection of the psalmist's plea.

Hakham notes that some use v. 2 as the indicator to read the psalm in the present, "Happy is he who considers his sickness." In verse 5, the words *ani amarti,* "I said," may indicate that the psalmist is beginning to recall a past narrative, although Hakham also notes that some interpret these words as, "I say."[58] Based on this evidence, Hakham presents both options, and notes that the reading of v. 5 ultimately depends on the interpretation of v. 2. If one reads this psalm as a thanksgiving psalm (in the past), then v. 2 is directed to the audience listening to the psalmist, and directly relates to the psalmist's own suffering. On the other hand, if the psalm is read as a lament (in the present), then v. 2 is meant to encourage the psalmist in a time of suffering, with an implied request that God act in this manner on the psalmist's behalf.[59] The majority of scholars suggest that v. 5 should be read as a part of the narrative recollection of a time when the speaker was ill in the past, which supports categorizing Psalm 41 as an individual thanksgiving psalm.

## Structure

Schaefer, Brueggemann and Bellinger, and Hakham all present a similar understanding of the structure of this psalm. After the superscription (v. 1), part one (vv. 2-4), focuses on the person who watches out for the poor or wretched. Part two, the petition (vv. 5-11), continues with the psalmist's recollection of the plea and the narrative description of the psalmist's hardship and mistreatment. Part three (vv. 12-13) ends with the claim that God favored and healed the psalmist. The final verse is a doxology, a verse

[58] Hakham, 323.
[59] Ibid., 327.

of praise, which is likely a later addition to conclude the first of the five books of Psalms (Psalms 1-41).

## Literary Analysis

The first section of this psalm starts with a teaching about the well-being of a person who cares for the poor (v. 2). The following two verses (vv. 3-4) function as a prayer to God for the statement in v. 2 to come true. Based on his past experience, the speaker asks God to protect those who look after those in need and, in a time of sickness, "sustain him on a couch of pain" (v. 4). This introduction connects to the poet's later memory of so-called friends and enemies who mistreated the psalmist while he was sick. Brueggemann and Bellinger label this a "didactic introduction" and conclude that God "acts to enhance life for those who enact YHWH's compassion and justice in the world."[60] Alter and Segal both comment that the word *maskil* implies both seeing and understanding.[61] Segal also suggests that *dal* may be translated as "poor" or "sick."[62] Thus, the psalm begins by establishing the attributed reason for intervention, where it is precisely the psalmist's integrity and compassion for the sick that, in hindsight, is associated with his recovery.

The words "enemy" (vv. 3, 6, 12) and "evil" (vv. 2, 6, 8), repeat three times over the course of the psalm. In verses 2 and 3, these words appear in a positive context, praising God's ability to protect the psalmist from enemies and evil. Alter notes that the general anecdote detailed in vv. 1-3 changes in v. 4b with the shift from verbs in the jussive to the perfect tense: "You transformed his whole bed of illness." He claims that

[60] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.
[61] Robert Alter, Kindle Edition.
[62] Segal, 188.

this switch represents the transition from the general prayer for the wretched in vv. 2-4 to main subject of the psalm: thanksgiving for an individual healed from an illness.[63]

The second section (vv. 5-11) begins as the speaker recalls the petition to God he recited in the past, when he was ill: "I said: 'LORD, grant me grace, heal me" (v. 5). Psalm 41 contains three inclusios that frame the short literary section within the larger poetic composition.[64] The imperative verbs in verse 5 ("be gracious, heal") and verse 11("be gracious, raise me up") make up the petitions to God that surround the psalmist's recollection of illness and mistreatment from those who visited him (vv. 6-10). "Thus, verse 5 and 11," argue Brueggemann and Bellinger, "frame the complaint and anticipate the divine rescue whereby the thou of YHWH attends to the helpless I of the psalmist."

Verses 6-10 contain the narrative section that elaborates on the psalmist's condition and the role others played in making a difficult situation even worse. The psalmist recounts how he was ill, and how those who visited him were not genuine ("his heart spoke a lie," v. 7) and did not wish him well ("plotted my harm," v. 8). The alienation the psalmist felt caused him emotional distress that only would have exacerbated the physical pain of his illness. In this section, the psalmist recalls all of the negative things that were said about him while he was ill. The repetition of the root *dvr* -- "said evil of me" (v. 6), "spoke a lie" (v. 7), and "spoke abroad" (v. 7) -- indicates that the mistreatment came in the form of devious speech. In verses 6 and 9, the psalmist quotes his foes: they asked, "When will he die and his name be lost?" (v. 6), and they expressed the opinion that "he will not rise again" (v. 9). Brueggemann explains that at this point in the psalm, "all social relationships for the psalmist have become distorted

[63] Robert Alter, Kindle Edition.
[64] Segal, 189.

and destructive."[65] An aversion to the sick is common in the psalms, and in life, as Schaefer adds, "The invalid's description is realistic--courteous, empty platitudes of some visitors to the sickroom, idle gossip in public."[66] For Brueggemann and Bellinger, the trouble, complaint and helplessness is bracketed by the interaction with God, "and by the deep hope that [God] will act decisively to give life back to this nearly defeated speaker."[67]

In verse 11, the psalmist's petition refers back to the previous section (vv. 6-10). The enemies who speak against the psalmist think, "He will rise not again" (v. 9). The same root, *kum*, appears again in verse 11: God will "raise up" (*lakum*) the psalmist "and place him or her in the divine presence forever."[68] The transition from the narrative of the complaint back to petition occurs in the juxtaposition of these two statements. The enemies say the psalmist is doomed to die, that "he will not rise"; but the repetition of the verb suggests hope and anticipation of divine rescue. As stated previously, this verse also serves as a bookend to verse 5, where language in the psalmist's previous plea returns in the verb "be gracious." The psalmist also promises that after such deliverance he will pay back those who spoke against him.

The concluding section (vv. 12-13) comprises an expression of assurance that God takes care of and heals those who are ill. Verse 12 also contains the word *oyev* ("enemy"), as do verses 3 and 6, therefore completing another inclusio found in this psalm. Segal explains that the repetition expands the definition of the enemy, as "the bothersome 'other' here is sometimes singular or plural, sometimes a former ally, and

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[65] Ibid.
[66] Schaefer, 103.
[67] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.
[68] Schaefer, 103.

sometimes duplicitous well wisher."[69] In v. 12, the psalmist gives thanks to God for not letting his enemies win, and for God sustaining him in his time of need. As Brueggemann and Bellinger teach, the assurance in the last two verses indicates that the prayer in.[70]

The final verse of the psalm, v. 14, also concludes the first books of Psalms. According to Alter, the formulary doxology, praise to God, is "an editorial flourish to mark the end of the first of the five books into which the redactors retroactively divided the Book of Psalms."[71] The statement stands out as this formula of praise occurs at the end of the first four subdivisions of the book of Psalms (also see Pss 72:18-20, 89:52,106:42). The last book does not end with this particular formula, because Psalm 150 itself serves as a doxology.[72]

## Concluding Observations

Psalm 41 begins with a short teaching about the benefit of caring for the sick, and the rest of the text expresses thanksgiving for recovery from an illness. The connection between caring for the sick and the psalmist's own mistreatment and rescue is the underlying message of the poem. The psalm examines what it means to "look to the poor," through the psalmist's own personal experience of being alienated and mistreated by those around him during a time of suffering. In response to the psalmist's bold petitions, God rescues and raises up the psalmist from his sickbed. In the end, the psalm celebrates the saving power of God.

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[69] Segal, 189.
[70] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.
[71] Alter, Kindle Edition.
[72] Schaefer, 104.

**Psalm 121**

1. A song of ascents.[73]
I lift up my eyes to the mountains:
from where will my help come?
2. My help is from the LORD,
maker of heaven and earth.
3. He does not let your foot stumble.
Your guard does not slumber.
4. Look, He does not slumber nor does He sleep,
Israel's guard.
5. The LORD is your guard,
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
6. By day the sun does not strike you,
nor the moon by night.
7 The LORD guards you from all harm,
He guards your life.
8 The LORD guards your going and your coming,
now and forevermore.

## Introduction

Psalm 121 is a psalm of hope and confidence in God's unwavering protection. The psalmist looks to the mountains and inquires, "From where will my help come?" The speaker states that help will come from God, the creator of the earth. The psalm then elaborates on the type of help that God provides, emphasizing that God is a vigilant and attentive guardian who will protect the psalmist at all times.

## Genre

Psalms 120-134 are often grouped together and labeled as "Pilgrimage Psalms," which some scholars suggest is due to their superscription, "A song of ascents." This

[73] Alter, Kindle Edition.

phrase may indicate that these psalms were used during pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem. Brueggemann and Bellinger explain that pilgrims on their way to the Temple in Jerusalem sung these psalms as they completed their difficult journey.[74] The concise, repetitive nature of the language in Psalm 121 would make the psalm easily memorizable, and thus well suited for use in a pilgrimage setting. Zenger observes that brevity is a characteristic of all of the Pilgrimage Psalms, which he thinks were most likely sung with beautiful melodies.[75] Alter also speculates that the Pilgrimage Psalms may have used a lyrical melody, an assertion he makes by providing an alternative meaning for the superscription:

> This is the first in a sequence of fifteen psalms that bear this heading. Most scholars assume that "ascents" refers to pilgrimages to Jerusalem. (The verb "ascend" or "go up" is the technical term used for pilgrimage.) But among other meanings that have been proposed, it could be a musical term, perhaps referring to an ascent in pitch or a crescendo in the song, or it could refer to the pattern of incremental repetition that is common to many of these poems.[76]

Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler add a number of other possible explanations of the superscription "Song of Ascents," including the interpretation of "ascents" or "steps" as referring to "the verbal structure in which a word or phrase at the end of one verse is repeated near the beginning of the next, creating a kind of stepping stone from one verse to the next." They cite midrashic and modern commentaries that read "ascents" as a reference to the return from Babylonian exile. Berlin and Brettler also mention a passage from the Mishnah that "explains that these fifteen songs were song by the Levites on the steps ('ma'alot') of the Temple" and Philo's understanding of these psalms as

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[74] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.
[75] Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101-150*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011), 4.
[76] Robert Alter, Kindle Edition.

"expressing the ascent of the individual to God.[77] According to Berlin and Brettler, Psalms 120-134 are exilic or post-exilic and focus on issues like return from exile and the centrality of the Temple and Jerusalem, with an emphasis on the blessings of peace, help, and hope for the future. They conclude, "The song of ascents are, by and large, prayers for God's blessings on or emanating from Jerusalem/Zion."[78]

Ultimately, there is uncertainty about how Psalm 121 was utilized, despite its inclusion in the Pilgrimage Psalms collection. It is important to consider the possibility of a function outside of a use related to pilgrimage to the Temple. Zenger states that "from a form-critical point of view, one may characterize Psalm 121 as a psalm which expresses confidence…[in God's protection], which as such need not necessarily be a pilgrimage psalm."[79] Brueggemann and Bellinger classify Psalm 121 as a "trust psalm," which is related to the thanksgiving psalm. This type of psalm speaks more generally about the psalmist's trust in God, rather than a specific situation of rescue.[80]

**Structure**

Hakham views Psalm 121 as a conversation between a traveler and a well-wisher. He thus divides Psalm 121 into two sections: the first section (vv. 1-4) are the words of the traveler, and the second section (vv. 5-8) are the blessing the well-wisher shares with the traveler. Hakham comes to this conclusion about the two speakers due to the shift in

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[77] Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2nd ed, (Oxford: University Press, 2014), 1411.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Zenger, 320.
[80] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.

language from first person to second person.[81] While Schaefer differentiates between the first person speaker in v. 1 and the unidentified voice that speaks to the psalmist in the subsequent verses,[82] Berlin and Brettler suggest that the 'other' voice is merely the inner dialogue of the psalmist.[83] In contrast to Hakham, Zenger introduces a four-part structure that groups the eight verses into pairs: "Help from YHWH" in vv. 1-2, "YHWH's Constantly Watchful Care" in vv. 3-4, "YHWH as Protective Shield" in vv. 5-6, and "YHWH as Protector for All Life's Ways" in vv. 7-8.[84]

The first section, verses 1-2, poses the question, "From where will my help come?" and also introduces the answer that help will come from God. The second section, verses 3-4, expands on this answer by describing the God who vigilantly and constantly protects. The third section, verses 5-6, expresses that God will be one's protection from danger and the elements throughout the day and night. The last section, verses 7-8, portrays the totality of God's protection: God will protect one's life always.

**Literary Analysis**

Following the superscription, the poem begins in the first person, with psalmist raising his eyes to the mountains and asking, "From where will my help come?" As Schaefer observes, "'Come' and 'coming' (vv. 1, 8) frames Psalm 121."[85] The transitional state of the poet is expressed in this opening statement and question, which embody the uncertainty of the psalmist's experience. Segal describes the poetic use of the

[81] Hakham, 296.
[82] Schaefer, 299.
[83] Berlin and Brettler, 1412.
[84] Zenger, 320-9.
[85] Schaefer, 299.

mountains in this verse as "wonderfully ambiguous."[86] Certainly, this verse could refer to real mountains encountered on a journey. However, Segal explains that the mountains "might be either a source of inspiration and hope (looking up to God, the grandeur of creation…) or of fear (picturing enemies, wild animals, or demonic forces)."[87] He offers additional interpretive possibilities when he notes that Radak claimed that the verse "simply indicates the height to which one ascends to look for help" by gaining a different vantage point; and Magonet observes that "the mountain tops are where heaven and earth meet," and thus provides access to divine realm.[88] The various interpretations of the mountains, and what it might mean to lift one's eyes to the mountains, reflect the many possible interpretations of Psalm 121 and how it may be applied to the human experience.

Anadiplosis is common linguistic characteristic of Psalm 121 and the fifteen ascent psalms. Anadiplosis occurs when the word at the end of one line ("my help" in v. 1) appears at the beginning of the subsequent line ("my help" in v. 2).[89] Berlin and Brettler suggest that some scholars label these as "ascents" or "steps" that build throughout the psalm and attribute the superscription, "A song of ascents," to this poetic feature of the ascent psalms.[90]

The second section of the psalm, verses 3-4, express the notion that God is guardian and protector. These verses identify three important characteristics of God: God who protects the path, God who never sleeps, and God who is eternally attentive.[91] The idea that God will "never let your foot stumble" conveys the idea that God will prevent a

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[86] Segal, 594.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Anadiplosis also occurs in Ps. 121:3-4, 7-8 as well as Ps. 130:1-2, 5-6, and 7-8.
[90] Berlin and Brettler, 1412.
[91] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.

person from undergoing negative events.[92] The psalm is not only applicable to physical journeys with idioms like feet stumbling and coming and going, but the journey may also be a metaphorical representation of the journey of life. The metaphor of God as a guard, who never slumbers, portrays the image of a constant protector who sees everything and is always alert and ready to come to the rescue at a moment's notice.

The root "to guard" is repeated six times in verses 3-8 (vv. 4, 5, 7, 8) and becomes a key word in the psalm. In verse 3, *shomrecha* ("your guard") describes the kind of help that God will provide. The use of the second person, "your guard," highlights the relationship between God and the psalmist, and the personal nature of the guardianship and protection. The repetitive use of *shomer* and the assurances that God does not slumber or sleep contrast to other psalms, such as Ps. 59:5, where the psalmist must arouse God from sleep to ask for help and protection. The opposite image occurs in Psalm 121, which communicates the trust and confidence in God's constant protection.

In the next section, verses 5-6, describes the kind of protection God will provide. The metaphor of God as "your shade at your right hand" further describes God as guardian. In v. 5a, "your guard," is parallel to v. 5b, "your shade at your right hand." The parallelism provides additional meaning to the word "guard." The metaphor "your shade at your right hand," is an image of God's protection from the elements, a possible deadly force for the psalmist without shade, or more broadly overall, God as a defensive shield over the psalmist.

The contrasting language and use of parallelism in verse 6, "By day the sun does not strike you, nor the moon by night," communicates the poet's belief that God will always serve as a vigilant protector. The parallel structure of the verse is seen in the

[92] See the discussion of this image of one's foot stumbling in analysis of Psalm 16.

absence of "does not strike you," in verse 6b, the same message is merely implied in the second part of the verse. Merisms, like day and night and heaven and earth (v. 2), are used throughout this psalm to show that God will protect the psalmist at all times and everywhere. This verse also summarizes the previous negations, "[God] will not let your foot stumble," "[God] shall not slumber," and "[God] neither slumbers nor sleeps." Schaefer explains that "the description is a guarantee especially against nocturnal danger; the night watchman is ever alert."[93]

The concluding section of the psalm, verses 7-8, begins with the divine name, and the verb *shomer* repeats two more times in verse 7. The verse differs from the previous verses because, according to Zenger, "it establishes an escalation in the content."[94] The first part of verse 7 "formulates the turning aside of evil and 7b intensifies with the statement that Yahweh will guard and keep the 'life' of the 'you.'"[95] Here, the thematic understanding of the psalm as one of confidence and assurance is summed up beautifully in just two short assertions, "The Lord guards you from all harm; He guards your life." Thus, the penultimate verse serves as a summation of the previous five verses.

According to Alter, the movement from v. 2, "maker of heaven and earth," creation, to the concluding verse, "now and forevermore," is the "concluding reference to the eternality of God's protection."[96] Once again, the psalmist employs merisms -- "going and coming" and "now and forevermore" --to express the totality of God's protective powers. Segal argues that the psalm is one of assurance and doubt, noting that the

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[93] Schaefer, 300.
[94] Zenger, 319.
[95] Ibid., 320.
[96] Alter, 438.

imperfect verbs in verses 6-8 imply a wish, rather than a future fact.[97] Nevertheless, the psalm ultimately ends with hope, whether it be a wish or fact.

**Concluding Observations**

The message of Psalm 121 is one of hope and confidence in God's guardianship. The linguistic features such as merisms, key words, word repetition, and parallelism serve to deepen the meaning and message of the entirety and eternal nature of God's protection. Schaefer concludes,

> The world and the psalmist are safe, because the creator can sustain creation while we sleep. The human world, measured by day and night and goings and comings, can trust in the transcendent guard and keeper who neither tires nor falls asleep. Thus, the psalm which began with raising the physical gaze to the heights concludes with a contemplative grasp of reality.[98]

The psalmist's reality centers on the assurance of protection from God, whether that be on a journey or when experiencing some sort of vulnerable or anxiety provoking moment in life, like illness or suffering. Accordingly, Psalm 121 can be relatable and applicable to anyone seeking help and assurance in a time of uncertainty.

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[97] Segal, 593.
[98] Schaefer, 300.

**Psalm 130**

1. A song of ascents. [99]
   From the depths I called You, LORD.
2. Master, hear my voice.
   May Your ears listen close to the voice of my plea.
3. Were you, O Yah, to watch for wrongs,
   Master, who could endure?
4. For forgiveness is Yours,
   so that You may be feared.
5. I hoped for the LORD, my being hoped,
   and for His word I waited.
6. My being for the Master—
   more than the dawn-watchers watch for the dawn.
7. Wait, O Israel, for the LORD,
   for with the LORD is steadfast kindness,
      and great redemption is with Him.
8. And He will redeem Israel
   from all its wrongs.

**Introduction**

Psalm 130 is an individual lament psalm that follows the psalmist on a journey from despair to hope. The psalm opens with the psalmist's call for God to be attentive to his plea for mercy. The poet then wonders, “Who could endure?” (v. 3) if God were to punish a person for all of his sins. The speaker explains that God’s forgiveness allows one to live and not be overcome by punishment; thus, the power of God’s forgiveness causes all people to stand in fear and awe of God. The psalmist awaits God’s response like a watchman waits for the dawn; and he encourages the community also to wait for

[99] Alter, Kindle Edition.

God's compassion and redemption. The psalm ends with a statement of trust that because of God's kindness and loyalty, God will redeem Israel of all iniquities.

**Genre**

Psalm 130 is categorized as a lament psalm and is part of the collection of Pilgrimage Psalms.[100] The lament psalms share a general format: invocation, complaint, petition, and finally, an affirmation of trust or praise.[101] One can see parts of the identified lament structure within Psalm 130, with some variations. Psalm 130 begins with a invocation to God in vv. 1b-2, where the psalmist calls out for God to hear him and listen attentively, "Master, Hear my voice." In v. 1b, there is a brief description of distress, as the psalmist calls from the depths; but there is not a detailed complaint as in other lament psalms. The speaker continues in verses 3-4 with a petition for forgiveness from sin. Verses 5-6 express an affirmation of trust in divine intervention, and the final verses (vv. 7-8) attest to God's compassion and redemption with words of praise.

Zenger suggests that some scholars, including B. Weber and Artur Weiss, identify Psalm 130 as a psalm of thanksgiving due to the reading of the verbs in v. 1b "call" and v. 5 "hope" in the past tense instead of in present tense.[102] Thus, Zegner explains that reading the verbs in the past indicates that the poet recalls a prior time of trouble, which is characteristic of the thanksgiving psalm. Brueggemann and Bellinger indicate that the verbs can be read in either past or present, but they conclude that "the use of the imperative ('hear my voice!') and the jussive ('Let your ears be attentive') in verse 2

[100] See discussion of Pilgrimage Psalms in analysis of Psalm 121.
[101] Brown, 44.
[102] Zenger, 426-7.

suggests that the most likely reading centers on petition."[103] The majority of scholars, including, Schaefer, Zenger, and Brueggemann and Bellinger, agree that Psalm 130 should be classified as a lament psalm because of the focus on petition.

**Structure**

Psalm 130 can be divided into two sections: verses 1-4 and verses 5-8. The first section, (vv. 1-4) can be subdivided into two parts: in verses 1-2, the psalmist cries out for God to hear him and listen attentively, "Master, Hear my voice"; and in verses 3-4, the psalmist asks for forgiveness from sin and states that God's power is in forgiveness. The second section (vv. 5-8) also can be subdivided into two parts, with verses 5-6 calling for the community to wait for God's steadfast kindness, and verses 7-8 providing the assurance that God will redeem all of Israel's iniquities.

Hakham comments that the subsections in each part parallel each other, that is, the first subsection (vv. 1-2) parallels the third subsection (vv. 5-6), and the second subsection (vv. 3-4) parallel the last subsection (vv. 7-8). Specifically in the first subsection, the cry for help correlates with the psalmist anticipating God's help in the third subsection. In the second subsection, the psalmist's acknowledgement of sin and God's forgiveness relate to the promise of redemption for all of Israel's wrongs in the last subsection. [104]

[103] Brueggemann and Bellinger, Kindle Edition.
[104] Ḥakham, 341.

**Literary Analysis**

It is interesting that a "song of ascents" begins with a cry "from the depths." The noun *ma'amakim* appears four other times in the Bible. In Ps 69:3, we read: "I have come into the *watery depths*, the flood sweeps me away"; and Isaiah 51:10 states; "It was [God] who dried up the sea the waters of the *great deep*." In the other two instances (Ezek 27: 34 and Ps 69:1), the speaker also pleads for God to rescue him from the "watery depths." In each of these verses, the word *ma'amakim* is associated with deep bodies of water. Thus, we can infer that in Psalm 130, the term *ma'amakim* refers to deep water and describes a near death experience of drowning. Some scholars suggest that the word *ma'amakim* goes further to allude to the underworld.[105]

After beginning the psalm in such deep despair, the psalmist takes the listener on a journey of ascents from despair to hope. Alter comments that many scholars believe that the "song of ascents" refers to pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem. The superscription may have been added later, and this is only one interpretation of this phrase;[106] nevertheless, the juxtaposition of these two seemingly contrasting statements is worth noting.

One of the key words in the psalm is the cry or voice of the psalmist calling out to God for help. The word *k'raticha* ("I called you") and *koli* ("my voice") in verses 1 and 2, plus the repetition of *kol* again in verse 2b, denote the psalmist's demands for God to listen attentively to his plea for mercy. Brueggemann questions where a cry to God "of a nobody from nowhere" should come from. He marvels at the idea that "[t]he cry penetrates the veil of heaven! It is heard and received. This God is palpable, available—a

[105] Hakham, 337.

[106] See the discussion of the superscription in the analysis of Psalm 121.

staggering comment both about God and about the speaker."[107] The psalm thus depicts God as reachable, as the lowly poet calls out from the depths and waits eagerly (vv. 5-6) for God to respond to his plea.

After the initial cry, the psalmist praises the forgiving nature of God. Another key word, *shomer*, appears in verse 3 and twice in verse 6. Alter translates *shomer* as "watch for," explaining that this translation "preserves the play in the Hebrew with the double occurrence of the same verbal stem in 'more than dawn-watchers watch for the dawn'."[108] Alter further explains the metaphor of waiting portrayed in this metaphor:

> The force of the image is evident: The watchmen sitting through the last of the three watches of night, peering into the darkness for the first sign of dawn, cannot equal my intense expectancy for God's redeeming word to come to me in my dark night of the soul.[109]

The psalmist understands that God does not "watch for wrongs," and it is God's kindness that the poet continues to watch for each morning.

The psalmist displays the knowledge of God's forgiveness through the use of a rhetorical question: "Were you, O Yah, to watch for wrongs, Master, who could endure?" The poet utilizes second person singular language, as if a direct conversation between the psalmist and God. The answer to this significant question is that "nobody" could survive if God accounted for every human's sins. The word "sin" is another key word in the psalm that appears here in v. 3 and again in v. 8. In v. 4, the psalm introduces the idea of divine forgiveness that is carried through the second half of the psalm. The psalmist acknowledges that everyone sins and trusts that God will provide forgiveness. In the next

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[107] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms,* 104.
[108] Robert Alter, Kindle Edition.
[109] Alter, 456.

section (vv. 5-6), the psalmist hopes in and waits for God's intervention. This part of the psalm also functions as an invitation for Israel to also participate in seeking God.

The opening of the second movement of the psalm (vv. 5-6) marks the shift from petition and acknowledgment of wrongdoing to the hope for deliverance from the crisis. The hope for the future comes about as a result of God's unwavering forgiveness. Brueggemann states, "Forgiveness leads to liberation from life as it is presently organized."[110] The repetition of the words "hope" and "wait" in vv. 5-7 express the anxiety and uncertainty the psalmist feels while waiting and pleading to be drawn out of the depths.

In verse 5, the poem returns to first person, mirroring the personal plea in verses 1-2, as alone the poet hopes for forgiveness. These verses are quite terse, with only six words in each verse. The verb *kiviti* ("I hope") opens verse 5, and the verb *hochalti* ("I waited") closes the verse. Thus, the key words "hope" and "wait" frame this succinct verse, making it clear that the psalmist anticipates God's word. The words *kiviti* and *hochalti* are synonyms that are also used in parallel in Isa. 51:5 and Micah 5:6. The psalmist explains further the concept of longing for God with the metaphor of the watchmen in the following verse.

The statements about watching for sins in verse 3 and waiting for God's kindness in verse 7 indicate the relationship between these two subsections. Hakham notes that the key word, *shomer* provides the thematic connection between the two verses.[111] The psalmist's persistence expresses his hope and the powerful reality that God's forgiveness like the first sight of dawn, meaning that it is inevitable. The metaphor of dawn, a time of

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[110] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms,* 106.
[111] Hakham, 341.

light, relates to the metaphor of the psalmist's cry from the deep dark waters in the first verse of the psalm. Though it may feel like the new day will never come, the certainty of redemption provides reassurance that despite our wrongdoings, the morning, God's steadfast kindness, will once again be revealed.

The transition to the concluding section, verses 7-8, marks a change in the poet's perspective. In these verses the psalmist expresses confidence in God's compassion. In verse 7, the word "wait" repeats again, but this time in a form of assurance and suggestion to the community that they too should have confidence that God will act. Hakham notes that the relationship between hope and steadfast kindness is seen in Ps 33:22, "May Your kindness, O LORD, be upon us, as we have yearned for You," and it indicates that those who hope for God receive God's kindness.[112] In vv. 7-8 the root *f-d-h* meaning to redeems repeats in each verse. The parallel nature of the word *hesed* ("steadfast kindness") and *f'dut* ("redemption") implies that God's redemption is included in the kindness. Hakham writes, "God's lovingkindness is His faithful promise to protect those who fear Him, and save them in their time of trouble."[113]

Schaefer suggests that the community-oriented nature of vv. 7-8 serve to generalize the situation. Explaining the movement from personal to communal, he writes: "In this prayer the individual and the believing community merge into one as the poet speaks with, for, and to the community. He or she embodies the guilt and hope of Israel."[114] In these concluding verses, the psalmist is not alone, for this is the human, lived experience of the entire community. The psalm recognizes that all people sin, but it asserts that God will bring redemption to all people.

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[112] Ibid., 340.
[113] Ibid., 340.
[114] Schaefer, 311

## Concluding Observations

Psalm 130 moves from despair, drowning in deep dark waters, to confidence and hope in God's redemption. In this "Psalm of Ascent," the listener experiences the ascent from an experience of anguish to anticipated redemption. The repetition of key words such as "watch," "hope," and "wait" convey the major themes of the psalm. The psalm begins with uncertainty and the worry that human wrongs will prevent God from acting on our behalf; but it concludes with the confidence in God's forgiveness and in the fact that that even in times of trouble, God will always be at our side.

# Chapter 2

## Psalms and Pastoral Care

The book of Psalms encompasses the breadth of human emotion and experience. This segment of the Bible provides pastoral caregivers with a wide range of thought-provoking and meaningful material with which to name and voice emotions in times of sorrow, suffering, joy, or exaltation. As a result, psalms can provide a powerful tool for opening up conversation during a pastoral encounter. Psalms provide language to express feelings that one may not readily speak about, or feelings that are difficult to access. The beautiful poetry of psalms can help people experience prayerful, meditative, and spiritual moments, especially when psalms are set to music, and they can lead to new ways of thinking about what people are feeling and experiencing on a given day.

### Historical Overview

Psalms have been a part of the liturgy of Jewish life since the time of the Bible. Although it is uncertain exactly how the psalms were used in cultic practice in ancient Israel, according to the Mishnah the Levites sang psalms corresponding to the days of the week. Mishnah Tamid 7:4 identifies seven psalms that are meant to be recited, beginning on Sunday, in the following order: Pss. 24, 48, 82, 94, 81, 93, and 92. Rabbi Daniel Polish notes, “The Talmud says that it was the will of the people at large that forced the Rabbis to formalize this practice of assigning a particular psalm to each day of the

week."[1] The book of Psalms contains prayers and poems filled with suffering and pain, as well as joy, exaltation, and thanksgiving. Jews do not necessarily study the psalms in the same way as other Jewish texts, in part because the psalms are more personal and are meant to be used to express the human experience. Polish explains, "In *Midrash Tehilim* (to psalm 18:1) Rabbi Yudan says in the name of Rabbi Judah, 'Whatever David says in his book pertains to himself, to all Israel, and to all times.'"[2] The psalms are relatable to the human condition, and are meant to be texts that connect and develop a close relationship between the listener and God.

The *Shimush Tehilim* is a medieval Kabbalistic work that describes how to utilize the power of psalms. The text provides instructions for when one should recite a psalm according to a desired outcome or situation. For example, a person should recite Psalm 18 to protect against sickness as well as robbers, Psalm 25 or 26 at a time of distress, and Psalm 138 for love.[3] However, the basis for assigning psalms to specific outcomes seems to have little relationship to the actual context of the psalm. The psalms in this instance function once again as texts that provide a specific usage for the listener as well as a personal connection to the psalms.

The obligation of *kavod hamet*, honoring the dead, is another area in which psalms have traditionally been utilized. In the period between death and burial, *aninut*, the Talmud teaches that it is necessary to guard or watch over the dead body so rodents

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[1] Daniel F. Polish, Bringing the Psalms to Life: How to Understand and Use the Book of Psalms (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2000), 12.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 18.

and other undesirable things will not touch it.[4] The act of *shmirah*, guarding the body, is not considered a *miztvah*, but it is for many communities a required and necessary step preceding the burial process. Psalms were used as early as the seventeenth century as guide for personal prayer during a time of transition for the family and the deceased. The early 17th century work, *Ma'avor Yabok*, published specifically for the *Chevra Kedisha* burial society, of Mantua, Italy, discusses death, dying, and the afterlife, and specifically refers to the use of psalms during *shmirah*. *Shomrim,* those entrusted with watching the body, are forbidden to engage in idle talk or gossip and they should "pray for the deceased with the Psalms, in particular Psalms 23 and 91."[5]

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, the late 18th century Hasidic master, "stressed the emotional, subjective, worshipful dimensions of Judaism."[6] Rabbi Nachman described the universality of the psalms, stating, "Every person, according to his or her nature, is able to find him- or herself within the book of Psalms and earn repentance through reading the Psalms (adapted)."[7] He identified ten psalms (Pss. 16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 105, 137) as the *Tikun HaKlai*, the complete remedy. He believed these psalms brought complete healing of the body (*R'fuat HaGuf*) and of the spirit (*R'fuat HaNefesh*). Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi in Pesahim 117a taught that the book of Psalms was composed through ten expressions of praise: *Nitzuah*, *Niggun*, *Maskil*, *Mizmor*, *Shir*, *Ashrei*, *Tehillah*, *Tefillah*, *Hoda'ah*, and *Halleluyah*. Nachman believed that the ten psalms of the

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[4] See Shabbat 151b and Berachot 18a. *Shmirah* is also discussed in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 341, 373:5, and 403.
[5] Hillel Golberg, *Mourning in Halacha* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1991), 55.
[6] Simkha Y. Weintraub, Healing of Soul, Healing of Body: Spiritual Leaders Unfold the Strength & Solace in Psalms (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1994), Kindle Edition, 89.
[7] Sheldon Marder, "Songs, Songs and Stories: Midrash and Music at the Jewish Home of San
Francisco," in *Midrash & Medicine: Healing Body and Soul in the Jewish Interpretive*

*Tikun HaKlai* contained the ten expressions of praise noted in the Talmud, thus they "embody the concentrated power of the entire book of Psalms."[8] He also taught that these psalms connected with the ten *sefirot*, God's "Direct Light," and that the recitation of the ten psalms are the "Reflected Light" in which God's light is reflected back by people doing God's will and praising God. It is the joining of the human voice with the "Direct Light," God, which reunites the *sh'khinah*, the feminine indwelling presence, with the other aspects of God. Rabbi Nachman's spiritual convictions defined his worldview; he believed that prayer is a "dialogue between humans and their Creator," and it is through the psalms that he believed humans could understand their own Godliness and create a connection with God.[9]

Dr. Donald Capps, Professor of Pastoral Care and Psychology of Religion at Phillips University, explains that when biblical passages were used in pastoral care during the 1950s and 60s, they would simply be read from the Bible according to the ailment of the individual but with no further integration into the person's care. In his article "Biblical Models in Pastoral Counseling," published during the summer of 1980, Capps writes:

> Few want to return to the era when pastors were armed with a list of Bible verses to cover every conceivable personal problem and hardly anyone has in mind turning counseling sessions into Bible study sessions. But many are asking whether it may be possible to recover the Bible as a resource in pastoral counseling and whether it might be useful to develop Biblically-informed methods of pastoral counseling.[10]

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[8] Simkha Y. Weintraub, "From the Depths: The Use of Psalms," in *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources* 2nd ed., ed. Dayle A. Friedman (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2010), Kindle Edition, 98.
[9] Ibid., Kindle Edition, 91.
[10] Donald Capps, *Biblical Approaches to Pastoral Counseling* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 252.

In other words, the pastoral care and biblical counseling models of the past were not integrated. However, during the past few decades, the use of psalms in pastoral care has been more fully developed, and today, many practitioners have found effective ways of utilizing Bible verses, and the psalms in particular, to offer meaningful pastoral care.

## Contemporary Usage

### *Language*

In, "Psalms as a Resource for Pastoral Care," Carol Schnabl Schweitzer explains that psalms are the language of the people:

> ...Psalms can inform our language of prayers and praise, and the poetry can guide or instruct us concerning how to think in new ways to help bring about the transformation of suffering in the lives of the faithful who seek our counsel.[11]

The psalms offer a two-fold experience: one that provides new language for prayer and one in which the structure and figurative language leads one to discover new and different ways to think about or approach a situation. Suffering individuals may see themselves in a psalm in a way they were not expecting or find their understanding of their situation expanded or deepened by the words of the psalm. The psalms provide a spiritual assessment tool that provides new language or newly discovered feelings for the patient.

### *Structure*

[11] Carol Schnabl Schweitzer, "Psalms as a Resource for Pastoral Care," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, eds. David Firth and Phillip S. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2005), 584.

In addition to language, the structure of psalms and the Psalter itself provides a framework for understanding the emotional journey of life. Rabbi Sheldon Marder explains:

> The psalms defy easy characterization, but many follow a pattern that leads from expectation (of God) to suspense and tension (when God is hidden or life looks dark and hopeless), and ends in a resolution (renewed hope and faith). As it follows this pattern, the psalm engages us in questions about the meaning of human existence and the emotions that accompany all of human experience… on a journey that begins, "When You hid Your face I was terrified," and finds resolution when "You turned my lament into dancing" (Psalm 30). The more complex the psalm-the more intense, ominous, and fraught-the more emotionally gratifying it is.[12]

Psalms also provide a structure for exploring a patient's experience during a pastoral interaction. By engaging with the text and the structure of a psalm a caregiver may ask: 'What are your expectations of God?' 'Do you feel like you are alone on your journey?' 'What brings you hope?' The mere structure and the themes of psalms invite and provoke these questions which may serve as productive interventions during a pastoral interaction.

Marder quotes author and poet Kathleen Norris on the benefits of psalms in spiritual care:

> The psalms make us uncomfortable because they don't allow us to deny either the depth of our pain or the possibility of its transformation into praise...If the psalm doesn't offer an answer," she writes, "it allows us to dwell on the question.[13]

Psalms can also hold two seemingly opposite emotions or feelings in time and space and promote exploration. For example, in Psalm 30, the poet expresses the stark contrasts between suffering in the face of a serious illness and the opportunity for new life, through metaphors that depict the possibility of such transformation. Specifically, in verse 6, the phrase, "At evening one beds down weeping, and in the morning, glad song," portrays the

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[12] Marder, Kindle Edition, 71.
[13] Marder, Kindle Edition, 69.

psalmist's experience of one moment experiencing deep despair and the next moment great joy. These contrasting moments of weeping and joy allow one to consider a wide range of emotions, and create a space for both to be discussed.

In *Biblical Approaches to Pastoral Counseling*, Capps presents a model for pastoral care based on the structure of the lament. The six elements of the lament are: address to God, complaint, confession of trust, petition, words of assurance, and vows to praise.[14] Capps suggests that the structure of the lament mirrors the stages of grief and thus provides a model of care that may be useful in helping someone through the grieving process. He also suggests that understanding these aforementioned elements of a lament can help chaplains provide a framework for care.

Like the elements of the lament, the book of Psalms as an entire unit, with some exceptions, generally move from lament to praise from Psalm 1-150. It is the inclusion of both distress and praise within the Psalms that offers the pastoral caregiver the opportunity to use them to connect with those experiencing a wide range of feelings. Sometimes the praise stems from surviving distress, even life threatening experiences: "I shall exalt you God for you drew me up" (Ps. 30:2). In other cases, the praise is a result of positive experiences. With regard to the experience of distress and the gratitude that follows such an experience, Weintraub writes, "Psalms are effective for 'taming-by-naming' one's distress or for locating and articulating a sense of gratitude."[15] It is often in the moments of distress that one is less likely to express gratitude to God. The psalms allow one to practice this art of gratitude even when offering a complaint. As a person reads the psalms aloud, the words may expand one's vocabulary of complaint and praise.

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[14] Capps, *Biblical Approaches to Pastoral Counseling*, 75.
[15] Weintraub, "From the Depths," Kindle Edition.

Another way in which psalms allow one to connect spiritually is the structural fluctuation between focus on the individual and focus on an other. The transition between first person and second person speech throughout the Psalter, as well as the devices of inner dialogue, personal conversation with God, and public address to the community remind sufferers that they are not alone. Some psalms begin with the individual, "I called out to the Eternal," (Ps. 130) and in the next verse address God directly, "For You brought me out" (Ps. 130). Jeffrey Newman, author of "The Power of the Psalms," writes, "[The psalms] are both personal and universal, so that we can recognize our most intimate experiences as archetypal – that is part of the collective, common to all peoples and times."[16] The individual cry of the psalmist is balanced with the universal language that lightens the burden of suffering from one person and allows the individual to feel that the community joins them in their experience.

*Psalms and the Use of Metaphor*

Although the psalms provide excellent material to identify and explore one's distress and grief, they also aid a broader scope of pastoral care. Schweitzer challenges pastoral caregivers to expand their use of psalms by exploring how metaphor and poetry in psalms provide opportunities for readers to discover new ideas or reinterpret older ones. Schnabl Schweitzer describes the findings of Gerhart and Russel who identify three main benefits of using metaphor in theological discourse:

> i. one can use the tension of metaphor to contradict one's ordinary world of meaning and to conclude in paradox; ii. one can succumb to the tension, allowing

[16] Jeffrey Newman, "Power of Psalms: Psalm 40," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe 22*, no. 2, *The Therapist and the Bible: Judaism and Psychotherapy III* (New York: Berghahan Books, 1989/90): 19.

> it to bring about a horizon shift so sudden and radical that self-continuity is sacrificed: and (iii) one can mediate the new meaning allowing it to transform the new incompatibility within the self's steady horizon-growth.[17]

Metaphor therefore allows people to expand their perspective, and examine new areas in which they can grow.

*Parallelism and Psalms*

Parallelism is a defining feature of psalms, and Marder notes a clever technique created by James Kugel to describe the kind of movement he sees between clauses in biblical texts. Marder writes, "He calls it a 'what's more' relationship...By inserting the phrase 'and what's more' between parallel parts of a line, we see more easily the relationships between words and the connections between ideas."[18] In Psalm 121:5-6, parallelism is utilized to further explain the role of God as guard and protector.

5. The LORD is your guard,

(and what's more…)

the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

In v. 5 "your guard," is parallel to v. 5b, "your shade at your right hand." The use of parallelism provides additional meaning to the word "guard." The metaphor "your shade at your right hand," is an idiom for God as a protection from the elements, or defensive shield over the psalmist. This technique is useful in pastoral care. Caregivers can encourage someone to reframe or expand a feelings through the device of "and what's more..." Such a practice encourages the individual to articulate a feeling or idea and then find additional metaphors that are helpful.

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[17]Schnabl Schweitzer, "Psalms as Resources," 591.
[18]Marder, Kindle Location 80.

*Models of use*

Contemporary practitioners continue to present new models for utilizing psalms in pastoral care. One example is Rabbi Simkha Weintraub, who teaches, "Illness, suffering, and loss mute us—they leave us without words… In the face of these challenges, those who are in pain, as well as those who care for them, may need new ways of communicating, new tools for talking, and new modes of relating."[19] He presents seven functions of psalms in Jewish life: ritual, prayer, song, study, meditation, community, and conversation.[20]

Weintraub also explores how a pastoral caregiver may utilize the psalms in regard to the previously mentioned categories. He suggests that the recitation or study of psalms can function as ritual and serve as a way to mark special moments and give expression to the feelings, emotions, and ideas of an individual or community. Psalms may be utilized in a group setting as a way to begin and end a meeting with set words that evoke certain feelings or emotions. For example, a support group might begin each meeting with a psalm of distress and end each meeting with a psalm of praise. A caregiver could explore a psalm with an individual resulting in the creation of a "portable, sacred space, an opportunity for meaningful self-care and devotion, long after and far from the pastoral encounter."[21]

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[19] Weintraub, "From the Depths," Kindle Edition.
[20] Weintraub, "From the Depths," Kindle Edition. See discussion of Weintraub's use of song in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[21] Ibid.

Weintraub advocates for deep engagement with psalms by caregivers who use them in pastoral work. He writes, "One must grow to identify with their contents in a deep and meaningful way, and seek to apply the words to oneself, to find oneself in the psalm."[22] He presents a helpful rubric to follow during a study session, and suggests that one begin by reading the psalm aloud, circle a section or phrase that stands out, and then chart the meaning of the psalm (sections, speakers, themes). He also includes questions like: "Do you experience something that is familiar? Where?" and "Where do you encounter difficulties in the psalms meaning?"[23]

Weintraub suggests that the difficult nature of the language and imagery in psalms may feel foreign at first, and the pastoral caregiver must acknowledge this and explore these difficulties with the person seeking care. Weintraub acknowledges that some of the images created in the psalms are alien, and that there are problematic theological or philosophical issues that may arise for both the pastoral caregiver and patient, and he states that it is important to speak about those issues.[24] The images in the psalms are often foreign because they are written according to the common experiences of those in Ancient Near Eastern societies, and therefore, one may not fully understand the meaning of words like "Sheol," the place for the dead, or the meaning of phrases such as, "By day the sun does not strike you, nor the moon by night," a metaphor from Ps 121:6 that refers to the ancient cultural opinion that the moon is a dangerous force. Further, theological issues may arise regarding the psalms portrayal of how God acts in the world, or the

[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Weintraub, personal interview by author, February 2015.

relationship between sin and punishment. A discussion of these important issues with the patient may create less of a barrier between the patient and the text.

Weintraub suggests that meditation may provide a more personal approach and connection to the psalms. Weintraub suggests using a verse or a few words of a particular psalm as mantra. He suggests posting the words of a psalm on their desk or computer screen to remind them to return to it during the day.[25] He identifies eighteen particular psalms (Psalms 26:6, 18:29, 1:3, 145:9, 150:6, 136:25, 86:11, 105:2, 96:12, 74:17, 113:3, 118:22, 145:16, 90:17, 35:18) and suggests different times and places when a caregiver might use them for a moment of meditation, for example, "while looking at art (Ps. 127:1)," "while enjoying bodies of water (Ps. 95:5)," or "while watching clouds roll by (Ps. 115:16)."

The communal use of psalms for healing is another popular use of psalms. *Chevrei Tehillim* groups often gather on a regular basis to recite and study the psalms as a community. The groups often recite psalms for people in the community who are ill or suffering, and there are groups that make it a priority to split up the psalms between members and recite all 150 psalms each day on behalf of those who are ill.[26] The fact that psalms are often published in their own pocket-sized edition speaks to the personal nature and use of psalms in the religious world. Psalms continue to be used in the Jewish community for study, personal prayer, healing, and worship.

Weintraub reminds the caregiver that, "The strength of psalms lies substantially in you—in what you, the reader, bring to the words and infuse in them."[27] Psalms can

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[25] Weintraub, "From the Depths," Kindle Edition.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

expand our ability to communicate with each other and with God, and continuing to make them a part of the conversation allows us to utilize their special language. “In pastoral care,” Weintraub continues, “so much is related to timing and relationship that it is important to remember that any text must come out of the context and be not a barrier to but a support for human connection and relatedness.[28]

Ultimately, the book of Psalms provides pastoral caregivers with a wide range of thought-provoking and meaningful material which can be used to facilitate meaningful interactions with the patient and strengthen the relationship between patient and caregiver. As explained in this chapter, language of the psalms can be used to aid the patient in understanding and articulating latent emotions in times of suffering or illness, and thus, the psalms are a powerful tool when used in pastoral encounters.

[28] Ibid.

# Chapter 3

## Music, Pastoral Care, and Psalms: A Complementary Approach

Humans connect with music physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and therefore, music can be a powerful intervention in pastoral care work. Israela Myerstein, social worker and family therapist, and Gila Ruskin, rabbi and chaplain, write:

> Music is an instant connector among people, a language everyone understands, across religions, cross cultures. Music often has the capacity to help a person connect to a deeper level of the self which is already healed and whole.[1]

Thus, pastoral caregivers may employ music as a tool for discovering and exploring the thoughts and feelings that it provokes within the patient. Additionally, music may help facilitate a positive relationship between the pastoral caregiver and patient by connecting them through this very special medium.

### The Psychological Impact of Music

Jonathan L. Friedmann, a California-based expert in Jewish music, explains in his book, *Music in Our Lives: Why We Listen, How It Works*, that when we listen to music, "Our ears funnel the sound to a deeper layer of our being, a layer where sound is made significant."[2] Thus, our bodies have the ability to transform what begins as the simple notes of the melodies into memory. One no longer experiences the song as distinct components--timbre, pitch, key, tempo, etc.--but as a beautiful whole. Friedmann notes,

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[1] Israela Myerstein and Gila Ruskin, "Spiritual Tools for Enhancing the Pastoral Visit to Hospitalized Patients," *Journal of Religion & Health* 46.1, (2007): 112.
[2] Jonathan L. Friedmann, *Music in Our Lives: Why We Listen, How It Works* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2015), Kindle Edition.

"More often than not, we embrace the rush of sound on a non-rational level, allowing the force and flow to take us where it will. We encounter it as a complete entity, unaware or unconcerned about the parts that comprise the whole."[3]

In their article, "Song of the Soul: The Use of Live Music in Professional Chaplaincy," Jesse Paledofsky and Zia Frances Shapiro echo the above teaching:

> When someone is faced with acute physical or emotional vulnerability, music may help to reconfigure the atmosphere, gently shifting the focus away from technical interventions to the heart and soul as trauma is absorbed and the spirit buoyed.[4]

Thus, in a time of crisis, music can help connect the pastoral caregiver and patient in a holy relationship. It is as if the melodies chosen build a fence around the two actors and transform the environment. In the newly created space, the patient may be more willing to confide in the caregiver, and music may enhance the connection between pastoral caregiver and patient.

*The Positive Psychological Effects of Music*

Modern scholars have been researching the positive psychological effects of music for decades.[5] According to Gilbert J. Rose of the Muriel Gardiner Program in Psychoanalysis and Humanities at Yale University:

> [People have an] inborn competence to feel tempo and tempo changes. Musical aesthetic perceptions and judgments being closely associated with tempo and

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[3] Friedmann, in Chapter 5 "Acoustic Anatomy," Kindle Edition.
[4] Jesse Paledofsky and Zia Frances Shapiro, "Song of the Soul: The Use of Live Music in Professional Chaplaincy," *Chaplaincy Today* 28, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2012): 31.
[5] D. Campbell and A. Doman, *Healing at the speed of sound: How what we hear transforms our brains and our lives from music to silence and everything in between* (New York: Hudson Street Press, 2011), 103.

> feeling, it would therefore seem that the emotional appeal of music comes largely from the body.[6]

This is the reason why people often unconsciously tap their feet or bob their head upon hearing certain kinds of music. Neuroscientist, musician, and author Dr. Daniel J. Levitin explains that certain kinds of danceable music increases cortisol levels in the body, and tapping one's feet or clapping one's hands is the result of heightened levels of the hormone.[7] Rose calls this a universal response. Thus, choosing a musical setting for a psalm or other liturgical piece in a pastoral environment, especially a tune with a recognizable rhythm or tempo, can be a valuable tool because, according to modern science, it would be hard for a patient to resist participating in some way.

*Music and Neuroscience: The Effect of Music on the Brain*

In recent decades, scientists have come far in understanding the effects of music on the brain. Paledofsky and Shapiro discuss the work of California-based neuroscientist Dr. Peter Janata, who is currently studying a region in the medial prefrontal cortex where the sections of our brain in which we process music, memory, and emotions meet. Neuroscientists propose that it is exactly this interaction of processing of music, memory, and emotions "that accounts for much of the power of music to touch us at the deepest levels.[8]

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[6] G. J. Rose, *Between couch and piano: Psychoanalysis, Music, Art and Neuroscience* (New York: BrunnerRoutledge 2004), 13.
[7] Daniel J. Levitin, *The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature* (New York: Plume, 2009), 72.
[8] Paledofsky and Shapiro, 34.

Music has the power to interact with all of our cognitive functions. Levitin explains:

> Musical activity involves nearly every region of the brain that we know about, and nearly every neural subsystem… Different aspects of the music are handled by different neural regions—the brain uses functional segregation for music processing, and employs a system of feature detectors whose job it is to analyze specific aspects of the musical signal, such as pitch, tempo, timbre, and so on.[9]

Here, Levitin concurs with a teaching presented in Paledofsky and Shapiro's aforementioned article attributed to Professor Robert Zattore of McGill University who said that "there is not a cognitive function that does not somehow relate to music."[10] The idea that music interacts with all of our brain centers demonstrates the power of music, and the use of music in pastoral care, therefore, reaches each person on a multiplicity of levels: cognitive, emotional, and physical.

**Components of Music and Their Application in Pastoral Work**

*Structure*

According to Campbell and Doman, the predictability of a song's rhythm can help to reduce anxiety, anger, and tension,[11] often a necessary first step for a pastoral caregiver when offering spiritual care. Consider, for example, a chaplain who enters the hospital room of an ailing patient surrounded by unfamiliar doctors and hospital staff, poked and prodded hourly, and forced to lie in a room with machines that constantly beep and buzz. Such conditions can certainly raise anxiety and possibly anger for the patient. The patient

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[9] Daniel J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York:
Plume/Penguin, 2007), 55.
[10] Robert Zattore, PhD neuroscientist, McGill University, in PBS documentary, "The Music Instinct: Science and Song," produced by Elena Mannes, 2009.
[11] Campbell and Doman, 73.

in this common scenario is forced "out of sync" and removed from his or her regular life. To this end, Dr. Carol Schnabl Schweitzer, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care at Union Presbyterian Seminary, teaches that it might be helpful for pastoral care providers to consider themselves like orchestra conductors:

> When engaging in the art of pastoral care, a minister may be attending to a broken or inconsistent tempo in the life of an individual or an inability of a family to keep time together or experience any kind of unity. In this case, she is keeping time for a person or family who is temporarily unable to keep a steady pace.[12]

Dr. Schnabl Schweitzer's metaphor of caregiver as conductor indicates that beyond the effectiveness of melody, the structure of music itself may also be a useful tool for the pastoral caregiver. Thinking of oneself as a conductor allows the pastoral caregiver to see his or her role as a presence that serves the specific purpose of restoring a sense of steadiness to the family and patient during a difficult time.

The notion of being "out of sync" does not just apply to the severely ill. Even patients who must miss work or cancel a family vacation due to a broken bone that will one day be healed, can be "out of sync," and the pastoral caregiver may act as the external metronome for these patients as well. As Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman explains, "Philosophers have long recognized music's unique ability to move us, sometimes to tears...sometimes to revolutionary zeal...sometimes to more complex emotional states we never even know we could realize."[13] It is the job of the pastoral care provider to select the appropriate melody to move a patient in an effective manner.

Schnabl Schweitzer proposes another helpful metaphor of pastoral care giver as accompanist. During a musical exchange between an accompanist and a soloist, the

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[12] Schnabl Schweitzer, "Tempo and Temperament," 725.
[13] Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only*, 2nd ed. (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2009), 191.

accompanist takes the lead in certain moments of the piece and follows attentively in other portions of the song. The accompanist may also make helpful suggestions and keep a steady tempo throughout the interaction. The metaphor of pastoral caregiver as accompanist provides a helpful framework in which to understand the reciprocal nature of the pastoral relationship. According to Knoblauch, as quoted in Schnabl Schweitzer:

> Accompanying is much like a therapist's offering a phrase or word to the patient and the patient either building on that phrase or offering a different or altered construction in response in order to sustain and continue the process of unfolding and expanding feelings and meanings emerging within the treatment.[14]

This metaphor is helpful in conceptualizing the role of the pastoral caregiver and patient and understanding that the conversation is a two-sided one with the participants working together to uncover and explore the patient's experience.

*Breath*

Both singing and playing music require musicians to be aware of and in control of their breathing. A group of singers or a string quartet may begin a piece of music with a single breath as the cue for members to begin singing or playing together. The breath becomes an important component of playing or singing which ensures that all of the musicians are united as one.

In a pastoral interaction, noticing the frequency of breath and the quality of the voice (is it strong, or soft and quivering?) provides another source of data with which the pastoral caregiver can assess the patient's emotional state. David Aldridge and Jörg Fachner explain, "Our voices express what's happening even when we are not

[14] Schnabl Schweitzer, "Tempo and Temperament," 725.

consciously aware of how we are feeling."[15] The awareness of the patient's breath and using breath as a guide in a pastoral conversation may help the caregiver better understand the emotional status of the patient. The caregiver's attentiveness to breath can help facilitate steady and regular breathing during conversation. The act of breathing together, particularly while singing, may serve to create a positive and calming space.

*Silence*

A choir comprised of hundreds of singers must work together to create beautiful music, but singing is not the most important thing that each choir member must do. Rather, the most important aspect of singing or playing music is to listen. Aldridge and Fachner teach, "Silence is the core of music…Listening is as important an activity as playing, and as musicians know, is an integral part of musical performance."[16] So, too, is listening crucial in any pastoral encounter. Both what is spoken during the conversation and what happens during the silent pauses is useful information. "Learning to use or create spaces for silence," explains Schnabl Schweitzer, "is one manner in which we may learn to take the lead as an accompanist, thus resulting in a readjustment of temperament that has become disordered."[17] Sometimes, silence is all that patients want and/or need, especially when they are recovering from a recent trauma or surgery.

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[15] David Aldridge and Jörg Fachner, "Chapter 12: Music Therapy and Spirituality: A Transcendental Understanding of Suffering," *Music & Altered States*, (2005): 167.

[16] Aldrige and Fachner,167.

[17] Schnabel Schweitzer, "Tempo and Temperment," 728.

*Repetition*

Repetition is a defining feature in music which reinforces and emphasizes the themes and meaning of the musical composition. As with psalms, musical motifs and themes recur throughout a piece, providing listeners with a familiar melody or chorus. Rabbi Sheldon Marder, Director of Religious Life at the Jewish Home in San Francisco, writes:

> Repetition is among music's most defining elements, and one that helps us to distinguish musical sounds from other audible stimuli. Far from being a source of boredom or irritation, repetitious phrases, relentless rhythms and recurring melodies can be an endless source of enjoyment. They satisfy a primal need.[18]

Repetition engages the listener and brings familiarity and anticipation to a piece of music; it can function similarly in pastoral care. Music is built upon repetition of musical motifs that the listener comes to expect. The anticipation of what is coming next and knowing that the chorus will come again creates a sense of comfort and familiarity with the music and the feelings it evokes. The pastoral caregiver who develops a relationship with a person who is struggling provides comfort and familiarity. Like repetition in music, a familiar face, prayer, or interaction from one pastoral encounter to the next may help to bring stability to the person's experience of illness or crisis.

**The Pastoral Caregiver's Use of Music in the Field: Two Models**

Rabbi Weintraub believes strongly in the positive effects and benefits of music as an important resource in pastoral care. In a personal interview, Weintraub recalls an experience of singing with a patient:

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[18]Friedmann, in Chapter 6 "Seeking Patterns," Kindle Edition.

> One of the things that happens with singing is you become one. You are standing on the same ground, it can form a therapeutic alliance; when you've sung with somebody you make a connection. I remember once singing with a very sick man, and when he could no longer sing he wanted me to sing, and I think inside he was [still] singing [with me].[19]

For Weintraub, singing together with a patient creates an opportunity to join with the person who is suffering, and it creates a common experience between the pastoral caregiver and patient. It also becomes another form of connection when other forms of communication are no longer possible.

Music not only connects the pastoral caregiver and patient, music also connects a person to other areas of the brain. It also can connect a patient to others who have survived a similar experience. Weintraub explains, "Music can free up parts of the brain that have been dominated or obscured by the other parts." He notes that there is so much worrying and complaining that accompanies suffering, and suggests that, "[Music] connects you to [other] people who have survived, and a community that is singing this, and maybe even to a God that listens."[20]

Weintraub is a strong proponent of music as a force for connecting pastoral caregivers and their patients. He proposes, "[One] could sing the *aleph bet* and it could be meaningful in terms of both the tune, and the sincerity, and the joining; so sometimes [one could use music] for quieting, or for just breathing."[21] Music offers a form of retreat for the patient and pastoral caregiver to enter a new space together, to explore new possibilities by quieting the patient's mind, and to create a place for self-discovery.

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[19] Simkha Weintraub, Personal Interview, February 2015.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

Rabbi Sheldon Marder similarly appreciates the efficacy of utilizing psalms and music in the pastoral setting and has formalized a model for doing so. The program he created, "Psalms, Songs, and Stories," is a project of the Jewish Home of San Francisco led by Rabbi Marder and music/songwriter Judith Kate Friedman, specifically aimed at seniors. The program:

> [Empowers elders] to become students and interpreters of biblical poetry, encourages reflection on their spiritual beliefs, and gives them tools to transform their shared reflections into songs that are imaginative, melodic, and hopeful.' The goal is an encounter between self and God in the fertile ground of sacred text, nurtured by a creative process that is musical and *midrashic*, spiritual and intellectual.[22]

The program combines the study of psalms, storytelling, and song writing to engage older people intellectually and spiritually.

"Psalms, Songs, and Stories" explores specific psalms such as Psalms 126 and 133 by studying interpretations of them by various artists, poets and scholars. The group facilitators pose questions based on the discussions that arise. When considering Psalm 133, for instance, the group might be asked, "What is life all about?" Through questions like these, the program creates a space for each person's memories which are then turned into lines of poetry, and each of the poeticized memories is woven together. The questions, "What do we want to say?" and "How is the song connected to the psalm and to our beliefs?" frame the discussion of the songwriting.[23] The transformation of the poetry into music is inspired by the elders' inner voices. The leaders encourage the group to:

> Listen deeply inside yourself for a melody, which often begins with just a single note or a simple musical phrase, and give voice to it. The memories do,

[22] Marder, "Songs, Songs and Stories," Kindle Edition, 70.
[23] Ibid., 73.

> indeed, add up to meanings. The richness of those meanings can inspire music.[24]

The specific cohort that Marder discusses in "Psalms, Songs, and Stories," worked for four months to accomplish the task of studying, writing, and composing these songs.

Marder explains that one of music's fundamental patterns – expectation/suspense/ resolution – has proven helpful to this group. He suggests that musical expectation and suspense is similar to the experience of expectations and suspense in everyday life. Marder references musicologist Leonard B. Meyer: "...it makes us feel something of the insignificance and powerlessness of man in the face of the inscrutable workings of destiny...."[25] It is impossible to know what lies ahead, and music can mirror this experience through creating expectation, suspense, and resolution. In the group process of songwriting, the facilitators have the participants explain "their personal movement from expectation, suspense, and resolution."[26] Marder offers the words of William Cutter to conclude why music is so important in his work:

> 'Music responds to illness,' writes William Cutter, 'more naturally than speech-any speech, even the speech of prayer. Perhaps it requires non-cognitive expression to capture the infinities of sorrow and hope.' And when those who are ill compose their own music to respond to their sorrows and hopes-how much the more so.[27]

**The Transformative Power of Music in Pastoral Care**

One must find the appropriate selection when utilizing music in pastoral care, and even when the piece is well considered, a pastoral caregiver can never be certain how a patient will respond. Schnabl Schweitzer warns, "Just as there is a multiplicity of

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[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 70.
[27] Ibid., 71.

responses to works of art, there will be a multiplicity of responses to particular pieces of music."[28] Pastoral care expert Dr. Jonathan Friedmann expands on this point when he writes:

> The listener's response to specific music will vary in type and intensity. She might feel very hopeful, a little bit sad, extremely calm, slightly anxious, and so on. These reactions may or may not be the intention of the composer or performer, and may change according to when and where the piece is heard.[29]

Therefore pastoral caregivers utilizing music as part of a patient's care must be attentive to the impact that their musical choices have on their patients and respond accordingly. Even if the care provider did not foresee an outcome, much can be learned, and patients can experience healing by processing the resulting experience. Weintraub explains, "[Music] can be a critical way of joining, of relating; it may facilitate the expression of pain and sorrow, or trigger the experience of joy and gratitude, or both."[30] Consequently, "Singing with and singing to Jews is an important resource in Jewish pastoral work."[31]

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[28] Schnabl Schweitzer, "Tempo and Temperament," 722.
[29] Friedmann, in Chapter 5 "Sound and Healing," Kindle Edition.
[30] Weintraub, "From the Depths," Kindle Edition.
[31] Ibid.

# Chapter 4

## Practical Application of Psalms in Pastoral Care

### Introduction

In this chapter, I offer suggestions for using psalms in the pastoral setting. Specifically, I will demonstrate how Psalms 16, 30, 41, 121, and 130 might be used in these settings to explore patients' feelings in times of suffering. The methods I propose are intended as suggestions for clergy who are engaged in pastoral care. While the ideas presented here are certainly accessible beyond the Jewish community, the psalms analyzed in this thesis are done so through a Jewish lens. Further, it is crucial for any caregiver to assess the state of the patient and make sure that offering a text is appropriate for the patient at that time.

In each case, I present a number of scenarios in which the psalm could be applied to address the issues and feelings of the patient. I then focus on particular verses of the psalm that portray the themes that may be most helpful in specific scenarios. Next, I offer a musical selection which provides an opportunity for the caregiver and patient to further explore the psalm through another medium. In addition to added depth, music can provide another form of connection between the pastoral caregiver and the patient. Pastoral caregivers do not have to be trained musicians; they can use their own voices or musical recording to bring music to the patient. As with any kind of art, each person has the ability to interpret a musical setting in their own way and may hear new and different things each time they listen.

## Pastoral Application: Psalm 16

*Setting*

Psalm 16 might be used in moments where the outcome is unknown, particularly when a patient is in need of protection or guidance. For example, a pastoral caregiver may utilize this psalm with a patient who is awaiting a surgical procedure.

*Psalm 16 and Pastoral Care*

Psalm 16 is an individual lament psalm, (elsewhere in the thesis I have referred to this as a "psalm of disorientation") that ends with hope and assurance of God's protection. The major theme of Psalm 16 is refuge and protection from God in a period of trouble. The psalm's message of protection and refuge is particularly strong in the first and last sections of the psalm, while the middle section describes the wrongdoing of those who worship other gods. In a pastoral setting, the themes of guidance, protection, and seeking refuge in God's presence are useful ideas to discuss with a patient in relation to an upcoming surgery.

The word *shomreini*, "guard me," is the opening petition of the psalmist. The request for protection suggests that the psalmist has a relationship, or wants to establish a relationship, with God. The psalmist is directly requesting help, and this is something that the pastoral caregiver may encourage the patient to do before a procedure. The language of the psalm serves as a starting point for the patient to use the words of the psalm to voice her fears and hopes during this time of uncertainty.

The psalmist describes God as a counselor, saying, "I shall bless the LORD, who gave me counsel through the nights that my conscience would lash me" (v. 7). In this case, God is the counselor and confidant, and the psalmist is speaking from the point of

view of hindsight and now giving thanks for this special relationship. The relationship between God and the psalmist is an important aspect of the psalm because it encourages one to consider his or her own relationship with God.

*Musical Setting of Psalm 16*

*Music:"Shiviti" Michael Isaacson*

The setting of Michael Isaacson's "Shiviti" sets the final verses (8-11) of Psalm 16 which speaks of the assurance and joy felt by the psalmist's relationship with God. The tempo--58 beats per minute--that Isaacson utilizes is relatively slow, as if Isaacson is saying "Slow your thoughts and remain present in the moment" one beat longer. Furthermore, the reverberation of the organ music creates a comforting feeling of being held in the moment. Its unseparated notes hold the listener in the song, and create a sense of majesty which mirrors the theme of this psalm.

One highlight of this musical selection is the composer's treatment the word *tamid*, or "always," in v. 8. In this particular phrase, the music is comprised of a series of 8th notes. At the word *tamid*, "always," the melody is drawn and sustained for a longer period of time, mirroring the meaning of the words and of the psalm. This change in the rhythmic patterns draws attention to the lyric. For the listener, the change creates space to reflect and linger on the word, "always." The music builds to this point, and reflects the desire of the psalmist to always be in the presence of God.

The music suggests the question: What does it mean to be in the presence of God always? Each individual's journey is unique, and so a conversation about one's journey could be cathartic. For an individual preparing for a surgical procedure or another challenging event, this conversation might facilitate introspection and help the patient

with the challenge of remaining present even with her fears and anxieties, perhaps also helping her to realize that this moment is one episode in her relationship with God.

*Methodology*

Psalm 16 may be used by the pastoral caregiver as a prayer for protection before surgery. In this instance, the pastoral caregiver may introduce the patient to the psalm by singing or playing the musical setting. The music is slow, steady, and has a calming effect, which is ideal for a patient who is awaiting a surgical procedure. The pastoral caregiver might explain to the patient that she would like to play a beautiful setting of Psalm 16, and suggest that the patient get comfortable in her chair or bed, and close her eyes if she wishes. The pastoral caregiver would then sing or play the musical setting of the psalm.

At the end of the piece of music, the pastoral caregiver might ask: How did the music make you feel? Without knowing what the words mean, what do you think the message of the psalm may be? The patient and pastoral caregiver can then speak about what feelings arose for the patient and what she thinks the psalm means.

After this discussion, the pastoral caregiver might share the text of the psalm and read it together with the patient. The caregiver and patient may then explore in what ways the patient has sought protection and refuge in the past, perhaps recalling a particularly meaningful activity or place (such as reading a book, a favorite vacation spot, etc.) as a way to envision herself in a better place at present. The pastoral caregiver might also inquire: What does it mean to find refuge with God? Have you ever experienced this kind of relationship with God? If so, what was that experience like? The concept of the patient

imagining herself in a place of security and protection may help lessen anxiety, and bring the patient to a more stable place.

The pastoral caregiver may want to examine with the patient the concept of being lashed by one's own conscience (v. 7), and what it feels like to share those negative feelings with a confidant. The pastoral caregiver and patient can discuss whether or not the patient confides in God and what it might mean or look like to do so. The pastoral caregiver may ask the patient, "What might God say to you when you experience these negative thoughts?" This conversation should offer the patient a chance to begin a compassionate dialogue with herself, which is an important opportunity for someone frightened before a challenging procedure.

The caregiver could close with a prayer drawn directly from Psalm 16 (vv. 8-12), with both the patient and pastoral caregiver reading the words of hope and assurance together. The caregiver might offer to leave the recording of the musical setting and copy of Psalm 16 with the patient so she can listen to the recording and read the psalm leading up to the procedure or when she is feeling anxious.

## Practical Application: Psalm 30

*Setting*

Psalm 30 might be used with a patient who is emerging from a time of illness or suffering or recently discharged from the hospital.

*Psalm 30 and Pastoral Care*

Psalm 30 is an individual thanksgiving psalm for recovery from an illness. The psalm recalls the recovery and rescue of the psalmist from a life-threatening situation. The reflection of the struggle is a significant aspect of the psalm and an important resource for the pastoral caregiver. The pastoral caregiver could use the words of the psalm to help the patient recall moments of trouble and voice gratitude for having made it through that struggle. Psalm 30 may serve as a model for reflection which can help the patient articulate where she has been - and is now - and encourage her to offer words of thanksgiving.

The focus of this psalm is the experience of being brought out of “the Pit” and given new life and the opportunity to express thanks. However, it is important to note that “new life” does not have to be interpreted literally; rather, the metaphor of life and death utilized in this psalm may be extrapolated and applied to help the patient to consider other moments when she was given the chance to start anew in different ways. The pastoral caregiver may encourage the patient to name the moments that she was in “the Pit,” as well as the moment when she believed that things began to improve, and where the patient feels she is at the current moment in the process of recovery.

The metaphor of mourning and dancing may be utilized to help the pastoral caregiver assess the patient's present emotions. It is essential for the pastoral caregiver to understand where the patient’s current emotional state so the caregiver can engage in meaningful conversation with the patient. The final metaphor of the psalm is about “turning dirge into dance,” and utilizes the powerful imagery of the sackcloth of mourning being undone and God wrapping the psalmist in joy. As stated earlier, in the

analysis of Psalm 30, the metaphor presents distress and joy as two interchangeable garments. This image suggests that the sackcloth of mourning will not be the garment that one must wear forever, but instead, with the help of our family, doctors, caregivers, and God, the patient may return to joy. The pastoral caregiver can utilize this imagery to discuss with the patient the transition from suffering to joy, and where the patients believes she is on that spectrum at present. The discussion can span from where the patient is now to where she hopes to be a few months from now, as she looks ahead to the future.

*Musical Setting of Psalm 30: "Mourning into Dancing," by Debbie Friedman*

In *Mourning into Dancing*, Debbie Friedman sets the melody to her own English translation and interpretation of Psalm 30. Here use of the English text is important because it makes both the music and lyrics accessible to the listener.

Friedman's music begins with the refrain, "You turn my mourning into dancing," followed by the chorus, "Oh God, my God, forever I will thank You," that repeats after each verse and ends with the refrain. The repetition of the chorus three times reinforces the psalm's theme of articulating gratitude after moments of difficulty.

The music itself serves as a powerful tool in understanding the overarching themes and meaning of the psalm. The driving rhythm of the accompaniment is the first aspect of the music that stands out. The steady rhythmic beat of the accompanying music (guitar) is both constant and soothing. The rhythm serves to move the listener forward throughout the entire piece and supports the impetus to move forward during a time of difficulty. The steady beat of the music may suggest the possibility of reestablishing a steady pulse, or rhythm, in the life of the patient.

The emphasis of the lyrics is another important feature of this musical setting. The chorus, “Oh God, my God…,” is marked by longer sustained notes on each word, with the word “God” being held the longest. The musical emphasis on God, the Divine helper, adds to the meaning of the lyrics, and features the word “God” as the most important word in the phrase. The words in the phrase, “Forever I will thank you,” are emphasized by the distinctive change in rhythmic pattern. Each syllable is sung on each beat of the measure and marks the only point where the rhythm consists of four quarter notes sung consecutively. This is a noticeable change from the combination of eighth notes and sustained half notes that make up the rest of the verses and chorus. The change from the longer sustained melody of “Oh God” to the “Forever I will thank You,” creates anticipation of that moment in the chorus. The concept of thanksgiving and praise to God for bringing the psalmist out of a difficult situation is the main message of the psalm. The music offers new meaning and feeling to the psalm’s words and an opportunity for the patient to express thanksgiving through singing, discussing or listening to the music.

*Methodology*

Psalm 30 is a text which is useful as a tool for reflection and examination of the patient's recovery. The pastoral caregiver may begin by introducing the text to the patient by reading through the text of psalm. The caregiver might ask: “Does this psalm relate to your current situation? What messages or ideas stand out to you?” The pastoral caregiver and patient might then discuss the patient’s journey through illness to recovery. The pastoral caregiver could ask the patient to reflect on whether she prayed during her illness, and if so, does she feel, like the psalmist, that God was the source of her recovery? If the patient did not pray during the illness, or did not believe that God was

responsible for her recovery, the pastoral caregiver and patient might have a conversation regarding other ways in which the patient coped with her illness. The pastoral caregiver could ask: “Is there something you do that helps you through difficult situations?” This may lead to a conversation about the patient’s beliefs, and further discussion of the kind of spiritual connection the patient may or may not have.

The pastoral caregiver could follow up by asking the patient about her current relationship with God, and use vv. 7-8, “As for me, I thought in my quiet days, ‘Never will I stumble.’ LORD, in your pleasure, You made me stand mountain-strong—When You hid Your face, I was stricken,” as a way to speak about how the patient's relationship with God might have changed due to her illness. The pastoral caregiver may ask the patient: “Do you think your illness has changed your perspective on prayer or asking God for help? Did you feel spiritually connected before your illness? Do you feel more spiritually connected after your illness?” The patient's experience may parallel the psalmist’s experience, or she might have a different outlook on how his illness changed (or did not change) her relationship with God.

The pastoral caregiver might then speak with the patient about what she is thankful for, using either the words of the psalm or the Friedman lyrics. Discussing the lyrics and the more straightforward nature of thanksgiving in Friedman’s song may be help the patient to develop her own words of thanksgiving. After the patient articulates her own thanksgiving, the pastoral caregiver and patient could sing the chorus of the song together, the words of thanksgiving, thus, ending musically on a note of thanksgiving with a joyful melody and simple words of thanks for healing and recovery.

## Pastoral Application: Psalm 41

*Setting*

Psalm 41 may be utilized for a patient recovering from an illness, particularly, a patient feeling hurt or mistreated by family and friends during her time of illness and suffering.

*Psalm 41 and Pastoral Care*

Psalm 41 is a psalm of thanksgiving for relief from illness. In it, the psalmist reflects on issues of mistrust, isolation, and suffering that ultimately lead to a powerful connection with God. The psalm describes the psalmist's experience of being isolated and mistreated by friends and enemies during a time of suffering. The psalm provides rich material for the pastoral caregiver and patient to discuss how the patient's relationship with family and friends may have been affected by her illness.

The psalmist speaks about visitors, so called "friends" who came to visit with poor intentions and spoke negatively about the psalmist. The interpretation of the word *maskil* is a helpful point for beginning a conversation about seeing and understanding someone who is infirm. As discussed earlier, two commentators note that the word *maskil* (v. 2), "look," implies both seeing and understanding.[1] The pastoral caregiver and patient may examine how the patient's experience with illness has changed her perspective on what it means to "see" and "understand" a friend or family member who is suffering. This conversation might also allow the patient to consider what and who she was thankful for during her time of suffering and in the present in order to provide an opportunity to share these thoughts and feelings.

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[1] Alter, Kindle Edition, and Segal, 188.
[2] Carlebach uses the Ashkenazic pronunciation; the most common modern pronunciation

*Musical Setting of Psalm 41*

*Music: "Ashray Maskeel" by* Rahel (Ann R. Silverman-Limor)

The composer of this piece of music, Ann R. Silverman-Limor, is known as Rahel, a self-identified Jewish singer-songwriter and therapeutic musician. On her album, *Tikun* (2004), she sets to music the ten healing psalms identified by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. Her music has a soothing quality, and she uses non-Western instruments such as the oud and sitar. The use of these instruments can serve to "transport" the listener to another time and place due to their "exotic" sound.

A purely instrumental introduction begins to reveal the melody and themes of the piece. The opening instrumental could be utilized to set the intention of conversation. The repetitive melody and rhythmic strumming quickly bring a sense of calm through the increasingly familiar patterns. In this setting, the music may better serve as an introduction and possible background music for exploring the first three verses of text.

The first line of the psalm, "*Ashrei maskil el dal*," "Happy [are those] who look to the poor" is repeated numerous times before the piece moves on to a new melody and the next two verses. The repetition of the verse allows time for one to think about what the words mean and how the patient might apply them to her own life. The repetition of the text is also an avenue for exploring the many meanings and interpretations of the word *maskil*. The pastoral caregiver and patient could study the word together, providing the patient with an opportunity to reflect on her own treatment.

*Methodology*

Psalm 41 is a powerful text for working with a patient who feels upset by how she was treated by friends or relatives during her illness. The pastoral caregiver may choose to begin the conversation by just playing the instrumental opening of the musical setting. The music is soft and soothing, and the repetition of the first verse creates a feeling of familiarity with the music, creating of a safe and relaxed space in which the pastoral caregiver and patient can be together. The pastoral caregiver may invite the patient to close her eyes and breathe naturally as the music plays.

The psalmist reflects on the negative words, whispers, and hurtful sentiments of those who visited the sick psalmist. In discussing these parts of the text (vv. 6-10), the pastoral caregiver may ask the patient: Did you have negative experiences with friends or family while you were sick? What was it like to not feel supported by them? Do you plan to speak with your family about your feelings of mistreatment or isolation during your time of need? The pastoral caregiver might then bring the conversation to discuss the possibility of reconciliation with the patient's friends or family members. Since the patient is now in a place of recovery, the patient may be ready to broach the topic of approaching the people who did not treat her with compassion or respect while she was ill. The pastoral caregiver and patient might discuss opportunities for the patient to voice her feelings to these people and to express the kind of support she needed during her illness. The conversation with her family or friends who hurt her may lead to reconciliation, and could also provide the family or friend with awareness of what it means to support a person who is experiencing an illness. The pastoral caregiver might use the patient's reflection on her suffering and mistreatment as an opportunity to find aspects of recovery that he or she is thankful for. In this discussion, the caregiver could

reintroduce the music to again create a more soothing and cathartic space. The patient could say these words aloud, write them down, or simply close her eyes and silently consider what is deserving of thanksgiving. The session will end with the patient being encouraged to think about these words of thanksgiving or speak them aloud.

## Pastoral Application: Psalm 121

*Setting*

Psalm 121 is ideal to be shared with a patient who is embarking on new chapter in her life, whether, positive or negative. For example, the patient could be moving from a family home to a senior living facility, or beginning a new long-term treatment process such as chemotherapy or radiation.

*Psalm 121 and Pastoral Care*

In Psalm 121, the psalmist describes God as a constant guardian and protector throughout one's entire life. The psalmist poses the question, "From where will my help come?" and proceeds to answer that question throughout the rest of the psalm. The psalm contains words of assurance and confidence that God is the guard not only of the psalmist but the entire community of Israel. The language of constant help and protection may be a source of comfort and hope for those who are in need, and provides a moment for reflection and discussion of the patient's fears and hopes moving forward in a new experience.

The psalmist in Psalm 121 is on a journey, and while the journey may be interpreted literally or figuratively, the language of the psalm indicates that God is one's

guard at all times and locations. The psalm says that God guards "your going and coming," meaning through all of our journeys, "now and forevermore," indicating the indefinite nature of this promise. Thus, Psalm 121 may be particularly comforting to the patient who is experiencing a time of transition in helping to initiate a conversation about upcoming changes and in aiding the patient to feel as though she may find comfort in God's presence, however she chooses to identify it.

*Musical Setting of Psalm 121*

*Music: "Esso Ainai, I Lift Up My Eyes" by Shlomo Carlebach*[2]

Shlomo Carlebach's musical setting of *Esso Einai*, Psalm 121, is one of this psalm's best known melodies. Carlebach sets the first two verses of the poetry, utilizing both the Hebrew and English translations of the text. The melody remains the same for both verses in the Hebrew and English, helping the listener to identify the meaning of the words with the melodic lines. The tempo is labeled as "moderately," but often some performers will opt to begin at a slower tempo and speed up slightly upon repeat. This method might be considered in the pastoral setting as well, depending, of course, on the type of situation in which this melody is to be utilized.

One of the beautiful aspects of Carlebach's melody is that it can be sung rather easily with or without accompaniment. Therefore, a pastoral caregiver with singing ability could begin by just singing the melody as a *niggun* and then add the words when the patient is comfortable with the melody. Beginning with just the melody and without

[2] Carlebach uses the Ashkenazic pronunciation; the most common modern pronunciation is *Esah*.

lyrics will allow for the music to set the mood in the room, contributing to the impact of the words once the melody is familiar.

The lyrics of the second verse, “My help comes from You, maker of heaven and earth” are accompanied by a section of legato, smoothly connected notes, that create a feeling of being gently cradled or rocked. This varies from the first melodic section that has a lilting rhythm. The feeling of the connected and smooth notes interacts with the meaning of the words to create a feeling of being helped and comforted in a time of need. Thus, the caregiver may opt to only use this section in certain scenarios such as in a quiet moment with a patient who is in the middle of a chemotherapy treatment; over time, this melody might be comforting for the patient.

*Methodology*

The beginning of any new journey, or a new portion of a journey, can be many things – frightening, nerve-wracking, or possibly even exciting. Wishing for a healthy life or a new beginning in a new place may evoke feelings of both fear and hope in the patient. In this setting, the pastoral caregiver might begin by simply asking the patient if she might share a beautiful melody with her. The pastoral caregiver can begin to slowly sing the melody as a *niggun*, without words, and invite the patient to join in when she feels comfortable. After singing the *niggun* together, the pastoral caregiver might then continue to discuss the patient’s impending journey.

The “mountains” in the psalm may be metaphorical or real; they may represent new and beautiful scenery or a dangerous obstacle in the patient's way. In a pastoral setting, the caregiver could ask the patient: What do you feel are your “mountains” or obstacles at this point? When counseling a patient who is beginning a new treatment, the

caregiver and patient could discuss the obstacles she is facing, for example, the side effects of the treatment, the lack of energy, or the isolation she may feel from family and friends. The question, “From where will my help come?” might be used as a prompt to discuss the support systems the patient has, such as family or friends, faith and relationship with God, and/or nurses and doctors. Naming the obstacles and discussing sources of comfort and help may encourage the patient to reflect on and identify her support systems, thus allowing the patient to feel less alone.

The pastoral caregiver and patient may also explore the different metaphors and descriptions of the word “guard” in the psalm: God guards the psalmist as shade that provides protection from the elements; God is a guard who never slumbers; and God guards from all harm forever. The pastoral caregiver may ask the patient: Which ideas resonate with you? What is difficult for you about the descriptions of God as guard? The conversation is then open for the patient to think about her own relationship with God and whether or not she feels constantly protected by God.

At the end of the conversation, the pastoral caregiver may once again sing the *niggun* with the patient, explaining that this is a simple melody she could listen to, sing, or hum while she receives treatment, or in moments of uncertainty on her new journey. The music will hopefully represent for the patient the concept of guardianship and protection even during difficult moments, and the music is something the pastoral caregiver leaves with the patient which may remind her of the conversation and provide comfort even when she is alone.

## Pastoral Application: Psalm 130

*Setting*

Psalm 130 may be utilized in working with patients whose suffering, whether from an acute or chronic condition, is causing them to question their faith in God and the reason for their plight.

*Psalm 130 and Pastoral Care*

Psalm 130 is a song of ascents, but the poet begins from "the depths," a place of desperation and despair. It is not uncommon for a patient to believe that suffering is caused by one's own actions; that is, that sins lead to suffering. Psalm 130 is the lament of an individual for the impact of his sins. Thus, to help the patient move to a place of reassurance and hope, it may be useful to explore this psalm with a patient who believes that her sins are directly related to her suffering.

One of the most important jobs of a pastoral caregiver is to accompany a person as she experiences the worst of her pain. In pastoral care literature, the word "join" is often used to suggest that a pastoral caregiver should actively join the patient in her suffering, in an attempt to make her feel less alone. Psalm 130 begins with a description of the psalmist's experience at her lowest point, "from the depths" (v. 1). In that moment, the psalmist calls out for God, asks God to hear her call (v. 2), and to "listen closely to my plea." Like the psalmist, the patient may also be at a point of desperation, seeking out God, yet wondering if she is worthy enough for God to hear her plea.

One of the defining features of Psalm 130 is the penitential section of the psalm, vv. 3-4. In this section, the poet recognizes that all people commit wrongdoings and says that if God were to punish for all of these sins, “Who could endure?” (v. 3). In acknowledging the reality of human imperfection and that humans are not expected to be perfect, the reader is ultimately led to the concept that God must be a forgiving God. Therefore, it is important to explore this concept with patients who believe that their illness is the result of God punishing them for their sins, to remind them that every human being sins, and that God knowingly forgives our iniquities. Ultimately, the goal of this discussion should be to help the patient acknowledge the universality of sin and God's forgiveness, as well as to help a patient apply the same compassion and forgiveness shown by God to oneself. For someone who is suffering, this is an opportune moment to discuss any feelings of guilt and responsibility for her illness. In the case of a patient who has a condition that resulted in part from the patient’s own actions, the discussion of sin and forgiveness is still relevant. Although the patient may have committed ‘sins’ against her own body, the caregiver should discuss the concept of forgiveness coming not only from God, but also from oneself. The caregiver could explain that self-acknowledgement and self-forgiveness is an important aspect of taking responsibility for one’s actions, and that the patient can move forward with compassion and forgiveness for her mistakes. Thus, discussing the expectation of God’s forgiveness can provide a positive way for the patient to discover more hopeful ways to navigate the future.

The psalmist’s realization of hope (v. 5), namely, that human wrongdoings do not prevent a relationship with God, follows the understanding that God is forgiving. The poem states in v. 5, “I hoped for the Lord, my being hoped, and for His word I waited.”

This is the transition and change in relationship from uncertainty to hope that God provides one with steadfast kindness which also includes redemption for the entire community of Israel from their iniquities. In this instance, redemption implies forgiveness and the assurance that God will be at one's side despite one's mistakes or wrongdoings. At this point, the poet is acknowledging that he does not have to be in this situation forever. This segment of the psalm may be useful in broaching a discussion with the patient about transition and repairing relationships with others that may have been affected by her suffering.

*Musical Setting of Psalm 130*

*Music:"Mima'amakim (Out of the Depths)" by Diane Kaplan*

Diane Kaplan's exquisite musical setting of Psalm 130 captures the feelings of hopelessness and hope in one piece of music. Kaplan uses the original Hebrew as the lyrics; in this case, the caregiver may want to read the first two lines of the psalm with the patient in English before playing or singing the music. The song opens with, *Mima'amikim*, "From the depths I called to You, Lord," sung four times with slight changes to the melodic line each time. The melody builds with intervals that move from low to high and reach the highest and longest sustained note on the last syllable of the word, *Mima'amikim*, which represents the psalmist coming from out of the depths, and ascending to a higher place. The superscription of the psalm indicates, "A psalm of ascents," which matches the musical composition.

The piece begins with a solo voice that sings the entirety of the verses. After singing the entire piece through once, the soloist is joined by more instruments and voices in a layered musical setting with various instruments. The added instrumentation

reinforces the psalm's message that the psalmist is not alone. The layered nature of the music is an opportunity for the pastoral caregiver and patient to experience the joining of other voices.

*Methodology*

Psalm 130 is a good text to use while meeting with a patient who is questioning the reason for her suffering, and struggling to feel hopeful about a positive outcome. In this setting, the pastoral caregiver might suggest to the patient that they read Psalm 130 together because the words of the psalm may resonate with her and what she is currently experiencing. After reading the psalm together, the pastoral caregiver can explore what resonated with the patient while reading the psalm. Then, the pastoral caregiver can introduce the musical setting of Psalm 130 to the patient as a way to conclude the interaction.

The metaphor of drowning in deep water is a powerful image that the pastoral caregiver can explain to the patient. The pastoral caregiver may then ask: "If the 'depths' refer to deep water, what does it feel like to be in 'the depths'? Do you feel like you are in the depths now?" The pastoral caregiver and patient can explore what the suffering feels like for the patient, and the patient may agree with the words of the psalm, or expand, using her own metaphor or description of what suffering feels like for her. The pastoral caregiver may also ask the patient: "What would you say if you were calling out to God in this moment?" The patient can then articulate questions or feelings that she is considering, thus enabling the pastoral caregiver to better understand some of the theological questions and issues with which the patient is struggling.

One of the theological questions that the psalm addresses is the relationship between suffering and sin. The patient may wonder, “Why is God punishing me with this suffering?” or “What did I do to deserve this?” The pastoral caregiver can expand upon these questions using the psalm as a guide that presents one answer to these questions. The pastoral caregiver could ask the patient, “Do you feel responsible for your suffering?” and use the psalm’s message of forgiveness and hope to discuss what it means to forgive oneself and to have God’s support and forgiveness.

After discussing different aspects of the psalms and exploring how the patient relates to the psalm, the pastoral caregiver may offer the patient the opportunity to listen to and chant the psalm together. The pastoral caregiver may either sing or play a recording of the musical setting. The pastoral caregiver will explain that this is an opportunity to internalize the discussion and reflect upon words or ideas that were meaningful. She will then ask the patient if she would like to participate or to just listen. This is a wonderful opportunity for meditation, listening to the music, and/or chanting or reciting “From out of the depths” with the patient. The goal of this exercise would be to create an environment in which the patient feels comfortable being still or quiet while the music plays, thereby encouraging the patient to reflect upon the previous conversation. As the music ends, the pastoral caregiver should take into consideration the patient's demeanor and decide whether or not singing or listening is the most appropriate way to end the session. If it seems necessary to ‘unpack’ the experience, the pastoral caregiver may end with an open ended question, “How was that for you?” or possibly with a blessing that relates to the conversation and psalm.

## Conclusion

The psalms analyzed in this thesis, Psalms 16, 30, 41, 121, and 130, are classified as psalms of thanksgiving, lament, and trust. The psalms express distress, anxiety, and fear in the midst of suffering and near death experiences, as well as praise, thanksgiving, and joy in renewed life and hope. These psalms reflect personal and intimate conversations with God and represent the psalmists' perspectives on their relationship with God. The psalms are powerful and moving, and they represent the human experience through the unique art form of biblical poetry.

Psalms are a powerful resource for pastoral caregivers. As discussed throughout this thesis, psalms provide both language and structure for what can feel like an often nebulous exploration of a patient's experience of suffering. Further, when used in the pastoral setting psalms may, in times of illness and recovery, help patients both express concerns, hopes, and fears and give voice to feelings of praise and thanksgiving. The psalms explored in this thesis are material for the pastoral caregiver and patient to explore together which may, through encouragement and guiding questions from the pastoral caregiver, provoke reflection and provide comfort.

The use of music in pastoral care creates another potential form of connection for the patient through which she may discover feelings not previously accessed through conversation alone. As described in these pages, music has the ability to transport a person to a new cognitive or emotional space, and create new opportunities for rich and productive dialogue with a pastoral caregiver.

The combination of psalms, music, and pastoral care offers a multifaceted approach to pastoral counseling which allows a pastoral caregiver to deeply engage with

the patient. Texts offer insight and language for many of emotional states that sufferer's experience. A text may also convey the message that the patient is not alone in her experience. Music adds another layer, serving as a tool to help the pastoral caregiver create a calming and safe environment and evoke emotions which may otherwise be difficult for a patient to verbalize.

It is my hope that the research and analysis provided here will encourage pastoral caregivers to experiment with integrating psalms and music in their work so as to provide patients with the richest and most fulfilling care possible.

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