

# THE EPIC OF EDEN

# PSALMS



EIGHT-SESSION STUDY GUIDE

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HarperChristian Resources

*Epic of Eden: Psalms Study Guide*

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As always, this *Epic of Eden* study of the book of Psalms is dedicated to all the students with whom I have had the privilege of learning this material. The Psalms are a gift to the church, and studying them has been a gift to me. May this deep dive into their content bring about joy, comfort, and a vision for the Almighty not glimpsed before!

This project could not have been completed without the colossal investment of many people. My deepest gratitude to Sara Riemersma, acquisitions editor and general mastermind of Zondervan/HarperChristian Resources, for her enthusiastic vision and masterful coordination of this project. Sara's tireless editing of video, text, and content is matched only by her commitment to excellence. My thanks as well to John Raymond for his behind-the-scenes leadership and "pinch-hitting" when we were in a pinch. To Marshall McLaughlin and his team from ProcessCreative, for hours (and hours) of filming under very challenging COVID conditions, as well as super creative ideas and editing that made all things beautiful. To Dale Williams, our visual editor, who tracked down countless images to best represent the material. And to Jessie Steffes for her dedicated work with our graphics and slides. To Kathy Noftsinger, my long-journey collaborator in the Epic dream. Kathy's dedication to these projects, as they morph from vision to video, is a constant source of strength, insight, and encouragement to me, and I am deeply grateful. Last but not least, to my beloved Steven, Noël, and Elise, who have paid the price of too many late nights and weekends away in order to bring this curriculum to its current state, my forever thanks. And to every pastor and lay leader who diligently sets about the task of teaching the people of God about their God, our team is grateful to say that the *Epic of Eden: Psalms* is here. Let the adventure begin!

## SCHEDULE TO FOLLOW

### SESSION ONE

#### GROUP MEETING

- Distribute study guides
- Watch Video Session 1—The Hymnbook of Ancient Israel  
Use Streaming Video code on inside front cover or DVD

#### INDEPENDENT STUDY

- The Hymnbook of Ancient Israel
- Who Wrote the Psalms & Why?

*This content will cover both Video Sessions 1 and 2*

### SESSION TWO

#### GROUP MEETING

- Watch Video Session 2—Who Wrote the Psalms & Why?  
Use Streaming Video code on inside front cover or DVD
- Discuss homework and video teaching

#### INDEPENDENT STUDY

- Interpreting the Psalms: Sacred Space

### SESSION THREE

#### GROUP MEETING

- Watch Video Session 3—Interpreting the Psalms: Sacred Space  
Use Streaming Video code on inside front cover or DVD
- Discuss homework and video teaching

#### INDEPENDENT STUDY

- Interpreting the Psalms: Theocracy

### SESSION FOUR

#### GROUP MEETING

- Watch Video Session 4—Interpreting the Psalms: Theocracy  
Use Streaming Video code on inside front cover or DVD
- Discuss homework and video teaching

#### INDEPENDENT STUDY

- The Power of Poetry

## SCHEDULE TO FOLLOW

### SESSION FIVE

#### GROUP MEETING

- Watch Video Session 5—The Power of Poetry  
Use Streaming Video code on inside front cover or DVD
- Discuss homework and video teaching

#### INDEPENDENT STUDY

- Lord, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

### SESSION SIX

#### GROUP MEETING

- Watch Video Session 6—Lord, Like a Shepherd Lead Us  
Use Streaming Video code on inside front cover or DVD
- Discuss homework and video teaching

#### INDEPENDENT STUDY ON

- Anatomy of a Lament

### SESSION SEVEN

#### GROUP MEETING

- Watch Video Session 7—Anatomy of a Lament  
Use Streaming Video code on inside front cover or DVD
- Discuss homework and video teaching

#### INDEPENDENT STUDY

- Jesus and the Psalms

### SESSION EIGHT

#### FINAL GROUP MEETING

- Watch Video Session 8: Jesus and the Psalms
- Discuss homework, video teaching, and the study overall

# HOW IS THIS GOING TO WORK?

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If your group has tackled an *Epic of Eden* study before, you're already pros. If not, here's the plan:

- The curriculum revolves around a set of eight filmed teaching sessions with me, Dr. Sandy Richter. Each study guide has a streaming video access code printed on the inside cover. You can view video from any device with this code. If you prefer, DVD is available for purchase.
- The second component is a study guide, which will contain lessons to be done independently at home whenever it fits your schedule. Three will focus on the upcoming week's video lecture; the fourth is a "bonus psalm!" Do as much or as little as your schedule permits. No pressure, really. The study guide is designed so that the homework (ideally) will be completed before watching the videos.
- Once per week your group will gather to view the video teaching, talk about the individual work from the week, and engage in group discussion questions about the video. Again, video is available either streaming using the code on inside cover, or on DVD.

You may want to plan a little extra time for your first gathering as you meet each other, get your books, drink some coffee, have some snacks (a must for every gathering, really), and dive into the first video. (The first video includes an introduction to the larger study as well as the first lecture.)

# INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PSALMS

ENTHRONED UPON THE *TEHILIM* OF ISRAEL



## ENTHRONED UPON THE TEHILIM (תהלים) OF ISRAEL

Psalms is perhaps the most beloved book of our Bibles. This anthology of prayers and praises is so familiar to us that quotations find their way onto dedicatory plaques and national monuments, songs and movie scripts, even the scenic overlooks at the Grand Canyon.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the book of Psalms is often published as an appendix to the New Testament! But even in that familiarity, the great Old Testament theologian Claus Westermann was absolutely right when he said, “the Psalms belong to a world which is no longer our world.”<sup>2</sup> Temples and priests; animal sacrifices, blood, and “drink offerings”; the intimate cohabitation of church and state—these are all so unfamiliar to the twenty-first-century believer that the substance behind these hymns and laments, the imagery deployed in these songs of praise is often beyond our grasp. Think about it. This hymnbook of ancient Israel emerges from a world that ceased to exist more than 2,000 years ago! That’s a long time. But the faith, the fear, the celebration, and the sorrow of the ancients—that, somehow, has not ceased to exist. Rather, as Athanasius said, “The Psalms have a unique place in the Bible because [whereas] most of Scripture speaks to us, the Psalms speak for us.”<sup>3</sup> The Psalms speak *for* us. And for those of you who are seasoned Christ-followers, you so know this. In that dark night of the soul, when my heart is overcome, Psalm 62 reminds me that I hold the hand of the Almighty: “Truly he is my rock and my salvation” and regardless of the locked doors, the lies, corruption, and betrayal all around me, “I will never be shaken” (v. 2). When the tears keep coming, and the loss simply cannot be eased, Psalm 88 cries *with* me: “my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, Lord, every day!” (v. 9).

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, these quotations from the book of Psalms have been removed. Olsen, “Officials Erode Psalm Displays at Grand Canyon.”

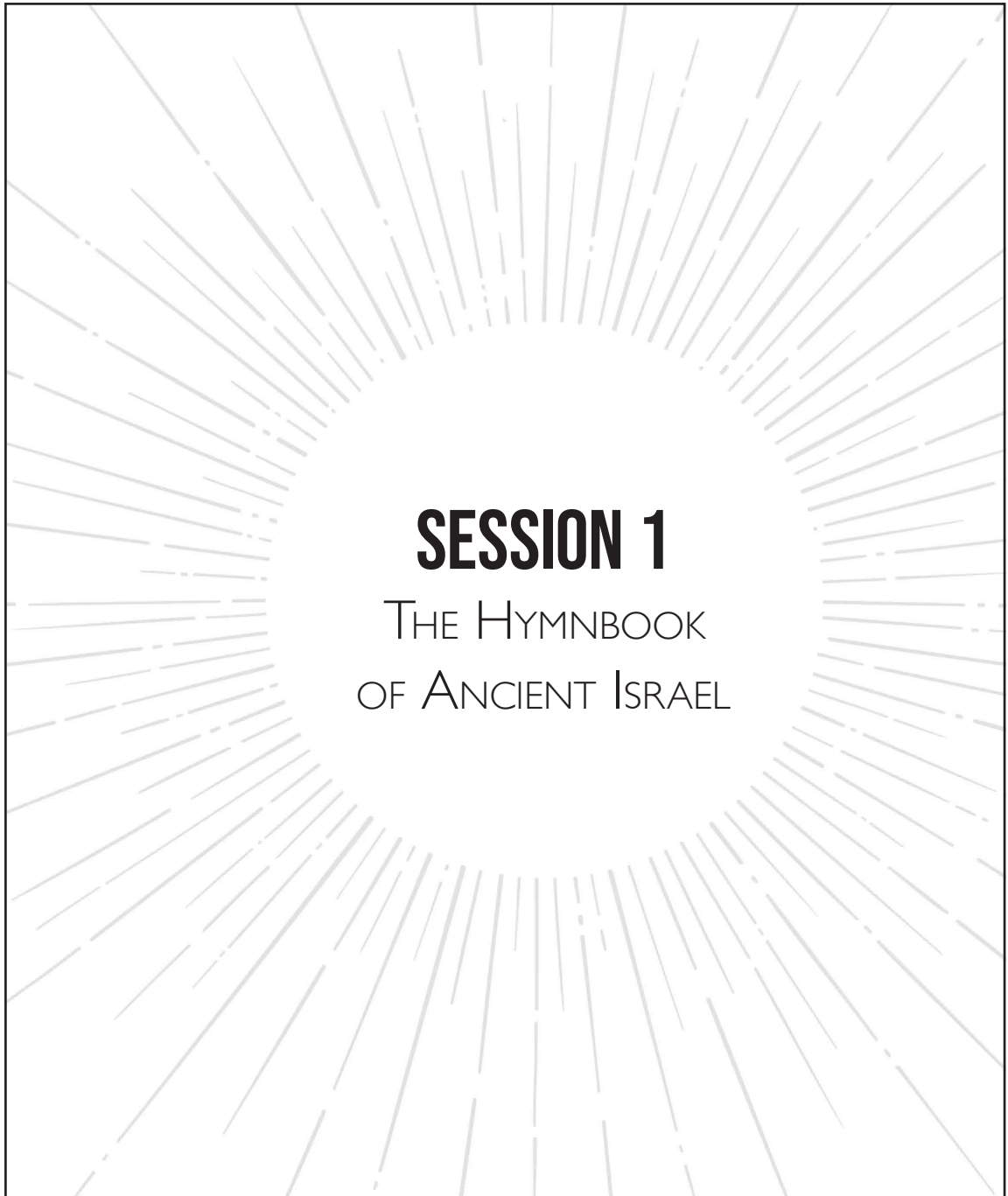
<sup>2</sup> Westermann, *The Psalms*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria (born c. 296–298 BCE, died 373 CE), was the twentieth bishop of Alexandria, a Christian theologian, a church father, and the chief defender of Trinitarianism against the heresy of Arianism. He served valiantly at the First Council of Nicaea and suffered five exiles at the hands of resistant Roman emperors and corrupt churchmen.



## THE EPIC OF EDEN: PSALMS

When the evil around me threatens to destroy everything I've loved and labored for, Psalm 124 reminds me who is on my side. And when the inconceivable has actually come to pass, when the impossible is in my hands, Psalm 126 celebrates with me, "[I was] like those who dreamed. . . . The LORD has done great things for [me]" (vv. 1, 3). Blessed be his name! The Psalms pray *for us*. So, in putting this curriculum into video and paper form, my wish for you and your group is that this deep dive into the book of Psalms will do three things: (1) it will help us reconnect with our ancestors in the faith as they tutor us in what honest faith in hard times looks like; (2) as our ancestors in the faith share their experience of praise and lament with us, we will be reminded of who we are and who God is; and (3) in this discipleship, we will find that we do not walk alone, but we will all find our way back to the Lord of Heaven and Earth who has never ceased to hear the cries of his people.



## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Epic of Eden: Psalms*! I am so grateful you have chosen this study and I am thrilled to go on this adventure together. We begin with an introductory video teaching, gathering us all onto the same page of both history and biblical text. Following the video, you will engage in what I'm certain will be rich and exciting group discussion sharing what you know already of the psalms and what you are most looking forward to learning.

Along this journey, I encourage you to take part in as much of the personal, independent study as you have time for. As a biblical scholar and professor, my joy comes from doing the heavy lifting of decades of research and study so that I can pass along the wonder of Scripture to you in these pages and provide the framework for you to grow closer to God's Word as a serious believer and follower of Jesus Christ!

After your leader sets up the groundwork for our time together and reviews the weekly schedule, briefly introduce yourselves. Then discuss the **Debrief & Discover** questions below before watching the Session I Video Teaching. After the video you will have group discussion in the **Dialogue & Digest** section before closing your gathering with doxology and prayer.

## DEBRIEF & DISCOVER

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about the book of Psalms?

What is it that makes the psalms special?

## WATCH SESSION 1 VIDEO: THE HYMNBOOK OF ANCIENT ISRAEL [28 MINUTES]

### Video notes

These are provided for you and your group members to follow along during the video as well as to offer room for note taking (writing down questions and aha moments as you like).

- I. What is the book of Psalms?
  - A. *tehilim* = “songs” or “praises”
  - B. A culled collection
  - C. A hymnbook: collects and organizes everything a congregation needs in order to worship as a congregation
- II. How were the psalms used?
  - A. Examples from our hymnals
    1. Easter
    2. Christmas
    3. Communion
    4. Marriage

B. Examples from the book of Psalms

- I. Hymns
2. Laments
3. Liturgical readings
4. Enthronement psalms

III. What was the function of the Psalms?

“In their feasts and fasts, their daily worship, and their special celebrations, the people of Israel remembered and relived God’s past victories, committed themselves to present obedience of the covenant laws, which called for full loyalty to Yahweh, and anticipated future triumphs, especially the ultimate defeat of Yahweh’s foes.”<sup>4</sup>

IV. How is the collection structured?

V. What is the point of the structure?

A. Psalm 1 is a Torah psalm; our foundation, our past

B. Psalm 2 is a Messianic psalm; our hope, our future

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<sup>4</sup> LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 443.

## DIALOGUE & DIGEST

Discuss the following as a group.

- Sandy quotes the fourth-century church father Athanasius saying: “The Psalms have a unique place in the Bible because [whereas] most of Scripture speaks to us, the Psalms speak *for* us.” How have you found this to be true in your own life?
- Describe the most powerful worship experience you’ve ever had or witnessed. What made it so powerful?
- Sandy describes the book of Psalms as the hymnbook of ancient Israel. Describe how this hymnbook compares and contrasts to our modern hymnbooks.
- Review the structure of the book of Psalms. What does Sandy say this structure tells us?

## DECIDE & DO

Read Psalm 150, the doxology of doxologies, aloud going around the group reading verse by verse.

## NEXT WEEK

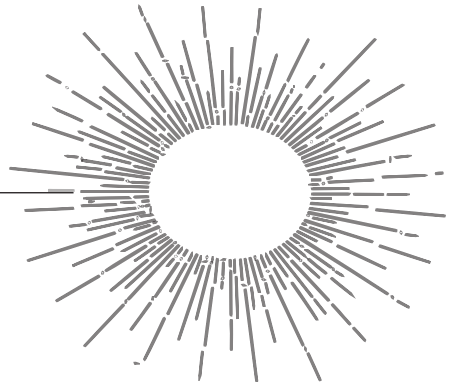
Next week we’ll dig into the book of Psalms and find answers to the questions *who wrote these psalms?* and *why did they write them?*

## CLOSING PRAYER

Ask your group members if there is anything they would like prayer for—especially something highlighted by this week’s video.

# INDEPENDENT STUDY 1

## THE HYMNBOOK OF ANCIENT ISRAEL WHO WROTE THE PSALMS & WHY?



Welcome to lesson one! This week in your homework you will be interacting with material from two of the video sessions. (This is the only lesson that relates to two video sessions.) Your first two days of study will cover information discussed in video session one, “The Hymnbook of Ancient Israel,” which you have already seen, so it will be mostly review for you. Day three’s study will then focus on the upcoming session two video, “Who Wrote the Psalms and Why?” And, finally, day four’s study will introduce you to our first “bonus psalm”!

## A WORD FROM SANDY

In the course of putting this curriculum together I wrote to several career worship leaders in my world, asking them why they thought the people of God “need to sing.” Why do we write songs, why do we collect those written by our forebearers, and why do we sing them as a congregation? Why was it that the first thing the Israelites did as they stood looking back at the Red Sea—which had just closed over the heads of their oppressors—was *sing*? Why is it that Paul and Silas, beaten and bleeding in the bowels of a Roman prison, were *singing* when the earthquake rattled the doors at midnight? Why are we commanded to *sing* to God and to each other (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16)? And why is it that the *first* thing we do when we gather as the community of faith is *sing*?

Marty Parks, author, composer, and director of a slew of your favorite anthems and cantatas (you can find him at [martyparks.com](http://martyparks.com)), says this: “Music, like all art, sorta bypasses the intellect and goes straight to the heart.”<sup>5</sup> I so agree. Music sneaks past our barriers, captures our attention when we are not offering it, and lays ahold of our souls. It speaks to us in a language we cannot resist. And when the right lyric is set to the right melody, animated by the right instrumentation . . . magic. When all of this is utilized to declare God’s Word to his people? Here is strength. And when the

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<sup>5</sup> Personal communication.

people of God come together in this extraordinary space and declare their shared story in song? Here is power. Here is a joy that heals and transforms. This is why we sing. This is why we sing *together*. And this is why we cull our songs until we have a hymnbook that embodies who we were, who we are, and who we pray we will be.

## REAL TIME & SPACE

As LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush note in their well-worn survey of the Old Testament, the Jerusalem temple must have been a busy place. The law prescribed daily services in the morning and at sundown (Exod 29:38–42; Num 28:2–8), sabbath rituals (Num 28:9f.), and special burnt offerings at the new moon (Num 28:11–15; cf. Hos 2:11). The Pilgrim festivals and high holidays were celebrated here, as well as daily special sacrifices for illness, vows fulfilled, personal celebration, and uncleanness. Those who lived nearby may have used the temple precinct for special family occasions. Public events such as the coronation of a king, a victory in battle, or relief from drought or plague would all gather the populace to the temple as well.

Annual feasts could last for several days and drew pilgrims to Jerusalem from throughout Israel: the combined feasts of Unleavened Bread and Passover in early spring (Exod 23:15; Lev 23:5); the feast of Weeks (a harvest festival in late spring, called “Pentecost” in the New Testament; Exod 23:16; 34:22; Num 28:26; Acts 2:1); and the feast of Tabernacles in early fall (also called Booths or Ingathering; Exod 23:16; 34:22; Deut 16:16).<sup>6</sup>

The temple was staffed by the priests and Levites. We will look at the role of the priests in another lesson. For now it is important to know that the Levites, our “second caste” of priests, did everything from putting up and tearing down the Tabernacle tent, to crowd control on holy days (1 Chr 23:2–9), to setting up the sound system and rehearsing the praise band! Among these were two very important family guilds of temple musicians, the “sons of Asaph” and the “sons of Korah.”

Asaph is named in 1 Chronicles 6:39; 15:17–19; 16:4–7; and 2 Chronicles 29:30. He was a Levite and a leader in the first choir David recruited to facilitate worship in Jerusalem. The “sons of Asaph” were famous for their musical service in the temple. “These are the men David put in charge of the music in the house of the Lord after the ark came to rest there. They ministered with music before the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, until Solomon built the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem.

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<sup>6</sup> LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 441–42.



## SESSION ONE: THE HYMNBOOK OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

They performed their duties according to the regulations laid down for them" (1 Chr 6:31–32). Psalms 50, 73–83 are among the psalms of Asaph.

The “sons of Korah” were another family guild, singers from the Kohathite division of Levites (1 Chr 6:33–48; cf. 2 Chr 9:17–19 and 2 Chr 20:19). If this group is descended from the same Korah as Moses’s nephew, then this is also the family that led a revolt against Moses in the wilderness (Num 16:31–33). But notice how the book of Numbers is careful to point out that Korah’s children were spared God’s judgment (26:11). Like many Levites, these guys were guards and porters in the tabernacle and were responsible for “things that were baked in the pans”—in other words, grain offerings (1 Chr 9:31; cf. Lev 2:1–10). The psalms attributed to this guild include Psalms 42; 44–49; 84–85; 87–88. The first three are placed in the collection of David.

# DAY ONE: A PRAYER

## FIRST CONTACT

Several years ago, my husband and I were gifted with Ben Patterson's *Praying the Psalms*. What a delightful little book! Each day Ben (retired campus pastor of Hope and Westmont colleges) offers a psalm for reading as well as brief words of wisdom regarding how that psalm speaks into our world today. For a full year Steve and I used this book for our daily devotions. Each day we prayed with Ben, and each day the ancients prayed with us. We learned by experience what Father Patrick Reardon (pastor of All Saints Orthodox Church in Chicago) claims, "Christ walks within the psalms."<sup>7</sup> We were strengthened, challenged, and encouraged. Who was speaking to our hearts during this year-long discipleship? Was it the young psalmist David as he scrambled to survive Saul's murderous jealousy (Ps 63); was it Ben Patterson and his hard-won life wisdom; or was it perhaps, the Word made flesh who held David's hand . . . and holds ours as well?

## INTO THE BOOK

In the words of the Psalms we hear the cries of the psalmists' hearts. We hear their praise and worship; we hear of their victories and defeats; and we often get a glimpse into their souls.

Read Psalm 32. As you do, notice the divisions throughout the psalm. For example: How does the psalm begin? How does it end? What happens in between?

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<sup>7</sup> Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, wxvi.

## Psalm 32

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.

<sup>2</sup> Blessed is the one  
whose sin the LORD does not count  
against them  
and in whose spirit is no deceit.

<sup>3</sup> When I kept silent,  
my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.

<sup>4</sup> For day and night  
your hand was heavy on me;  
my strength was sapped  
as in the heat of summer.

<sup>5</sup> Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, "I will confess  
my transgressions to the LORD."  
And you forgave  
the guilt of my sin.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore let all the faithful pray to you  
while you may be found;  
surely the rising of the mighty waters  
will not reach them.

<sup>7</sup> You are my hiding place;  
you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of  
deliverance.

<sup>8</sup> I will instruct you and teach you in the  
way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my loving  
eye on you.

<sup>9</sup> Do not be like the horse or the mule,  
which have no understanding  
but must be controlled by bit and bridle  
or they will not come to you.

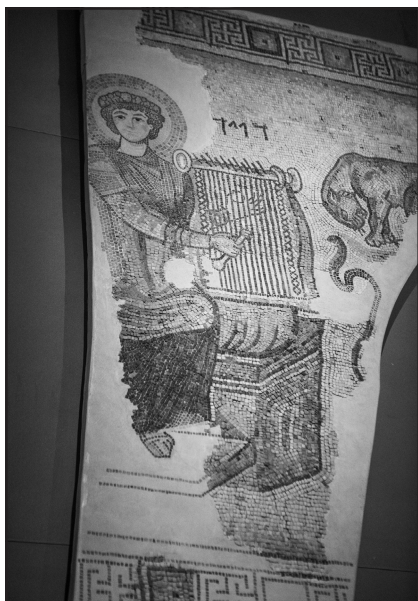
<sup>10</sup> Many are the woes of the wicked,  
but the LORD's unfailing love  
surrounds the one who trusts in him.

<sup>11</sup> Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you  
righteous;  
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

## THE EPIC OF EDEN: PSALMS

- Draw a line between each of the divisions.
- Give a short title to each division.
- Notice the progression throughout the psalm. Circle the words that indicate the progression of the psalmist's journey.
- Choose a color to highlight the words describing the psalmist's condition in verses 3 and 4.
- Now choose another (happier) color to highlight the words describing his condition as a result of his action taken in verse 5 (don't forget to look at verses 1 and 2!).
- What does the psalmist encourage his readers to do and not do? Underline those words.

## REAL PEOPLE, REAL PLACES, REAL FAITH



***Mosaic image of king David playing the lyre, from a 6th century A.D. synagogue in Gaza.***

One of the things to keep in mind as we begin our journey into the book of Psalms is that these psalms were written by real people, in real places, struggling with real faith. The superscript of Psalm 32 tells us that our psalm for this lesson is a psalm “of David” (*ledavid*). The Hebrew is made up of a preposition (*le*) attached to the name “David,” thus the literal translation is “belonging to David.” But the exact meaning of the phrase is unclear. Is this “authored by David,” “dedicated to David,” or “belonging to the Davidic collection”? We don’t know. But what we do know is that seventy-three songs are attributed to David in this way. Seventy-three. What this tells us is that David was a man of worship. A man who loved his God and was not at all shy to say so. In the psalms we hear David’s petitions, his confessions, and his celebration of God’s faithfulness. As a result, we are privileged to pray *with* him, and we are challenged to be *like* him—a people who cry out to God in our brokenness and our joy.

## OUR PEOPLE, OUR PLACES, OUR FAITH

When I began putting this curriculum on paper, I posted an inquiry to my Facebook page: “What is your favorite psalm, and why?” A friend and colleague from my days at Wheaton College named Psalm 32 as “her” psalm and posted this in response:

After living a life far from God during most of my 20s, when I became a mother in my 30s I found my way back to the church and Jesus. Life was good now, right? Not quite. In my 40s I finally had to come face-to-face with the sin of those early years. The shame I had carried for so long was just more than I could bear. God was so good to put me in places where I could process through that. Where I could fully experience God’s love for me, something I had never been able to imagine.

It began in a women’s Bible study when my leader asked us to close our eyes and imagine what it would be like when we first met God in heaven. The tears came quickly. I couldn’t even imagine looking upon his goodness. I saw myself turned away, not even able to lay my eyes upon him.

After some really hard work, a lot of time in the Scripture, and some providential sermons, I knew I wanted to confess my sin out loud. That tangible act felt really important. As part of that confession, I read Psalm 32. Those words around God’s forgiveness were a balm to my soul.

Dee Pierce 2020

Director of the Center for Vocation and Career  
Wheaton College

Let me challenge you, right now, to do what Dee did. It is true that when we keep silent about our sin—shove it down, box it up, and bury it—our sin eats away at our souls like a cancer. But it is also true that if we are faithful to confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive. Indeed, as the book of Galatians tells us, “It is for freedom that Christ set us free” (Gal 5:1). So, let’s be free. Read this psalm again, out loud, and with each line respond:

## THE EPIC OF EDEN: PSALMS

- Verses 1–2:** It is true, how “blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven”!
- Verses 3–4:** I will no longer be silent.
- Verse 5:** Confess your sin and be assured that He forgives.
- Verses 6–7:** I don’t care what the rest of the world knows or thinks they know. “You are my hiding place.”
- Verse 8:** Create in me a clean heart, oh God, change me, conform me to the image of the Son (Rom 8:29).
- Verse 9:** I will not be a stubborn mule, an untrainable beast.
- Verses 10–11:** This is my inheritance, and I will not allow anything or anyone to rob me of it! I will be glad in the Lord, I will shout for joy that I am forgiven and free!

If you are comfortable, share this moment with a friend you trust. Let this be the day when the power of darkness is shattered and the hope of a new day dawns.

## DAY TWO: THE COLLECTION

### FIRST CONTACT

Confession time—I can get lost in a paper bag. During my first summer working at the Teen Challenge Women’s Home in downtown Philadelphia, the higher-ups finally gave up on sending me out for errands. It wasn’t because I was unwilling or irresponsible. I had a car and a great work ethic. They stopped sending me out because . . . well, I would never come back. A seemingly innocuous run to the hardware store could result in three hours of desperate left-hand turns around the city. I am grateful to say that later in my emerging adulthood I discovered this amazing thing called a MAP—that ingenious contribution to the well-being of humanity that puts all the streets and highways on paper! I LOVE maps! Not only because they help me find my way home from the hardware store, but because they offer the big picture. In my opinion, an essential aspect of understanding just about anything. A map lets you see how everything fits together—side streets, highways, city, and open space. Oh, how I love seeing my world coordinated to the page in front of me. And guess what? Once I get a picture of the terrain into my brain . . . I stop getting lost.

### INTO THE BOOK

Did you know that the book of Psalms is actually made up of five different books? Did you know that each of those five books ends the same way? With a brief but beautiful doxology. Did you also know that many of the psalms contain a superscript that names the author (or compiler), the type of psalm, its liturgical function, the instruments used to accompany the psalm, and/or historical information about the piece? A few psalms even contain a postscript. Today’s study will take you on a tour of the book of Psalms. The goal? To coordinate all these signposts to the larger structure of the book so that you won’t ever get lost on the way back from the hardware store again.

Open your Bible to Psalm 1. Look just above the title. What is the first thing you notice in the heading? “Book I,” right? Working from the video lecture, flip through the book of Psalms and find where each of the five books begins and ends. Write out the doxology that concludes each book. Complete the following chart as you do. This will be your “map” to the book of Psalms.

THE EPIC OF EDEN: PSALMS

BOOK NUMBER	PSALMS	DOXOLOGY
I	I–41	Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen. (Ps. 41:13)
II		
III		
IV		
V		



Next, go back through the book of Psalms and read some of the superscripts (the words written above the first line of the psalm, often beginning with “for the director of music” or a psalm of . . .”). As you do, see if you can find and list here:

- Five different authors
  
- Three different sets of instructions for the director of music
  
- Five different types of psalms

## REAL PEOPLE, REAL PLACES, REAL FAITH

As you worked your way through the superscripts and postscripts, you no doubt ran into some unfamiliar stuff. For example, in yesterday’s study of Psalm 32, the superscript tells the reader what type of psalm it is—a *maskil*. This term is used of thirteen psalms. Its exact meaning is unclear, but some suggestions include “memory verse,” “contemplation,” or “wisdom song put to music.”<sup>8</sup> Another term found all over the psalms is *selah* (*sel-a*). This one is used more than seventy times in the Psalter. Most believe it refers to some sort of cessation in the singing or recitation of the psalm that makes space for an instrumental interlude, a response from the choir, or an interjection by the liturgist. Did it surprise you to find that the ancients had a “director of music”? Have you ever thought about the temple having a “worship pastor,” choirs, and choir directors? What does that tell you about the setting and function of these songs?

As you likely observed, the superscript “for the director of music” occurs frequently in the superscripts of the psalms. In fact, according to Bruce Waltke, this phrase occurs fifty-five times.

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<sup>8</sup> HALOT 1:641; Holladay, 217; LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 444.

## THE EPIC OF EDEN: PSALMS

After investigating the hymns and laments found in other biblical books,<sup>9</sup> and comparing these with their ancient Near Eastern counterparts, Waltke made an interesting discovery. He found that the phrase “for the director of music” and other information pertaining to the liturgical performance of a psalm (the accompanying instruments or the recommended tune) always appeared in other texts at the *end* of the psalm. In these other musical pieces (in and out of the Bible) the material at the *beginning* of the psalm consisted of information about the genre and the author (such as “a psalm of David”). Thus, Waltke proposed that the superscript “for the director of music” that we read in our Bibles at the beginning of a psalm is actually the postscript of the *previous* psalm,<sup>10</sup> and that these notations were somehow merged in the transference of the book. There are major Bible translation committees that are investigating the feasibility of changing this in your English Bible! For instance, using Psalm 58 as an example, the words “a psalm of David” at the beginning of the psalm should indeed be read as its superscript. But the words, “for the director of music, sung to the tune of ‘Do Not Destroy’” should be read as the postscript of Psalm 57. Kind of mind-blowing, yes? What does this mean for you and me? Well, it certainly doesn’t alter the contents of the psalms, and I’d encourage us to leave the ultimate placement of these notations to Waltke. But I’d also encourage you to see that your book of Psalms really is a *functioning* hymnal. Just like the songs in your hymnal (or PowerPoint slides!), a worship song should be visibly attributed to its correct author (copyright!), and the hows and whens and wheres of performing the song must be attended to by the worship leader.

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<sup>9</sup> See for example, Exod 15:1; Judg 5; 2 Sam 18; Job 31:40b; Isa 38:19b; Hab 3:19b.

<sup>10</sup> Waltke, “Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both,” 583–96.

## OUR PEOPLE, OUR PLACES, OUR FAITH

In an essay he published in 2005, Walter Brueggemann speaks of the difficulty of preaching the Psalms. In his introduction he speaks of the Psalms being “too”—*too* abrupt and disjunctive, *too* abrasive, *too* emotional, *too* “filled with embarrassing passion,” and *too* linked to now defunct cultic practices.<sup>11</sup> As I ponder this observation, I think of the last time I made one of my “emergency” phone calls to my lifelong comrade at arms, Sara King. I think of how I totally let whatever it was rip, venting about whatever absurdity, frustration, or injustice was taking over my world that particular week. I think about how abrupt, disjunctive, abrasive, and “filled with embarrassing passion” those conversations always are. But my friend listens hard, steps into my space with the empathy and accountability that only a long-lived friendship has—and talks me down off the ledge. Do you have one of those friends? If not, you need one!

Then I think of the last time I dropped to my knees, outraged at the latest absurdity, frustration, or injustice taking over my world and ranted to the Almighty. Demanding that he SEE my circumstances and RESPOND! Abrupt, disjunctive, “filled with embarrassing passion.” Yes, that is what the Psalms are, because they are real. The real emotions of real people trying to live a real life of faith in the midst of a very real fallen world. And those people are our people. Those prayers are our prayers. Real life is not easily domesticated. And neither are the psalms.

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<sup>11</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms in Narrative Performance.”

## DAY THREE: THE CONTENT

### FIRST CONTACT

At a lecture I was privileged to attend at Harvard Divinity School back in the days of my PhD program, the evangelical church historian, Mark Noll, gave a presentation I will never forget.<sup>12</sup> Noll had been invited to do the impossible: to inaugurate a new Evangelical Chair of Theology at Harvard Divinity without offending anyone. As the historical Christian faith is exclusive, and Harvard Divinity is not, the chances of this going well were pretty slim. But Noll managed to openly affirm historical, evangelical faith and *not* offend the very progressive crowd sitting in front of him. How did he do that? He (brilliantly) let our *hymnody* do the talking. This hymnody—consider Charles Wesley (“Come, O My Guilty Brethren, Come”) and Augustus Montague Toplady (“The Old Rugged Cross”)—is not only beautiful . . . it has content.

### INTO THE BOOK

Read Psalm 19 out loud.

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<sup>12</sup> See Mark Noll, “We Are What We Sing” 40.

## Psalm 19

*A psalm of David.*

<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his  
hands.

<sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> They have no speech, they use no words;  
no sound is heard from them.

<sup>4</sup> Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.  
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for  
the sun.

<sup>5</sup> It is like a bridegroom coming out of his  
chamber,  
like a champion rejoicing to run his  
course.

<sup>6</sup> It rises at one end of the heavens  
and makes its circuit to the other;  
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

<sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect,  
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.

<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right,  
giving joy to the heart.  
The commands of the LORD are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever.  
The decrees of the LORD are firm,  
and all of them are righteous.

<sup>10</sup> They are more precious than gold,  
than much pure gold;  
they are sweeter than honey,  
than honey from the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup> By them your servant is warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

<sup>12</sup> But who can discern their own errors?  
Forgive my hidden faults.

<sup>13</sup> Keep your servant also from willful sins;  
may they not rule over me.

## THE EPIC OF EDEN: PSALMS

Then I will be blameless,  
innocent of great transgression.

<sup>14</sup> May these words of my mouth and this  
meditation of my heart

be pleasing in your sight,  
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Now read the psalm again. This time respond to the questions below.

- ☐ For each of verses 1–6, indicate the subject, **verb**, and object by underlining, **highlighting** or circling them.
- ☐ What is happening in verses 1–6?
- ☐ In verses 7–10, using the same method as in the previous verses, indicate the subject, verb, and adjectives.
- ☐ To what are the subjects of verses 7–9 being compared in verse 10?
- ☐ What is their purpose?
- ☐ What is the psalmist's prayer and desire?
- ☐ Who is the focus of this psalm?

## REAL PEOPLE, REAL PLACES, REAL FAITH

The superscripts in the Psalter show us over and over again that the majority of the psalms were meant to be sung. Some of the instructions include the instruments to be used, while others name a particular tune for accompaniment. Julie Tennent of Asbury Theological Seminary, who is herself a very accomplished musician, decided a number of years ago it was time to take these ancient instructions seriously. Her thesis? “The Psalms are for singing—so why don’t we sing them?”<sup>13</sup> The result was an Asbury Spring Reader entitled, *Sing*. Here Tennent provides three different tune options for singing each of the psalms. And she challenges us to *do* it. Sing the psalms! Tennent claims that “[i]t is as though the act of singing bridges a distance between us and the text, enabling us to enter into the world of the psalmist.”<sup>14</sup> I completely concur, but would like to add that singing these ancient prayers also enables the ancients to enter our world and stand with us in our own joys and challenges.

Go to <http://psalms.seedbed.com/> and navigate your way to Psalm 19. Choose one (or try all three) of the tune options there and sing, yes, *sing* the words of this psalm!

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<sup>13</sup> Tennent, *Sing*: “Singing the Psalms.”

<sup>14</sup> Tennent, *Sing*: “Singing the Psalms,” 4.

## OUR PEOPLE, OUR PLACES, OUR FAITH

On a website titled, “It’s All About Me,” the author has this to say about the human ego: “While necessary in moderation, allowing one’s ego to become overinflated leads to self-centered and downright embarrassing behavior. Such an excess of self-importance can be called egotism.”<sup>15</sup> Ah, the oldest crime in the book. The sin foundational to all sin. “It’s all about me!” What absurdities have arisen from that foolish posture. And what beauty arises when we resist that posture! Indeed, one of the glories of Christian worship is that for a few bright and shining moments we humans join our voices to declare, “No, no it’s not!” So, what a bummer it is when we transform even our worship songs into a recitation of self. There are some songs you could sing to Jesus or your boyfriend and no one could tell the difference. This sort of music is one of my all-time pet peeves.

When an entire worship set is all about how I *feel* today, then we can be assured that the congregation will leave church knowing nothing more than they knew when they walked through the door. Worse, they will leave their encounter with the Creator of the cosmos having ignored him and focused only on their own very limited perspective. A diet of cotton-candy, feel-good lyrics is just as detrimental to the growth of a congregation as a steady diet of Sour Patch Kids and Almond Joys are to your seven-year old. Sure, having a candy bar for lunch makes you feel great for about ten minutes, but (to switch metaphors) it is not going to give you the endurance you need to face the dark night of the soul. Rather, when it’s 3 a.m., and I’m in the ICU holding the hand of someone I love, and all I can hear around me are the beeps and whirring of life-support machines, the lyrics of “Jesus or My Boyfriend” songs are useless. No, I need to be reminded of the mighty acts of God. I need to hear that God is near from someone who knows of what they speak. I need lyrics that challenge my anxious perspective and catapult me into *his* perspective. And I need to know that the God I am praying to is the one who parted the Red Sea and raised Lazarus from the dead. When real life happens, cotton-candy lyrics are not going to do it.

I’ve been on this soap box long enough that one of my students finally decided it was high time I have my very own “Jesus Is My Boyfriend” song. So, with his permission, I thought you might enjoy having your very own copy of Kevin Peake’s “Jesus Is My Boyfriend.” (Thanks, Kevin!)

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<sup>15</sup> <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ItsAllAboutMe>



## JESUS IS MY BOYFRIEND<sup>16</sup>

I remember the first time you asked me out  
To be with you makes me shout.  
With all I feel it's too much to say,  
You never even make me pay.

### CHORUS

Even when we sit down to eat,  
I'm reminded of our *berit*.  
If I look good or I'm a slob,  
It's nice to be in the *bet'ab*

### CHORUS

Jesus, thank you for the call  
I give you my all and all.  
Being with you has no end,  
Because Jesus you're my boyfriend!

—bkp

Downright embarrassing, isn't it? And worse, with a catchy tune and the right instrumentation I'm sure we could get it published! So we circle back and ask, what is the real purpose of worship? As Samuel Terrien says: "A service of adoration does not primarily aim at edifying, elevating, purifying or consecrating the worshipers. To be sure, it should bring about all these results, but they are only its by-products. The purpose of worship is to ascribe glory to God." Yes, that is the objective of a worship service. Anything less is not only an affront to God, but it defrauds the people of God.<sup>17</sup> Let's see what we can do to move in that direction.

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<sup>16</sup> Used by permission.

<sup>17</sup> Terrien, *The Psalms and Their Meaning*, xi.

## DAY FOUR: A PSALM

### FIRST CONTACT

As noted in the introduction, the day four studies are what we've called bonus psalms. As such I've designed the day four studies a bit differently than the other three days. Each of these studies will still consist of a "First Contact" section. After that the psalm of the day will be presented, followed by a section called "Reading and Observing." In this section, I will lead you through a close read of the psalm by asking in-depth observation questions. Finally, a "Responding" section will offer you multiple ways in which you can respond to the psalm. Over the course of the eight lessons you will dig into psalms from each of the five books of the Psalms, including several different types of psalms (hymns, prayers, thanksgiving, etc.). Remember these are bonus psalms so there is no pressure to complete these prior to viewing the upcoming video.

Read through the entire psalm once (preferably out loud) without stopping to take notes. Then follow the instructions below in your second reading.

## Psalm 96

- <sup>1</sup> Sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- <sup>2</sup> Sing to the LORD, praise his name;  
proclaim his salvation day after day.
- <sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
- <sup>4</sup> For great is the LORD and most worthy  
of praise;  
he is to be feared above all gods.
- <sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the nations are idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens.
- <sup>6</sup> Splendor and majesty are before him;  
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.
- <sup>7</sup> Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of  
nations,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- <sup>8</sup> Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his  
name;  
bring an offering and come into his  
courts.
- <sup>9</sup> Worship the LORD in the splendor of his  
holiness;  
tremble before him, all the earth.
- <sup>10</sup> Say among the nations, "The LORD  
reigns."  
The world is firmly established, it  
cannot be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity.
- <sup>11</sup> Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth  
be glad;  
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
- <sup>12</sup> Let the fields be jubilant, and everything  
in them;  
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.
- <sup>13</sup> Let all creation rejoice before the LORD,  
for he comes,  
he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness  
and the peoples in his faithfulness.

## READING & OBSERVING

Read through the psalm again, this time looking for these things:

- Which collection does the psalm belong to (Book I, II, III, IV, V)?
  
- Is there is a superscript? If so, what is it? Who is the psalm attributed to?
  
- What type of psalm is it? (What is the psalmist doing: praying, praising, complaining, giving thanks, etc.?)

### **Verses 1–3**

Notice the verbs in verses 1–3. What does the psalmist instruct his readers/listeners to do? **Highlight** the verbs the psalmist uses. Underline the object of each verb.

### **Verses 4–6**

Circle the reasons the psalmist provides in these verses for the instructions that he gives in verses 1–3.

### **Verses 7–10**

**Highlight** the verbs the psalmist uses in verses 7–10. What does the psalmist instruct his readers/listeners to do? Underline the objects of each verb. Who are these instructions addressed to?

### **Verses 11–13**

Who or what are these instructions addressed to? What are they supposed to do? Circle the reason.

## RESPONDING

When I read this psalm, I want to respond. I anticipate you feel the same way. Choose one (or more) of the following to participate in the words of the psalmist: pray his prayer, sing his song, and embed these truths on your heart.

- Sing the psalm! Go to **<http://psalms.seedbed.com/>** and navigate your way to Psalm 96. Choose one (or all) of the tune options there and sing this psalm to the Lord.
- Illustrate the psalm! Those of you who are artistically inclined might be interested in an ancient and beautiful tradition known as “illuminated manuscripts.” This is when a manuscript is rewritten in calligraphy and supplemented with raised and elaborate letters from the text, borders (marginalia), and miniature illustrations. There are pages set aside at the back of the book (pages 209–217) for you to create your own illuminated psalms as well as a sample to get your creative juices flowing.
- Pray the psalm! Put in your own names and places, and let the ancients pray with you!
- Memorize a portion of the psalm!
- Set the psalm to your own music! Let the words find their way into your heart.

### Tips to Memorizing

- Start small
- Write it down
- Say it out loud
- Repeat