



A SUMMER IN THE
Psalms

A GUIDE FOR PERSONAL & GROUP STUDY

Written by Erin Feldman

Edited by Lindsey Lundin

Many thanks to Jeff Lark, Walt Lengel, Ross Lester, Steve McNamee, Ian O'Donnell,
Andres Rojas, and Maddi Whitaker

Summer in the Psalms, Vol. I: A Guide for Personal & Group Study

Copyright © 2024 The Austin Stone Community Church

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without written permission from The Austin Stone Community Church, 104 E Highland Mall Blvd, Suite 110, Austin, TX 78752, austinstone.org.

All Scripture quotations are from the CSB® Bible. Christian Standard Bible® copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman book publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Table of Contents

How to Use This Guide	4
Introduction to Psalms	5
A Psalm of Wisdom Psalm 1	6
A Psalm of Lament Psalm 89	12
A Psalm of Thanksgiving Psalm 136	22
A Psalm of Praise Psalm 139	30
A Psalm of Trust Psalm 62	38
Bonus Psalm 119:1–88	46
How to Read a Psalm	56
How to Pray the Psalms	58



How to Use This Guide

Summer in the Psalms, Vol. I: A Guide for Personal & Group Study supplements The Austin Stone's annual summer sermon series on the book of Psalms. The guide's six sessions invite us to bring our Sunday worship into our days, and our daily life into our Sunday worship. Because the number of sessions exceeds the number of sermons, groups may decide to finish the guide immediately after the sermon series ends or at some other time.

THE GUIDE INCLUDES FIVE COMPONENTS:

1. Introductory material
2. Personal study
3. Notes
4. Group reflection
5. Group discussion

INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

The guide introduces the book of Psalms as a whole and features a brief introduction to each assigned psalm.

PERSONAL STUDY

The study follows the REAP Bible study method, which stands for read, examine, apply, and pray. Each study includes questions and prompts interspersed throughout the assigned text. These questions are aimed toward building a framework for studying poetic texts in the Bible.

NOTES

Each session includes set-aside space for notes, which can be taken during personal study, group discussion, or Sunday worship.

GROUP REFLECTION

The group reflection is a prompt designed to foster deeper friendships. It includes two options, a table conversation or a shared meal, to support different group dynamics. The second option features a suggested meal.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The group discussion questions typically build on questions asked in the personal study. Groups can use these questions as they are, or they can combine them with questions from the personal study.

Introduction to Psalms¹

Psalms was the ancient hymnal of God’s people. Just as we sing beloved songs on Sunday mornings, so the people of Israel worshiped God through their psalms. The collection of 150 psalms was not reserved for a single day of worship; it traveled with God’s people, day in and day out. The people spoke and sang the Psalms when they sat down or slept, when they rose and greeted the day, and when they walked. These songs tuned and shaped them into people who loved and obeyed God wholeheartedly.

The Psalms remains a powerful means for worshiping God. It gives us language to sing praise, to bow our heads in thankfulness to God. It proclaims Jesus as the Messiah-King, coming to save people from their sin. It creates room for our complaints and questions when we hurt, grieve, and fear.

The Psalms is organized into five books, which are thought to correspond with Israel’s history in particular and with God’s big story—creation, fall, redemption, and re-creation—universally. Each psalm is precisely placed in its book, and each psalm aligns with a category. A category is important. It acts as a navigational tool, helping us to orient ourselves to the text and what it intends to say.

Several categories have been proposed over the years, from as few as three to as many as eight. We will use five, keeping in mind that the categories are not an exact science. You may read a psalm and decide it’s more of a praise than a thanksgiving. Or you might read a psalm that fits within two or more categories. That’s normal. Life is messy, and the book of Psalms gives us prayers for life as it is—messy. The Psalms are prayers for humans learning to depend fully on God.

CATEGORIES IN PSALMS

Psalm Categories	Definition	Example Psalms
Wisdom	Wisdom psalms answer the question, “What is the good life, and how do I take hold of it?”	Psalms 37, 49, 62
Lament	Laments express sorrow for sin or grief about suffering.	Psalms 25, 51, 88
Thanksgiving	Thanksgiving psalms are personal or communal songs written in response to God’s deliverance.	Psalms 18, 34, 116
Praise	Praise psalms respond to God as Creator and/or Redeemer.	Psalms 104, 105, 148
Trust	Trust psalms concern God’s kingship and care.	Psalms 24, 121, 131

¹ Adapted from *Psalms: The Traveling Songs of God’s People* by Erin Feldman (Austin, TX: The Austin Stone Community Church, 2023), 9–13.

A Psalm of Wisdom | Psalm 1

Psalms of wisdom illuminate God’s way in contrast to the wicked way. These psalms contain proverbs (short, memorable instructions) and imagery (word pictures) to help people comprehend truth. Examples include Psalms 127, 73, and 37.

Psalm 1 is a wisdom psalm. It argues there is a right way and a wrong way to live—an argument that fills the book of Psalms. This argument is not necessarily presented through commands but through description and emotive language. Both elements invite readers to answer the same question posed to the Israelites: which way will you choose?²

In Psalm 1, the writer exhorts people to choose to do right by God and others by depicting the two ways and their results. When a person meditates on the LORD’s instruction, they flourish. The psalm then offers a contrast. The wicked are not happy or rooted; they drift away with each passing wind. The psalm concludes with a succinct summation: the way of the righteous leads to God, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.

Personal Study

READ & EXAMINE

Psalm 1

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 its leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.

² For two occasions when the Israelites were told to choose between God’s way and the wicked way, see Deuteronomy 6–8 and Joshua 24.

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

- 7 What does the LORD do?
- 8 In what ways do these final two lines relate to each other?
- 9 Think about the person who meditates on the LORD's instruction. What happens to that person? What contrast is being made between that person and the one who follows the way of the wicked?

APPLY & PRAY

- 1 What comfort do you find in verse 6? How can you hold onto that when following and delighting in the LORD's way is difficult?
- 2 What will you need to do to become more like a tree planted by living waters?
- 3 Tell God about your resistance toward or hopes for delighting in His instruction. Pray that His words would become water to your soul.

NOTES

Group Reflection

OPTION 1

At your table, reflect on your days. What fills your hours? How do you know when a day has been a good one? What characterizes it? What, if anything, would you like to be different about your days, especially as it pertains to spending time with God and His people?

OPTION 2

Over a shared meal (suggested recipe follows the Group Discussion), have a conversation about the following question: What, if anything, would you like to be different about your days, especially as it pertains to spending time with God and His people?

Group Discussion

Invite someone to read Psalm 1 aloud. (You can also take turns reading the psalm.)

- Psalm 1 says the happy person does not walk, stand, or sit with the wicked. What is the progression with these words? How is walking different from standing, and standing from sitting?
- Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9. What connections between this passage and Psalm 1 do you see?
- Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 1 suggest the transformational effect of our friendships. In light of that, why is it important to pursue God in community rather than by yourself?
- Return to your conversation from the Group Reflection about how you spend your hours. What patterns or trends emerged or are emerging from that conversation?
- Follow-up question: What habit could you adopt, starting this week, to address that pattern? For example, if your phone snags your attention when you wake each morning, commit to a habit of no phone for the first hour of each day. Share the results of keeping that habit with your community when you next meet.

Invite someone to pray to close your time together.

Sheet-Pan Caprese Pizza³

Serves 12

DIRECTIONS

To make the balsamic glaze:

1. Combine 2 cups of balsamic vinegar with ½ cup brown sugar in a saucepan over medium heat, stirring constantly until the sugar dissolves.
2. Bring mixture to a boil.
3. Reduce heat and simmer until glaze reduces by half and/or coats the back of a spoon, about 20 minutes.
4. Let cool and store in a lidded jar.
5. Store unused glaze in the refrigerator.

To make the pizzas:

1. Preheat the oven to 450°.
2. Place two 17x12-inch baking sheets in the oven, and allow them to warm as the oven preheats.
3. On parchment paper, stretch pizza dough into two 15x10-inch rectangles.
4. Brush dough with oil; sprinkle it with salt and pepper.
5. Transfer to baking sheets.
6. Bake until the crust starts to brown, about 10 minutes.
7. Remove from the oven and top evenly with cheese and tomatoes.
8. Return to the oven and bake at 450° until the cheese starts to melt, about 2 minutes.
9. Remove from the oven.
10. Sprinkle with basil leaves and remaining salt and pepper. Drizzle with glaze.
11. Slice each pizza into 6 pieces.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds whole-wheat pizza dough, at room temperature
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 ½ teaspoon kosher salt, divided
- 1 teaspoon black pepper, divided
- 16 ounces fresh mozzarella, thinly sliced
- 4 cups baby heirloom tomatoes, halved or quartered
- 1 cup loosely packed basil leaves
- 4 tablespoons balsamic glaze

³ Recipe from EatingWell.com (eatingwell.com).



A Psalm of Lament | Psalm 89

Psalms of lament are songs of “disorientation.”⁴ Examples include Psalms 4, 22, 44, 88, and 89. Whether written for an individual or a group of people, laments express the free-fall that accompanies a disruption in ordinary life. This disruption can be the result of sin, but it also can arise from betrayal, mad kings (see Saul’s pursuit of David), sickness, death, and exile.

Psalm 88 and 89 are laments, and they are some of the darkest ones. They were written after Jerusalem was sacked and most of the people exiled to Babylon. In such a situation—the loss of home and temple, friends and family, the seeming absence of God’s steadfast love and faithfulness—lament is appropriate. Lament deals with life as it is, not as one wishes it were. It simultaneously hopes for renewal and restoration. It clings to the truth that darkness is not ultimate, for God separated and named dark and light (Genesis 1). He is present and in control on the blackest night.

Ethan the Ezrahite wrote Psalm 89. He likely composed songs alongside other psalmists, namely, Asaph and Heman, during King Solomon’s reign.⁵ Meaning: Ethan witnessed the height of Israel’s glory and watched it dwindle as Israel’s enemies plundered and pillaged the Promised Land.

Ethan’s psalm follows the trajectory of his life. It begins in a major key: “I will sing of the LORD’s love; I will sing of it forever!” (Psalm 89:1). It then strikes a minor note. “How long?” Ethan pleads. “Will You hide forever? Will Your anger keep burning like fire?” (Psalm 89:46). And yet—Ethan’s song begins and ends with the language of blessing and lovingkindness. God’s love surrounds him and keeps him safe, so safe that he shares his hurt, anger, and confusion with God, who is to be blessed forever (Psalm 89:52).

Personal Study

READ & EXAMINE

Psalm 89

A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

¹ I will sing about the LORD’s faithful love forever;
I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations
with my mouth.

⁴ Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*, ed. David M. Howard Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2007), 150.

⁵ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms Volume 2 (Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary)*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 139.

² For I will declare,
“Faithful love is built up forever;
you establish your faithfulness in the heavens.”

³ The LORD said,
“I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn an oath to David my servant:

⁴ ‘I will establish your offspring forever
and build up your throne for all generations.’” *Selah*

- 4 Underline the words “faithful” and “faithfulness.” Circle “establish” and “forever.”

What stands out to you about the number of repeated words? What point do you think the writer is trying to make?

- 5 In what ways do verses 3 and 4 answer or reinforce verses 1 and 2?

⁵ LORD, the heavens praise your wonders —
your faithfulness also —
in the assembly of the holy ones.

⁶ For who in the skies can compare with the LORD?
Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD?

⁷ God is greatly feared in the council of the holy ones,
more awe-inspiring than all who surround him.

⁸ LORD God of Armies,
who is strong like you, LORD?
Your faithfulness surrounds you.

⁹ You rule the raging sea;
when its waves surge, you still them.

¹⁰ You crushed Rahab like one who is slain;
you scattered your enemies with your powerful arm.
¹¹ The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours.
The world and everything in it — you founded them.
¹² North and south — you created them.
Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at your name.
¹³ You have a mighty arm;
your hand is powerful;
your right hand is lifted high.
¹⁴ Righteousness and justice are the foundation
of your throne;
faithful love and truth go before you.
¹⁵ Happy are the people who know the joyful shout;
LORD, they walk in the light from your face.
¹⁶ They rejoice in your name all day long,
and they are exalted by your righteousness.
¹⁷ For you are their magnificent strength;
by your favor our horn is exalted.
¹⁸ Surely our shield belongs to the LORD,
our king to the Holy One of Israel.

6 What elements of nature are featured?

7 What qualities or characteristics of God are highlighted?

8 Read verses 15–18 again. What relationship might the “happy” in these verses have with the “happy” found in Psalm 1?

¹⁹ You once spoke in a vision to your faithful ones
and said, "I have granted help to a warrior;
I have exalted one chosen from the people.

²⁰ I have found David my servant;
I have anointed him with my sacred oil.

²¹ My hand will always be with him,
and my arm will strengthen him.

²² The enemy will not oppress him;
the wicked will not afflict him.

²³ I will crush his foes before him
and strike those who hate him.

²⁴ My faithfulness and love will be with him,
and through my name
his horn will be exalted.

²⁵ I will extend his power to the sea
and his right hand to the rivers.

²⁶ He will call to me, 'You are my Father,
my God, the rock of my salvation.'

²⁷ I will also make him my firstborn,
greatest of the kings of the earth.

²⁸ I will always preserve my faithful love for him,
and my covenant with him will endure.

²⁹ I will establish his line forever,
his throne as long as heaven lasts.

³⁰ If his sons abandon my instruction
and do not live by my ordinances,

³¹ if they dishonor my statutes
and do not keep my commands,

³² then I will call their rebellion
to account with the rod,
their iniquity with blows.

³³ But I will not withdraw
my faithful love from him
or betray my faithfulness.

³⁴ I will not violate my covenant
or change what my lips have said.

³⁵ Once and for all
I have sworn an oath by my holiness;
I will not lie to David.
³⁶ His offspring will continue forever,
his throne like the sun before me,
³⁷ like the moon, established forever,
a faithful witness in the sky.” *Selah*

- 9 Underline the words “faithful” and “faithfulness.” Circle “establish” and “forever.”

What stands out to you about these words, either in their reappearance (see v. 1–18) or in their repetition?

³⁸ But you have spurned and rejected him;
you have become enraged with your anointed.
³⁹ You have repudiated the covenant with your servant;
you have completely dishonored his crown.
⁴⁰ You have broken down all his walls;
you have reduced his fortified cities to ruins.
⁴¹ All who pass by plunder him;
he has become an object of ridicule
to his neighbors.
⁴² You have lifted high the right hand of his foes;
you have made all his enemies rejoice.
⁴³ You have also turned back his sharp sword
and have not let him stand in battle.
⁴⁴ You have made his splendor cease
and have overturned his throne.
⁴⁵ You have shortened the days of his youth;
you have covered him with shame. *Selah*

10 “But” is a conjunction that often indicates a change in direction or distinguishes one idea from another. What changes or distinctions does the conjunction in verse 38 point out?

11 What does the writer say the LORD has done?

12 Verse 41 differs from the verses before and after it. What makes it different? Why do you think the writer sets verse 41 where he does? What effect does its placement have?

⁴⁶ How long, LORD? Will you hide forever?

Will your anger keep burning like fire?

⁴⁷ Remember how short my life is.

Have you created everyone for nothing?

⁴⁸ What courageous person can live and never see death?

Who can save himself from the power of Sheol? *Selah*

⁴⁹ Lord, where are the former acts of your faithful love
that you swore to David in your faithfulness?

⁵⁰ Remember, Lord, the ridicule against your servants —
in my heart I carry abuse from all the peoples —

⁵¹ how your enemies have ridiculed, LORD,
how they have ridiculed every step of your anointed.

⁵² Blessed be the LORD forever.

Amen and amen.

- 13 What questions are asked? What kinds of questions would you say they are?
- 14 Consider the repetition of “faithful” and “forever” throughout this psalm. What contrast does the writer set up in verses 46–51? What argument do you think the writer is making with this contrast?
- 15 Why do you think the writer concludes, “Blessed be the LORD forever. Amen and amen”?

APPLY & PRAY

- 1 When have you asked questions of God? If you have refrained from asking questions of Him, what would it look like to follow the writer’s example?
- 2 The writer never receives answers to his questions, at least not as far as we know. Yet he asks the questions, because he believes in God’s faithful love and hopes in the renewal of God’s promises. What would it look like for you to ask questions of God, both in light of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and in light of God’s promise to make all things new?
- 3 Pray for the courage to ask questions. God wants to hear them. Also pray for the courage to share your story with others. If Ethan wrote his psalm for our benefit, how might your story comfort or encourage someone whose faith is faltering?

NOTES

Group Reflection

OPTION 1

At your table, share a time when life didn't go the way you hoped or expected. What happened? What emotions did you feel? What questions did you ask? How did you, or are you, finding a new equilibrium?

OPTION 2

Over a shared meal (suggested recipe follows the Group Discussion), converse about a time when you were uprooted from the life you knew. What happened? How did you, or are you, finding a new equilibrium?

Group Discussion

Take turns reading Psalm 89 aloud. Before asking any questions, let the words linger—in silence—for 30 seconds or so.

- Why is hope important? Where do you see glimmers of hope in Psalm 89?
- When was the last time you asked a difficult question of God? What answer did you receive?

Pause and pray. Ask God to draw near those who are hurting and have difficult questions, asked or unasked. Praise God, for His faithful love endures forever.

- When you have a difficult question, do you share it with other believers or church leaders? Why or why not?
- What changes might be needed in our community for it to be a place where difficult questions are welcomed and not rushed toward answers?

Pray again. Ask God to knit your community together so that it becomes a place where questions can be asked and negative emotions can be expressed.

Tomato Soup & Grilled Cheese Sandwiches⁶

Serves 8

DIRECTIONS

To make the tomato soup:

1. Heat pot over medium heat.
2. Add butter and onions. Sauté 10–12 minutes, until onions are soft and golden. Add garlic and sauté 1 minute, or until fragrant.
3. Add crushed tomatoes with the juice, chicken stock, sugar, and black pepper. Stir.
4. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes. (Partially cover the pot with a lid to avoid excessive evaporation.)

Optional: Use an immersion blender to reach the desired soup consistency. You can also use a regular blender, and afterward, return the soup to the pot.

5. Add cream and parmesan cheese and return to a simmer. Season with salt and pepper, if needed.
6. Turn off heat and allow to cool slightly before serving the soup.
7. Top soup with parmesan and chopped basil.

To make the grilled cheese sandwiches:

8. Preheat a skillet over medium/low heat.
9. Spread ½ tablespoon butter on one side of each slice of bread.
10. Add 2 slices of bread to the skillet, butter side down.
11. Stack 1 slice of each cheese on one piece of toast.
12. Once the bread slices are golden brown, close the sandwich.
13. Continue cooking until the bread is a richer brown. Flip once and press down lightly to help the bread stick to the cheese.
14. Remove the sandwich from the skillet once the cheese is melted.
15. Repeat with the next sandwich.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 yellow onions, finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 56 ounces crushed tomatoes
- 2 cups chicken stock
- ¼ cup fresh basil, chopped (set some aside for a garnish)
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ cup heavy whipping cream
- ⅓ cup shredded parmesan cheese

Note: Use a non-reactive pot (e.g., stainless steel or enamel) to avoid a metallic tinge to the soup.

⁶ Recipes from Natasha's Kitchen (natashaskitchen.com).



A Psalm of Thanksgiving | Psalm 136

Psalms of thanksgiving can be personal (I give thanks) or communal (we give thanks). Both are written in response to God’s deliverance. When the Israelites sang to God after walking through the Red Sea, they sang a song of thanksgiving (Exodus 15). Other songs, or psalms, of thanksgiving include Psalms 18, 34, and 75.

Psalm 136 is another. It contains the refrain, “His faithful love endures forever.” This psalm, like the one in Exodus 15, is meant for a congregation. One person or group of people likely called one line, and another group of people responded with the refrain.

This particular psalm, especially its refrain, appears in other circumstances. David includes the phrase when he installs Asaph and his family as temple singers, whose primary work was to give thanks to the LORD (1 Chronicles 16:7–37; 2 Chronicles 5:11–14). God’s people sing it when King Solomon finishes the temple (2 Chronicles 7:1–11). The Israelites sing it again as they go to war with the Ammonites, Moabites, and the inhabitants of Mount Seir (2 Chronicles 20).

Psalm 136 captures God’s goodness and deliverance, from the heavens where He dwells to the earth, which is His footstool. It proclaims God everywhere, God ready to deliver His people, God gracious and kind to “every creature” (Psalm 136:25). The right and fitting response to such a God? Give thanks, for His faithful love endures forever.

Personal Study

READ & EXAMINE

Psalm 136⁷

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

His faithful love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods.

His faithful love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords.

His faithful love endures forever.

⁷ Psalm 136 is one psalm, without any stanza (paragraph) breaks. We have broken it into parts to aid in reading and reflection.

1 Why are we instructed to give thanks to God?

2 What does it mean for God to be *good*?

3 What is the significance of the LORD being the God of gods and the Lord of lords?

⁴ He alone does great wonders.

His faithful love endures forever.

⁵ He made the heavens skillfully.

His faithful love endures forever.

⁶ He spread the land on the waters.

His faithful love endures forever.

⁷ He made the great lights:

His faithful love endures forever.

⁸ the sun to rule by day,

His faithful love endures forever.

⁹ the moon and stars to rule by night.

His faithful love endures forever.

4 How is God involved with His wonders? Is He distant or near? How can you tell?

5 Why do you think the psalmist says the LORD created the heavens skillfully?

¹⁰ He struck the firstborn of the Egyptians
His faithful love endures forever.
¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them
His faithful love endures forever.
¹² with a strong hand and outstretched arm.
His faithful love endures forever.
¹³ He divided the Red Sea
His faithful love endures forever.
¹⁴ and led Israel through,
His faithful love endures forever.
¹⁵ but hurled Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea.
His faithful love endures forever.
¹⁶ He led his people in the wilderness.
His faithful love endures forever.

6 Underline any repeated words in verses 10–16. What, if anything, stands out to you?

7 What effect does pairing “hurled” with “led” have? What do the two verbs (action words) indicate about who God is and what He is like?

¹⁷ He struck down great kings
His faithful love endures forever.
¹⁸ and slaughtered famous kings —
His faithful love endures forever.
¹⁹ Sihon king of the Amorites
His faithful love endures forever.
²⁰ and Og king of Bashan —
His faithful love endures forever.
²¹ and gave their land as an inheritance,
His faithful love endures forever.

²² an inheritance to Israel his servant.

His faithful love endures forever.

²³ He remembered us in our humiliation

His faithful love endures forever.

²⁴ and rescued us from our foes.

His faithful love endures forever.

8 What words in verses 17–24 repeat from verses 10–16? What other words are repeated?

9 Who are Sihon and Og? (If needed, use a Bible dictionary or concordance to answer this question.)

10 What is the significance of the land being an *inheritance*?

²⁵ He gives food to every creature.

His faithful love endures forever.

²⁶ Give thanks to the God of heaven!

His faithful love endures forever.

11 Why do you think the psalm turns to God's care of all creatures rather than continuing to recount God's deeds on behalf of His people?

- 12 Every psalm employs a structure. Sometimes they expand to the heavens and contract to the earth. Other times they begin with a general statement and proceed to more specific ones. What kind of structure do you see in this psalm? Why might it be important?
- 13 What effect does the refrain have on you as a reader or listener?

APPLY & PRAY

- 1 What wondrous works has God done in your life?
- 2 One of our Austin Stone Kids' *7 Basic Truths* says, "God is King of everything, including me." How is God the King of everything? How is God *your* King?
- 3 Thank God for who He is and how He leads you. If you need to examine and confess any areas of your life that are not yet submitted to His loving reign, do so. Tell God about your sin. Then thank Him for His unfailing love, which lasts forever.

NOTES

Group Reflection

OPTION 1

At your table, consider the role we play in thanking God for His wondrous works. Peter says we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession **so that we might proclaim His praises** (1 Peter 2:9–10, emphasis added). What would it look like to proclaim God's praises in your home, at your workplace, or in some other environment?

OPTION 2

Over a shared meal (suggested recipe follows the Group Discussion), remember who we are in Christ. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession **so that we might proclaim His praises** (1 Peter 2:9–10, emphasis added). Answer the following question: What would it look like to proclaim God's praises in your home, at your workplace, in the city or nations, or in some other environment?

Group Discussion

Read Psalm 136 aloud. Designate one person or several people as the leaders and have them read the varying line. Have the remaining people speak the refrain.

- Share how God has been faithful to you, both in the past and more recently.
- How does remembering God's faithful love to the Israelites give us confidence to hope in His love in the present and for the future?
- What would it look like to encourage people in our community group with God's faithfulness?
- Why is it important to remember God's faithful love on our own and in community with others?
- What would it look like to proclaim God's praises as a group of people? What could you do this week to move toward that?

Invite someone to pray Psalm 136 over the group.

Butter Chicken⁸

Serves 12

DIRECTIONS

To make the marinade:

1. Combine all marinade ingredients in a large bowl.
2. Add chicken pieces and coat thoroughly.

Note: Combine the marinade with the chicken, cover, and store overnight in a refrigerator, up to 24 hours (3 hours minimum).

To make the curry:

3. Heat $\frac{1}{2}$ of the ghee over high heat in a large frying pan.
4. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ of the chicken to the frying pan.
5. To the frying pan, add 2 cups tomato passata (puree), 2 cups heavy cream, 2 tablespoons sugar, and 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons salt. Add half of the remaining marinade.
6. Turn heat to low and simmer for 20 minutes.
7. Remove the first half of the curry from the pan, and repeat with the second half.
8. Combine the halves together.
9. Prepare rice according to its instructions.
10. Garnish with coriander or cilantro and serve with flatbread, if desired.

INGREDIENTS

- o 6 pounds chicken thigh pieces, cut in bite-size pieces
- o Basmati, white, or cauliflower rice
- o Coriander or cilantro leaves

Marinade:

- o 2 cups plain yogurt, full fat
- o 4 tablespoons lemon juice
- o 4 teaspoons turmeric powder
- o 8 teaspoons garam masala
- o 2 teaspoons cayenne pepper
- o 4 teaspoons ground cumin
- o 4 tablespoons ginger, freshly grated
- o 8 cloves garlic, crushed

Curry:

- o 8 tablespoons ghee or butter
- o 4 cups tomato passata or puree
- o 4 cups heavy cream
- o 4 tablespoons sugar
- o 5 teaspoons salt

⁸ Recipe from Recipe Tin Eats (recipetineats.com).



A Psalm of Praise | Psalm 139

Psalms of praise celebrate God as Creator and/or Redeemer. (Many psalms include both aspects.) Examples include Psalms 8, 19, 104, 105, 96, and 148. These psalms emphasize God’s beautiful creation, over which He reigns, or His redemptive acts in history.

Psalm 139 praises God as Creator. Its focus, however, lies with the personal rather than the universal. “God made me!” this psalm exudes. The universal intrudes; the psalmist says God’s thoughts for him outnumber the grains of the sand, and God’s presence makes the night shine like the day.

The psalmist also declares God reigns over everything. “Where can I go? Where can I flee? Wherever I go, there You are” (Psalm 139:7–12, paraphrased). The psalmist cannot escape God, and for him, it is not a reason to quail in fear. God’s presence brings him joy. In that presence, the psalmist realizes who he is—“remarkably and wondrously made” (Psalm 139:14)—and how far he is from the person God made him to be. He concludes his praise song with the following sentiment: “Search me, God, and know my heart ... lead me in the everlasting way” (Psalm 139:23–24).

Personal Study

READ & EXAMINE

Psalm 139

For the choir director. A psalm of David.

¹ LORD, you have searched me and known me.

² You know when I sit down and when I stand up;
you understand my thoughts from far away.

³ You observe my travels and my rest;
you are aware of all my ways.

⁴ Before a word is on my tongue,
you know all about it, LORD.

⁵ You have encircled me;
you have placed your hand on me.

⁶ This wondrous knowledge is beyond me.
It is lofty; I am unable to reach it.

4 What does the LORD know?

5 These verses mention sitting, standing, resting, talking, and traveling, which most likely meant walking. How might these words be related to some of the psalms read in prior weeks?

⁷ Where can I go to escape your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

⁹ If I fly on the wings of the dawn
and settle down on the western horizon,

¹⁰ even there your hand will lead me;
your right hand will hold on to me.

¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me,
and the light around me will be night” —

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you.

The night shines like the day;

darkness and light are alike to you.

6 How does the psalmist react to “this wondrous knowledge”?

7 In what ways might verses 7–12 respond to the psalmist who cannot reach “this wondrous knowledge” in verse 6?

¹³ For it was you who created my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I will praise you
because I have been remarkably and wondrously made.
Your works are wondrous,
and I know this very well.

¹⁵ My bones were not hidden from you
when I was made in secret,
when I was formed in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw me when I was formless;
all my days were written in your book and planned
before a single one of them began.

¹⁷ God, how precious your thoughts are to me;
how vast their sum is!

¹⁸ If I counted them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand;
when I wake up, I am still with you.

8 What imagery (word pictures) is in verses 13–18?

9 What is the psalmist's mental or emotional state? How do you know?

¹⁹ God, if only you would kill the wicked —
you bloodthirsty men, stay away from me —

²⁰ who invoke you deceitfully.

Your enemies swear by you falsely.

²¹ LORD, don't I hate those who hate you,
and detest those who rebel against you?

²² I hate them with extreme hatred;

I consider them my enemies.

10 What does the psalmist request?

11 Why do you think he requests those things?

²³ Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my concerns.

²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me;
lead me in the everlasting way.

12 Psalm 139 begins and ends with “way(s).” How do the words change, and in what way(s)? How are the two words related to one another?

13 What is the theme, or main idea, of Psalm 139?

14 How does the theme of Psalm 139 enable the psalmist to examine his life for wayward motives, confess them to God, and turn toward God’s “everlasting way”?

APPLY & PRAY

- 1 How do you react to verses 19–22? Why might it be important to engage with those verses rather than avoid them?⁹
- 2 What would it take for you to be so secure in God’s love that you could confess bitterness, hatred, resentment, or some other ugly thought, emotion, or action?
- 3 Talk with God, using the pattern set for examination, confession, and repentance in Psalm 139. Acknowledge who God is and praise Him for that. Remember how God has made you and how He has lovingly put you together. Then say, “God, if only You would _____.” Confess the desires of your heart, no matter how squirmy they make you feel. Then, invite God into your ways. Ask Him to reveal what is offensive in you so that you can turn from sin and follow Him in the everlasting way.

⁹ When we encounter a Scripture passage that makes us uncomfortable, we are invited to investigate not only the Scripture but also ourselves. We can ask questions like these: “What am I missing here? What am I not understanding? What am I feeling right now? What story am I believing about God, other people, or myself?”

It also helps to remember themes and context. The book of Psalms emphasizes the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked and regularly exhorts people to remember God, the righteous King. When David asks God to do away with evildoers, he could be requesting that God establish His righteous rule, right here and now. Then again, David could be expressing his sin nature. If that’s the case, David is doing the right thing: he’s confessing his sinful thoughts, attitudes, and actions to God so that God can correct them and lead David in the way of righteousness.

NOTES

Group Reflection

The foods we like and dislike communicate aspects of our personalities. A favorite snack may note a changing palate—or a return to a childhood love. A particular dish can display our heritage or culture.

OPTION 1

At your table, talk about your favorite foods. Why that food? What story comes with it? How is that food and story a part of how God has made you?

OPTION 2

At your next gathering, bring a treasured dish or snack to share. This food can be something you would eat at a celebration or during a holiday or something that brings to mind comfort, a sense of safety and togetherness. During the meal, invite your community into how God has made you, and the time and place in which He has set you, by sharing a story about that snack or dish. Start or end the shared meal with a prayer of praise for how God has knit each person and your community together.

Group Discussion

Invite someone to read Psalm 139 aloud. (You can also take turns reading the psalm.)

- What is the psalmist's relationship with God like? How do you know?
- What imagery (word pictures) did you find in the psalm? How do those word pictures help you know God, the psalmist, or yourself better?
- Some Hebrew manuscripts translate verse 18 as "when I come to an end, I am still with you," suggesting God is with us at the moment of conception and at our deathbed. Is that comforting? Why or why not?
- What would you like to be different about your relationship with God and/or other people? Is there anything in this psalm that could help you step toward that?
- God designed each one of us, and He designed your community, too. Consider how God is knitting your community together. Then, praise Him for what He is doing and how He is working in your lives together.

A Psalm of Trust | Psalm 62

Psalms of trust typically concern God’s divine reign and emphasize His kingship, superiority over other gods, care for all creation and all nations, and works of creation, redemption, and judgment. Psalms 16, 23, 62, 91, and 121 are psalms of trust. These psalms, and others like them, express confidence in God’s nearness and unwavering goodness. They also sometimes speak of the Anointed One, who will enact God’s judgment.

Jesus is that Anointed One. He is the promised Messiah-King, who will come and set things right. The Israelites waited with expectation for His arrival. We now wait for His return, which allows us to speak and sing the ancient songs with renewed fervor. In Jesus, the past and future meet in our present.

Psalm 62 is a psalm of trust written by David. Considering his history with rebellious sons, treacherous friends, and murderous kings, he could have composed it when he was young, middle-aged, or old. The truths found in this psalm are not reliant on a specific date. They spoke to him then, and they speak to us now. “Trust in God at all times,” David says. “Tell Him about your concerns, because He is our refuge” (Psalm 62:8, paraphrased).

Personal Study

READ & EXAMINE

Psalm 62

For the choir director: according to Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

¹ I am at rest in God alone;
my salvation comes from him.

² He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my stronghold; I will never be shaken.

1 Underline or circle any repeated words.

Hebrew poetry often relies on parallelism, a literary device that repeats an idea using different but nearly equal terms. Where do you find parallelism in these two verses? (Refer to “How to Read a Psalm” at the end of this guide for a more in-depth definition of parallelism.)

2 What imagery (word pictures) is employed, and what does it communicate?

³ How long will you threaten a man?

Will all of you attack
as if he were a leaning wall
or a tottering fence?

⁴ They only plan to bring him down
from his high position.

They take pleasure in lying;
they bless with their mouths,
but they curse inwardly. *Selah*

3 What comparison (often identified by a “like” or “as”) is made?

4 How is the comparison related to the first two verses?

- 5 What does the “you” and the “they” do? Do their actions remind you of other psalms or passages of Scripture? If so, which ones?

⁵ Rest in God alone, my soul,
for my hope comes from him.

⁶ He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my stronghold; I will not be shaken.

⁷ My salvation and glory depend on God, my strong rock.
My refuge is in God.

⁸ Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts before him.

God is our refuge. *Selah*

- 6 Read verses 1–2 again. How are verses 5–8 both a repetition and a variation?

- 7 Why does the psalmist say to pour out our hearts to God?

- 8 What is the emotion or tone of these verses? What words or phrases help you discern it?

⁹ Common people are only a vapor;
important people, an illusion.

Together on a scale,
they weigh less than a vapor.

¹⁰ Place no trust in oppression

or false hope in robbery.
If wealth increases,
don't set your heart on it.

9 Underline or circle any repeated words. What point do you think the psalmist is making with those repeated words?

10 In some ways, the psalm shifts toward wisdom in these verses. What advice does the psalmist give?

11 Why do you think the psalmist gives this advice?

¹¹ God has spoken once;
I have heard this twice:
strength belongs to God,
¹² and faithful love belongs to you, LORD.
For you repay each according to his works.

12 What effect do the words, "God has spoken once; I have heard this twice," have on the words that follow?

13 Why do you think the psalm ends with God's strength, faithful love, and justice?

- 14 Read verses 1–2 again. How are the final two lines related to the first two? How do they work together?

APPLY & PRAY

- 1 Where are you not at rest in your life?
- 2 Read Matthew 11:28–30. What is the answer for our restlessness, according to the passages in Matthew and Psalms?
- 3 Invite God into any areas of unrest in your life. Ask Him to be your strength.

NOTES

Group Reflection

OPTION 1

At your table, talk about a time when you were afraid. What were the circumstances? How did you navigate that fear? Do you wish you had responded to the fear differently? If so, how?

OPTION 2

Over a shared meal (suggested recipe follows the Group Discussion), share a time when you were afraid. What were the circumstances? How did you navigate that fear? What, if anything, would you want to change about your response to that fear?

Group Discussion

Invite someone to read Psalm 62 aloud. (You can also take turns.)

- What stood out to you in this psalm? What did you learn about God or humanity?
- The psalmist offers advice for living a good life in verses 9 and 10. In what ways is his advice contrary to the American way or dream?

Pause to pray. Ask God to help your community know Him as our stronghold and salvation. Praise Him for His strength and faithful love.

- When have you or are you feeling like “a leaning wall / or a tottering fence”? What support do you need?
- What would it look like to live as though God is our source of strength and salvation? What would need to change in our personal lives and our lives together?

Pray by reading Psalm 62:5–8 aloud.

Sheet-Pan Sticky Ginger Sesame Chicken & Crispy Brussel Sprouts¹⁰

Serves 12

INGREDIENTS

- 3 pounds boneless chicken, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 ½ pounds Brussel sprouts, halved
- basmati, white, or cauliflower rice
- green onions
- 2 eggs, beaten
- ½ cup all-purpose flour (substitute with gluten free all-purpose flour)
- 12 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil or sesame oil, divided
- 1 ⅓ cups low-sodium soy sauce
- ¾ cup pomegranate juice
- ½ cup honey
- 4 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 4 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons molasses
- 2 tablespoons creamy peanut butter (substitute with sunflower seed butter)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced or grated
- 1–2 teaspoons ginger, freshly grated
- 2 teaspoons crushed red pepper flakes

DIRECTIONS

To make the chicken and Brussel sprouts:

1. Preheat the oven to 475°.
2. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper.
3. In a large bowl, add chicken, egg, and a pinch of black pepper. Toss to combine.
4. Add flour to a separate bowl. Working in batches, lightly coat the chicken pieces in the flour.
5. Place ½ of the chicken on one half of one baking sheet. Repeat with the other baking sheet.

Note: You may wish to pan-fry the chicken prior to baking it. The cook time may alter slightly if using the pan-frying technique.

6. Drizzle each portion of chicken with 3 tablespoons of olive or sesame oil.
7. In a large bowl, toss the Brussel sprouts with 4 tablespoons of oil, salt, and pepper. Arrange cut side down on the other half of the baking sheets.
8. Bake for 12 minutes. Toss the sprouts, turn the chicken, and return to the oven for another 3–5 minutes, until the chicken is cooked through.

Note: The sauce can take more than eight minutes to render, so you may want to start with the sauce rather than the chicken and Brussel sprouts. Some people find the listed ingredients make for a too-salty sauce. If saltiness is a concern, reduce the amount of soy sauce or use tamari or some other sauce. You can also reduce the amounts of garlic and ginger.

To make the sauce:

1. Combine the soy sauce, juice, honey, two vinegars, molasses, peanut butter, garlic, ginger, and red pepper flakes in a medium-large saucepan.
2. Set over medium-high heat and bring to a boil.
3. Boil for 5–8 minutes until sauce thickens and reduces by ⅓.
4. Remove from heat.

Once the sauce is rendered:

5. Reduce the oven heat to 400°.
6. Pull the two baking sheets from the oven.
7. Pour half of the sauce over the two chicken portions. Toss to combine.
8. Toss the Brussel sprouts with another tablespoon of oil, 1 tablespoon per pan or baking sheet.
9. Return everything to the oven for up to 3 minutes, until the sauce sticks to the chicken. (Watch closely, as the sauce can burn.)
10. On the stovetop or in the microwave, prepare the rice according to its instructions.
11. Serve the chicken over bowls of rice. Garnish with green onions; add additional sauce, if desired.

¹⁰ Recipe from Half-Baked Harvest (halfbakedharvest.com).

BONUS

Psalm 119:1–88

Psalm 119 employs a distinct structure: the acrostic. The psalm features 22 stanzas, of eight lines each. Each stanza corresponds to a subsequent letter in the Hebrew alphabet, beginning with aleph and concluding with tav. Every line in their respective stanza also begins with the same letter. As a matter of composition, Psalm 119 sets the standard. Its structure is simple, yet complex and complicated and profound.¹¹

Its subject matter—God’s instruction—is equally simple, complex, and profound. In fact, the writer could have summed up his subject in two lines. He sort of does: “How happy are those whose way is blameless, / who walk according to the LORD’s instruction!” (Psalm 119:1).

But he continues writing. Why? Because two lines are inadequate to express how good God’s instruction is, in and of itself, and in its benefits to us. God’s instruction is endlessly surprising and endlessly good. If we plant ourselves in it, we will produce fruit appropriate to the season and bear leaves that give shelter to all who rest beneath them.

Personal Study

READ & EXAMINE

Instead of questions being interspersed throughout the psalm, you will read the selected portion of the psalm in full, whether in one sitting or over the course of several days. Some guidance is given at the start. Questions follow at the end.

- Choose a word or phrase to follow. Mark every instance of it as you read. (You can select more than one word or phrase, but when you begin, choose **one** and follow it.)
- Take notes as you read. What, if anything, in Psalm 119 connects with other psalms or passages of Scripture you have read?

¹¹ Further proof of complexity within simplicity: some scholars, such as James M. Hamilton Jr., note that the stanzas seem to operate in pairs, and the stanzas often contain two four-line units of thought. Each stanza also stands on its own, with the first line introducing it and the final line summarizing it in some way, as well as alongside the others. Several motifs serve as threads of continuity throughout the psalm.

Psalm 119:1–88

¹ How happy are those whose way is blameless,
who walk according to the LORD's instruction!
² Happy are those who keep his decrees and seek him with all their heart.
³ They do nothing wrong;
they walk in his ways.
⁴ You have commanded that your precepts be diligently kept.
⁵ If only my ways were committed to keeping your statutes!
⁶ Then I would not be ashamed when I think about all your commands.
⁷ I will praise you with an upright heart when I learn your righteous judgments.
⁸ I will keep your statutes;
never abandon me.

א Beth

⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping your word.
¹⁰ I have sought you with all my heart;
don't let me wander from your commands.
¹¹ I have treasured your word in my heart
so that I may not sin against you.
¹² LORD, may you be blessed;
teach me your statutes.
¹³ With my lips I proclaim
all the judgments from your mouth.
¹⁴ I rejoice in the way revealed by your decrees
as much as in all riches.
¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts
and think about your ways.
¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes;

I will not forget your word.

ג Gimel

¹⁷ Deal generously with your servant
so that I might live;
then I will keep your word.
¹⁸ Open my eyes so that I may contemplate
wondrous things from your instruction.
¹⁹ I am a resident alien on earth;
do not hide your commands from me.
²⁰ I am continually overcome
with longing for your judgments.
²¹ You rebuke the arrogant,
the ones under a curse,
who wander from your commands.
²² Take insult and contempt away from me,
for I have kept your decrees.
²³ Though princes sit together speaking
against me,
your servant will think about your statutes;
²⁴ your decrees are my delight
and my counselors.

ד Daleth

²⁵ My life is down in the dust;
give me life through your word.
²⁶ I told you about my life,
and you answered me;
teach me your statutes.
²⁷ Help me understand
the meaning of your precepts
so that I can meditate on your wonders.
²⁸ I am weary from grief;
strengthen me through your word.
²⁹ Keep me from the way of deceit

and graciously give me your instruction.

³⁰ I have chosen the way of truth;
I have set your ordinances before me.

³¹ I cling to your decrees;
LORD, do not put me to shame.

³² I pursue the way of your commands,
for you broaden my understanding.

ן He

³³ Teach me, LORD, the meaning of your statutes,
and I will always keep them.

³⁴ Help me understand your instruction,
and I will obey it
and follow it with all my heart.

³⁵ Help me stay on the path of your commands,
for I take pleasure in it.

³⁶ Turn my heart to your decrees
and not to dishonest profit.

³⁷ Turn my eyes
from looking at what is worthless;
give me life in your ways.

³⁸ Confirm what you said to your servant,
for it produces reverence for you.

³⁹ Turn away the disgrace I dread;
indeed, your judgments are good.

⁴⁰ How I long for your precepts!
Give me life through your righteousness.

י Waw

⁴¹ Let your faithful love come to me, Lord,
your salvation, as you promised.

⁴² Then I can answer the one who taunts me,
for I trust in your word.

⁴³ Never take the word of truth from my mouth,

for I hope in your judgments.

⁴⁴ I will always obey your instruction,
forever and ever.

⁴⁵ I will walk freely in an open place
because I study your precepts.

⁴⁶ I will speak of your decrees before kings
and not be ashamed.

⁴⁷ I delight in your commands,
which I love.

⁴⁸ I will lift up my hands to your commands,
which I love,
and will meditate on your statutes.

ז Zayin

⁴⁹ Remember your word to your servant;
you have given me hope through it.

⁵⁰ This is my comfort in my affliction:
Your promise has given me life.

⁵¹ The arrogant constantly ridicule me,
but I do not turn away from your instruction.

⁵² LORD, I remember your judgments from
long ago
and find comfort.

⁵³ Fury seizes me because of the wicked
who reject your instruction.

⁵⁴ Your statutes are the theme of my song
during my earthly life.

⁵⁵ LORD, I remember your name in the night,
and I obey your instruction.

⁵⁶ This is my practice:
I obey your precepts.

ח Cheth

⁵⁷ The LORD is my portion;
I have promised to keep your words.

⁵⁸ I have sought your favor with all my heart;

be gracious to me according to your promise.

⁵⁹ I thought about my ways
and turned my steps back to your decrees.

⁶⁰ I hurried, not hesitating
to keep your commands.

⁶¹ Though the ropes of the wicked
were wrapped around me,
I did not forget your instruction.

⁶² I rise at midnight to thank you
for your righteous judgments.

⁶³ I am a friend to all who fear you,
to those who keep your precepts.

⁶⁴ LORD, the earth is filled with your faithful
love;
teach me your statutes.

⌋ Teth

⁶⁵ LORD, you have treated your servant well,
just as you promised.

⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and discernment,
for I rely on your commands.

⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray,
but now I keep your word.

⁶⁸ You are good, and you do what is good;
teach me your statutes.

⁶⁹ The arrogant have smeared me with lies,
but I obey your precepts with all my heart.

⁷⁰ Their hearts are hard and insensitive,
but I delight in your instruction.

⁷¹ It was good for me to be afflicted
so that I could learn your statutes.

⁷² Instruction from your lips is better for me
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

⌋ Yod

⁷³ Your hands made me and formed me;

give me understanding
so that I can learn your commands.

⁷⁴ Those who fear you will see me and rejoice,
for I put my hope in your word.

⁷⁵ I know, LORD, that your judgments are
just
and that you have afflicted me fairly.

⁷⁶ May your faithful love comfort me
as you promised your servant.

⁷⁷ May your compassion come to me
so that I may live,
for your instruction is my delight.

⁷⁸ Let the arrogant be put to shame
for slandering me with lies;
I will meditate on your precepts.

⁷⁹ Let those who fear you,
those who know your decrees, turn to me.

⁸⁰ May my heart be blameless regarding your
statutes
so that I will not be put to shame.

⌋ Kaph

⁸¹ I long for your salvation;
I put my hope in your word.

⁸² My eyes grow weary
looking for what you have promised;
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"

⁸³ Though I have become like a wineskin
dried by smoke,
I do not forget your statutes.

⁸⁴ How many days must your servant wait?
When will you execute judgment on my
persecutors?

⁸⁵ The arrogant have dug pits for me;
they violate your instruction.

⁸⁶ All your commands are true;
people persecute me with lies — help me!

⁸⁷ They almost ended my life on earth,
but I did not abandon your precepts.

⁸⁸ Give me life in accordance with your faithful love,
and I will obey the decree you have spoken.

- 1 In what category would you place Psalm 119? (The categories are **trust**, **praise**, **thanksgiving**, **lament**, and **wisdom**.)
- 2 What words, or terms, are used to refer to the LORD's Torah, the LORD's instruction?
- 3 What word or phrase did you choose to follow? What did you learn from following it?
- 4 Why do you think the writer frequently mentions his heart, especially his "whole heart" or "all my heart"?
- 5 Who are the writer's enemies? What about his friends?

APPLY & PRAY

- 1 What stood out to you in this psalm?
- 2 For the psalmist, God's instruction is inseparable from God Himself. Both bring the psalmist joy; both offer great reward. God and His Word prompt the psalmist toward wholehearted devotion. What encouragement or conviction are you finding as you spend time with the psalmist, who so delights in God's Word?
- 3 Ask God to grow a deeper love and respect for His Word in you.

NOTES

Group Reflection

OPTION 1

At your table, read 2 Timothy 3:16–17. When have you experienced God’s Word as teaching, rebuking, correcting, or training you? How did it make you more “complete, equipped for every good work”?

OPTION 2

Over a shared meal (suggested recipe follows the Group Discussion), talk about when the words of the Bible came alive for you. What was that experience like?

Group Discussion

The following discussion concerns the 88 verses included in the personal study. To begin that discussion, invite someone to read Psalm 119:1–8. (You can read all 88 verses, if you prefer and time allows.)

- What is the main idea of this psalm?
- What truths did you discover in this psalm? Encourage each other with your findings.
- Where did you see parallels with other psalms or passages of Scripture?
- How can our community grow as people who “fear God ... [and] keep God’s precepts” (Psalm 119:63)?
- This psalm mentions being an alien and a sojourner fairly frequently. When have you or do you most feel like a sojourner or alien? How could this community be a place of rest and reassurance as we head toward God, who is our home?

Pray for your community, that it would grow in love for God, His Word, and for one another.

Fish Tacos with Cumin-Lime Coleslaw¹²

Serves 12

DIRECTIONS

To make the coleslaw:

1. Place the coleslaw mix and onions in a bowl.
2. In a separate bowl, stir together the mayonnaise, lime juice, cumin, cayenne, salt, and sugar.
3. Add the dressing to the coleslaw mix and stir to combine.
4. Refrigerate the coleslaw until you're assembling the tacos.

To make the fish tacos:

1. Toast the tortillas on a dry skillet until browned on each side. Stack the tortillas and cover with foil to keep warm.
2. Combine the chili powder, cumin, garlic powder, and salt in a small bowl.
3. Cut each fish filet into taco-sized pieces. Season the pieces with the spice mix.
4. Add half of the oil to a large skillet and heat over medium. Once heated, add half of the fish pieces and cook for a few minutes on each side, or until cooked through. Repeat with more oil and the remaining fish.
5. Top each tortilla with a piece of fish, a slice of avocado, a spoonful of coleslaw, and a couple of jalapeños. Enjoy warm.

INGREDIENTS

- o ¾ cup mayonnaise
- o 3 tablespoon lime juice
- o 1 ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- o ¼ teaspoon cayenne
- o 1 ½ teaspoon sugar
- o ¾ teaspoon salt
- o 1 ½ bags (16 ounces each) coleslaw mix
- o 6 green onions, sliced
- o 24 small corn tortillas
- o 6 teaspoon chili powder
- o 1 ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- o ¾ teaspoon garlic powder
- o ¼ teaspoon salt
- o 3 tablespoon cooking oil
- o 3 pounds cod filets (substitute chicken or other white fish, if preferred)
- o 3 avocados, sliced
- o 3 jalapeños, sliced

¹² Recipe from Budget Bytes (budgetbytes.com).

How to Read a Psalm¹³

Great poetry, like any great art, helps us sit in the tension of the already and not yet. Psalms, a book of Hebrew poetry, is the greatest poetry, because it is the inspired Word of God. In the book of Psalms, we find spaces where we can depend on God even as we wrestle with life's big questions.

How does the book of Psalms do that? Knowing some elements of Hebrew poetry can help us become better readers of Psalms, other poetic texts, and Scripture as a whole.

- **Line:** A line is like a unit of thought. In Psalms, the text is arranged as lines on the page rather than as blocks of prose.
- **Stanza:** A stanza is a grouping of lines set apart by extra space. A stanza in poetry is comparable to a paragraph in prose.
- **Refrain:** A refrain repeats words, lines, or stanzas at regular intervals, establishing cadence.
- **Inclusio:** An inclusio is a frame. It typically opens and closes a poem, as in Psalm 8.
- **Acrostic:** In an acrostic, each stanza or line begins with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, starting with aleph and concluding with taw.
- **Doxology:** A doxology is a short hymn of praise to God.
- **Parallelism:** Parallelism repeats “an idea using different but equivalent terms.”¹⁴ Psalms features three types of parallelism:
 - *Synonymous:* the second line restates the first (Psalm 77:11)
 - *Antithetical:* the second line restates the first from the opposite direction (Psalm 27:2)
 - *Synthetic:* the second line heightens the first (Psalm 77:16)
- **Chiasmus:** In a chiasmus, the first and last elements correspond to one another, as do the second and second-to-last, working toward the central hinge. That hinge often recalls the beginning and points to the end.
- **Imagery:** Imagery, or figurative language, includes devices like these:
 - *Allusion:* An allusion refers to something outside the poem to “deepen the definition of or extend the quality of something in the poem.”¹⁵

¹³ Adapted from *Psalms: The Traveling Songs of God's People* by Erin Feldman (Austin, TX: The Austin Stone Community Church, 2023), 11 and 14.

¹⁴ T. Desmond Alexander, “Introduction to Hebrew Poetry,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed 3 February, 2023, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/hebrew-poetry/>.

¹⁵ Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1994), 104.

- *Personification*: Personification gives “a physical characteristic or innate quality of animation to something that is inanimate, or to an abstraction.”¹⁶
- *Simile*: A simile is a stated comparison. One thing is “like” another thing, or one thing does something “as” another thing does. For example, the person who follows God is like a tree planted by living waters.
- *Metaphor*: A metaphor implies comparison. It drops the “like” and “as,” declaring God is a rock, a consuming fire, a mother hen, the wind, etc.
- **Compression**: Compression is the art of saying a lot with a little. In Psalms, this means the writer does not tell the entire history of God’s people—that is what the other books of the Old Testament are for—but alludes to it with key images and historical details.

General Questions to Ask When Reading a Poetic Text

- How does the psalm fit in or connect to the larger story of Scripture (creation, fall, redemption, new creation)?
- Where is Christ present, predicted, or needed in the psalm?
- Does the psalm include a superscription that provides additional context about the speaker or the psalm’s use in worship?
- How many units of thought are present? (Much of Hebrew narratives and poetry operate on principles of three. Genesis 1, for instance, employs a structure of 3-3-1.)
- What words are repeated?
- In what ways are the first verse and last verse related?
- If the first verse and final verse repeat one another (even with variation), is there a turning point in the middle of the psalm? (That is, is a chiasmus present?)
- What connecting words (and, or, but, nor, thus, therefore, etc.) are present?
- What imagery (word pictures) are used?
- What comparisons (often found with the words “like” or “as”) are made?
- What contrasts (often through opposites) are made?
- What is the overall tone or mood of the psalm?
- What evocative verbs (action words) are used?
- What questions does the psalmist ask? What kind of questions are they?
- What is the main idea of the psalm?

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 103.

How to Pray the Psalms¹⁷

When we are unsure of what to say to God, the Psalms step in. The Psalms is a book of praises and prayers inspired by God to be spoken to God and shared with others.¹⁸ When we pray its songs and prayers, we join a long line of people who spoke and sang them, too.

How do we pray the 150 psalms? One place to start is praying the words as they are. Read a psalm each morning, afternoon, and/or evening as though speaking it to God, yourself, and others. Let its words wash over you and nurture you. Drink from them, for God’s words are trustworthy and true.

Another place is responding to the words of a psalm. For instance, if you were reading Psalm 1, you could pray to God anytime a word, phrase, or concept in the psalm provoked thought. Maybe the word “happy” invites you to consider whether you would describe yourself as happy. You could pray, “God, what does it mean to be happy in the way Psalm 1 describes? I want to understand. Will You teach me?” Keep praying about that word until your thoughts cease or your mind wanders. When that occurs, read the next line. If something comes to mind, pray about it. If nothing comes to mind, move to the next line. Not every line of Scripture will immediately prompt a response. Continue the pattern of read-and-response until time runs out or you reach the end of the psalm.

You can apply the second method to any psalm, and any passage of Scripture. Allow God’s Word to direct your attention toward Him and others. Use it as a springboard for conversation, because that’s what prayer is. God speaks to us in His Word, and we answer Him with His words and our own.

Let’s practice by praying a portion of Psalm 19. We’ve provided example responses to the first two lines to get you started.

1 The heavens declare the glory of God

God, thank You for the night-time sky. I don’t see it that often in Austin, but it blows me away whenever I see it, like when I’m on vacation. Thank You for vacations, God, and for time to get away from the city.

¹⁷ Some text adapted from *An Introduction to REAP: A Method for Studying the Bible* by Erin Feldman (Austin, TX: The Austin Stone Community Church, 2018), 25.

¹⁸ Donald Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 45.

and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands.

God, everything in the world proclaims You exist. Your work is beautiful! I'll never stop being amazed by it. Thank You, God, for beautiful things and beautiful people, including my spouse and kids. Please help me to teach our kids to love You and to pay attention to the work of Your hands.

YOUR TURN.

Read Psalm 19:9–14. Respond to the words, images, and ideas that prompt prayers to God. Record your prayers below.

⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;

the ordinances of the LORD are reliable
and altogether righteous.

¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold —
than an abundance of pure gold;

and sweeter than honey
dripping from a honeycomb.

¹¹ In addition, your servant is warned by them,
and in keeping them there is an abundant reward.

¹² Who perceives his unintentional sins?
Cleanse me from my hidden faults.

¹³ Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins;
do not let them rule me.
Then I will be blameless
and cleansed from blatant rebellion.

¹⁴ May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

