



THE BOOK OF

# Psalms

THE MESSAGE<sup>®</sup>

EUGENE H. PETERSON

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*P*SALMS



Eugene H. Peterson

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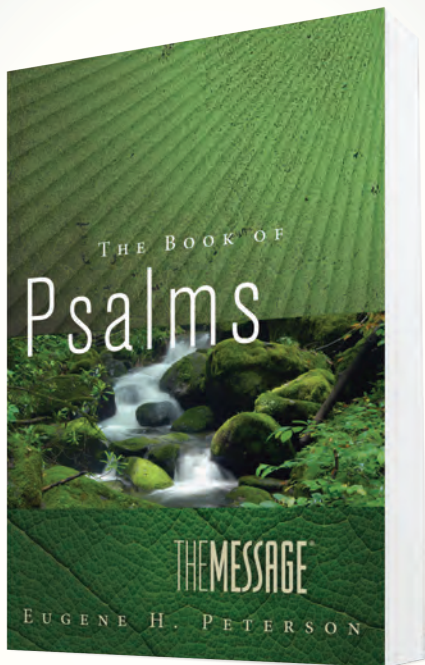
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# Psalms

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## INTRODUCTION

Most Christians for most of the Christian centuries have learned to pray by praying the Psalms. The Hebrews, with several centuries of a head start on us in matters of prayer and worship, provided us with this prayer book that gives us a language adequate for responding to the God who speaks to us.

The stimulus to paraphrase the Psalms into a contemporary idiom comes from my lifetime of work as a pastor. As a pastor I was charged with, among other things, teaching people to pray, helping them to give voice to the entire experience of being human, and to do it both honestly and thoroughly. I found that it was not as easy as I expected. Getting started is easy enough. The impulse to pray is deep within us, at the very center of our created being, and so practically anything will do to get us started—"Help" and "Thanks!" are our basic prayers. But honesty and thoroughness don't come quite as spontaneously.

Faced with the prospect of conversation with a holy God who speaks worlds into being, it is not surprising that we have trouble. We feel awkward and out of place: "I'm not good enough for this. I'll wait until I clean up my act and prove that I am a decent person." Or we excuse ourselves on the grounds that our vocabulary is inadequate: "Give me a few months—or years!—to practice prayers that are polished enough for such a sacred meeting. Then I won't feel so stuttery and ill at ease."

My usual response when presented with these difficulties is to put the Psalms in a person's hand and say, "Go home and pray these. You've got wrong ideas about prayer; the praying you find in these Psalms will dispel the wrong ideas and introduce you to the real thing." A common response of those who do what I ask is surprise—they don't expect this kind of thing in the Bible. And then I express surprise at their surprise: "Did you think these would be the prayers of *nice* people? Did you think the psalmists' language would be polished and polite?"

Untutored, we tend to think that prayer is what good people do when they are doing their best. It is not. Inexperienced, we suppose that there must be an "insider" language that must be acquired before God takes us seriously in our prayer. There is not. Prayer is elemental, not advanced, language. It is the means by which our language becomes honest, true, and personal in response to God. It is the means by which we get everything in our lives out in the open before God.

But even with the Psalms in their hands and my pastoral encouragement, people often tell me that they still don't get it. In English translation, the Psalms often sound smooth and polished, sonorous with Elizabethan rhythms and diction. As literature, they are beyond compare. But as *prayer*, as the utterances of men and women passionate for God in moments of anger and praise and lament, these translations miss something. *Grammatically*, they are accurate. The scholarship undergirding the translations is superb and devout. But as *prayers* they are not quite right. The Psalms in Hebrew are earthy and rough. They are not genteel. They are not the prayers of nice people, couched in cultured language.

And so in my pastoral work of teaching people to

pray, I started paraphrasing the Psalms into the rhythms and idiom of contemporary English. I wanted to provide men and women access to the immense range and the terrific energies of prayer in the kind of language that is most immediate to them, which also happens to be the language in which these psalm prayers were first expressed and written by David and his successors.

I continue to want to do that, convinced that only as we develop raw honesty and detailed thoroughness in our praying do we become whole, truly human in Jesus Christ, who also prayed the Psalms.



# Psalm

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# 1

How well God must like you—  
you don't hang out at Sin Saloon,  
you don't slink along Dead-End Road,  
you don't go to Smart-Mouth College.

Instead you thrill to GOD's Word,  
you chew on Scripture day and night.  
You're a tree replanted in Eden,  
bearing fresh fruit every month,  
Never dropping a leaf,  
always in blossom.

You're not at all like the wicked,  
who are mere windblown dust—  
Without defense in court,  
unfit company for innocent people.

GOD charts the road you take.  
The road *they* take is Skid Row.

# 2

Why the big noise, nations?  
Why the mean plots, peoples?  
Earth-leaders push for position,  
Demagogues and delegates meet for summit talks,  
The God-deniers, the Messiah-defiers:  
“Let's get free of God!

Cast loose from Messiah!”  
Heaven-throned God breaks out laughing.  
At first he’s amused at their presumption;  
Then he gets good and angry.  
Furiously, he shuts them up:  
“Don’t you know there’s a King in Zion? A  
    coronation banquet  
Is spread for him on the holy summit.”

Let me tell you what GOD said next.  
He said, “You’re my son,  
And today is your birthday.  
What do you want? Name it:  
Nations as a present? continents as a prize?  
You can command them all to dance for you,  
Or throw them out with tomorrow’s trash.”

So, rebel-kings, use your heads;  
Upstart-judges, learn your lesson:  
Worship GOD in adoring embrace,  
Celebrate in trembling awe. Kiss Messiah!  
Your very lives are in danger, you know;  
His anger is about to explode,  
But if you make a run for God—you won’t regret it!

### 3

A DAVID PSALM, WHEN HE ESCAPED FOR HIS LIFE FROM ABSALOM, HIS SON

GOD! Look! Enemies past counting!  
Enemies sprouting like mushrooms,

Mobs of them all around me, roaring their mockery:  
“Hah! No help for *him* from God!”

But you, GOD, shield me on all sides;  
You ground my feet, you lift my head high;  
With all my might I shout up to GOD,  
His answers thunder from the holy mountain.

I stretch myself out. I sleep.  
Then I'm up again—rested, tall and steady,  
Fearless before the enemy mobs  
Coming at me from all sides.

Up, GOD! My God, help me!  
Slap their faces,  
First this cheek, then the other,  
Your fist hard in their teeth!

Real help comes from GOD.  
Your blessing clothes your people!

# 4

A DAVID PSALM

When I call, give me answers. God, take my side!  
Once, in a tight place, you gave me room;  
Now I'm in trouble again: grace me! hear me!

You rabble—how long do I put up with your scorn?  
How long will you lust after lies?  
How long will you live crazed by illusion?

Look at this: look  
Who got picked by GOD!  
He listens the split second I call to him.

Complain if you must, but don't lash out.  
Keep your mouth shut, and let your heart do the  
talking.  
Build your case before God and wait for his verdict.

Why is everyone hungry for *more*? "More, more,"  
they say.  
"More, more."  
I have God's more-than-enough,  
More joy in one ordinary day

Than they get in all their shopping sprees.  
At day's end I'm ready for sound sleep,  
For you, GOD, have put my life back together.



A DAVID PSALM

Listen, GOD! Please, pay attention!  
Can you make sense of these ramblings,  
my groans and cries?  
King-God, I need your help.  
Every morning  
you'll hear me at it again.  
Every morning  
I lay out the pieces of my life

on your altar  
and watch for fire to descend.

You don't socialize with Wicked,  
or invite Evil over as your houseguest.  
Hot-Air-Boaster collapses in front of you;  
you shake your head over Mischief-Maker.  
GOD destroys Lie-Speaker;  
Blood-Thirsty and Truth-Bender disgust you.

And here I am, your invited guest—  
it's incredible!  
I enter your house; here I am,  
prostrate in your inner sanctum,  
Waiting for directions  
to get me safely through enemy lines.

Every word they speak is a land mine;  
their lungs breathe out poison gas.  
Their throats are gaping graves,  
their tongues slick as mudslides.  
Pile on the guilt, God!  
Let their so-called wisdom wreck them.  
Kick them out! They've had their chance.

But you'll welcome us with open arms  
when we run for cover to you.  
Let the party last all night!  
Stand guard over our celebration.  
You are famous, GOD, for welcoming God-seekers,  
for decking us out in delight.

# 6

A DAVID PSALM

Please, GOD, no more yelling,  
no more trips to the woodshed.  
Treat me nice for a change;  
I'm so starved for affection.

Can't you see I'm black and blue,  
beat up badly in bones and soul?  
GOD, how long will it take  
for you to let up?

Break in, GOD, and break up this fight;  
if you love me at all, get me out of here.  
I'm no good to you dead, am I?  
I can't sing in your choir if I'm buried in some  
tomb!

I'm tired of all this—so tired. My bed  
has been floating forty days and nights  
On the flood of my tears.  
My mattress is soaked, soggy with tears.  
The sockets of my eyes are black holes;  
nearly blind, I squint and grope.

Get out of here, you Devil's crew:  
at last GOD has heard my sobs.  
My requests have all been granted,  
my prayers are answered.

Cowards, my enemies disappear.  
Disgraced, they turn tail and run.

7

A DAVID PSALM

GOD! God! I am running to you for dear life;  
the chase is wild.

If they catch me, I'm finished:  
ripped to shreds by foes fierce as lions,  
dragged into the forest and left  
unlooked for, unremembered.

GOD, if I've done what they say—  
betrayed my friends,  
ripped off my enemies—  
If my hands are really that dirty,  
let them get me, walk all over me,  
leave me flat on my face in the dirt.

Stand up, GOD; pit your holy fury  
against my furious enemies.  
Wake up, God. My accusers have packed  
the courtroom; it's judgment time.  
Take your place on the bench, reach for your gavel,  
throw out the false charges against me.  
I'm ready, confident in your verdict:  
"Innocent."

Close the book on Evil, GOD,  
but publish your mandate for us.



You get us ready for life:  
    you probe for our soft spots,  
    you knock off our rough edges.  
And I'm feeling so fit, so safe:  
    made right, kept right.  
God in solemn honor does things right,  
    but his nerves are sandpapered raw.

Nobody gets by with anything.  
    God is already in action—  
Sword honed on his whetstone,  
    bow strung, arrow on the string,  
Lethal weapons in hand,  
    each arrow a flaming missile.

Look at that guy!  
    He had sex with sin,  
    he's pregnant with evil.  
Oh, look! He's having  
    the baby—a Lie-Baby!

See that man shoveling day after day,  
    digging, then concealing, his man-trap  
    down that lonely stretch of road?  
Go back and look again—you'll see him in it  
    headfirst,  
    legs waving in the breeze.  
That's what happens:  
    mischief backfires;  
    violence boomerangs.

I'm thanking God, who makes things right.  
I'm singing the fame of heaven-high GOD.

# 8

A DAVID PSALM

GOD, brilliant Lord,  
yours is a household name.

Nursing infants gurgle choruses about you;  
toddlers shout the songs  
That drown out enemy talk,  
and silence atheist babble.

I look up at your macro-skies, dark and enormous,  
your handmade sky-jewelry,  
Moon and stars mounted in their settings.  
Then I look at my micro-self and wonder,  
Why do you bother with us?  
Why take a second look our way?

Yet we've so narrowly missed being gods,  
bright with Eden's dawn light.  
You put us in charge of your handcrafted world,  
repeated to us your Genesis-charge,  
Made us lords of sheep and cattle,  
even animals out in the wild,  
Birds flying and fish swimming,  
whales singing in the ocean deeps.

GOD, brilliant Lord,  
your name echoes around the world.

# 9

A DAVID PSALM

I'm thanking you, GOD, from a full heart,  
I'm writing the book on your wonders.  
I'm whistling, laughing, and jumping for joy;  
I'm singing your song, High God.

The day my enemies turned tail and ran,  
they stumbled on you and fell on their faces.  
You took over and set everything right;  
when I needed you, you were there, taking charge.

You blow the whistle on godless nations;  
you throw dirty players out of the game,  
wipe their names right off the roster.  
Enemies disappear from the sidelines,  
their reputation trashed,  
their names erased from the halls of fame.

GOD holds the high center,  
he sees and sets the world's mess right.  
He decides what is right for us earthlings,  
gives people their just deserts.

GOD's a safe-house for the battered,  
a sanctuary during bad times.

The moment you arrive, you relax;  
you're never sorry you knocked.

Sing your songs to Zion-dwelling GOD,  
tell his stories to everyone you meet:  
How he tracks down killers  
yet keeps his eye on us,  
registers every whimper and moan.

Be kind to me, GOD;  
I've been kicked around long enough.  
Once you've pulled me back  
from the gates of death,  
I'll write the book on Hallelujahs;  
on the corner of Main and First  
I'll hold a street meeting;  
I'll be the song leader; we'll fill the air  
with salvation songs.

They're trapped, those godless countries,  
in the very snares they set,  
Their feet all tangled  
in the net they spread.  
They have no excuse;  
the way God works is well-known.  
The cunning machinery made by the wicked  
has maimed their own hands.

The wicked bought a one-way  
ticket to hell.

No longer will the poor be nameless—  
no more humiliation for the humble.  
Up, GOD! Aren't you fed up with their empty  
strutting?  
Expose these grand pretensions!  
Shake them up, GOD!  
Show them how silly they look.

## 10

GOD, are you avoiding me?  
Where are you when I need you?  
Full of hot air, the wicked  
are hot on the trail of the poor.  
Trip them up, tangle them up  
in their fine-tuned plots.

The wicked are windbags,  
the swindlers have foul breath.  
The wicked snub GOD,  
their noses stuck high in the air.  
Their graffiti are scrawled on the walls:  
“Catch us if you can!” “God is dead.”

They care nothing for what you think;  
if you get in their way, they blow you off.  
They live (they think) a charmed life:  
“We can't go wrong. This is our lucky year!”

They carry a mouthful of hexes,  
their tongues spit venom like adders.

They hide behind ordinary people,  
then pounce on their victims.

They mark the luckless,  
then wait like a hunter in a blind;  
When the poor wretch wanders too close,  
they stab him in the back.

The hapless fool is kicked to the ground,  
the unlucky victim is brutally axed.  
He thinks God has dumped him,  
he's sure that God is indifferent to his plight.

Time to get up, GOD—get moving.  
The luckless think they're Godforsaken.  
They wonder why the wicked scorn God  
and get away with it,  
Why the wicked are so cocksure  
they'll never come up for audit.

But you know all about it—  
the contempt, the abuse.  
I dare to believe that the luckless  
will get lucky someday in you.  
You won't let them down:  
orphans won't be orphans forever.

Break the wicked right arms,  
break all the evil left arms.  
Search and destroy  
every sign of crime.

GOD's grace and order wins;  
godlessness loses.

The victim's faint pulse picks up;  
the hearts of the hopeless pump red blood  
as you put your ear to their lips.

Orphans get parents,  
the homeless get homes.

The reign of terror is over,  
the rule of the gang lords is ended.

# 11

A DAVID PSALM

I've already run for dear life  
straight to the arms of GOD.  
So why would I run away now  
when you say,

“Run to the mountains; the evil  
bows are bent, the wicked arrows  
aimed to shoot under cover of darkness  
at every heart open to God.  
The bottom's dropped out of the country;  
good people don't have a chance”?

But GOD hasn't moved to the mountains;  
his holy address hasn't changed.  
He's in charge, as always, his eyes  
taking everything in, his eyelids

Unblinking, examining Adam's unruly brood  
inside and out, not missing a thing.  
He tests the good and the bad alike;  
if anyone cheats, God's outraged.  
Fail the test and you're out,  
out in a hail of firestones,  
Drinking from a canteen  
filled with hot desert wind.

GOD's business is putting things right;  
he loves getting the lines straight,  
Setting us straight. Once we're standing tall,  
we can look him straight in the eye.

# 12

A DAVID PSALM

Quick, GOD, I need your helping hand!  
The last decent person just went down,  
All the friends I depended on gone.  
Everyone talks in lie language;  
Lies slide off their oily lips.  
They doubletalk with forked tongues.

Slice their lips off their faces! Pull  
The braggart tongues from their mouths!  
I'm tired of hearing, "We can talk anyone into  
anything!"  
Our lips manage the world."



Into the hovels of the poor,  
Into the dark streets where the homeless groan,  
    God speaks:  
“I’ve had enough; I’m on my way  
To heal the ache in the heart of the wretched.”

God’s words are pure words,  
Pure silver words refined seven times  
In the fires of his word-kiln,  
Pure on earth as well as in heaven.  
GOD, keep us safe from their lies,  
From the wicked who stalk us with lies,  
From the wicked who collect honors  
For their wonderful lies.

# 13

A DAVID PSALM

Long enough, GOD—  
    you’ve ignored me long enough.  
I’ve looked at the back of your head  
    long enough. Long enough  
I’ve carried this ton of trouble,  
    lived with a stomach full of pain.  
Long enough my arrogant enemies  
    have looked down their noses at me.

Take a good look at me, GOD, my God;  
    I want to look life in the eye,

So no enemy can get the best of me  
or laugh when I fall on my face.

I've thrown myself headlong into your arms—  
I'm celebrating your rescue.  
I'm singing at the top of my lungs,  
I'm so full of answered prayers.

# 14

A DAVID PSALM

Bilious and bloated, they gas,  
“God is gone.”  
Their words are poison gas,  
fouling the air; they poison  
Rivers and skies;  
thistles are their cash crop.

GOD sticks his head out of heaven.  
He looks around.  
He's looking for someone not stupid—  
one man, even, God-expectant,  
just one God-ready woman.

He comes up empty. A string  
of zeros. Useless, unshepherded  
Sheep, taking turns pretending  
to be Shepherd.  
The ninety and nine  
follow their fellow.

Don't they know anything,  
all these impostors?  
Don't they know  
they can't get away with this—  
Treating people like a fast-food meal  
over which they're too busy to pray?

Night is coming for them, and nightmares,  
for God takes the side of victims.  
Do you think you can mess  
with the dreams of the poor?  
You can't, for God  
makes their dreams come true.

Is there anyone around to save Israel?  
Yes. God is around; GOD turns life around.  
Turned-around Jacob skips rope,  
turned-around Israel sings laughter.

# 15

A DAVID PSALM

GOD, who gets invited  
to dinner at your place?  
How do we get on your guest list?

“Walk straight,  
act right,  
tell the truth.

“Don’t hurt your friend,  
don’t blame your neighbor;  
despise the despicable.

“Keep your word even when it costs you,  
make an honest living,  
never take a bribe.

“You’ll never get  
blacklisted  
if you live like this.”

# 16

A DAVID SONG

Keep me safe, O God,  
I’ve run for dear life to you.  
I say to GOD, “Be my Lord!”  
Without you, nothing makes sense.

And these God-chosen lives all around—  
what splendid friends they make!

Don’t just go shopping for a god.  
Gods are not for sale.  
I swear I’ll never treat god-names  
like brand-names.

My choice is you, GOD, first and only.  
And now I find I’m *your* choice!

You set me up with a house and yard.  
And then you made me your heir!

The wise counsel GOD gives when I'm awake  
is confirmed by my sleeping heart.  
Day and night I'll stick with GOD;  
I've got a good thing going and I'm not letting go.

I'm happy from the inside out,  
and from the outside in, I'm firmly formed.  
You canceled my ticket to hell—  
that's not my destination!

Now you've got my feet on the life path,  
all radiant from the shining of your face.  
Ever since you took my hand,  
I'm on the right way.

# 17

A DAVID PRAYER

Listen while I build my case, GOD,  
the most honest prayer you'll ever hear.  
Show the world I'm innocent—  
in your heart you know I am.

Go ahead, examine me from inside out,  
surprise me in the middle of the night—  
You'll find I'm just what I say I am.  
My words don't run loose.

I'm not trying to get my way  
in the world's way.  
I'm trying to get *your* way,  
your Word's way.  
I'm staying on your trail;  
I'm putting one foot  
In front of the other.  
I'm not giving up.

I call to you, God, because I'm sure of an answer.  
So—answer! bend your ear! listen sharp!  
Paint grace-graffiti on the fences;  
take in your frightened children who  
Are running from the neighborhood bullies  
straight to you.

Keep your eye on me;  
hide me under your cool wing feathers  
From the wicked who are out to get me,  
from mortal enemies closing in.

Their hearts are hard as nails,  
their mouths blast hot air.  
They are after me, nipping my heels,  
determined to bring me down,  
Lions ready to rip me apart,  
young lions poised to pounce.  
Up, GOD: beard them! break them!  
By your sword, free me from their clutches;  
Barehanded, GOD, break these mortals,

these flat-earth people who can't think beyond  
today.

I'd like to see their bellies  
swollen with famine food,  
The weeds they've sown  
harvested and baked into famine bread,  
With second helpings for their children  
and crusts for their babies to chew on.

And me? I plan on looking  
you full in the face. When I get up,  
I'll see your full stature  
and live heaven on earth.

## 18

A DAVID SONG, WHICH HE SANG TO GOD AFTER BEING SAVED FROM ALL HIS  
ENEMIES AND FROM SAUL

I love you, GOD—  
you make me strong.  
GOD is bedrock under my feet,  
the castle in which I live,  
my rescuing knight.  
My God—the high crag  
where I run for dear life,  
hiding behind the boulders,  
safe in the granite hideout.

I sing to GOD, the Praise-Lofty,  
and find myself safe and saved.

The hangman's noose was tight at my throat;  
devil waters rushed over me.  
Hell's ropes cinched me tight;  
death traps barred every exit.

A hostile world! I call to GOD,  
I cry to God to help me.  
From his palace he hears my call;  
my cry brings me right into his presence—  
a private audience!

Earth wobbles and lurches;  
huge mountains shake like leaves,  
Quake like aspen leaves  
because of his rage.  
His nostrils flare, bellowing smoke;  
his mouth spits fire.  
Tongues of fire dart in and out;  
he lowers the sky.  
He steps down;  
under his feet an abyss opens up.  
He's riding a winged creature,  
swift on wind-wings.  
Now he's wrapped himself  
in a trenchcoat of black-cloud darkness.  
But his cloud-brightness bursts through,  
spraying hailstones and fireballs.



Then GOD thundered out of heaven;  
the High God gave a great shout,  
spraying hailstones and fireballs.  
God shoots his arrows—pandemonium!  
He hurls his lightnings—a rout!  
The secret sources of ocean are exposed,  
the hidden depths of earth lie uncovered  
The moment you roar in protest,  
let loose your hurricane anger.

But me he caught—reached all the way  
from sky to sea; he pulled me out  
Of that ocean of hate, that enemy chaos,  
the void in which I was drowning.  
They hit me when I was down,  
but GOD stuck by me.  
He stood me up on a wide-open field;  
I stood there saved—surprised to be loved!

GOD made my life complete  
when I placed all the pieces before him.  
When I got my act together,  
he gave me a fresh start.  
Now I'm alert to GOD's ways;  
I don't take God for granted.  
Every day I review the ways he works;  
I try not to miss a trick.  
I feel put back together,  
and I'm watching my step.

GOD rewrote the text of my life  
when I opened the book of my heart to his eyes.

The good people taste your goodness,  
The whole people taste your health,  
The true people taste your truth,  
The bad ones can't figure you out.  
You take the side of the down-and-out,  
But the stuck-up you take down a peg.

Suddenly, GOD, you floodlight my life;  
I'm blazing with glory, God's glory!  
I smash the bands of marauders,  
I vault the highest fences.

What a God! His road  
stretches straight and smooth.  
Every GOD-direction is road-tested.  
Everyone who runs toward him  
Makes it.

Is there any god like GOD?  
Are we not at bedrock?  
Is not this the God who armed me,  
then aimed me in the right direction?  
Now I run like a deer;  
I'm king of the mountain.  
He shows me how to fight;  
I can bend a bronze bow!  
You protect me with salvation-armor;  
you hold me up with a firm hand,

caress me with your gentle ways.  
You cleared the ground under me  
so my footing was firm.  
When I chased my enemies I caught them;  
I didn't let go till they were dead men.  
I nailed them; they were down for good;  
then I walked all over them.  
You armed me well for this fight,  
you smashed the upstarts.  
You made my enemies turn tail,  
and I wiped out the haters.  
They cried "uncle"  
but Uncle didn't come;  
They yelled for GOD  
and got no for an answer.  
I ground them to dust; they gusted in the wind.  
I threw them out, like garbage in the gutter.

You rescued me from a squabbling people;  
you made me a leader of nations.  
People I'd never heard of served me;  
the moment they got wind of me they listened.  
The foreign devils gave up; they came  
on their bellies, crawling from their hideouts.

Live, GOD! Blessings from my Rock,  
my free and freeing God, towering!  
This God set things right for me  
and shut up the people who talked back.

He rescued me from enemy anger,  
he pulled me from the grip of upstarts,  
He saved me from the bullies.

That's why I'm thanking you, GOD,  
all over the world.  
That's why I'm singing songs  
that rhyme your name.  
God's king takes the trophy;  
God's chosen is beloved.  
I mean David and all his children—  
always.

# 19

A DAVID PSALM

God's glory is on tour in the skies,  
God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.  
Madame Day holds classes every morning,  
Professor Night lectures each evening.

Their words aren't heard,  
their voices aren't recorded,  
But their silence fills the earth:  
unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.

God makes a huge dome  
for the sun—a superdome!  
The morning sun's a new husband  
leaping from his honeymoon bed,

The daybreaking sun an athlete  
racing to the tape.

That's how God's Word vaults across the skies  
from sunrise to sunset,  
Melting ice, scorching deserts,  
warming hearts to faith.

The revelation of GOD is whole  
and pulls our lives together.  
The signposts of GOD are clear  
and point out the right road.  
The life-maps of GOD are right,  
showing the way to joy.  
The directions of GOD are plain  
and easy on the eyes.  
GOD's reputation is twenty-four carat gold,  
with a lifetime guarantee.  
The decisions of GOD are accurate  
down to the nth degree.

God's Word is better than a diamond,  
better than a diamond set between emeralds.  
You'll like it better than strawberries in spring,  
better than red, ripe strawberries.

There's more: God's Word warns us of danger  
and directs us to hidden treasure.  
Otherwise how will we find our way?  
Or know when we play the fool?

Clean the slate, God, so we can start the day fresh!  
Keep me from stupid sins,  
from thinking I can take over your work;  
Then I can start this day sun-washed,  
scrubbed clean of the grime of sin.  
These are the words in my mouth;  
these are what I chew on and pray.  
Accept them when I place them  
on the morning altar,  
O God, my Altar-Rock,  
God, Priest-of-My-Altar.

## 20

A DAVID PSALM

GOD answer you on the day you crash,  
The name God-of-Jacob put you out of harm's reach,  
Send reinforcements from Holy Hill,  
Dispatch from Zion fresh supplies,  
Exclaim over your offerings,  
Celebrate your sacrifices,  
Give you what your heart desires,  
Accomplish your plans.

When you win, we plan to raise the roof  
and lead the parade with our banners.  
May all your wishes come true!

That clinches it—help's coming,  
an answer's on the way,  
everything's going to work out.

See those people polishing their chariots,  
and those others grooming their horses?  
But we're making garlands for GOD our God.  
The chariots will rust,  
those horses pull up lame—  
and we'll be on our feet, standing tall.

Make the king a winner, GOD;  
the day we call, give us your answer.

## 21

A DAVID PSALM

Your strength, GOD, is the king's strength.  
Helped, he's hollering Hosannas.  
You gave him exactly what he wanted;  
you didn't hold back.  
You filled his arms with gifts;  
you gave him a right royal welcome.  
He wanted a good life; you gave it to him,  
and then made it a *long* life as a bonus.  
You lifted him high and bright as a cumulus cloud,  
then dressed him in rainbow colors.  
You pile blessings on him;  
you make him glad when you smile.

Is it any wonder the king loves GOD?  
that he's sticking with the Best?

With a fistful of enemies in one hand  
and a fistful of haters in the other,  
You radiate with such brilliance  
that they cringe as before a furnace.  
Now the furnace swallows them whole,  
the fire eats them alive!  
You purge the earth of their progeny,  
you wipe the slate clean.  
All their evil schemes, the plots they cook up,  
have fizzled—every one.  
You sent them packing;  
they couldn't face you.

Show your strength, GOD, so no one can miss it.  
We are out singing the good news!

## 22

A DAVID PSALM

God, God . . . my God!  
Why did you dump me  
miles from nowhere?  
Doubled up with pain, I call to God  
all the day long. No answer. Nothing.  
I keep at it all night, tossing and turning.



And you! Are you indifferent, above it all,  
    leaning back on the cushions of Israel's praise?  
We know you were there for our parents:  
    they cried for your help and you gave it;  
    they trusted and lived a good life.

And here I am, a nothing—an earthworm,  
    something to step on, to squash.  
Everyone pokes fun at me;  
    they make faces at me, they shake their heads:  
“Let's see how GOD handles this one;  
    since God likes him so much, let *him* help him!”

And to think you were midwife at my birth,  
    setting me at my mother's breasts!  
When I left the womb you cradled me;  
    since the moment of birth you've been my God.  
Then you moved far away  
    and trouble moved in next door.  
I need a neighbor.

Herds of bulls come at me,  
    the raging bulls stampede,  
Horns lowered, nostrils flaring,  
    like a herd of buffalo on the move.

I'm a bucket kicked over and spilled,  
    every joint in my body has been pulled apart.  
My heart is a blob  
    of melted wax in my gut.

I'm dry as a bone,  
my tongue black and swollen.  
They have laid me out for burial  
in the dirt.

Now packs of wild dogs come at me;  
thugs gang up on me.  
They pin me down hand and foot,  
and lock me in a cage—a bag  
Of bones in a cage, stared at  
by every passerby.  
They take my wallet and the shirt off my back,  
and then throw dice for my clothes.

You, GOD—don't put off my rescue!  
Hurry and help me!  
Don't let them cut my throat;  
don't let those mongrels devour me.  
If you don't show up soon,  
I'm done for—gored by the bulls,  
meat for the lions.

Here's the story I'll tell my friends when they come  
to worship,  
and punctuate it with Hallelujahs:  
Shout Hallelujah, you God-worshippers;  
give glory, you sons of Jacob;  
adore him, you daughters of Israel.  
He has never let you down,  
never looked the other way

when you were being kicked around.  
He has never wandered off to do his own thing;  
he has been right there, listening.

Here in this great gathering for worship  
I have discovered this praise-life.  
And I'll do what I promised right here  
in front of the God-worshippers.  
Down-and-outers sit at GOD's table  
and eat their fill.  
Everyone on the hunt for God  
is here, praising him.  
“Live it up, from head to toe.  
Don't ever quit!”

From the four corners of the earth  
people are coming to their senses,  
are running back to GOD.  
Long-lost families  
are falling on their faces before him.  
GOD has taken charge;  
from now on he has the last word.

All the power-mongers are before him  
—worshiping!  
All the poor and powerless, too  
—worshiping!  
Along with those who never got it together  
—worshiping!

Our children and their children  
will get in on this  
As the word is passed along  
from parent to child.  
Babies not yet conceived  
will hear the good news—  
that God does what he says.

## 23

A DAVID PSALM

GOD, my shepherd!  
I don't need a thing.  
You have bedded me down in lush meadows,  
you find me quiet pools to drink from.  
True to your word,  
you let me catch my breath  
and send me in the right direction.

Even when the way goes through  
Death Valley,  
I'm not afraid  
when you walk at my side.  
Your trusty shepherd's crook  
makes me feel secure.

You serve me a six-course dinner  
right in front of my enemies.  
You revive my drooping head;  
my cup brims with blessing.

Your beauty and love chase after me  
every day of my life.  
I'm back home in the house of GOD  
for the rest of my life.

## 24

A DAVID PSALM

GOD claims Earth and everything in it,  
GOD claims World and all who live on it.  
He built it on Ocean foundations,  
laid it out on River girders.

Who can climb Mount GOD?  
Who can scale the holy north-face?  
Only the clean-handed,  
only the pure-hearted;  
Men who won't cheat,  
women who won't seduce.

GOD is at their side;  
with GOD's help they make it.  
This, Jacob, is what happens  
to God-seekers, God-questers.

Wake up, you sleepyhead city!  
Wake up, you sleepyhead people!  
King-Glory is ready to enter.

Who is this King-Glory?  
GOD, armed  
and battle-ready.

Wake up, you sleepyhead city!  
Wake up, you sleepyhead people!  
King-Glory is ready to enter.

Who is this King-Glory?  
GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies:  
he is King-Glory.

## 25

A DAVID PSALM

My head is high, GOD, held high;  
I'm looking to you, GOD;  
No hangdog skulking for me.

I've thrown in my lot with you;  
You won't embarrass me, will you?  
Or let my enemies get the best of me?

Don't embarrass any of us  
Who went out on a limb for you.  
It's the traitors who should be humiliated.

Show me how you work, GOD;  
School me in your ways.

Take me by the hand;  
Lead me down the path of truth.  
You are my Savior, aren't you?

Mark the milestones of your mercy and love, GOD;  
Rebuild the ancient landmarks!

Forget that I sowed wild oats;  
Mark me with your sign of love.  
Plan only the best for me, GOD!

GOD is fair and just;  
He corrects the misdirected,  
Sends them in the right direction.

He gives the rejects his hand,  
And leads them step by step.

From now on every road you travel  
Will take you to GOD.  
Follow the Covenant signs;  
Read the charted directions.

Keep up your reputation, GOD;  
Forgive my bad life;  
It's been a very bad life.

My question: What are God-worshippers like?  
Your answer: Arrows aimed at God's bull's-eye.

They settle down in a promising place;  
Their kids inherit a prosperous farm.

God-friendship is for God-worshippers;  
They are the ones he confides in.

If I keep my eyes on GOD,  
I won't trip over my own feet.

Look at me and help me!  
I'm all alone and in big trouble.

My heart and kidneys are fighting each other;  
Call a truce to this civil war.

Take a hard look at my life of hard labor,  
Then lift this ton of sin.

Do you see how many people  
Have it in for me?  
How viciously they hate me?

Keep watch over me and keep me out of trouble;  
Don't let me down when I run to you.

Use all your skill to put me together;  
I wait to see your finished product.

GOD, give your people a break  
From this run of bad luck.

## 26

A DAVID PSALM

Clear my name, GOD;  
I've kept an honest shop.  
I've thrown in my lot with you, GOD, and  
I'm not budging.



Examine me, GOD, from head to foot,  
order your battery of tests.

Make sure I'm fit  
inside and out

So I never lose  
sight of your love,  
But keep in step with you,  
never missing a beat.

I don't hang out with tricksters,  
I don't pal around with thugs;  
I hate that pack of gangsters,  
I don't deal with double-dealers.

I scrub my hands with purest soap,  
then join hands with the others in the great  
circle,  
dancing around your altar, GOD,  
Singing God-songs at the top of my lungs,  
telling God-stories.

GOD, I love living with you;  
your house glows with your glory.  
When it's time for spring cleaning,  
don't sweep me out with the quacks and crooks,  
Men with bags of dirty tricks,  
women with purses stuffed with bribe-money.

You know I've been aboveboard with you;  
now be aboveboard with me.

I'm on the level with you, GOD;  
I bless you every chance I get.

# 27

A DAVID PSALM

Light, space, zest—  
that's GOD!  
So, with him on my side I'm fearless,  
afraid of no one and nothing.

When vandal hordes ride down  
ready to eat me alive,  
Those bullies and toughs  
fall flat on their faces.

When besieged,  
I'm calm as a baby.  
When all hell breaks loose,  
I'm collected and cool.

I'm asking GOD for one thing,  
only one thing:  
To live with him in his house  
my whole life long.  
I'll contemplate his beauty;  
I'll study at his feet.

That's the only quiet, secure place  
in a noisy world,

The perfect getaway,  
far from the buzz of traffic.

God holds me head and shoulders  
above all who try to pull me down.  
I'm headed for his place to offer anthems  
that will raise the roof!  
Already I'm singing God-songs;  
I'm making music to GOD.

Listen, GOD, I'm calling at the top of my lungs:  
"Be good to me! Answer me!"  
When my heart whispered, "Seek God,"  
my whole being replied,  
"I'm seeking him!"  
Don't hide from me now!

You've always been right there for me;  
don't turn your back on me now.  
Don't throw me out, don't abandon me;  
you've always kept the door open.  
My father and mother walked out and left me,  
but GOD took me in.

Point me down your highway, GOD;  
direct me along a well-lighted street;  
show my enemies whose side you're on.  
Don't throw me to the dogs,  
those liars who are out to get me,  
filling the air with their threats.

I'm sure now I'll see God's goodness  
in the exuberant earth.

Stay with GOD!

Take heart. Don't quit.

I'll say it again:

Stay with GOD.

## 28

A DAVID PSALM

Don't turn a deaf ear  
when I call you, GOD.

If all I get from you is  
deafening silence,

I'd be better off  
in the Black Hole.

I'm letting you know what I need,  
calling out for help

And lifting my arms  
toward your inner sanctum.

Don't shove me into  
the same jail cell with those crooks,  
With those who are  
full-time employees of evil.

They talk a good line of "peace,"  
then moonlight for the Devil.

Pay them back for what they've done,  
for how bad they've been.

Pay them back for their long hours  
in the Devil's workshop;  
Then cap it with a huge bonus.

Because they have no idea how God works  
or what he is up to,  
God will smash them to smithereens  
and walk away from the ruins.

Blessed be GOD—  
he heard me praying.  
He proved he's on my side;  
I've thrown my lot in with him.

Now I'm jumping for joy,  
and shouting and singing my thanks to him.

GOD is all strength for his people,  
ample refuge for his chosen leader;  
Save your people  
and bless your heritage.  
Care for them;  
carry them like a good shepherd.

## 29

A DAVID PSALM

Bravo, GOD, bravo!  
Gods and all angels shout, "Encore!"

In awe before the glory,  
in awe before God's visible power.  
Stand at attention!  
Dress your best to honor him!

GOD thunders across the waters,  
Brilliant, his voice and his face, streaming brightness—  
GOD, across the flood waters.

GOD's thunder tympanic,  
GOD's thunder symphonic.

GOD's thunder smashes cedars,  
GOD topples the northern cedars.

The mountain ranges skip like spring colts,  
The high ridges jump like wild kid goats.

GOD's thunder spits fire.  
GOD thunders, the wilderness quakes;  
He makes the desert of Kadesh shake.

GOD's thunder sets the oak trees dancing  
A wild dance, whirling; the pelting rain strips their  
branches.  
We fall to our knees—we call out, "Glory!"

Above the floodwaters is GOD's throne  
from which his power flows,  
from which he rules the world.

GOD makes his people strong.  
GOD gives his people peace.

# 30

A DAVID PSALM

I give you all the credit, GOD—  
you got me out of that mess,  
you didn't let my foes gloat.

GOD, my God, I yelled for help  
and you put me together.  
GOD, you pulled me out of the grave,  
gave me another chance at life  
when I was down and out.

All you saints! Sing your hearts out to GOD!  
Thank him to his face!  
He gets angry once in a while, but across  
a lifetime there is only love.  
The nights of crying your eyes out  
give way to days of laughter.

When things were going great  
I crowed, "I've got it made.  
I'm GOD's favorite.  
He made me king of the mountain."  
Then you looked the other way  
and I fell to pieces.

I called out to you, GOD;  
I laid my case before you:  
“Can you sell me for a profit when I’m dead?  
auction me off at a cemetery yard sale?  
When I’m ‘dust to dust’ my songs  
and stories of you won’t sell.  
So listen! and be kind!  
Help me out of this!”

You did it: you changed wild lament  
into whirling dance;  
You ripped off my black mourning band  
and decked me with wildflowers.  
I’m about to burst with song;  
I can’t keep quiet about you.  
GOD, my God,  
I can’t thank you enough.

# 31

A DAVID PSALM

I run to you, GOD; I run for dear life.  
Don’t let me down!  
Take me seriously this time!  
Get down on my level and listen,  
and please—no procrastination!  
Your granite cave a hiding place,  
your high cliff aerie a place of safety.

You’re my cave to hide in,  
my cliff to climb.



Be my safe leader,  
    be my true mountain guide.  
Free me from hidden traps;  
    I want to hide in you.  
I've put my life in your hands.  
    You won't drop me,  
    you'll never let me down.

I hate all this silly religion,  
    but you, GOD, I trust.  
I'm leaping and singing in the circle of your love;  
    you saw my pain,  
    you disarmed my tormentors,  
You didn't leave me in their clutches  
    but gave me room to breathe.  
Be kind to me, GOD—  
    I'm in deep, deep trouble again.  
I've cried my eyes out;  
    I feel hollow inside.  
My life leaks away, groan by groan;  
    my years fade out in sighs.  
My troubles have worn me out,  
    turned my bones to powder.  
To my enemies I'm a monster;  
    I'm ridiculed by the neighbors.  
My friends are horrified;  
    they cross the street to avoid me.  
They want to blot me from memory,  
    forget me like a corpse in a grave,  
    discard me like a broken dish in the trash.

The street-talk gossip has me  
“criminally insane”!  
Behind locked doors they plot  
how to ruin me for good.

Desperate, I throw myself on you:  
you are my God!  
Hour by hour I place my days in your hand,  
safe from the hands out to get me.  
Warm me, your servant, with a smile;  
save me because you love me.  
Don't embarrass me by not showing up;  
I've given you plenty of notice.  
Embarrass the wicked, stand them up,  
leave them stupidly shaking their heads  
as they drift down to hell.  
Gag those loudmouthed liars  
who heckle me, your follower,  
with jeers and catcalls.

What a stack of blessing you have piled up  
for those who worship you,  
Ready and waiting for all who run to you  
to escape an unkind world.  
You hide them safely away  
from the opposition.  
As you slam the door on those oily, mocking faces,  
you silence the poisonous gossip.  
Blessed GOD!  
His love is the wonder of the world.

Trapped by a siege, I panicked.  
“Out of sight, out of mind,” I said.  
But you heard me say it,  
you heard and listened.

Love GOD, all you saints;  
GOD takes care of all who stay close to him,  
But he pays back in full  
those arrogant enough to go it alone.

Be brave. Be strong. Don't give up.  
Expect GOD to get here soon.

## 32

A DAVID PSALM

Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be—  
you get a fresh start,  
your slate's wiped clean.

Count yourself lucky—  
GOD holds nothing against you  
and you're holding nothing back from him.

When I kept it all inside,  
my bones turned to powder,  
my words became daylong groans.

The pressure never let up;  
all the juices of my life dried up.

Then I let it all out;  
I said, "I'll make a clean breast of my failures to  
GOD."

Suddenly the pressure was gone—  
my guilt dissolved,  
my sin disappeared.

These things add up. Every one of us needs to pray;  
when all hell breaks loose and the dam bursts  
we'll be on high ground, untouched.

GOD's my island hideaway,  
keeps danger far from the shore,  
throws garlands of hosannas around my neck.

Let me give you some good advice;  
I'm looking you in the eye  
and giving it to you straight:

"Don't be ornery like a horse or mule  
that needs bit and bridle  
to stay on track."

God-defiers are always in trouble;  
GOD-affirmers find themselves loved  
every time they turn around.

Celebrate GOD.  
Sing together—everyone!  
All you honest hearts, raise the roof!

# 33

Good people, cheer GOD!

Right-living people sound best when praising.

Use guitars to reinforce your Hallelujahs!

Play his praise on a grand piano!

Invent your own new song to him;

give him a trumpet fanfare.

For GOD's Word is solid to the core;

everything he makes is sound inside and out.

He loves it when everything fits,

when his world is in plumb-line true.

Earth is drenched

in GOD's affectionate satisfaction.

The skies were made by GOD's command;

he breathed the word and the stars popped out.

He scooped Sea into his jug,

put Ocean in his keg.

Earth-creatures, bow before GOD;

world-dwellers—down on your knees!

Here's why: he spoke and there it was,

in place the moment he said so.

GOD takes the wind out of Babel pretense,

he shoots down the world's power-schemes.

GOD's plan for the world stands up,

all his designs are made to last.

Blessed is the country with GOD for God;  
blessed are the people he's put in his will.

From high in the skies GOD looks around,  
he sees all Adam's brood.

From where he sits  
he overlooks all us earth-dwellers.

He has shaped each person in turn;  
now he watches everything we do.

No king succeeds with a big army alone,  
no warrior wins by brute strength.

Horsepower is not the answer;  
no one gets by on muscle alone.

Watch this: God's eye is on those who respect him,  
the ones who are looking for his love.

He's ready to come to their rescue in bad times;  
in lean times he keeps body and soul together.

We're depending on GOD;  
he's everything we need.

What's more, our hearts brim with joy  
since we've taken for our own his holy name.

Love us, GOD, with all you've got—  
that's what we're depending on.

## 34

A DAVID PSALM, WHEN HE OUTWITTED ABIMELECH AND GOT AWAY

I bless GOD every chance I get;  
my lungs expand with his praise.

I live and breathe GOD;  
if things aren't going well, hear this and be happy:

Join me in spreading the news;  
together let's get the word out.

GOD met me more than halfway,  
he freed me from my anxious fears.

Look at him; give him your warmest smile.  
Never hide your feelings from him.

When I was desperate, I called out,  
and GOD got me out of a tight spot.

GOD's angel sets up a circle  
of protection around us while we pray.

Open your mouth and taste, open your eyes and see—  
how good GOD is.  
Blessed are you who run to him.

Worship GOD if you want the best;  
worship opens doors to all his goodness.

Young lions on the prowl get hungry,  
but GOD-seekers are full of God.

Come, children, listen closely;  
I'll give you a lesson in GOD worship.

Who out there has a lust for life?  
Can't wait each day to come upon beauty?

Guard your tongue from profanity,  
and no more lying through your teeth.

Turn your back on sin; do something good.  
Embrace peace—don't let it get away!

GOD keeps an eye on his friends,  
his ears pick up every moan and groan.

GOD won't put up with rebels;  
he'll cull them from the pack.

Is anyone crying for help? GOD is listening,  
ready to rescue you.

If your heart is broken, you'll find GOD right  
there;  
if you're kicked in the gut, he'll help you catch  
your breath.

Disciples so often get into trouble;  
still, GOD is there every time.

He's your bodyguard, shielding every bone;  
not even a finger gets broken.

The wicked commit slow suicide;  
they waste their lives hating the good.

GOD pays for each slave's freedom;  
no one who runs to him loses out.



# 35

A DAVID PSALM

Harass these hecklers, GOD,  
punch these bullies in the nose.  
Grab a weapon, anything at hand;  
stand up for me!  
Get ready to throw the spear, aim the javelin,  
at the people who are out to get me.  
Reassure me; let me hear you say,  
“I’ll save you.”

When those thugs try to knife me in the back,  
make them look foolish.  
Frustrate all those  
who are plotting my downfall.  
Make them like cinders in a high wind,  
with GOD’s angel working the bellows.  
Make their road lightless and mud-slick,  
with GOD’s angel on their tails.  
Out of sheer cussedness they set a trap to catch me;  
for no good reason they dug a ditch to stop me.  
Surprise them with your ambush—  
catch them in the very trap they set,  
the disaster they planned for me.

But let me run loose and free,  
celebrating GOD’s great work,  
Every bone in my body laughing, singing, “GOD,  
there’s no one like you.

You put the down-and-out on their feet  
and protect the unprotected from bullies!”

Hostile accusers appear out of nowhere,  
they stand up and badger me.  
They pay me back misery for mercy,  
leaving my soul empty.

When they were sick, I dressed in black;  
instead of eating, I prayed.  
My prayers were like lead in my gut,  
like I'd lost my best friend, my brother.  
I paced, distraught as a motherless child,  
hunched and heavyhearted.

But when I was down  
they threw a party!  
All the nameless riffraff of the town came  
chanting insults about me.  
Like barbarians desecrating a shrine,  
they destroyed my reputation.

GOD, how long are you going  
to stand there doing nothing?  
Save me from their brutalities;  
everything I've got is being thrown to the lions.  
I will give you full credit  
when everyone gathers for worship;  
When the people turn out in force  
I will say my Hallelujahs.

Don't let these liars, my enemies,  
    have a party at my expense,  
Those who hate me for no reason,  
    winking and rolling their eyes.  
No good is going to come  
    from that crowd;  
They spend all their time cooking up gossip  
    against those who mind their own business.  
They open their mouths  
    in ugly grins,  
Mocking, "Ha-ha, ha-ha, thought you'd get away  
    with it?  
    We've caught you hands down!"

Don't you see what they're doing, GOD?  
    You're not going to let them  
Get by with it, are you? Not going to walk off  
    without *doing* something, are you?

Please get up—wake up! Tend to my case.  
    My God, my Lord—my life is on the line.  
Do what you think is right, GOD, my God,  
    but don't make me pay for their good time.  
Don't let them say to themselves,  
    "Ha-ha, we got what we wanted."  
Don't let them say,  
    "We've chewed him up and spit him out."  
Let those who are being hilarious  
    at my expense  
Be made to look ridiculous.

Make them wear donkey's ears;  
Pin them with the donkey's tail,  
who made themselves so high and mighty!

But those who want  
the best for me,  
Let them have the last word—a glad shout!—  
and say, over and over and over,  
“GOD is great—everything works  
together for good for his servant.”  
I'll tell the world how great and good you are,  
I'll shout Hallelujah all day, every day.

## 36

A DAVID PSALM

The God-rebel tunes in to sedition—  
all ears, eager to sin.  
He has no regard for God,  
he stands insolent before him.  
He has smooth-talked himself  
into believing  
That his evil  
will never be noticed.  
Words gutter from his mouth,  
dishwater dirty.  
Can't remember when he  
did anything decent.  
Every time he goes to bed,  
he fathers another evil plot.

When he's loose on the streets,  
nobody's safe.  
He plays with fire  
and doesn't care who gets burned.

God's love is meteoric,  
his loyalty astronomic,  
His purpose titanic,  
his verdicts oceanic.  
Yet in his largeness  
nothing gets lost;  
Not a man, not a mouse,  
slips through the cracks.

How exquisite your love, O God!  
How eager we are to run under your wings,  
To eat our fill at the banquet you spread  
as you fill our tankards with Eden spring  
water.  
You're a fountain of cascading light,  
and you open our eyes to light.

Keep on loving your friends;  
do your work in welcoming hearts.  
Don't let the bullies kick me around,  
the moral midgets slap me down.  
Send the upstarts sprawling  
flat on their faces in the mud.

# 37

A DAVID PSALM

Don't bother your head with braggarts  
or wish you could succeed like the wicked.  
In no time they'll shrivel like grass clippings  
and wilt like cut flowers in the sun.

Get insurance with GOD and do a good deed,  
settle down and stick to your last.  
Keep company with GOD,  
get in on the best.

Open up before GOD, keep nothing back;  
he'll do whatever needs to be done:  
He'll validate your life in the clear light of day  
and stamp you with approval at high noon.

Quiet down before GOD,  
be prayerful before him.  
Don't bother with those who climb the ladder,  
who elbow their way to the top.

Bridle your anger, trash your wrath,  
cool your pipes—it only makes things worse.  
Before long the crooks will be bankrupt;  
GOD-investors will soon own the store.

Before you know it, the wicked will have had it;  
you'll stare at his once famous place and—  
nothing!

Down-to-earth people will move in and take over,  
relishing a huge bonanza.

Bad guys have it in for the good guys,  
obsessed with doing them in.  
But GOD isn't losing any sleep; to him  
they're a joke with no punch line.

Bullies brandish their swords,  
pull back on their bows with a flourish.  
They're out to beat up on the harmless,  
or mug that nice man out walking his dog.  
A banana peel lands them flat on their faces—  
slapstick figures in a moral circus.

Less is more and more is less.  
One righteous will outclass fifty wicked,  
For the wicked are moral weaklings  
but the righteous are GOD-strong.

GOD keeps track of the decent folk;  
what they do won't soon be forgotten.  
In hard times, they'll hold their heads high;  
when the shelves are bare, they'll be full.

God-despisers have had it;  
GOD's enemies are finished—  
Stripped bare like vineyards at harvesttime,  
vanished like smoke in thin air.

Wicked borrows and never returns;  
Righteous gives and gives.  
Generous gets it all in the end;  
Stingy is cut off at the pass.

Stalwart walks in step with GOD;  
his path blazed by GOD, he's happy.  
If he stumbles, he's not down for long;  
GOD has a grip on his hand.

I once was young, now I'm a graybeard—  
not once have I seen an abandoned believer,  
or his kids out roaming the streets.  
Every day he's out giving and lending,  
his children making him proud.

Turn your back on evil,  
work for the good and don't quit.  
GOD loves this kind of thing,  
never turns away from his friends.

Live this way and you've got it made,  
but bad eggs will be tossed out.  
The good get planted on good land  
and put down healthy roots.

Righteous chews on wisdom like a dog on a bone,  
rolls virtue around on his tongue.



His heart pumps God's Word like blood through  
his veins;  
his feet are as sure as a cat's.

Wicked sets a watch for Righteous,  
he's out for the kill.  
GOD, alert, is also on watch—  
Wicked won't hurt a hair of his head.

Wait passionately for GOD,  
don't leave the path.  
He'll give you your place in the sun  
while you watch the wicked lose it.

I saw Wicked bloated like a toad,  
croaking pretentious nonsense.  
The next time I looked there was nothing—  
a punctured bladder, vapid and limp.

Keep your eye on the healthy soul,  
scrutinize the straight life;  
There's a future  
in strenuous wholeness.  
But the willful will soon be discarded;  
insolent souls are on a dead-end street.

The spacious, free life is from GOD,  
it's also protected and safe.  
GOD-strengthened, we're delivered from evil—  
when we run to him, he saves us.

# 38

A DAVID PSALM

Take a deep breath, GOD; calm down—  
don't be so hasty with your punishing rod.  
Your sharp-pointed arrows of rebuke draw blood;  
my backside smarts from your caning.

I've lost twenty pounds in two months  
because of your accusation.  
My bones are brittle as dry sticks  
because of my sin.  
I'm swamped by my bad behavior,  
collapsed under gunnysacks of guilt.

The cuts in my flesh stink and grow maggots  
because I've lived so badly.  
And now I'm flat on my face  
feeling sorry for myself morning to night.  
All my insides are on fire,  
my body is a wreck.  
I'm on my last legs; I've had it—  
my life is a vomit of groans.

Lord, my longings are sitting in plain sight,  
my groans an old story to you.  
My heart's about to break;  
I'm a burned-out case.

Cataracts blind me to God and good;  
old friends avoid me like the plague.  
My cousins never visit,  
my neighbors stab me in the back.  
My competitors blacken my name,  
devoutly they pray for my ruin.  
But I'm deaf and mute to it all,  
ears shut, mouth shut.  
I don't hear a word they say,  
don't speak a word in response.  
What I do, GOD, is wait for you,  
wait for my Lord, my God—you *will* answer!  
I wait and pray so they won't laugh me off,  
won't smugly strut off when I stumble.

I'm on the edge of losing it—  
the pain in my gut keeps burning.  
I'm ready to tell my story of failure,  
I'm no longer smug in my sin.  
My enemies are alive and in action,  
a lynch mob after my neck.  
I give out good and get back evil  
from God-haters who can't stand a God-lover.

Don't dump me, GOD;  
my God, don't stand me up.  
Hurry and help me;  
I want some wide-open space in my life!

# 39

A DAVID PSALM

I'm determined to watch steps and tongue  
so they won't land me in trouble.

I decided to hold my tongue  
as long as Wicked is in the room.

"Mum's the word," I said, and kept quiet.

But the longer I kept silence

The worse it got—

my insides got hotter and hotter.

My thoughts boiled over;

I spilled my guts.

"Tell me, what's going on, GOD?

How long do I have to live?

Give me the bad news!

You've kept me on pretty short rations;

my life is string too short to be saved.

Oh! we're all puffs of air.

Oh! we're all shadows in a campfire.

Oh! we're just spit in the wind.

We make our pile, and then we leave it.

"What am I doing in the meantime, Lord?

*Hoping*, that's what I'm doing—hoping

You'll save me from a rebel life,

save me from the contempt of dunces.

I'll say no more, I'll shut my mouth,  
since you, Lord, are behind all this.  
But I can't take it much longer.  
When you put us through the fire  
to purge us from our sin,  
our dearest idols go up in smoke.  
Are we also nothing but smoke?

“Ah, GOD, listen to my prayer, my  
cry—open your ears.  
Don't be callous;  
just look at these tears of mine.  
I'm a stranger here. I don't know my way—  
a migrant like my whole family.  
Give me a break, cut me some slack  
before it's too late and I'm out of here.”

## 40

A DAVID PSALM

I waited and waited and waited for GOD.  
At last he looked; finally he listened.  
He lifted me out of the ditch,  
pulled me from deep mud.  
He stood me up on a solid rock  
to make sure I wouldn't slip.  
He taught me how to sing the latest God-song,  
a praise-song to our God.  
More and more people are seeing this:

they enter the mystery,  
abandoning themselves to GOD.

Blessed are you who give yourselves over to GOD,  
turn your backs on the world's "sure thing,"  
ignore what the world worships;  
The world's a huge stockpile  
of GOD-wonders and God-thoughts.  
Nothing and no one  
comes close to you!  
I start talking about you, telling what I know,  
and quickly run out of words.  
Neither numbers nor words  
account for you.

Doing something for you, bringing something to  
you—  
that's not what you're after.  
Being religious, acting pious—  
that's not what you're asking for.  
You've opened my ears  
so I can listen.

So I answered, "I'm coming.  
I read in your letter what you wrote about me,  
And I'm coming to the party  
you're throwing for me."  
That's when God's Word entered my life,  
became part of my very being.

I've preached you to the whole congregation,  
I've kept back nothing, GOD—you know that.  
I didn't keep the news of your ways  
a secret, didn't keep it to myself.  
I told it all, how dependable you are, how  
thorough.  
I didn't hold back pieces of love and truth  
For myself alone. I told it all,  
let the congregation know the whole story.

Now GOD, don't hold out on me,  
don't hold back your passion.  
Your love and truth  
are all that keeps me together.  
When troubles ganged up on me,  
a mob of sins past counting,  
I was so swamped by guilt  
I couldn't see my way clear.  
More guilt in my heart than hair on my head,  
so heavy the guilt that my heart gave out.

Soften up, GOD, and intervene;  
hurry and get me some help,  
So those who are trying to kidnap my soul  
will be embarrassed and lose face,  
So anyone who gets a kick out of making me  
miserable  
will be heckled and disgraced,  
So those who pray for my ruin  
will be booed and jeered without mercy.

But all who are hunting for you—  
oh, let them sing and be happy.  
Let those who know what you're all about  
tell the world you're great and not quitting.  
And me? I'm a mess. I'm nothing and have nothing:  
make something of me.  
You can do it; you've got what it takes—  
but God, don't put it off.