

Lectionary Psalms

A Worship Music Planner's Guide

Why sing the lectionary Psalm?

- The Christian Church has always placed high value on singing the Psalter.
- The lectionary is the best tool for making sure we sing the whole of the Psalms rather than singing only our favorites. Of course, this means that we'll encounter some difficult Psalms, Psalms that express anger, doubt and fear. We'll also encounter Psalms that have less musical settings than others. This is all part of the spiritual discipline of worship and worship planning.

What types of Psalm songs are available? (the short version)

- Metrical: a specialty of the Reformed tradition, the original Psalm text is versified in a common rhyme scheme and set to music.
- Responsorial: traditionally found in the Roman Catholic church, these leader/people settings of the Psalms are making their way into churches of all types.
- Scripture song: most closely associated with the contemporary Evangelical church, scripture songs usually extract only short phrases from the Psalms.
- Hybrid: a combination of forms. For example, In *Sing! A New Creation* many short scripture choruses are paired with a full Psalm text that is spoken by leader and people.

Where can I find the lectionary Psalm for a given Sunday?

- <http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/>

Are there any places to find recommendations for Psalm songs arranged according to the lectionary?

- *Call to Worship* (PCUSA)
- *Sundays and Seasons* (ELCA)
- *Going to Wait and Waiting to Go!* (African American)
- *Liebert's Index of Psalm Hymns* (http://web.sfts.edu/faculty/liebert/book_psalms/psalm-index.pdf)
- *The New Handbook of the Christian Year* (PCUSA)
- *Choosing Contemporary Music* (ELCA)
- *Handbook for the Revised Common Lectionary* (PCUSA)
- Online:
 - <http://www.gbod.org/worship/>
 - <http://www.hymnary.org/?category=texts&sub=scripture&scripture=psalm>
 - <http://www.textweek.com/>
 - <http://www.togethertocelebrate.com.au/>

I just can't get enough—can you recommend some good bedtime reading?

- John Witvliet's *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship* is a good overview of the Psalms and Psalm singing.
- Irene Nowell's *Sing a New Song: The Psalms in the Sunday Lectionary* is a lectionary-based commentary that pays special attention to the way the lectionary Psalm fits into the rest of the lectionary readings.
- Walter Brueggemann's *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* talks about orientation, disorientation and reorientation in the Psalms.
- The *NIV Study Bible's* commentary on the Psalms is quite good, especially in the area of Hebrew poetic forms.
- *The Vitality of Worship* by Robert Davidson (Eerdmans, 1998) and *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years* by William L. Holladay (Augsburg Fortress, 1996) have both been helpful commentaries.

Psalmody Collections

Primarily Metrical

- *Michael Morgan's *Psalter for Christian Worship* – all 150 Psalms in metrical form with suggestions for common hymn tunes that can be used.
- **Psalter Hymnal* – first 150 hymns are metrical settings of the Psalms, but there are many more Psalm songs throughout the hymnal.
- *The Presbyterian Hymnal* – it includes about half the Psalms, all of which are well-chosen and very singable.
- *Trinity Hymnal* – This PCA/OPC hymnal contains metrical versions of most Psalms. An index of these Psalms can be found at <http://swanson.kepler.covenant.edu/psalm/index.html>.

Primarily Responsorial

- *cross generation* – contemporary song book from Catholic publisher GIA that includes a good sampling of lectionary Psalms.
- **Gather Comprehensive* – GIA's (Roman Catholic) monumental modern songbook with lots of great Psalm settings (and hymns), many by Marty Haugen.
- **Glory & Praise* – OCP's competition to *Gather*. Tends to be slightly folkier than *Gather*.
- *Lead Me Guide Me* – an African American Catholic hymnal that has a good collection of responsive Psalms in gospel and jazz styles.
- *Michel Guimont's *Psalms for the Revised Common Lectionary* – beautiful, singable responsorial settings that have become a standard in modern Catholic churches.
- *Psalm Settings for the Church Year* – the Lutherans give us this complete collection of Psalms. An interesting feature of this collection is that choral scores for each Psalm can be downloaded for \$5. Expect to see more publishers offering online resources in the future.
- *Psalm Songs 1, 2 and 3* – Though the collection is somewhat uneven, there are many gems among the 50 plus songs in this Augsburg Fortress collection.
- *Psalms for the Church Year* – a series that features different composers and styles in each new volume. Many of the more popular Psalm settings have subsequently been published in GIA hymnals.
- *Psalms for the Soul* – black gospel responsive Psalms.
- **Psalms of the Notre Dame Folk Choir* – 21 beautiful, accessible responsive Psalms by Steven C. Warner.
- **RitualSong* – GIA's more "highbrow" hymnal. The hymns in this are great, but the Psalms tend toward Gelineau chant. (That is, quality music that is somewhat difficult for churches not steeped in the responsorial tradition.)
- *The Portland Psalter* – 81 responsive Psalms that have become quite popular in the Episcopal Church.
- *The Psalter: Psalms & Canticles for Singing* – it's the Presbyterian answer to responsorial Psalmody. Many are composed by Hal Hopson.

Mixed

- *Renew!* – edited by the late Robert Webber, this is a great collection of songs.
- **Sing! A New Creation* – a great collection of creative Psalm settings with a denominational stamp of approval.
- *Taize* – Many Taize songs are based on Psalms. The leader's editions often have a cantor part that sings the whole Psalm text.
- *The Faith We Sing* – The United Methodist version of *Sing! A New Creation*.

*Essential collections for the limited budget.

Your friendly guide to the Psalms, Greg Scheer, has composed a number of Psalm settings:
http://www.gregscheer.com/songs_by_scripture.html