

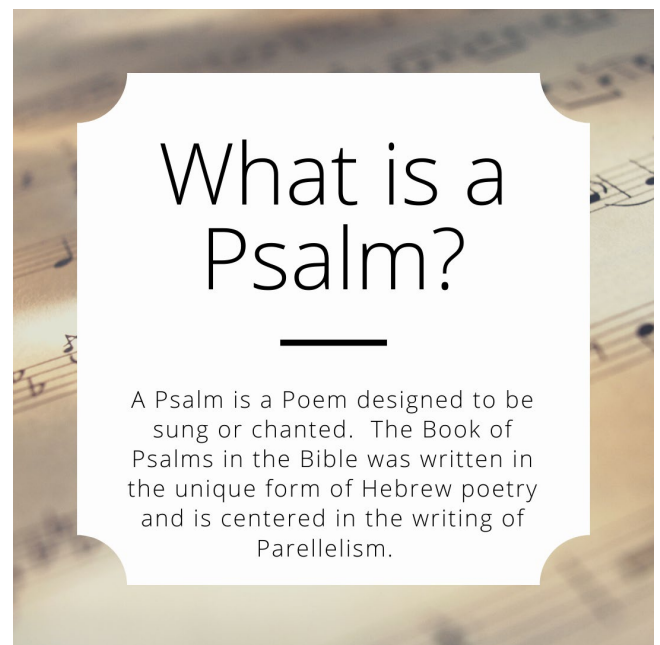


## A Psalms Study Guide

If you open up your bible in the very middle, you'll likely find yourself in the book titled, "Psalms". If you dive right in, you might ask yourself "Who's talking here?", "Why are they writing so differently?", or "Why is this important?". The Psalms are a collection of prayers of God's people throughout the centuries, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and written in poetic language. The Psalms have been used as a prayer book by God's people for centuries. The Psalms were part of Jesus' bible too!

The Psalms range from prophecy to wisdom, and from praise to lament. They recount the story of a merciful and powerful God through the prayers of His people. The Psalms are a tapestry of God's interactions with His people. They are woven with words of praise, sorrow, awe, fear, devotion, affection, turmoil, gratitude, assurance, and, most importantly: Promise.

God is our God, and we are His people. That makes these Psalms our Psalms too. In reading, studying, and praying the Psalms we join in the Divine Drama of a merciful God and a stubborn people. In looking closely at the Psalms, we get a clear picture of living in Christ in all circumstances. These prayers are memorable, and they still ring "true" today. Join us as we dive into the bible's song book this summer!

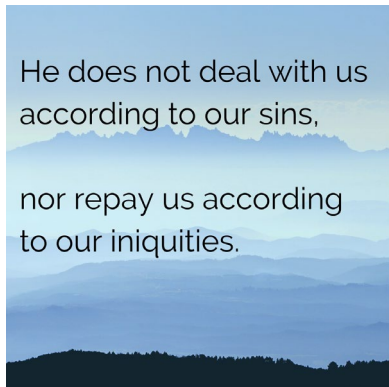


*We join together in reading and meditating on Psalms this Summer.*

## STEP ONE: Reading the Psalms

When studying the Psalms, the first thing to recognize is that the Psalms are poetry. Therefore, the rules of poetry guide our reading and study of the Psalms. Like all poetry, the Psalms use imagery, metaphor, repetition, and other non-literal language to get our attention and engage us in reflective reading and study. In this way, the Psalms express more richly, more intensely, and more forcefully the nature of God and our relationship to Him.

**Perhaps the most common feature of the Psalms as poetry is the use of parallelism.** In parallelism two or more lines are placed next to each other and it is up to the reader to determine what that relationship is. In the most common form of parallelism, the thought of the first line is carried forward into the second. An example is Psalm 103:10...



Here, the general thought of both lines is the same - God is gracious towards sinful man. From God we don't get what we deserve, but rather something far better. In what ways have we sinned? What type of response should we expect from a just God? What type of repayment would be fair? How does God deal with us? The thought of the first line is carried forward into the second as the repetition invites us to slow down and ponder what is being said.

**This is not the only type of parallelism in the Psalms. Other options are:**

## Contrast

The lines are set against one another as opposing thoughts:

*For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1:6)*

*The wicked borrows but does not pay back,  
but the righteous is generous and gives. (Psalm  
37:21)*

## Enhancement

The thought of the first line is enhanced, explained or intensified by subsequent lines:

*Now I know the Lord saves his anointed;  
he will answer him from his holy heaven,  
with the saving power of his right hand.  
(Psalm 20:6).*

*The LORD is near to all who call on him,  
to all who call on him in truth. (Psalm 145:18)*

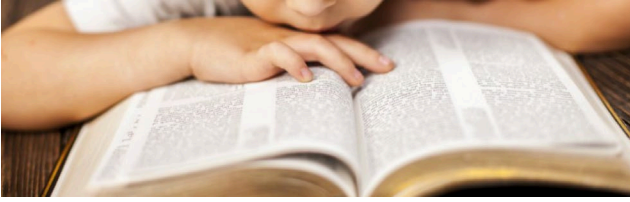
## Complementary -

The thought of the first line finds its complement or counterpart in subsequent lines.  
Because x, then y.

*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be  
afraid? (Psalm 27:1).*

*My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. (Psalm  
63:8).*

## Try Reading a Psalm on your own....



When you study the Psalms, take your time and think about what you are reading and the parallelism between lines, verses, or even whole sections of the Psalm.

- How does the imagery, language, repetition, and parallelism help me understand what the writer is trying to convey?

As you ponder the Psalm, you will begin to move from study of the Psalm as a poem to meditation on the Psalm as the Word of God to you.

**Use this page to take your own notes or list the parallels you see in the Psalms you read.**

## STEP TWO: Meditating on the Psalms

Most of us have experienced the difference between studying God's Word for its historical, literary, or logical features and praying God's Words back to him. Meditation - or pondering what God's Word says and how it applies to us - is the bridge between study and prayer.

One way to approach meditating on the Psalms is like a conversation with a new acquaintance and potential friend. Just as God's people of the Old Testament were waiting for God to fulfill his promise to send the Messiah and establish his kingdom on earth, we too are waiting for Jesus to return and the final fulfillment of all of God's promises. And so, just as you would learn about a new friend by asking questions and listening for what they might say, asking questions of the Psalms is one way to move from study to meditation to prayer.

The following questions are designed to help you meditate on the Psalms. Not all of the questions will apply equally to every Psalm and it may be overwhelming to ask all of the questions for every Psalm you read. However, by reading the Psalms and asking a few of these questions at a time, you will begin to hear God's Word in the Psalms as God's Word to you.

### According to the speaker, where is God?

- *Is he near or far?*
- *Is he intimate (like a father, shepherd, friend)?*
- *Or is he transcendent (creator, ruler of all things, holy)?*

### Remember that the Psalms are poetry, so what kinds of symbolism or imagery is used?

- *Where is this same type of imagery used elsewhere in Scripture?*
- *What other Bible passages come to mind?*

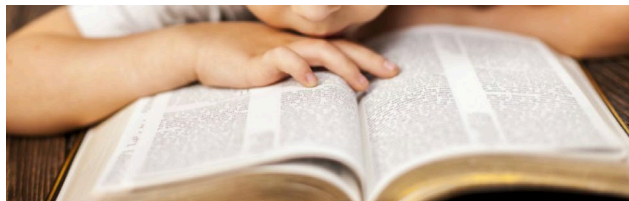
## What is going on inside me as I read?

- Am I moving closer to God or away from him?
- Am I agreeing, questioning, confused, joyful, empathizing? What do I identify with in this Psalm?
- Or perhaps is the Psalm hard to identify with?

If the Psalm doesn't seem to apply to you individually, consider how it might apply to Christians in other places or times or how it might apply to Christ.

- In what ways is this Psalm true of me?
- In what ways is it not true?
- What do I notice or value in this Psalm?

## Try Meditating on a Psalm on your own...



When you meditate on the Psalms, take a small chunk of one Psalm (a couple of verses or section) and try to focus in on one part before expanding to the next section.

Use this page to take your own notes as you meditate.

## How does this Psalm confront me?

- What action is called for in this Psalm?
- What does this Psalm make possible that wasn't before?
- Or impossible that seemed like an option?
- Does this Psalm present the world as it is or as it should be?
- What assumptions does the Psalm make?

## How do I interpret this Psalm

...

- In the life of Israel (in the Old Testament) In the life of the Church (in the New Testament/contemporary times)?
- In my own life or the lives of those around me?
- In light of Christ?

**NOTE: Don't jump to Jesus too quickly! While meditation on the Psalm will point you to Christ, immediately going to Jesus can cut off the conversation and your meditation.**

## STEP THREE: Praying the Psalms

There are innumerable ways to “pray the Psalms” by incorporating the text of the Psalms into our own prayers. As you move from study to meditation you may find yourself unintentionally praying, speaking the words of the Psalm back to God. Great! However, if you find yourself stuck, try one of these methods outlined by Timothy Keller in his book *Prayer*.

As it was with meditation, some Psalms fit more naturally with one method more than the others. You can move back and forth between methods, combine methods, or come up with your own. Feel free to try various methods of praying the Psalms until you find one or more ways that work well for you.

### Verbatim

*Many of the Psalms are already written as direct prayers to God, so simply repeat the words verbatim, perhaps pausing between lines, verses, or sections.*

### Paraphrase

*How might you put the Psalm into your own words? Or if the Psalm is not literally true for you right now, in what sense might it fit? For example, the Psalms often talk about enemies in the literal, human sense. Even if you don't have enemies like that, the New Testament talks about the world, the flesh, and the devil as enemies of God's people. You can pray the Psalm in light of these enemies.*

### Responsive

*Let your meditations stimulate adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication as your prayer to God. Again, this can be done line-by-line, verse-by-verse, or section-by-section.*



## Reading the Psalms as a Community Group

1. Use the Psalm of the week as preached the previous Sunday or pick a Psalm to study in your group.
2. Consider having group members follow Steps 1 and 2 prior to gathering taking notes on both the reading and the meditating prompts.
3. As you gather consider the liturgy we use for children's times at our campuses:

**SHARE** - Check in, highs and lows

**TALK** - Discuss the psalm, how did you read it, what did you notice in terms of parallels, style and type of psalm, what hit you as important or relevant?

**PRAY** - Use one approach in Step 3 to pray the Psalm together

### Additional Resources

#### Books

- 1517 Publishing - [The Sinner/Saint Devotional: 60 Days in the Psalms](#)
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer - [Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible](#)
- Timothy Keller - [Prayer](#)
- Patrick Henry Reardon - [Christ in the Psalms](#)

#### The Bible Project Videos

- [Overview of Psalms](#)
- [How to Read Biblical Poetry](#)

#### Resources for Families

- Website [Meditating on the Psalms with Children](#)
- Book [Psalms for Young Children](#)

**NOTES:**