The Psalms, a Means to the Spirit-filled Life

with stories of Their Use from History and Experience

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THE WITNESS COMMITTEE
Millvale, R. 4, Pittsburgh, Pa.
“Be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.” Ephesians 5:18-19. (A. R. V.) Compare Col. 3:16.

A Preliminary Question. If the “Psalms” are the Old Testament Psalms, what are the “hymns and spiritual songs?”

The Answer. Paul is referring only to the Psalms of the Bible, using twice this same title as do Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs as his title for the Psalter.

This book of Ephesians, like the rest of the New Testament, was written in Greek, the international language. The Old Testament, the only literature of the early Christians, they used in their worship, was in Hebrew. A Greek version called the Septuagint, “That the Apologists were well acquainted with this translation and used it frequently, is shown in the three translations from its pages. There is a ready recurrence of these three designa-
tions, psalm, hymn, spiritual song,” are the terms for the Psalter. Besides the captives of the entire Psalter, which are Psalms, Paul calls this section of his Epistle “hymns,” which are the Hymns of the版志。From the titles given in Colossians 3:16, and Ephesians 5:18-19, we have the term song, which is used in the Old Testament 141 times of them alone. In forty-seven of these the word song occurs twenty times, (see 2:1, 9. 5:16, 19:21, 26. 3:17, 30. 4:11. 5:19, 10:16, 13:4). Also because of the Psalms are those at the Direc-
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THE PSALMS, A MEANS TO THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

The church of the apostles sang the Psalms at Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out; in the Psalms they found the texts for their messages.

The Psalter of the Bible was a part of their great inheritance from the prophets. To the authority of its divine inspiration had been added the riches of sacred memories. The example of Christ's own use of it, and His explanation of its prophecies concerning Himself, made it seem to them the fitting manual of praise to guide in the erection of that building whose "chief cornerstone" is Christ.

For two to three centuries all Christians united in using the Psalter in God's praise as they used the Bible of which it is a part. Then uninspired compositions began to take its place. The Reformation brought it back to the Presbyterian and Reformed churches where the Psalms were sung exclusively till near the end of the 18th century. Again, however, other compositions began to be preferred, and now the Psalter has largely lost its place in the praise of the Christian church. Was this change justified?
Amid the changing of church hymnals to still newer ones, there is in some quarters a trend back toward larger use of the Psalms. Prominent evangelists and Christian workers openly condemn many of the hymns as unsavory. Was the change from the Psalms without disobedience to any Scriptural injunction?

A reference to our text and to the explanation on page two shows that Paul refers to the Psalter of the Bible and to it alone; and we have here a Scriptural command for the use of the Psalms.

A further reading of the text shows that this exhortation to the use of the Psalms is the first of three practical suggestions of the means to fulfilling the injunction, "Be filled with the Spirit:" by a fervent and shared use of the Psalms, by a predominant attitude of thanksgiving, and by a humble cooperation with Christian brethren—all under God.

As the context indicates, this ideal of the Spirit-filled life is urged on those who needed warning against the exaltation of drunkenness; Spirit-filling is therefore not reserved for exceptional Christians but is normal for all children of God.

Let us study then—for our own spiritual gain—The Psalms as a means to the Spirit-filled life. Many of the illustrations are condensed from Prothero's The Psalms in Human Life.

The Psalms from the Holy Spirit

1. The Psalms are a means to the Spirit-filled life because they are from the Spirit.

"Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," writes Paul, but if the word "songs" is quoted from the title of the Psalter, it seems likely (and grammatically it is possible) that the adjective "spiritual" which comes after the three names in Greek, refers to the whole title, that is, psalms and hymns and songs, all spiritual and inspired of the Spirit, "divinely inspired and so redolent of the Holy Spirit." (Thayer'sLexicon.)

"The Spirit of God spake by me, and his word was in my tongue," wrote David. Jesus confirms the statement by saying, "The Holy Spirit spake by the mouth of David." In no other way can we explain the matchless character of the Psalms, the authority of their promises and the extent of their revelations. We can find no other reason for the certainty of their prophecies, which causes them to be quoted by the New Testament writers on important doctrines, and leads Jesus to say, "All things must be fulfilled which are written in the Psalms concerning me." The Spirit guided the pen that wrote the Psalms. As a means of grace to men He will use His own words.
The Spirit’s Ideal

2. The Psalms are a means to the Spirit-filled life because they speak the language of the Spirit’s ideal, glorify Christ.

In our effort after a life filled with the Spirit, there is great advantage in having for study and use the law with its strong outline of Christian character, indicating clearly the different parts of a godly life, noting carefully and warning against the chief defects. It is an inspiration to have in detail the illustrations of the biography of good men and women, and especially of Jesus Christ. But the Psalms hold a definite and necessary place, in both the Old and the New Testaments, as an expression of the spirit of an upright life, in its struggle with sin in the heart and in the world, its perception of the holiness and justice and love of Jehovah, its vision of God and communion with Him as present in all His works, its hope and confidence in the glory of the future kingdom of His Son.

The Psalter speaks the language of the Spirit’s ideal. Here are the expressions of the spiritual life which were selected by the Spirit of God, and are preserved that we may adopt them and make them our own. These are the songs of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” songs of “the fruit of the Spirit,” songs of His Ideal.

If our understanding has been opened we shall find Christ in the Psalms. Luke 24:45-47. It is not strange He should be there. Already the covenant of redemption had been made, already God was preparing the world for the coming of His Son; and what was guiding the providence of the Father and the Son was also filling the mind of the Spirit, and found expression through David when he and other inspired men wrote the Psalms. Christ was the ideal of the Spirit; the life and experience of Christ were the subject of His speech. And so while the world waited for a Redeemer, the songs of His coming were being sung by the chosen people “of whom as pertaining to the flesh Christ came.” In the second Psalm they sang of His eternal Sonship and His inheritance of the nations, in the forty-sixth of His perfect life, in the seventy-second of His ascension, in the twenty-fourth of His resurrection, in the sixty-ninth of His trial and crucifixion, in the twenty-second of His death, in the twenty-third of His Father’s house. Even the tenses of the verbs relating the facts of Christ’s life are suited for our use till the kingdom comes. And Jesus, who as Mediator is revealed in the mercy of God through all the Psalms, is “the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.”
Spiritual Feeling

The Psalms are a means to the Spirit-filled life because they express in song and refine, every Christian emotion. Paul commends the Psalms as a means of expression between Christians. “Speaking one to another in Psalms, singing.” Poetry is the language of emotion. Its figures, its quick changes of thought, its imagination, its rhythmic accent, are suited to the expression of strong feeling. Paul would add to that the power of song. The enormous choirs at revival meetings, and the martial music on patriotic occasions are recognitions of the power of music to rouse and express the feelings.

The Psalms are Hebrew poetry, and when translated into English verse furnish a splendid vehicle for the expression of Christian feeling in song. The Spirit dwells in Christians in all situations and has provided as a means of expression a proper variety of Psalms. History proves their fitness for all occasions in every age.

“The Imitation of Christ,” by Thomas à Kempis, expresses the best spirit of Medieval Christianity and, translated into many languages, is still much used and loved. Its title evokes a study of the life of Christ, but in thought, in feeling, even in language, it is based largely upon the Psalms. The Psalms are more frequently cited than the gospels, and the illustrations from the Psalter in “The Imitation” outnumber those taken from all four gospels. The Psalms had first laid hold upon him, and wrought in him that remarkable combination of religious calm and ardent love which is the atmosphere of the book.

When John Eliot, the first Protestant missionary of England, took up his life work as an apostle of love, for the conversion of the Indians near the Puritan settlements of New England, he gave them the Bible translated into their own language—but first of all, the Psalter. For in singing the Psalms, he found the best means of winning their attention, and the simplest expression of truth to their childish minds.

Under what widely varying circumstances the same Psalms suit the occasion! Bernard Palissy, the Huguenot potter, who in his effort to solve the mystery of enamel, beggared his family, found consolation in the Psalms. Worn out, starved, mocked by neighbors, and reproached by his own family; he wandered in the fields admiring the beauty and variety of nature and adoring God in the words, “Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but to thy name give the praise.” Ps. 115:1.

These same words were sung by the English army on bended knee, when fresh from the victory at Agincourt. They were the
motto which the king, Henry V., received from his father.

France too felt their charm. The lives of the two great Huguenot leaders, Condé, famous in the charge, and Coligny, great in defeat, were sought by the Catholic queen. Warned by a dashing horseman of coming arrest, they with their families and fifty followers started on the long journey through hundreds of miles of hostile territory. As they crossed the Loire, the water came to the saddle girth of the horses; next morning it rose to a flood, and they were safe. Kneeling on the bank, they sang in thanksgiving the 114th Psalm, "What ailed thee, O thou sea."

And Scotland too. The Free Church, founded by men who, under the lead of Thomas Chalmers, for conscience sake gave up their livings, was dedicated with the singing of the Psalms, the best expression of their anxious hope and sacrificing loyalty.

Widowed, the Catholic missionary to England in the 17th century, found them his companions in study, his songs of cheer in prison. And later the Catholic opponents of the Huguenots, feeling the charm of Psalm singing, sought rivals to the Protestant version of Marot and Beza. Many versions were prepared and Psalm singing became exceedingly popular, till persecution interfered.

What a multitude of noted occasions might be cited of the use of the Psalms by people differing in education, removed from one another by centuries of time, often of contending faiths, living at social extremes! And if there is such a variety of public and known instances, of which have been mentioned but a few, how infinite has been their use by all Christians in every circumstance.

But what a supreme comfort the Psalms have been to the Christian's death! Of the seven sayings of Christ upon the cross, two are direct—and two others, indirect quotations from the Psalms. When the struggle was ended, and His work finished, He said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," (Ps. 31), and so He died.

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, caught that password from the lips of His Master. Many of the early Christian martyrs; forerunners of the Reformation like Huss and Jerome, both burned alive; reformers like Luther and Melancthon of the next generation; leading Englishmen like More, Fisher, the great prime minister Thomas Cromwell, Bishop Hooper; Christopher Columbus; and more than half the Covenant martyr's from Hugh M'Kell to James Renwick, used these words of their Master, the language of that Psalm, when they came to the gates of death. How many
a humble Christian has been supported in the dying hour by the Shepherd Psalm.

**Inspiration to Heroism**

4. The Psalms are a means to the Spirit-filled life because they offer an excellent means of inspiration to Christian devotion.

William Wallace, one of the greatest of Scotland's many great ones, the leader who in spite of faithless followers first taught the Scotch that they could be free, and awakened that love of liberty in which the Scotch have led the world, was a hero whose courage was fed from the Psalms. His one request before he met his cruel death, August 23, 1305, was that, as he suffered, he might be allowed to look upon his Psalter.

The Psalms were the war songs of the Crusades, those campaigns of militant Christianity to drive back the tide of infidel invasion; and they were the strength of those who faced the Mohammedan advance into Europe. Demetrius the Don, Grand Prince of Russia, with his little army, faced the Tartar hordes at Koulikoff in 1381. To the young prince—only twenty-nine—defeat seemed inevitable and his heart quailed; but he renewed his courage with the 46th Psalm, which he read aloud, and then plunged into the fight. His victory was complete.

The 20th Psalm, "Some put trust in chariots," encouraged the Spaniards to cross the Tagus in the face of the Moorish troops and drive them from the land.

As the Psalms had stirred the hearts of Christian soldiers to beat back the infidels, so they became the strength of the Huguenots in their struggle for Protestant liberty. In persecution they had made the Psalms their own. Jean Leclere, burned alive for his faith at Metz, still remained true, as he repeated the same words which had encouraged the martyrs of the early Christian era: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They that make them are like unto them; and so are all such as put their trust in them." (Psalms 115.) Sometimes companions on the way to execution chanted the 79th Psalm, and the song was taken up by the bystanders. Catholic priests, displeased, tried to drown the singing with chants in Latin, but their words lacked the energy and vigor of the vernacular French and won no response from the crowd. Many victims were gagged before being burned, but the fire severed the cords that held the gags in place, and with charred lips the sufferers sang the Psalms.

It was when the congregation in the grange at Vassy was singing the Psalms, that Guise gave signal for the massacres (1562) which finally provoked the wars of religion. When once the sword was drawn,
the Psalms became the battle songs of the Huguenots; and the 76th, the 118th, and especially Beza's version of the 68th became the chants of Protestant victories. As the persecutors gave up the siege of Rochelle, some one on the ivall sang the 68th Psalm. Before the battle of Coutras, the Huguenots knelt in prayer and chanted Psalm 118th, verses 24-26. One of the enemy thought they were confessing themselves. He was soon enlightened.

At Dieppe, in the face of great odds, Navarre was discouraged. His reinforcements had failed him, but he must fight. "Come, minister," said the king, "lift the Psalm. It is full time." And then to the time of the Psalm, there was the sound of marching feet and the swinging lines of soldiers gathered courage as they sang. Above the din of battle arose the chant of the 68th Psalm, and Navarre's iron wedge of soldiers cut through the enemy's lines.

"To the Puritans of the 17th century, the Psalter was the book of books." Soldiers and ploughmen, ladies and lovers, sang them from memory. When liberty of Psalm singing was denied them in the Old World, men and women crossed the seas that they might find that freedom in the New. A little congregation who had loved the Psalms more than their homes in England and had crossed to Leyden in the Low Countries started in July, 1620, for the New World. They cheered one another as they said "good-bye" in the singing of the Psalms, making joyful melody in their hearts. "To the singing of the Psalm the sails of the Mayflower were set to catch the winds that wafted the Pilgrim Fathers to the white-sand banks of Cape Cod; to their music was laid the foundation of the United States of America." A Psalm suggested the name of their first settlement; and the love of the Psalms brought them their first teacher. "Tell the end of the 18th century, the Psalms were exclusively sung in the churches and chapels of America... " "And in the spirit of the Psalms as they interpreted them, the Puritans who remained behind in England fought out their struggle with the Stuarts." The Psalms of the Puritans seemed to the haughty Cavaliers at first a cause of mockery but soon became a fear. They would criticize the tunes, but fled before the iron courage those words inspired.

As with the Cevenols in France, so with the Covenanters in Scotland, the Psalms were the inspiration of a popular movement. From the moorlands came the sound of the sweet singing of the persecuted folk. A Psalm made the Sanquhar Declaration an act of worship; a Psalm made Ayrsmoss a sacrifice; with a Psalm the Covenanters faced defeat at Rullion Green.
and won a victory at Drumlog. Supported by a Psalm Hugh McKail, Donald Cargill, James Renwick, Isabel Alison, Marion Hervie, Margaret Wilson, and a host of other heroes and heroines of the Covenant met torture or a violent death. The Psalms were the daily support of the charmed life of Alexander Peden. They cheered the captives on Bass Rock, or in the dungeon of Dunottar, and soothed their weary imprisonment. It was the Psalms that encouraged others as they toiled in exile and slavery among the rice-fields and sugar plantations of the New World.

And when we seek to preserve the faith and to overcome in our own struggle for the kingdom of God, can we do better than by a daily use of the Psalms seek our share of their inspiration to Christian service—the Psalms which in the Crusades in the Holy Land, in the wars against the Turks in Europe and the Moors in Spain, in the struggle of Protestants against their persecutors in Germany, France, and England, and Scotland, and in the setting of our own shores, strengthened men and women for sacrifice, for loyal service, and for death, supplied the watchwords and battle songs of Christian armies, their chant of victory, or their comfort in defeat? These are the songs that have kept God's people faithful and have made the nations free.

THE METHOD

How shall we use the Psalms which Paul, guided by the Spirit, recommends to us so highly as a means to the Spirit-filled life?

First by singing them in the worship of God. "Singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord."

The Psalms were made for the worship of God; that is their highest use. With them on his lips and heart, the humble Christian directs his voice to Him who sits upon the throne of thrones, presenting to the King of heaven and earth the songs which the stamp of God's own approval makes sure of welcome. This offering of praise is a gift of God's love to man; so was Christ. This is prepared for a special purpose; so was Christ. This unites the best of earth with the Spirit of heaven; so did Christ. This offering when made the sinner's own is accepted of Heaven; so is the offering of Christ. Both are heaven-born; both have a dwelling among men. Upon the Psalms a ladder reaching to heaven, the praise of man ascends and the blessing descends, as the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

Do the Psalms speak the language of the Spirit's ideal? When are our hearts so well tuned to that high key as when we praise our God? They not only speak to God but they speak to ourselves; and we, with God, listen to our words and gaze at the
pictures they describe in the glow of a light that comes from heaven.

Do the Psalms express and refine any Christian emotion? When does the Christian so require proper emotion and fitting expression as when he addresses his God? The Psalms help us to keep our emotions within proper bounds. They aid us to accomplish that wonderful transformation so often found in the Psalter from the deepest sorrow to the highest joy, from fear to faith, from terror of captivity to the triumph of certain deliverance, from penitent prayer to confident communion.

Do the Psalms inspire to Christian devotion? Then let us, in the singing, awaken our spiritual strength, fan the furnace of loyalty, and gather power for the struggle. These are the revival songs of the Spirit.

Need I say, "Sing only the Psalms in the praise of God"? Shall we in the very act of praise to God set aside His own words? Shall we in such holy service adopt that for the acceptance of which we have no promise? Shall we, while we seek to meet all Christians at the throne, ever lay aside that which as a part of the Bible offers a proper meeting place?

Let us sing the Psalms to God, but never without accompaniment,—the melody in the heart. "Singing and making melody (psaltemus, touching the chords) in the heart to the Lord." "Singing with grace in the heart to the Lord." (Col. 3:16). Without those responding chords of sincere devotion, the music of the lips is empty. But no words are so fitted to awaken the proper chords as the ones God has given; and the Spirit, who knows His own music and loves His own songs, can give that grace which the worshipping singer needs to harmonize his heart with the sacred words. Like the sound of the trumpet, which God ordained to accompany the sacrifice (Leviticus 29:25-28), shall this harmony of grace (John 4:21-24) ascend from the living temple of Christian hearts. "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms." Second, by committing the Psalms to memory.

The frequent and popular use of the Psalms, which Paul here recommends, is possible only to those who are familiar with the Psalms and can repeat some, at least, from memory. The choosing of an appropriate Psalm depends on our acquaintance with them. Paul and Silas knew the Psalms by heart, and in the midnight darkness of the inner prison, they sang praise to God. Jesus and his disciples knew them when they sang together in the upper room. We must learn them by heart.

In the early centuries, "to learn the Psalter by heart was, in monastic life, the first duty of a novice. Among the secular clerg-
knowledge of the Psalter was the threshold to preferment. A council of the church and the capitularies of an emperor, provided that no one should be raised to any ecclesiastical dignity who could not recite the whole book. By the Psalms, were sustained the lives and deaths of the men whose spiritual daring converted Europe to Christianity. Above the mists of legend, through the pictured veil of romance, one star shines out with steadfast light. It is the strength that, in solitude or danger, the missionary and the monk, the secular priest and the anchorite derived from the Psalms of David. The words lived in his mind; they were ever on his lip; in them his thoughts were unconsciously clothed; in them, his cry for help was naturally expressed."

The lives of monks and nuns were regulated to a great extent by the Psalms, which were sung through every week. Columba, the great missionary to Scotland, when able only to read the alphabet, was said to be able to say the Psalms by heart. One of his first, and one of his last labors was the transcribing of the Psalter. The Puritans, the Huguenots, and the Covenanters were great students of the Psalter and the singing of the Psalms was often the mark by which they were known.

The Puritans, the Huguenots, and the Covenanters were great students of the Psalter and the singing of the Psalms was often the mark by which they were known. This habit helped make them great.

What is there necessary for man to know, which the Psalms are not able to teach? They are to beginners an easy and familiar introduction; a mighty augmentation of all virtue and knowledge in such as are entered before; a strong confirmation of the most perfect amongst others...

... Let there be any grief or disease incident into the soul of man, any wound or sickness named, for which there is not in this treasure-house a present comfortable remedy at all times ready to be found. Hereof it is that we dwell to make the Psalms especially familiar to us all. This is the very reason why we iterate the Psalms oftener than any other part of the Scripture besides." (Hooker.)

The third method for making the Psalms a means to a Spirit-filled life is by making them a life companion. The extensive use which is here commanded is such as would make of the Psalter an everyday companion; in this position they best show their power to help.

It was to the Psalms that JOHN CALVIN turned for strength in those great labors which taxed so severely his weak body, and they have left their stamp upon Protestant Christendom. THEODORE BEZA, when he turned his brilliant powers from a life of self-seeking to the service of religion, took refuge with Calvin; and when he entered the Reformed Assembly for the first time, the congregation was singing Psalm 91, "Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow
of the Almighty." "He never forgot the effect of the words. They supported him in all the difficulties of his subsequent life; they conquered his fears and gave him courage to meet every danger." He devoted the best years of his life to translating the Psalter in French poetry, completing the version of Marot. He wrote that version of the 68th Psalm which became the battle song of the Huguenots; and he died with the words of a Psalm upon his lips.

The ennobling effect of the Psalms upon the Huguenots, the Puritans and Covenanters has already been mentioned. But great names are not scarce among those strengthened by the Psalms for a godly life.

If we turn to the missionaries, we must think of DAVID BRAHMAIARD, the missionary to the Indians of Delaware and Pennsylvania. Brainard's own journal is "permeated with the power of the Psalms. So much had they become a part of his habitual thoughts, that his hopes, fears, and aspirations flow naturally into language, which recalls, even when it does not actually reproduce the actual words. That Journal is a forgotten book. Yet it would be difficult to measure the magnitude of the results which it indirectly produced. It fired the imagination of William Carey; it stirred the zeal of Henry Martyn; it helped to lead David Livingstone to become a Missionary.

The morning DAVID LIVINGSTONE left home, he read the 111th and 130th Psalms in family worship. "It was with a Psalm that he encouraged himself to face the unknown future which each day might bring. Menaced with death by savages, sickened by the atrocities of the slave trade, often prostrated by fever or gnawed by hunger, tormented by poisonous insects, sometimes in such bodily pain that he felt as if he were dying on his feet, he found his daily strength in the words of the 37th Psalm, verse 5: "It is singular," he says, "that the very same text which occurred to my mind at every turn of my course in life in this country and even in England, should be the same as Captain Mcllroy, the discoverer of the Northwest Passage mentions in a letter to his sister as familiar in his experience: ... "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." All of which reminds us that the one who wrote the letter to the Ephesians was in his labors the chiefest among the apostles, the great Missionary Paul. He was a Spirit-filled life, and from the riches of his own experience, he writes to us: "Be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Reader, for the sake of the spiritual benefit that the Psalms would bring to the
Church, as well as for obedience to the Bible, the guide of the Church, let us hasten the return to the Psalms in worship.

If you belong to a denomination which by its principles and practice has sought to make the Psalter a permanent possession for the worshipping people of God, seek to make such a use of the Psalms as the Spirit commanded through his apostle. The best protection against loss is proper use.

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God of Paul, and the saints of old, make us appreciate these songs of praise given in Thy book. Lead us to choose rather to keep our hearts and lips in tune with the voices of the Master and His disciples in the upper room and with the gathered hosts of the early church and the godly men and women of the past, than to tune ourselves to another praise. Through these Psalms, fill us with Thy Spirit, strengthen our souls that we may carry forward the work of the kingdom and bear the banner of Thy truth throughout the world. If like Cinderella, we have in our care a precious ark, for which an indifferent Israel finds no present use, may we sanctify ourselves to guard it reverently, that Jehovah who gave it may bless our house; and that a revived Israel, turning again to bear the gift of God to its honored resting place, may find it still adored and not forgotten.