

# Memorizing Psalms

Mary J Moerbe

I will be honest. Memorization does *not* come easily to me or to my children. Still, Luther insisted that teachers should ask students to memorize a number of easy psalms. So, having memorized the catechism, we are turning toward memorizing psalms as a family.

The psalms are more than useful. They not only teach us to pray a full range of prayers, including praise, lament, thanksgiving, remembrance, and more. They also put godly words into our mouths for when we have to face our personal weaknesses, enemies, fear, impatience, etc.

In short, psalms form Christians as well as their prayers. Psalms lend us a wide perspective and wholesome channels for our thoughts, concerns, and feelings, while also joining us in prayer with one another, Christ, and the Church throughout the ages.

This resource for Psalm Memorization consists of five parts:

1. A few paragraphs on incorporating—and recognizing—psalms in everyday life
2. Recommended aids compiled from others
3. 10 Shortest Psalms
4. Luther's Recommended Psalms
5. A few Additional Psalms

The first is to assure parents. Whether or not you “know” or “have studied” the psalms, the psalms are part of Christian life. Parents are *not* starting at ground zero with this.

The second is to help in transitions, if or when help is needed. Many of the recommendations put psalms to music and that can provide phenomenal assistance in memory work.

The third may be a little cowardly on my part, but some things are learned by doing. I thought starting with short psalms could help me and my family grow in the discipline of memorizing Scripture passages rather than verses. The Small Catechism is a tremendous bridge between memorizing sentences and memorizing paragraphs. Still, psalms are poetry, not paragraphs.

In the fourth section, Luther suggests Psalms 112, 34, 128, 125, 127, and 133. These are noted from *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony* (1528, AE vol. 40, pp. 269-324) ([excerpt found here in a great compilation, “Luther on Education”](#)) and described as “a number of easy Psalms [sic] that contain in themselves a summary of the Christian life and speak about the fear of God, faith, and good works.”

The fifth section exists because there are simply more psalms to learn. Would we really exclude Psalm 23? Legend has it that Luther, in dark times, would say, “Come, let us sing the 46<sup>th</sup> psalm and let them do their worst.” Psalm 46 is foundational for “A Mighty Fortress.” Psalm 51 is significant for its depth of confession and trust—[Here](#) is a handout about Luther on Psalm 51 by Prof. Pless.

Altogether, there are 16 psalms here to memorize: 15 (5 verses), 23 (6 verses), 34 (22!), 46 (11), 51 (11), 70 (5), 93 (5), 112 (8), 117 (2), 123 (4), 125 (5), 127 (5), 128 (6), 131 (3), 133 (3), and 134 (3). If you’d rather memorize from a Bible or hymnal, of course do so! *My First Hymnal* includes several psalms that are obviously child friendly. But, perhaps, if your family successfully memorizes these 16 psalms—or 5, 10, whatever you choose—then you could celebrate or even award a child with a book like *Reading the Psalms with Luther* (available on [CPH](#), [Amazon](#), and elsewhere).

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## **Incorporating Psalms**

Psalms are likely more incorporated into your lives than you realize. There are images and expressions from the psalms all around us, and Lutheran church services are full of psalmic text. Psalms are found in vesicles (that back and forth, call and response, between pastors and congregations), introits, hymns, prayers, and simply as psalms. Many devotions include both a reading and a psalm, including [Portals of Prayer](#) and [Around the Word..](#)

Psalms are literally an open and go resources. Granted, you may want to scan through them to see what type it may be: thanks, praise, wisdom, lament, remembrance, prophecy, judgment upon enemies (imprecatory), etc.

## **Recommended Aids**

The two easiest resources are a family Bible or hymnal. Another option is a psalter, a book that often pairs psalms with music or psalm tones for chanting. (In my personal experience, my children learned to chant psalms as soon as they could read. Our congregation does chant responses, although psalms are spoken responsively.) Both the *Lutheran Service Book* and the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* include psalters and chant tones.

There are CDs of Scripture set to music, such as those done by the [Harrow Family](#) (which is recommended as a part of Sonlight curriculum). Other curriculum, like [Write Through the Bible](#), incorporate copywork & memorization of psalms, although I'm not sure entire psalms are included.

If you'd like, you can use *Reading the Psalms with Luther* to introduce a psalm as you begin your memory work, and, if you want to slow things down and get your kids to really think about the psalms, consider using the King James' Version.

#### Optional Practices to aid in memorization

- Daily recitation/daily prayer; spoken, sung, or chanted
- Copy a verse or section at a time. This can be as simple as copy-work or as elaborate as lettering & illuminated calligraphy.
- Read &/or quiz as part of routine car rides to piano, the gym, etc. (A copy of this in the car)
- Use actions! Make up your own or search the Internet for kids signing psalms in ASL!

## 10 Shortest Psalms

### **Psalms 117: "Praise the LORD"**

1 Praise the LORD, all nations!

Exalt him, all peoples!

2 For great is his steadfast love toward us,

and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.

Praise the LORD!

### **Psalms 134: "Come, Bless the Lord"**

1 Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD,

who stand by night in the house of the LORD!

2 Lift up your hands to the holy place

and bless the LORD!

3 May the LORD bless you from Zion,

he who made heaven and earth!

**Psalm 131: “O LORD, my heart is not lifted up”**

1 O LORD, my heart is not lifted up;  
my eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things  
too great and too marvelous for me.  
2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
like a weaned child is my soul within me.  
3 O Israel, hope in the LORD  
from this time forth and forevermore.

**Psalm 133: “Behold, how Good and pleasant it is”**

1 Behold, how good and pleasant it is  
when brothers dwell in unity!  
2 It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down on the collar of his robes!  
3 It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion!  
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing,  
life forevermore.

### **Psalm 123: “To you I lift up my eyes”**

1 To you I lift up my eyes,  
O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

<sup>2</sup> Behold, as the eyes of servants  
look to the hand of their master,  
as the eyes of a maidservant  
to the hand of her mistress,  
so our eyes look to the LORD our God,  
till he has mercy upon us.

<sup>3</sup> Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,  
for we have had more than enough of contempt.

<sup>4</sup> Our soul has had more than enough  
of the scorn of those who are at ease,  
of the contempt of the proud.

### **Psalm 93: “The LORD Reigns”**

1 The LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty;  
the LORD is robed; he has put on strength as his belt.  
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved.

<sup>2</sup> Your throne is established from of old;  
you are from everlasting.

<sup>3</sup> The floods have lifted up, O LORD,  
the floods have lifted up their voice;  
the floods lift up their roaring.

<sup>4</sup> Mightier than the thunders of many waters,  
mightier than the waves of the sea,  
the LORD on high is mighty!

<sup>5</sup> Your decrees are very trustworthy;  
holiness befits your house,  
O LORD, forevermore.

### **Psalm 15: “O Lord, Who Shall Sojourn”**

1 O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?  
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?  
<sup>2</sup> He who walks blamelessly and does what is right  
and speaks truth in his heart;  
<sup>3</sup> who does not slander with his tongue  
and does no evil to his neighbor,  
nor takes up a reproach against his friend;  
<sup>4</sup> in whose eyes a vile person is despised,  
but who honors those who fear the LORD;  
who swears to his own hurt and does not change;  
<sup>5</sup> who does not put out his money at interest  
and does not take a bribe against the innocent.  
He who does these things shall never be moved.

### **Psalm 125: “Those who trust in the Lord”**

1 Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,  
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.  
<sup>2</sup> As the mountains surround Jerusalem,  
so the LORD surrounds his people,  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
<sup>3</sup> For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest  
on the land allotted to the righteous,  
lest the righteous stretch out  
their hands to do wrong.  
<sup>4</sup> Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,  
and to those who are upright in their hearts!  
<sup>5</sup> But those who turn aside to their crooked ways  
the LORD will lead away with evildoers!  
Peace be upon Israel!

**Psalm 70: “Make haste, O God”**

1 Make haste, O God, to deliver me!

O LORD, make haste to help me!

<sup>2</sup> Let them be put to shame and confusion  
who seek my life!

Let them be turned back and brought to dishonor  
who delight in my hurt!

<sup>3</sup> Let them turn back because of their shame  
who say, “Aha, Aha!”

<sup>4</sup> May all who seek you  
rejoice and be glad in you!

May those who love your salvation  
say evermore, “God is great!”

<sup>5</sup> But I am poor and needy;  
hasten to me, O God!

You are my help and my deliverer;  
O LORD, do not delay!

**Psalm 127: “Unless the LORD builds the house”**

1 Unless the LORD builds the house,  
those who build it labor in vain.

Unless the LORD watches over the city,  
the watchman stays awake in vain.

<sup>2</sup> It is in vain that you rise up early  
and go late to rest,

eating the bread of anxious toil;  
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

<sup>3</sup> Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,  
the fruit of the womb a reward.

<sup>4</sup> Like arrows in the hand of a warrior  
are the children of one's youth.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed is the man

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who fills his quiver with them!  
He shall not be put to shame  
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

## **“Luther’s Psalms”**

### **Psalm 112: “Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone”**

- 1 Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone;  
for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.
- 2 Everyone utters lies to his neighbor;  
with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.
- 3 May the Lord cut off all flattering lips,  
the tongue that makes great boasts,
- 4 those who say, “With our tongue we will prevail,  
our lips are with us; who is master over us?”
- 5 “Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan,  
I will now arise,” says the Lord;  
“I will place him in the safety for which he longs.”
- 6 The words of the Lord are pure words,  
like silver refined in a furnace on the ground,  
purified seven times.
- 7 You, O Lord, will keep them;  
you will guard us from this generation forever.
- 8 On every side the wicked prowl,  
as vileness is exalted among the children of man.



### **Psalm 34: "I will bless the Lord"**

- 1 I will bless the Lord at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
- 2 My soul makes its boast in the Lord;  
let the humble hear and be glad.
- 3 Oh, magnify the Lord with me,  
and let us exalt his name together!
- 4 I sought the Lord, and he answered me  
and delivered me from all my fears.
- 5 Those who look to him are radiant,  
and their faces shall never be ashamed.
- 6 This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him  
and saved him out of all his troubles.
- 7 The angel of the Lord encamps  
around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- 8 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!  
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
- 9 Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints,  
for those who fear him have no lack!
- 10 The young lions suffer want and hunger;  
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.
- 11 Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
- 12 What man is there who desires life  
and loves many days, that he may see good?
- 13 Keep your tongue from evil  
and your lips from speaking deceit.

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14 Turn away from evil and do good;  
seek peace and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous  
and his ears toward their cry.

16 The face of the Lord is against those who do evil,  
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

17 When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears  
and delivers them out of all their troubles.

18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted  
and saves the crushed in spirit.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

20 He keeps all his bones;  
not one of them is broken.

21 Affliction will slay the wicked,  
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

22 The Lord redeems the life of his servants;  
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

### **Psalm 128: "Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord"**

1 Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord,  
who walks in his ways!

2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;  
you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.

3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine  
within your house;

your children will be like olive shoots  
around your table.

4 Behold, thus shall the man be blessed

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who fears the Lord.

5 The Lord bless you from Zion!

May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem  
all the days of your life!

6 May you see your children's children!

Peace be upon Israel!

Psalm 125 (Already memorized above)

Psalm 127 (Already memorized above)

Psalm 133 (Already memorized above)

## **Additional Psalms**

### **Psalm 23: "The Lord is my Shepherd"**

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

3 He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

**Psalm 46: “God is our refuge and strength”**

- 1 God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
- 3 though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.
  
- 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;  
God will help her when morning dawns.
- 6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;  
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- 7 The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
  
- 8 Come, behold the works of the Lord,  
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
- 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the chariots with fire.
- 10 “Be still, and know that I am God.  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!”
- 11 The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

## **Psalm 51: “God is our refuge and strength”**

God is our refuge and strength,

a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,

though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

3 though its waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,

the holy habitation of the Most High.

5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;

God will help her when morning dawns.

6 The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;

he utters his voice, the earth melts.

7 The Lord of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our fortress.

8 Come, behold the works of the Lord,

how he has brought desolations on the earth.

9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;

he burns the chariots with fire.

10 “Be still, and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!”

11 The Lord of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Want to memorize even more? Go ahead! Psalm 118 may have been Luther’s favorite (29 verses with repetition). Some psalms may be harder to understand than others, but *all* scripture has been given to us so that we “may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17).

Here are a few links I found pertaining to adult memorization, but they have some pretty interesting tricks that might be helpful:

- <https://praypsalms.org/how-i-learn-the-psalms-by-heart-761ef7debde8>
- <https://www.jeanejones.net/2015/04/seven-tips-tricks-to-memorize-psalms/>

(I have not otherwise looked over those sites.)