

PSALMS

Inspiring Truths





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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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➤ ABOUT THIS STUDY

Sometimes when we read the Bible, it seems as if our lives are worlds apart from those depicted on the pages of Scripture. It's easy to ponder, sometimes with guilt and secrecy in our hearts, whether the Bible is relevant to our feelings, thoughts, struggles, or circumstances.

This study of the Book of Psalms holds good news for you. A psalmist has likely written about whatever feelings you might experience in any situation in which you find yourself. These lessons speak to those who are soaring on the heights of spiritual growth and to those who are in the depths of spiritual weakness. It legitimizes the feelings of those seeking God's recompense for persecutors and those seeking forgiveness for having done wrong to others. It teaches lessons for dealing with the perils or the successes of life with great grace, patience, and faith while extolling the loving-kindness of our God, who is always worthy of praise.

No matter what you're experiencing in life, this journey through the Book of Psalms is for you. If you earnestly apply its lessons, it will provide inspiration and godly wisdom as you seek to walk the narrow path surrounded by distractions from your devotion to God, challenges to your faith, and contemporary philosophies that aim to compete with biblical truth.

The ***Explore the Bible*** series will help you know and apply the encouraging and empowering truth of God's Word. Each session is organized in the following way.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT: This page explains the original context of each passage and begins relating the primary themes to your life today.

EXPLORE THE TEXT: These pages walk you through Scripture, providing helpful commentary and encouraging thoughtful interaction with God through His Word.

OBEY THE TEXT: This page helps you apply the truths you've explored. It's not enough to know what the Bible says. God's Word has the power to change your life.

LEADER GUIDE: This final section provides optional discussion starters and suggested questions to help anyone lead a group in reviewing each section of the personal study.



For helps on how to use *Explore the Bible*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading, visit:
ministrygrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.

➤ GROUP COMMITMENT

As you begin this study, it's important that everyone agrees to key group values. Clearly establishing the purpose of your time together will foster healthy expectations and help ease any uncertainties. The goal is to ensure that everyone has a positive experience leading to spiritual growth and true community. Initial each value as you discuss the following with your group.

☐ PRIORITY

Life is busy, but we value this time with one another and with God's Word. We choose to make being together a priority.

☐ PARTICIPATION

We're a group. Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one dominates.

☐ RESPECT

Everyone is given the right to his or her own opinions. All questions are encouraged and respected.

☐ TRUST

Each person humbly seeks truth through time in prayer and in the Bible. We trust God as the loving authority in our lives.

☐ CONFIDENTIALITY

Anything said in our meetings is never repeated outside the group without the permission of everyone involved. This commitment is vital in creating an environment of trust and openness.

☐ SUPPORT

Everyone can count on anyone in this group. Permission is given to call on one another at any time, especially in times of crisis. The group provides care for every member.

☐ ACCOUNTABILITY

We agree to let the members of our group hold us accountable to commitments we make in the loving ways we decide on. Questions are always welcome. Unsolicited advice, however, isn't permitted.

I agree to all the commitments.

Date

➤ GENERAL EDITOR



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to the LORD,
shout triumphant
of our salvation,
let us enter his presence
with thanksgiving,
let us shout triumph
in song.^{af}

For the LORD is great
a great King above
The depths of the earth;
in his hand,
and the mountain peaks
the sea is his; he made
his hands formed the

Come, let us worship
and bow down;
let us kneel before the
our Maker.^{af}
For he is our God,
and we are the people
of his pasture,
the sheep under his

Today, if you hear his voice,
Do not harden your hearts
as at Meribah,
as on that day at Massah
in the wilderness
where your fathers
they tried me, though
what I did.^{ac}
For forty years I was with that generation,
said, "They are a people
whose hearts go astray,
they do not know my voice.
So I swore in my anger
They will not enter my rest."

in 96^{af}
OF THE EARTH
Sing a new song to the LORD,
let the whole earth
sing to the LORD.^{ag}
Sing to the LORD, but
proclaim his salvation
to day.^{ah}
Declare his glory among the nations

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THE PATH

Believers should embrace godly wisdom because obedience to God's Word is the path of true life.



...prese
...giving;
...triumpha

...e LORD is a great
...at King above all
...depths of the ear
...his hand,
...the mountain pe
...sea is his; he mad
...hands formed the

...we, let us worship
...and bow down;
...kneel before th
...maker.^y
...he is our God,
...we are the peopl
...of his pasture,
...sheep under his c

...ay, if you hear his
...not harden your h
...at Meribah,
...on that day at Mas
...the wilderness^{ab}
...your fathers t
...tried me, thoug
...that I did.^{ac}

...forty years I was
...with that generati
...nd, "They are a pe
...whose hearts go a
...they do not know m
...I swore in my ang
...they will not enter

...46^{af}

...THE EARTH

...ng a new song to t
...the whole earth s
...to the LORD.^{ag}
...ng to the LORD, his

► ABOUT THE BOOK OF PSALMS

The Book of Psalms displays a broad range of content and style. New Testament writers quoted from Psalms and Isaiah more than any other Old Testament book. Paul stated that the early church sang psalms in their worship (see Eph. 5:19).

Writer. Numerous people wrote the psalms. The writers of some are unknown. Many psalms have superscriptions with names such as David, Moses, Asaph, Korah, and Solomon. However, the Hebrew preposition *of* may mean “by,” “for,” “about,” or “concerning.” Thus, “a psalm of David” or “a Davidic psalm” may mean David wrote the text, but in a few cases it may mean something else. The sons of Korah were descendants of the Levite who died for rebelling against Moses and Aaron (see Num. 26:10-11). Some served as singers and musicians in the temple choir. Heman was the founder of the choir during the monarchy of David. Asaph and Jeuthum were choir directors.

Date. Each psalm must be dated independently. The psalms were written, used, and collected over the entire period of Israel’s history. They were the result of both personal and national experiences. The Book of Psalms was in its present form by the fourth century B.C.

Titles. All but 34 of the psalms have individual titles. Although these titles are very ancient, many scholars conclude that they were likely added after the poems were written. Nonetheless, it’s very unlikely that later scribes would have inserted titles for psalms that didn’t clearly reflect the situation described in the title.

Outline. Since ancient times Psalms has been divided into five books, presumably corresponding to the five books of the Law. Each division ends in a doxology. Psalm 1 serves as an introduction to the Book of Psalms, Psalm 150 as the conclusion.

Types. Identifying the type of psalm can give you insight into its original use and context. Types of psalms include lament, thanksgiving, hymn, royal, enthronement, penitential, and wisdom.

“WHEN MEN ARE LIVING
IN SIN, THEY GO FROM
BAD TO WORSE. AT FIRST
THEY MERELY WALK IN
THE COUNSEL OF THE
CARELESS AND UNGODLY,
WHO FORGET GOD ...
BUT AFTER THAT, THEY
BECOME HABITUATED TO
EVIL, AND THEY STAND
IN THE WAY OF OPEN
SINNERS WHO WILLFULLY
VIOLATE GOD’S
COMMANDMENTS.”

—Charles H. Spurgeon

➤ PSALM 1

Think About It

Observe the variety of images employed in Psalm 1. What do these assorted, real-life sketches suggest about the importance of making correct choices?

Notice the number of times the word wicked occurs in Psalm 1. Why do you think the writer repeated this term so many times?

1 How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers!

2 Instead, his delight is in the LORD's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

4 The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand up in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.



Many psalms were intended to be sung. Go to the leader helps at lifeway.com/explorethebible to hear some of these psalms set to music and to download free worship arrangements of them.

► UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

Psalm 1 is commonly classified as a wisdom psalm. *Wisdom* may be defined as “the appropriate application of knowledge.” For example, understanding that a light socket conducts electricity is knowledge. Wisdom is keeping one’s finger out of the socket. On the other hand, screwing a light bulb into the socket in order to illuminate the darkness shows an even higher form of wisdom. Wisdom psalms present examples of human behavior to demonstrate that some behaviors are wise and some are foolish. These examples are intended to point readers to choices that please God. Wisdom psalms tend to be proverbial. Indeed, many of the ideas in this psalm have parallels in the Book of Proverbs.

Psalm 1 must be viewed in relation to the entire Book of Psalms. This first psalm serves as an introduction to the entire psalter. In like manner, Psalm 150 functions as the conclusion to the book. In Psalm 1 the righteous are blessed by God, and in Psalm 150 the righteous bless God. Psalm 1 describes what God does for His people, and Psalm 150 instructs God’s people to bless God.

Psalm 1 easily divides into two parts: the path of life (see vv. 1-3) and the path of death (see vv. 4-6). The two lifestyles are contrasted in the first two verses. Then in verses 3-4 the nature and value of each lifestyle are sketched with a botanical analogy. The last two verses then disclose the ultimate fate of each lifestyle.





➤ EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE PATH OF LIFE (Psalm 1:1-3)

¹How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers!

The Book of Psalms reveals much about how to have a blessed or happy life. The word *happy* is translated “blessed” in some translations (KJV, ESV, NIV). The term is best understood as the sense of joy, blessedness, or contentment of those who faithfully walk in a right relationship with God. The word essentially points to the best possible life an individual can achieve and occurs at least 20 times in the Book of Psalms.

Take note in Psalm 1:1 of the progressive action from walking to standing to sitting. In this image of life as a journey down a path, a traveler stops to listen to the banter of bystanders. The unsuspecting journeyer soon joins the conversation and eventually takes a seat among these gabbers. In contrast, the traveler in verse 1 doesn’t do these things. He doesn’t stop, stand, or become one of the wicked.

A wicked person is someone who is corrupt in his or her heart. Sinners continuously practice sin. Mockers scoff at God. The word *walk* refers to the decisions a person makes in life. The word *stand* refers to a person’s commitments, and sitting represents a person’s attitudes and the disposition of his or her heart.

This verse warns the reader that each step is a choice. The psalm encourages readers to avoid that choice. Don't be influenced by the wicked. Refuse to walk down the sinful path. Don't align yourself with those who scoff at what is holy. The psalmist wasn't offering a method for avoiding the wicked. The psalmist's words serve as a warning to be careful about our close associations.

²Instead, his delight is in the LORD's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.

If certain behaviors must be avoided in order to attain biblical happiness, then what conduct is acceptable? The answer isn't a catalog of activities but dependence on a single source that will produce appropriate behavior in any situation. The source is "the LORD's instruction," literally "Yahweh's law." This phrase is synonymous with Scripture. Scripture transforms the nature of those who delight in it. Such people read the Bible because they hunger for God. They eagerly absorb its instructions and constantly seek to abide by them.

Biblical meditation isn't related to Eastern religions or transcendental meditation. The Hebrew verb means "to read or repeat Scripture in an audible whisper." The command to meditate on it day and night doesn't mean God expects people to read the Bible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. However, it does mean that the actions of the righteous are steered by the truths of Scripture at all times. God's Word has become an integral part of their thinking.

³He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

The psalmist compared the person who follows God's counsel to a productive tree planted near a river or irrigation canal. The verb *planted* reveals that the tree didn't sprout in this location by chance. God set it in this place. The analogy points to the Bible as God's resource for living in a manner that keeps a person right with Him.

The person who follows the counsel of God's Word will flourish and produce fruit. Therefore, God's Word supplies everything necessary for living a fruitful and rewarding life. The phrase "Whatever he does prospers" doesn't guarantee financial prosperity or career

KEY DOCTRINE

The Scriptures

The Holy Bible is a perfect treasure of divine instruction.

BIBLE SKILL

Use other Scriptures to help understand a Bible passage.

The psalmist wasn't the only one to emphasize the importance of life choices. Compare Psalm 1 with Deuteronomy 30:19-20 and Matthew 7:24-27. How are these passages similar? What common themes are found in all three passages? Record a summary statement of the teachings found in all three passages.

advancement. Rather, because this person follows the counsel of God's Word, his or her ambition is to glorify God, not to obtain monetary or personal reward.

What's the godly fruit that God desires for His followers to produce? How can worldly wisdom hinder growth? How does reading the Bible nurture the development of this godly fruit?

THE PATH OF DEATH (Psalm 1:4-5)

⁴The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.

The psalmist pointed out that the wicked are like worthless chaff that the wind blows away. The words "not like this" are emphatic in the Hebrew text. The wicked are the opposite of all that was said about the righteous in the previous three verses.

In ancient Israel harvested grain stalks were laid out to dry, commonly in a shallow pit cut in the stone bedrock of a hilltop. After the stalks dried, the grain was beaten on the rock surface either with a large stone or with the hoofs of animals walking on the grain. In the evening the wind normally blew harder across the hill. At that time the farmer used a winnowing fork to toss the beaten crop up into the evening breeze. The heavy kernels of grain dropped back onto the threshing floor, while the chaff was blown away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand up in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

Listening to the deceptive advice of the wicked leads to instability and destruction. The psalmist warned his readers that the wicked face sure judgment and eternal separation from God's righteous people. When the wicked are brought before the Almighty in judgment, they will be unable to defend the choices that produced their lifestyle. God's verdict will result in eternal separation from Him.

How should God's warning about the future of the wicked affect you? How should you feel? What should you do?

THE CONCLUSION (*Psalm 1:6*)

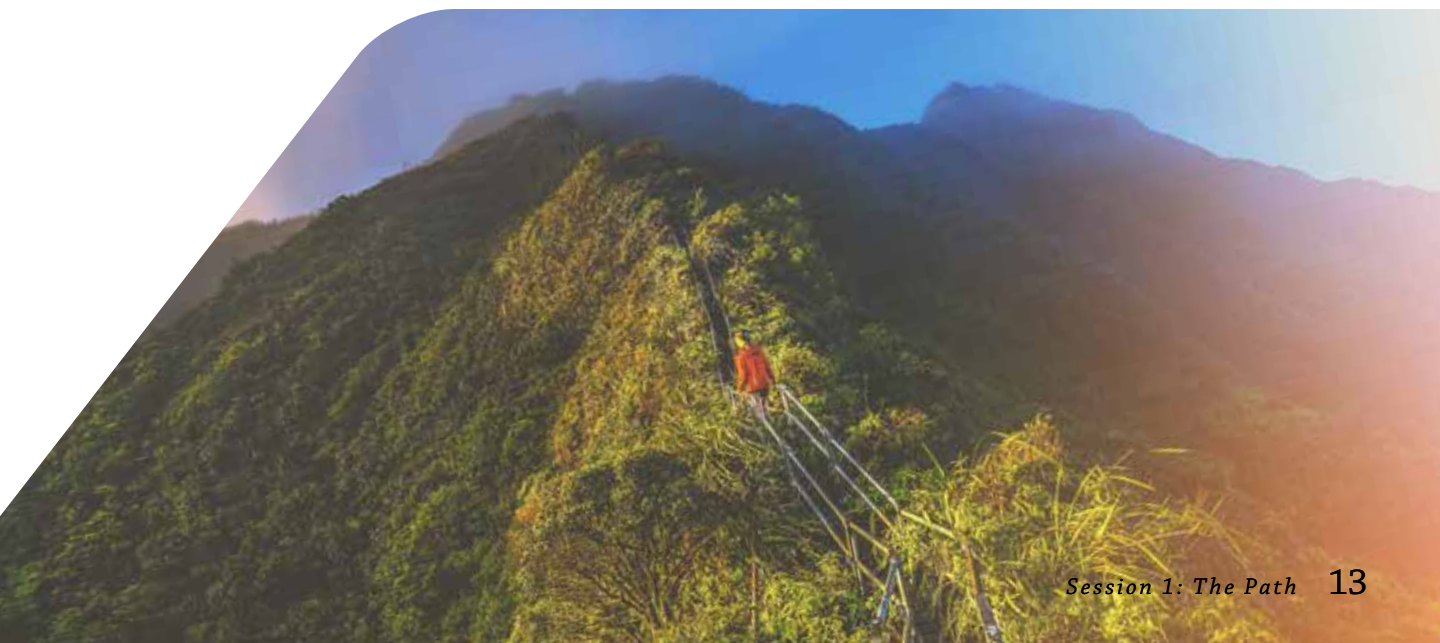
⁶For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.

“The LORD watches over the way of the righteous” stresses that God’s knowledge of the righteous is a present reality. The verb itself means “to know through experience.” God’s knowledge of His people is knowledge that’s derived by walking with His people.

The word LORD is the Hebrew Yahweh. This is the name God used in His covenant with Israel and therefore indicates that the relationship is an intimate one. The intimacy of God’s knowledge guarantees His presence to secure His people. Believers can live with confidence, knowing that God guarantees His protection to the obedient.

The righteous are individuals who are right with God. Their way is a lifestyle of faith. Faith isn’t merely saying words but is a trust that produces obedient acts. However, the lifestyle of the ungodly ultimately “leads to ruin.”

What does this verse teach about the security of those who follow God? How does this security affect our behavior?



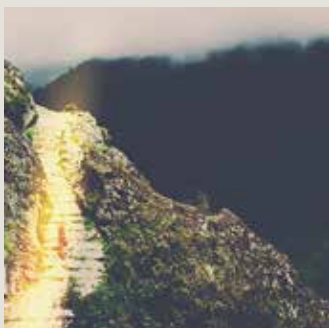
► OBEY THE TEXT

- Fulfillment in life is found through faithful obedience to God and His Word.
- Falling for the deceptive advice of the wicked leads to instability, worthlessness, and destruction.
- Believers can live with confidence, knowing that God guarantees His protection to the obedient.

What's the role of the Bible in your life? How much time do you spend reading and studying the Bible on a weekly basis? What actions can you take to increase that time?

As a group, list ways ungodliness is promoted in our world today. How can your Bible-study group help one another avoid the influence of these sins?

What are some situations in your life in which godly living is difficult? How do you determine what God wants you to do in these situations? What are some Bible verses that can give you confidence to do what God wants?



MEMORIZE

The LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.—Psalm 1:6

USE THE SPACE PROVIDED TO MAKE OBSERVATIONS AND RECORD PRAYER REQUESTS DURING THE GROUP EXPERIENCE FOR THIS SESSION.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you'll put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

