

Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide

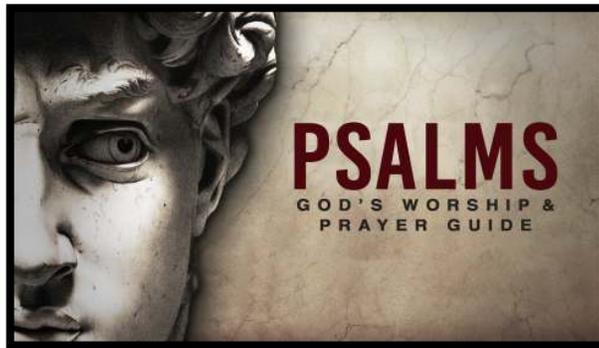
The Crazy Cycle: Part 1

Psalm 106

Written By

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The young lady we'll call Tracy stood out as one of the leaders of my first youth pastoral position in San Diego. She was smart, funny, perceptive, cared for people, and in love with Jesus Christ. For her, promise and hope for a great life lived for God with maximum impact on others seemed like a given.

Somewhere along the line, however, somebody introduced her to cocaine. At first she took just a little in order to, you know, fit in with other cool teens. It didn't take long for the drug to consume and control her whole life, forcing her to do things she never dreamed she'd do . . . like stealing and selling her grandmother's beautiful wedding ring given to her mother just so she could purchase another high.

I remember the last time I saw her before I went back to Dallas to finish my fourth and final year of seminary at Dallas Theological Seminary. She called me from a detox hospital near La Jolla and asked me if I would come and see her and pray for her. I don't think I was mentally prepared for what she looked like. Entering the locked facility and walking to her room, I couldn't believe the impoverished, skeletal looking young woman sitting on the bed. She looked like a different person altogether because the drug use had taken a toll on her body, her mind, and her spiritual walk.

What did I pray for her that day? I prayed for the Spirit of God to help her break free from the crazy cycle of this particular sinful craving. This was the appropriate prayer for humanly she would remain in bondage to the carnal cycle, but spiritually she, the broken and humbled saint, had access to the power of God Almighty to gain her freedom.

Paul talks about this in his letter to the saints in Rome:

¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,

¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.
(Rom. 6).

The negative here, “no” wedded to the present imperative “reign” (Μὴ οὖν βασιλευέτω ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θνητῷ ὑμῶν σώματι εἰς τὸ ὑπακούειν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτοῦ) forbids an action in progress.¹ As a saint you don’t have to let sin dominate and enslave you because you can submit yourself to God, asking for his back-up and He will help you at that point of confession.

What about you? Are you caught up in a crazy cycle of sin as a saint? Are you, like Paul, struggling with knowing what you know you should do but you quickly and easily doing what you don’t want to do (Rom. 7)? Is guilt weighing you down? Is internal peace ever elusive? Do you long for help and hope? If so, today is the day to find freedom from your slavery to whatever sin trips you up and places you back in the insane, seemingly never-ending sin-cycle (Heb. 12:1).

Long before Paul addressed this spiritual issue the Spirit made sure it was addressed in the Psalter. Psalm 106 is a case study of how the crazy cycle of sin works and how to break free from it and secure a life of joy and holiness before the Lord’s all-seeing eyes. One cannot read these forty-eight verses and not see the central truth and challenge. With a loud voice the Spirit of God calls to you and says . . .

It’s Time To Stop The Crazy Sin Cycle (Psalm 106)

How? Three structural movements designed by God and recorded by the unknown psalmist living in the time of Israel’s captivity in Babylon give us the much needed insight to break free. Before we launch into these verses, permit me to make a few foundational points. One, because there are forty-eight verses, and I typically move through each on a word at a time, we will not cover every clause and key word. I will therefore attempt to simply give you the main ideas of each section. Two, if you are not a Christian realize you have no option for breaking free from sin’s domination over your life because without Christ’s forgiveness of your sin at the moment of confession, sin is your unrelenting, unmerciful master (Rom. 6:15-23). The moment, however, you turn to Christ in confessional faith you are not only forgiven positionally of your sin, you are given Christ’s holiness (1 Cor. 1:30), coupled with the power of the resident Spirit of God to battle the world, the flesh, and the Devil (1 Cor. 12:13ff).

With these thoughts in mind, I invite you to come with me to learn how to be a victor and not a victim where sin is concerned. From the three structural movements of the passage we can readily identify three life-giving principles.

Realize There’s A Right Path (Psalm 106:1-5)

The Psalmist must have been a glass is half-full type of person because he starts out on positive footing as he thinks about battling the magnetic, mesmerizing power of sin.

¹ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 301.

¹ Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting. ² Who can speak of the mighty deeds of the LORD, or can show forth all His praise?

This the first of several Hallelujah Psalms where God is praised for something in particular (Psalm 111-113, 117, 135, 146-150). Here we, as His people, are called to praise Him for being the type of loving Lord who never deserts us. The Hebrew word, *hesed* (חֶסֶד), or lovingkindness speaks of God's inexorable love and commitment to us as we walk down the road of life.² Amazing. Even when you willfully live as if you don't love Him, nothing, as Paul states in the NT, separates you from God's love for you (Rom. 8:35-39). I'd dare say this truth should move us to praise more often than not.

After he establishes why God's people should praise Him, the Psalmist zeros in on a crucial life concept in verse 3.

³ How blessed are those who keep justice, who practice righteousness at all times!

⁴ Remember me, O LORD, in Thy favor toward Thy people; visit me with Thy salvation, ⁵ That I may see the prosperity of Thy chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance (Ps. 106).

Knowing how prone we are to live contrary to the ways of God, the Psalmist tells us in verse three what a blessed and happy life really consists of. This is so important because when you succumb to the allurements and enticements of sin, be what it may, the Devil whispers in your ear with his raspy voice that this particular activity will lead to bliss. It won't.

Once when my mother left us to do some errands, I searched the kitchen for something sweet to eat. After combing like a determined detective through every cabinet, I finally spotted a box full of chocolates. Quickly, I pulled off the lid and sunk my seven-year-old teeth in to the thick, square delight in my hand. Believe me, it was not delightful for I had just been introduced to my mother's box of baking chocolates, which was a ten on a bitter scale. Such is the nature of

² Holladay, *Hebrew and Aramiac Lexicon of the OT*, חֶסֶד (ca. 250 x; sg. 234 x, 125 x Ps): חֶסֶד, sf. חֶסֶד, חֶסֶד; pl. חֶסֶד, cs. חֶסֶד, sf. חֶסֶד, חֶסֶד (Ps 106⁴⁵ & La 3²², Kt חֶסֶד), Ps 119⁴¹ חֶסֶד: — 1. **obligation to the community** in relation to relatives, friends, guests, master & servants, &c.; unity, solidarity, **loyalty**: a) *mesed* & *b@rit*: a *b@rit* is initiated by ceremony, *mesed* results fm. closer relation betw. parties, but the obligations are largely the same; *mesed* we^o@met Gn 24²⁷⁻⁴⁹ lasting loyalty, **faithfulness**; ±¹'â *mesed* show loyalty Gn 21²³; b) *mesed* exists betw. son & dying father Gn 47²⁹, wife & husband Gn 20¹³, relatives Ru 2²⁰, guests Gn 19¹⁹, friends 1S 20⁸, people who do favors for each other Ju 1²⁴, king & people 2S 3⁸; c) spec.: °iš *mesed* confidant Pr 11¹⁷, °anšê *mesed* devout men Is 57¹; malkê *mesed* loyal kings 1K 20³¹; °iš *masdô* everyone his faithfulness Ps 20⁶; d) community > protection Ps 144² > **favor** Est 2⁹⁻¹⁷, *mesed* lifnê hammelek Ezr 7²⁸; tôrat *mesed* friendly instruction Pr 31²⁶; charm (of flowers) Is 40⁶; — 2. *mesed* in relation of God to people or individuals, **faithfulness, kindness, grace**: a) *mesed* yhwh Ps 33⁵; l@±δl'm *masdô* Je 33¹¹; b) ±¹'â *mesed* show faithfulness, w. l@ Ex 20⁶; š'mar *mesed* Dt 7⁹, oth. vbs.; c) God is rab *mesed* rich in faithfulness Ex 34⁶; — 3. pl. *ms'dim*, *masdê* &c. individual acts flowing fm. solidarity: a) (of men) **godly deeds** Ne 13¹⁴; b) (of God) **evidences of grace** Is 55³. (pg 111)

sin. It promises you one thing you think you want, while giving you something you don't want (Pro. 9:17-18). Can you relate? Yes, what started out as one social drink to be found acceptable with some clients has now become a bitter experience you can't seem to shake. But I digress.

With verse 3, the Psalmist tells us how to go about living a great, happy, and enjoyable life: live a life of justice and righteousness at all times. It's just to follow the law, not break or bend the law. It's just to treat all people the same regardless of their race, social standing, worth, education and so forth. It's just not to deceive a client in order to increase your sales commission. It's just to stand for truth and not attempt to subvert truth. It's just to . . . well you can fill in the blank, I'm sure. Likewise, it's righteous to call sin, sin and not seek to rationalize it. It's righteous to steer clear of sin instead of seeking to get as close to it as possible. It's righteous to be bothered by sin as opposed to being bothered by people who are bothered by sin. It's righteous to seek forgiveness of your mate when you've sinned against and mistreated them. It's righteous, again, you can keep filling in the next point, I'm convinced.

Is it really possible to live a godly life all the time? No doubt, we will not be perfect until we see Christ; however, we can, through the Spirit's resident power learn to choose that which glorifies God more often than not. Many texts in the NT tell us this much:

¹⁵ For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them (John. 13).

²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does (James 1).

It's one thing to hear and know the Word of God on a given matter, and quite another to implement it in your life. When you chose to obey that word, you move toward growing up in righteousness. Do this enough and it will become a lifestyle, resulting in the blessing of God resting on you, regardless of what you face on a given day. Do this enough and you will also not find yourself caught up on the crazy cycle of carnal sin.

So, if you are entrapped on this cycle what should you do? Head toward freedom by realizing you need to start choosing the right path to walk on as clearly delineated in God's Word. To better understand this simple premise, let's switch metaphors. While body surfing once in high school with my pastor's son, we became caught in a rip tide which sucked us out into the open ocean. I'm sure glad we had our boogie boards that day. The only way to know to get free from the powerful current was to swim with our boards in a parallel fashion to the beach. Perhaps this is what you need to do as the rip tide called sin has swept you out to sea. You need to purposefully paddle toward being obedient to God's Word. Do this and you will not only break free from sin's grasp, but you will grow spiritually while also learning how to live a truly blessed and thriving spiritual life.

Now back to our initial metaphor.

Freedom comes to those who learn how to live consistently on the right path of life as denoted by the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

Bondage, however, comes when fail to do this. If you've been shackled by a sin, it is time to wake up and . . .

Realize There's A Wrong Path (Psalm 106:6-46)

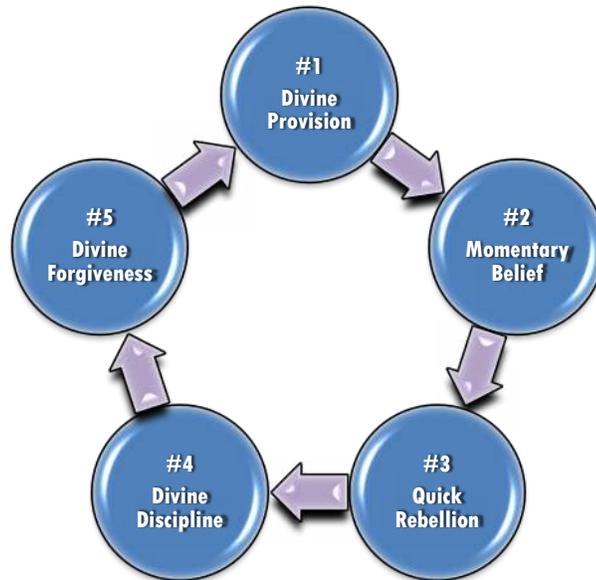
When the Psalmist says in verse 4, "*visit me with salvation*," he is saying he realizes he's living on the wrong path, the path of sin. He's also saying he knows the only way he can get off of this path with its crazy cycle of sin is to be saved from it by the living God. With verse 6, he informs us right up front that not only is he on the wrong path, but so, too, are his people. Shockingly he admits they collectively have willfully and purposefully stepped into the crazy sin cycle like their forefathers.

⁶ We have sinned like our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly (Ps. 106).

You can sense the Psalmist's dismay and dumbfoundedness at the fact that he and his people are guilty of getting caught up in sin's crazy cycle just like those who lived long before them. You would logically think he and his people, living in a time of captivity because of their sinful ways, would have steered clear of various sins because of what they learned from their fathers, grandfathers, and great, great, great grandfathers lives, but they didn't. Thinking they were smarter, or shrewder, or more in control of themselves, they ignorantly paddled as close to the whirlpool of sin, not thinking a moment it would begin to powerfully drawn them morally and spiritually downward as their historical writings so aptly demonstrate. Tell me, who in their right mind would paddle the kayak of their life next to this particular whirlpool and think that they, of all people, could easily paddle to safety if things went south? The sad truth is Christians like Tracy do it all the time and it always heads in the same cyclical direction.

Beginning with verse 7 and concluding in verse 46, the Psalmist takes us through two time periods involving two geographical areas when and where Israel stepped onto sin's cycle. More specifically, verses 7 through 33 give us six historical snapshots of how the sin cycle operated during the period of Israel's wilderness wanderings. Then in verses 34 through 46, the Psalmist turns and introduces us to how Israel arrogantly engaged in the sin cycle during the period of the Judges, or during the time when they first inherited the land of promise. As we move through these two time periods, mark well the lessons stated about the crazy cycle of sin, and then determine to not walk on this same perilous path.

Lastly, before we look at these various time periods, let me direct your attention to an overview chart/graphic of how the crazy cycle operates. *First*, you will live to see God do something amazing in your life, something where you know He is there and He is not silent. *Second*, said providential provision, be what it may, leads you, the shallow saint, to believing God's work but not necessarily believing His word. You might need to hear that (or read that) one more time. This time let it sink into your soul. *Third*, not long thereafter a temptation comes your way and you, for whatever misguided reasons, rebel against God and enjoy the sin. *Fourth*, because God is holy and wants you to move toward holiness (1 Pet. 1:15-16), and because He loves you as your Heavenly Father (Heb. 12:3-11), He will eventually move to discipline you to wake you up. *Fifth*, when you wake up (or swim away from the sinful current, or step off of the wrong path . . . you can pick whatever metaphor works for you), God stands ready to forgive and reinstate you. *Sixth*, this is *basically* how the cycle function, but as you will see in the ensuing verses, there are some minor exceptions.



In case you need a life story to validate this whole cycle from a NT perspective, I'd direct you to the story of the Prodigal Son as found in Luke chapter 15. In any event, the ultimate goal in life as a Christian is to limit the times you bite the spiritual dust in cycle numbers two and three. The saint who gains mastery here is not zapped by the cycle of sin as much and he enjoys more times of inner peace and outer blessing.

With all of this before us, let's look at the raw reality of life. We encounter it in the first Photo album. I'll call this . . .

Photo Album #1: The Wandering Period (Psalm 106:7-33). Remember within this large album are six historical snapshots designed to show us how the crazy sin cycle works. Of course, as Paul mentions in his letter to the Corinthians, all of what is recorded here from Israel's sordid spiritual history is divinely intended to be our examples of how not to live (1 Cor. 10:1-13). Did you get that? I hope so.

Snapshot #1: The Exodus (vv. 7-15). Talk about a miraculous event which should have caused God-fearing people to live God-fearing lives until they did, friend, this was it.

⁷ Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Thy wonders; they did not remember Thine abundant kindnesses, but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.

Dr. Allen Ross, my former Hebrew professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, clarifies this first clause by translating it “they gave them [the ten plague miracles; Nile turned to blood, Ex. 7:14-25; Frogs, Exodus 8:1-15; Gnats/Mosquitoes, Exodus 8:16-19; Flies, Exodus 8:20-32; Plague on cattle, Exodus 9:1-7; Boils, Exodus 9:8-12; Hail, Exodus 9:13-35; Locusts, Exodus, 19:1-20; Darkness, Exodus 10:21-29; Death of firstborn, Exodus 11:1-12:36] *no thought*” [italics mine . . . because I’m absolutely, well, floored]. Translated, they saw these spectacular, jaw-dropping miracles and basically shrugged their shoulders and became indifferent.³ Huh? How could you do that? They did. Just goes to show you that Jeremiah was right when he said years later, “*The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it (Jer. 17)?*” Yeah, who can understand how one can experience the miraculous provision of God ten times in a row and respond by basically shrugging one’s shoulders. Stunning. This, by the way, is why you must guard your heart on a daily, moment by moment basis for it is prone to responding to God in the same unhealthy, unnatural fashion.

With their backs up against the Red Sea to the east and the fast approaching Egyptian chariots from east, the people rebelled. Boy did they.

¹⁰ And as Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. ¹¹ Then they said to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹² Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?' For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness" (Exod. 14).

Amazing and sad. You have slaves freed here by the power of God who want to return to slavery. The Scripture is true which says, “²² It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet. 2).

How did God respond to their willful rejection of Him by quickly forgetting the power He displayed in freeing them? He, the God of *hesed*, moved with compassion:

⁸ Nevertheless He saved them for the sake of His name, that He might make His power known. ⁹ Thus He rebuked the Red Sea and it dried up; and He led them through the deeps, as through the wilderness. ¹⁰ So He saved them from the hand of the one who hated *them*, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. ¹¹ And the waters covered their adversaries; not one of them was left.

In a split second God outdid himself when He parted the Red Sea. With an average depth of 1,608 feet, don’t you know it was awe-inspiring to watch the water part, stack up and then witness the muddy sea bottom turn to dry land (Isa. 63:13). It must have been awe-inspiring to walk to the other side while watching fish swimming in the walls of water to your right and left. It must have

³ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150): Commentary*, vol. 3, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2016), 286.

been awe-inspiring to watch the waters quickly collapse on the mighty Egyptian military machine the minute the last Israelite stepped to safety. Everyone who saw this knew all of this was no fluke, but was the handiwork of the God who went before them to save them. What divine provision.

How did Israel respond? As you would have:

¹² Then they believed His words; they sang His praise.

Ah, *now* they believed God's words because they saw one of the greatest miracles of all time. Too bad they didn't just believe His word, end of story. The fact they *now* believed tells us their faith was weak, anemic, and shallow. I hope I would have believed God after I saw the first plague, but, then again, I know the human heart. It tends to drift toward the carnal crazy cycle of sin, and that's just what happened in due course. Here is how the Psalmist describes what happened next:

¹³ They quickly forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel, ¹⁴ But craved intensely in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. ¹⁵ So He gave them their request, but sent a wasting disease among them (Psalm 106).

Breath-taking, isn't it? No sooner did Moses and Aaron's wife, Miriam, a prophetess finish singing their songs of God's spectacular deliverance, than the people sinned by craving water (Ex. 15:22-27) and food (Ex. 16:1-36). Again, I must say how shocking. They arrogantly questioned the One who parted a massive body of water by complaining about their lack of the key life substance while walking in the dry, dusty desert. What unbelief. What hubris. He gave them water by telling Moses to throw a tree into a body of water to make it sweet to drink. Moses complied and God worked another outright miracle for felled trees don't change the taste of water. God gave these cyclical sinners food too: manna which they had to eat for FORTY YEARS, and so much quail they gorged themselves on the birds (Num. 11:31-35). God judged them for their sin of complaint of fickle faith by sending a plague which killed many of them as they chewed on the meat of the quail they had cooked en masse (Num. 11:33).

Let this all be a lesson for us. Be on guard for how quickly you forget the work of God in your life and in the lives of saints of old, and how naturally you seek your counsel and not His. Why don't you wait for His counsel? Because you are probably not going to like what He has to say, right? Believe me, when a saint is sinning, I'm the last person they usually want to hear from because they will know what I'm going to say. Talking with a young Christian mother who is having an affair the other day I told her she needed to break off the sinful relationship and get back with her husband and children so they could at least begin to work on their fractured marriage. Her reply was unbelievable, "The man I'm with is at least a Christian." When I asked her how many times he'd been married, she said, "Three times." I then said, "And you think that he will really be faithful and loyal to you?" I haven't had another conversation with her over the last month or so. I think I know why.

The Hebrew of verse 14 literally reads the Israelites *craved a craving*. I know, you are fine as long as the Girl Scout *Thin Mints* are not in the house, but once they're in the freezer (which is the best place for them) it's as if they are calling your name. So, you open one of two sleeves, intending to eat just one. Sure. Next thing you know you are down one sleeve, maybe two if it's a bad control day. Wanting one or two *Thin Mints* is one thing, craving the entire box is another thing altogether,

wouldn't you agree? Wanting food and water is a natural thing, but to be *utterly consumed* with desiring it 24/7 when God has promised to provide for you is nothing short of high handed sin. Such behavior always runs headlong into the discipline of God who desires you to move toward holy behavior and away from the crazy cycle of sin. Got anything/anyone in your life which is an all-consuming sinful craving?

As we shall see in the ensuing verses, there is only one thing God is looking for when you are caught up in a crazy sin cycle. It's called confession. If you will but confess your sin, He will be faithful for forgive and restore you as His child (1 John 1:9). He'll also empower you to gain victory where you have typically experienced spiritual defeat. Anyone ready to break free from the crazy cycle?

If you are not a Christian right now, I leave you with a story for your instruction.

I got a call this week from a lady I met in San Diego years ago. She is a non-Christian who has had many personal and family issues over the years. While at a cookout, I gave her my business card and said, "If I can ever help you, give me a call."

She called this week after performing CPR on her heroine over-dosed son who served in the U.S. Army for eight years. The young twenty-something man will call Bill is hopelessly trapped on a sin cycle. How will he ever find freedom and lasting hope? These two priceless commodities only come from the Savior who died to free him from sin's dominion, and they are given for free to those sin-laden, broken people who bow before Jesus in saving faith. And not only will He perform the miracle of forgiving them of all of their sin, He will give them the Spirit to empower them to power out of the strong current of evil so they can motor toward holiness and health.

Got any Bills or Babaras here today who need Jesus?

