



# Psalm Study



WITH REFLECTIONS ON

## The Case For The Psalms: Why They Are Essential

BY N.T. WRIGHT

# Welcome!

## Open Source Resource

Bailey Lenzen wrote this study in Spring 2020. Anyone is free to use this book study as long as ownership is attributed to All The More ([www.allthemore.org](http://www.allthemore.org)).

## Purpose Behind This Study

At All The More, our mission is to encourage one another, all the more. To grow in community with our contributors and readers, we create seasonal studies to engage in conversations around Scripture.

We pray the resources give you a desire to grow in your knowledge of our Father, to learn alongside other believers both virtually and in-person, and to spur one another on to better live out our mission as Christ-followers.

## About This Study

This book study was initially created in Spring 2020 during our global pandemic for a group of recently graduated college students at Texas A&M University.

In a time of significant life transition, this study of the Psalms helped these recent college graduates grow in their love of scripture while also clinging to community when churches could not be safely opened.

## What You Will Need For This Study

### Required:

- *The Case For The Psalms* by N.T. Wright
- Journal and pen (or online journal)
- The Bible (ESV and RSV)

### Recommended:

- *Reflections on the Psalms* by C.S. Lewis
- The Bible Project YouTube Channel
- *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak For Us Today* by Bernhard Anderson

*May we follow Him to the foot of the cross.*

## How to Use This Study

Each week includes supplemental reading, listening, reflection questions, and an option for you to write down a verse or chapter to meditate or pray with from the Psalms.

Each week's material should take you about 30–45 minutes total after reading the chapter or half of the chapter, or three days of 10–15 minutes each for reflection and journaling.

# Setting The Scene

## Quotes about the Book of Psalms by Authors and Commentators

*"We have now before us one of the choicest parts of the Old Testament, wherein there is so much of Christ and his gospel, as well as of God and his law, that it has been called the summary of both Testaments."*

– **Matthew Henry** (18th-century author and minister)

*"The more deeply we grow into the psalms and the more often we pray them as our own, the more simple and rich will our prayer become."*

– **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (20th century German pastor, martyr, and spy during WWII)

*"Whenever the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure is lost to the Christian church. With its recovery will come unexpected power."*

– **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

*"When we read the Psalms, we are meant to learn things about God and about human nature and about how life is to be lived. Some poetry makes no claim to instruct the mind. The Psalms do. They are meant to be instructive about God and man and life."*

– **John Piper** ([desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org))

## Who This Study Is Recommended For

This Psalms study is recommended for the All The More community of contributors and readers and anyone interested in learning more about the book of Psalms.



## Introduction to The Book of Psalms

### Introductory Video from The Bible Project (25 min)

- The OT Overview—TaNuk
- How to Read The Psalms
- Overview: Psalms

### Reflection Questions (10 min)

1. Why do you want to study the book of Psalms?
2. How would you summarize the most important thing you learned from the videos?
3. What Psalm(s) do you find yourself going back to for encouragement, and why?
4. If you have an approach to reading the Psalms, what is it?
5. If you find a particular Psalm confusing, write down this number to refer to at the end of the study to see if you have any answers to your questions by then.

### Journal (10 min)

1. Who wrote the Psalms?
2. What are the types of Psalms?
3. What should Psalms primarily be read as? (Stated in Chapter 1, Reflections on the Psalms; Ch 2 of Out of the Depths by Bernard Anderson; How to Read the Psalms Video). How does this change how you read the Psalms? What do we know about poems?
4. How do you hope to see your relationship with or understanding of God change as we study the psalms?

**Memorize:** \_\_\_\_\_ **and/or Pray:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction to The Case For The Psalms

Also read: Revelation 4 and 5, Psalm 1 and 2, 2 Samuel 7 (Goes with Psalm 2)

### Reflection Questions (15 min)

1. What are your thoughts and questions about the introduction?
2. Why should the Psalms be read?
3. How should the Psalms be used? NOT used?
4. How can we find our way into the world of the Psalms? What connections do you see to 2 Samuel 7 in Psalms 2 and vice versa?
5. Have you ever thought about what your worldview is? How would you describe your worldview?

### For More Thinking

In answer to the questions about what to do with the Psalms which are vindictive/angry/resentful, let these quotes from C.S. Lewis illuminate your understanding:

*"One may try to excuse it on the ground that they were not Christians and knew no better. But there are two reasons why this defence, though it will go some way, will not go very far. The first is that within Judaism itself the corrective to this natural reaction already existed (Leviticus 19:17-18, Exodus 23:4-5, Proverbs 24)"*

– **C.S. Lewis**, Reflections on the Psalms, Chapter 3: The Cursings

*"St. Paul ... a direct quotation from the same book ... Proverbs 25:21 ... But that is one of the rewards of reading the Old Testament regularly. You keep on discovering more and more what a tissue of quotations from it the New Testament is; how constantly Our Lord repeated, reinforced, continued, refined, and sublimated, the Judaic ethics, how very seldom He introduced a novelty."*

– **C.S. Lewis**, Reflection on the Psalms, Chapter 3: The Cursings

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# Week Two

## Introduction to The Case For The Psalms

[Continued]

[Speaking of young soldiers who disbelieved what they read in the papers about the cruelties of the Nazi regime in WWII] *"If they had perceived, and felt as a man should feel, the diabolical wickedness which they believed our rulers to be committing, and then forgiven them, they would have been saints. But not to perceive it at all - not even to be tempted to resentment—to accept it as the most ordinary thing in the world—argues a terrifying insensibility. Clearly these young men had (on that subject anyway) no conception of good and evil."*

– **C.S. Lewis**, Reflection on the Psalms, Chapter 3: The Cursings

\*Note Lewis is not discussing the Psalms about justice, which he discusses in later chapters.

**Memorize:** \_\_\_\_\_ **and/or Pray:** \_\_\_\_\_

# Join us on Facebook

Did you know we have a Facebook group for everyone participating in this book study? Join the weekly discussion if you haven't already:

[Encouraging One Another All The More](#)

# Week Three

## Chapter 2: Pray and Live

Also read: Psalm 2, 22, 47, 72

### When reading The Psalms,

Underline phrases about what God does and put brackets around any phrases describing who God is.

#### Reflection Questions (15 min)

1. What are your thoughts and questions about Chapter 2?
2. "What are these poems that I have been praying and singing all this time? What have they been doing to me, or in me, or helping me to do or to become?" (p. 14)
3. "How would devout Jews in the late first century BC have heard, read, sung, and prayed this?" (p. 15) Pick a Psalm from the four you read this week and try to answer this.
4. What is Epicureanism? Why should we bother to know what it is?
5. Though our modern Western world encourages us to "shrug our shoulders and enjoy life as best as we can," how has God specifically called you out of this worldview?
6. What is the difference in studying the Psalms versus praying and living the Psalms? What do poems do for us that perhaps no other literature can (p. 23)?
7. "...You become what you worship" (p. 27). What, then, is a way you would like to be intentional to weave the Psalms into your life going forward?
8. How are the Psalms God's gift to us, specifically (p. 36)?

Memorize: \_\_\_\_\_ and/or Pray: \_\_\_\_\_



# Week Four

## Ch 3: At the Threshold of God's Time (p. 37–61)

Also read: Psalm 104 and Genesis 1; choose 2–3 other Psalms mentioned in this chapter to read in full.

### Reflection Questions (15 min)

1. What are your thoughts and questions about Chapter 3?
2. What are the royal psalms—the violent ones that we don't know what to do with—meant for? How can we sing them today? (p. 50)
3. What is the appropriate way to take up an appointed role? (p. 51) Who in scripture stands out to you as having taken a right view of their role?
4. What is “the ecstasy and the agony of the Old Testament”? And what even does that mean, “the ecstasy and the agony”? (p. 52)
5. Read Psalm 104 carefully. Make a list of connections you find to the creation story's aspects and sequence (Genesis 1).

## Psalm Song to Meditate on

Psalm 42 by Tori Kelly

Memorize: \_\_\_\_\_ and/or Pray: \_\_\_\_\_

# Week Five

## Ch 3: At the Threshold of God's Time (p. 61–76)

Also read: Psalm 51, Psalm 89, Mark 4:35–41, Romans 8:17–26

### Reflection Questions (15 min)

1. When have you cried out to God in a similar way as the disciples in Mark 4:38?
  - a. How does He respond in verse 39–40? Have you ever felt these were the questions He was asking you?
  - b. What ought to be your response based on the disciples' response in verse 41? What Psalms come to mind that express a similar state of emotion?
2. What is the concluding message of Chapter 3 about why we are given these psalms to ask God to remember? (p. 74)
3. Why did Wright choose time as a central theme from the book of Psalms? In this chapter or otherwise, which psalm helps you “pray yourself out of your own impatience”?
4. Which of the parts of time—past, present, or future—do you have the hardest time giving to God?

*God, thank you for motivating me to take Psalm 51 seriously and help me to hold onto this motivation in the days to come so that I continue to know you more. This is all I want to desire. Amen.*

Memorize: \_\_\_\_\_ and/or Pray: \_\_\_\_\_

# Week Six

## Chapter 4: Where God Dwells (p. 76–98)

Also read: Psalm 48, 1 Samuel 4, Psalm 78:56–64

### Reflection Questions (15 min)

1. What are the Songs of Ascents? What is the significance of Jerusalem and the Temple? (p. 87)
2. What is the Ark of the Covenant?
  - a. Thankfully, we do not have to go anywhere to commune with God's presence. He lives in us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Amen!) When do you feel His presence dwell most richly in you? How can you experience more of His company more intentionally this week?
3. How would you describe the first and last verse of Psalm 48?
  - a. Listen to Promises by Maverick City.
4. As we await his return, do you make space to sing, pray, and hope for it? Is that a prayer you are comfortable praying? Why or why not?

Memorize: \_\_\_\_\_ and/or Pray: \_\_\_\_\_

## Follow us on Spotify

Our contributors have compiled the praise and worship songs they're listening to most during this season. Follow [All The More](#) on Spotify for more songs to meditate on.



# Week Seven

## Chapter 4: Where God Dwells (p. 98–115)

Also read: Psalm 19

### When reading The Psalms,

Remember Wright's advice on p. 110, *"Try singing those psalms Christologically, thinking of Jesus as their ultimate fulfillment. See how they sound, what they do, where they take you."*

#### Reflection Questions (15 min)

1. What does it mean for God to be our dwelling place and refuge?
2. "YHWH does not actually want the kind of worship that goes on in the Temple half as much as he wants an obedient ear and heart." What does it mean in your own life for you to obey God? What does it look like for our heart specifically to obey?
3. Why do you think C.S. Lewis called Psalm 19 the most beautiful poetry?
  - a. Using [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org), what are the different meanings of the words, law, precept, command, and so on used in Psalm 19 according to the Strong Numbers? Why do you think the Psalmist used all these different words instead of just one? (See the tutorial on how to do this on Blue Letter Bible [here](#).)
4. What can we learn about Jesus in that He prayed Psalm 22? What new implications does that have for becoming more like Him?

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# Week Seven

## Chapter 4: Where God Dwells (p. 98-115)

[Continued]

### Bailey's Testimony

The Bible, and especially the Psalms, are not a story of feel-good triumphs. It's not a Marvel movie.

Unfortunately, our culture has debased Christianity as simply a set of beliefs, a religion, an uninviting group of people, hypocrites, and hate. Lots of hate, actually.

That's why we need the church. We need to be rooted in the Word. In community. Living in confidence that what is here is not all there is. And in sharing that BEAUTIFUL story of Christ's sacrifice that leads us to joy, hope, and peace. The Psalms show us glimpses of our future home over and over again.

**Memorize:** \_\_\_\_\_ **and/or Pray:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Learn more about Bailey*

To read more from Bailey, visit [AllTheMore.org/Bailey](https://AllTheMore.org/Bailey)

Learn more about Bailey and other All The More contributors by visiting [AllTheMore.org/Writers](https://AllTheMore.org/Writers)

# Week Eight

## Chapter Five: All the Trees of the Forest Sing for Joy (p. 117–142)

Also read: Psalm 95, Psalm 104, Colossians 1:15–20

### Reflection Questions (10 min)

1. Wright points out that Psalm 104 is addressed to God by the pronoun "You" twenty times. Find another psalm that addresses God frequently.
2. "Why, after all, would a good God make a world that is other than himself?" Have you asked something like this question before? How has God answered this question for you?
3. "We...find our own stories within the larger narrative of creation—our own small but significant stories of wine and bread, of work and rest, of death and new life, and through it all, of praise." What praise do you find yourself echoing from scripture?
4. What is your prayer right now as it relates to your current season of life?

Memorize: \_\_\_\_\_ and/or Pray: \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm Song to Meditate on

House of God, Forever by Page CXVI

## Chapter Five: All the Trees of the Forest Sing for Joy (p. 142–162)

Also Read: Psalm 140–149

TIP: Try dividing it up by reading two of these nine Psalms per day

### Reflection Questions (15 min)

1. What questions do you have about the second half of this chapter? What impacted you?
2. Wright camps out in the 140s of the Psalms. Let us also:
  - a. What is to be learned about who God is—His nature and character—from these Psalms? (Aim for 2–3 main takeaways.)
  - b. What is to be learned about God's love for you from these Psalms? (Aim for 2–3 main takeaways.)
3. Have you experienced transformation due to a habit you developed by His goodness and grace, as described on page 157?
  - a. What is a habit you wish to work on in the next two months?

### Bailey's Testimony

Not every day will I be a great warrior for Christ, because I am—spoiler alert—not the divine being. As Philip Yancey says in the book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, we are all leading our neighbors heavenward, or we are not. Which is it?

I'm left struck by the woman at the Chicago airport who asked Yancey: Bailey, "Do you ever just let God love you?"

I am, by his mercy, covered in grace. To the cross, I must cling.

Memorize: \_\_\_\_\_ and/or Pray: \_\_\_\_\_

# Week Ten

## Chapter 6: At Home With the Psalms

Listen: Write your own Psalm from "The Place We Find Ourselves" Podcast (30 min)

### Reflection Questions (10 min)

1. What are your thoughts and questions about Chapter 6?
2. "To worship without using the Psalms is to risk planting seeds that will never take root." (p. 165) Do you agree? If so, why?
  - a. How does this relate to what was discussed in the podcast?
3. What are some ways we can use the whole Psalter, as Wright suggests on p. 166?
4. What stands out to you from the podcast? What was a new or interesting way the host posed about how to read the Psalms or write your own?

## Your Turn

Use this space to write your own psalm here after listening to the podcast.

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Memorize: \_\_\_\_\_ and/or Pray: \_\_\_\_\_



## Afterword: My Life with the Psalms

Meditate on: Psalm 94, 19, 56, 27, 73, 97, 84, 122

### Reflection Questions (15 min)

1. What verses are new parts of your “psalm-shaped memory” resulting from going through this book study?
2. Can I pray the angry psalms (e.g., Psalm 88)?
  - a. What is there to learn from them?
  - b. What are these enemy references even about?
3. “Can it be that God really wants me to do something special for him? (The answer, by the way, is always “yes,” but God’s sense and ours of what is “special” are usually different.)” Has this ever held true for you?
4. “Are we really supposed to enjoy “this world” so much?” What is the answer to this question Wright poses based on how he refers to Psalm 104?
5. Which Psalm would you say is (or you would like it to be) making “its way slowly but surely towards the center of your thinking and praying”?

### Your Final Thoughts (10 min)

What do you think of the book now that you have finished it? In what circumstances or to whom would you recommend reading it?

Go back to this question from the first week:

- What Psalm did you find yourself struggling with from the first week?
  - What do you now understand about this Psalm that you did not before?
- For the Psalm you find yourself going back to, what do you now understand about this psalm you did not before?

# You've Finished!

## Let Us Know How It Went

We welcome your thoughts. Please share in our Facebook group what you learned from this book and this study. We would love to know how God moved through His Word in your life!

## Let's Stay Connected

Thank you for letting us join you on your faith journey. We'd love to stay connected to continue encouraging one another, all the more. If you haven't already, please subscribe to our newsletter, follow us on social, and check out our Spotify playlist.

