

Psalms and Rhythm of Life: Orientation, Disorientation, Reorientation

The OT Scholar Walter Brueggemann has developed a very helpful way of categorizing the Psalms and bringing them into our own personal lives. Brueggemann suggests that we regularly find ourselves in one of three places:

- a place of orientation, in which everything makes sense in our lives;
- a place of disorientation, in which we feel we have sunk into the pit; and
- a place of new orientation, in which we realize that God has lifted us out of the pit and we are in a new place full of gratitude and awareness about our lives and our God.

Brueggemann suggests that the psalms generally match those places, and that there are psalms of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. Recognizing this pattern of organization can help us identify psalms that fit our personal lives.



Remember:

- Psalms are Songs or Poems
- This list is not exhaustive, and the categories are not divinely inspired or authoritative.

❖ **Psalms of Orientation** – For those times when the world is well-ordered, reliable, and everything is going great

- Creation Psalms– in which we consider the world and our place in it
 - Psalms 8, 19, 33, 50, Psalm 74, 89, 90, 100, 102, 104, 115, 119, 121, 124, 134, 135, 139
- Torah Psalms – in which we consider the importance of God’s revealed will
 - Psalms 1, 19:7-14, 119
- Wisdom Psalms – in which we consider the importance of living wisely
 - Psalms 1, 36, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133
- Narrative Psalms – in which we consider our past and its influence on our present
 - Psalms 8, 105-106, 135, 136
- Psalms of Trust – in which we express our trust in God’s care and goodness

- Psalms 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131
- ❖ **Psalms Disorientation** – For those times when we experience the brokenness of life, and everything seems chaotic:
 - Lament Psalms – in which we/I express anger, frustration, confusion about the experience of God’s absence
 - Community Laments: 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129
 - Individual Laments: 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 5*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142
 - Note: Every lament Psalm except for Psalm 88 concludes with a prayer of thanksgiving expressing faith that God will rescue us and bring us up from the depths
 - Penitential Psalms – in which we express regret and sorrow over wrongs we have done
 - Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
- ❖ **Psalms of Reorientation** – For those times when God’s grace fills us with thanks and wonder:
 - Psalms of Thanksgiving – in which we thank God for what God has done for us/me
 - Community Thanksgiving: Psalms 65, 67, 75, 107, 124, 136
 - Individual Thanksgiving: Psalms 18, 21, 30, 32, 34, 40:1-11, 66:13-20, 92, 108, 116, 118, 138
 - Hymns of Praise – in which we praise God for who God is
 - Psalms 8, 19:1-6, 33, 66:1-12, 67, 95, 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150
 - Songs of Zion – in which we praise God for His presence in the ancient city of Jerusalem, and the way it points to His presence at the center of the Kingdom of God.
 - Psalms 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122
 - Royal/Enthronement Psalms – in which we consider the role of Kings in Ancient Israel, but more importantly how that Kingship is fulfilled and made perfect in the rule of Jesus our Messiah King
 - Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 29, 45, 47, 72, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 110, 144
 - Covenant Renewal – in which we renew our relationship with God
 - Psalms 50, 78, 81, 89, 132