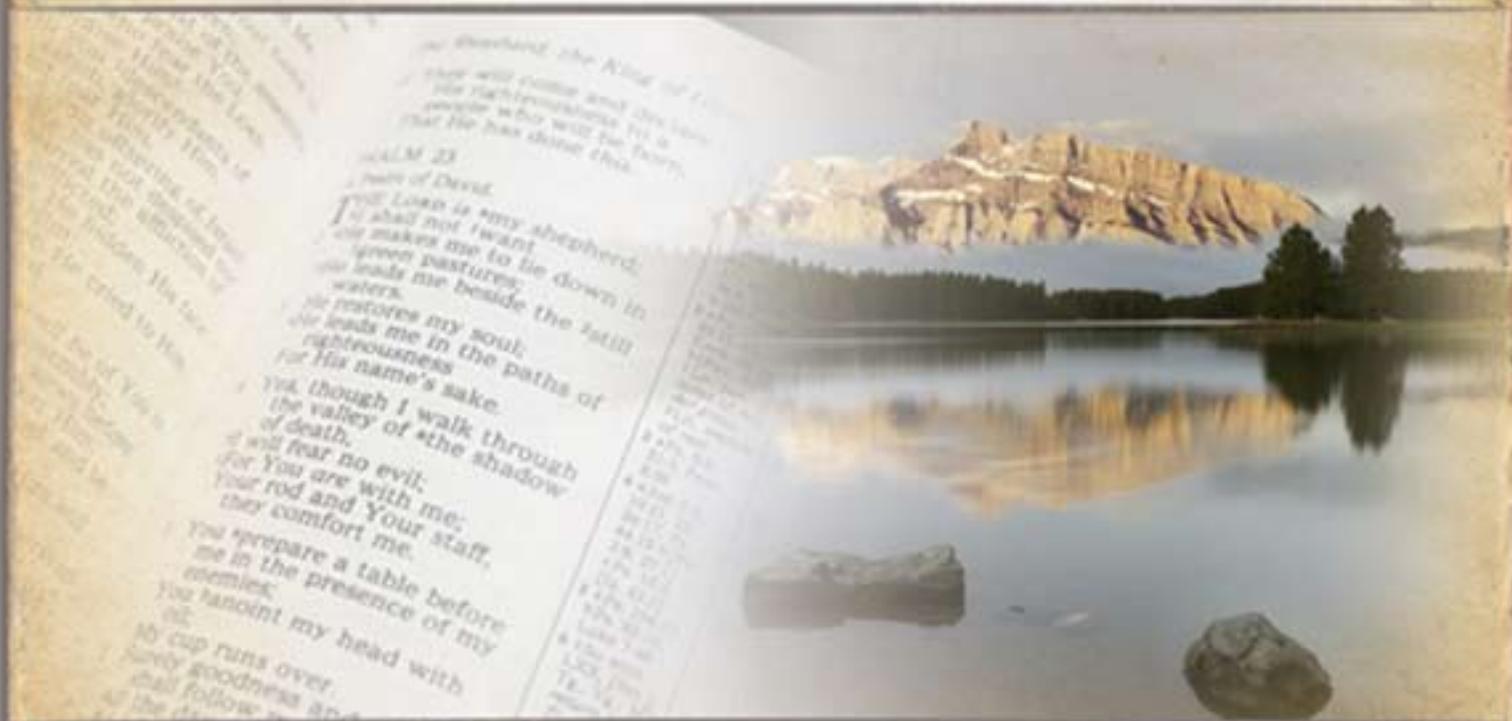
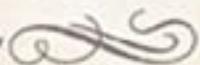


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A 12-WEEK STUDY THROUGH THE CHOICEST PSALMS



## STEVE GALLAGHER

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# HE LEADS ME BESIDE STILL WATERS

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## INTRODUCTION

The actual title of the book of Psalms in the original language is *sepher thillim*, “the book of praises.” This is an apt name, as the adoration of God is such a prominent theme throughout the book. One old-time writer stated, “The book begins with benediction, and ends with praise - first, blessing to man, and then glory to God.”<sup>1</sup>

Unquestionably, the Psalter contains some of the richest passages found in Scripture. C.S. Lewis spoke for countless saints when he wrote: “The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express that same delight in God which made David dance... I find an experience fully God-centered, asking of God no gift more urgently than His presence, the gift of Himself, joyous to the highest degree, and unmistakably real.”<sup>2</sup>

In a day when one can easily while away hours titillating the flesh with the worldly fare offered on television or the Internet, the importance of possessing inspired literature which can turn our thoughts heavenward cannot be overstated. No other portion of Scripture is so capable of ushering the hungry soul into the presence of God as this compilation of ancient Hebraic songs.

As has already been noted, the worship of Jehovah is one of the primary subjects covered in the book of Psalms. The authors\* address God’s glorious attributes in a variety of ways. His sovereignty, majesty, power, mercy, compassion and trustworthiness are all emphasized in different parts of the book. One cannot read Psalms without walking away with a more lofty perspective of the Lord. Nowhere in this book does one encounter the disrespectful and flippant attitude toward the Lord that is practiced in much of today’s Church. Every word penned emits the aroma of humble worship and reverential fear.

Perhaps what stands out above all else is the sense

that the reader is allowed inside the most intimate thoughts of these dear saints of old. “The whole inner life of the pious man is laid open,” says one commentator.<sup>3</sup> It is “a record of the workings of the heart,” states another.<sup>4</sup>

The book of Psalms brings the lives of biblical heroes down to our level—where we are provided a forthright glimpse into their minds. When David opens up about his deepest fears, one can see that he, too, “was a man with a nature like ours.” (James 5:17) When Asaph expresses his indignation over the fact that the Lord allows the wicked to prosper, we find a God who is willing to allow questions to be raised about His fairness. When others upbraid the wicked or share their most private doubts, the reader is witnessing the uncontrived feelings experienced by the writer.

Through it all one cannot escape the fact that the book of Psalms is an utterly candid compilation of the mental struggles of these different men; of their varying seasons of joy, anguish and despair; of their highest hopes and deepest fears; of their conflicts or even failures with sin; of their disgust for self-serving flatterers and their compassion for the needy; and most of all, for their overarching appreciation for the Lord’s sovereign involvement in their lives.

The book of Psalms is a treasure chest of the most profound interactions between pious men and a loving, caring God. David, its most prominent writer, was called a man after God’s own heart. What could be more beneficial and rewarding than to contemplate his times of intimate communion with a holy God?

A study of such a book as this deserves one’s utmost effort. With that in mind, I would like to offer a few suggestions that I believe will help the reader maximize the benefits of this study through the choicest Psalms:

**First, prayerfully approach each day’s lessons.** The Lord will speak to you and implant His wisdom in your heart if you will but ask Him. You do not need more biblical knowledge; you need a divine impartation! If you will ask, seek and knock,

\* Some authorities believe that every psalm was written by David. According to their theory, those ascribed to other writers were either compiled and used by them (e.g., Asaph, the sons of Korah, et al) or dedicated to them (e.g., Solomon). Athanasius (296-373) claimed that Hezekiah’s scholars chose 150 out of 3,000 psalms penned by David. It is possible that his opinion came from having access to writings that have since been lost. Conversely, evidence indicates that a number of the psalms were written at a much later period of time (i.e., during the exile in Babylon).



unexpected doors will be opened to you through Scripture. Approach the Word with expectancy and faith!

**Second, be ever mindful that you live in a world that lies under a satanic enchantment.** Spiritual darkness pervades our culture. The intoxicating voice of darkness blares at you relentlessly through television, radio and the Internet. It appears as truth, but is actually laced with underlying false messages, cunningly cloaked in seemingly innocuous information. The Bible is the one existing source of pure *truth*. Humble yourself before it and treat it with the utmost reverence.

**Third, spend as much time as you can in your studies.** You probably don't realize how much you have been polluted by the spirit of this world.<sup>†</sup> The more time you spend soaking in Scripture, the more you will take on the mind of God. Conversely, the more you immerse yourself in the world, the more its standards and values will shape your thinking and desires.

If you feel as though you have already been terribly contaminated, don't despair! The Word of God can and will straighten out faulty perspectives, skewed attitudes and unlawful desires. You need only immerse yourself in it, allowing it to do its supernatural work inside you. David said it himself: "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul..." (Psalm 19:7)

### Practical Considerations

Before you begin, there are a few things to consider about the study. Each week will cover various psalms. Make sure that you prayerfully read each day's featured psalm. You will also notice a supplemental reading: a pertinent chapter from the Bible for you to read if you want to spend more time studying after completing that day's lesson. Occasionally, you will be asked to look up a Hebrew word in a Bible dictionary. This can be a thorough reference book such as the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* or the simpler *Strong's Hebrew Dictionary* found on many computer Bible programs.

In some studies, I offer different Bible translations or paraphrases which provide a fresh perspective on key verses for that week's study. Since our book of

Psalms is translated from a different language, no single translation will always capture the full sense of what was being expressed. Sometimes the student will gain a much richer comprehension of a verse by reading it in a variety of translations. A list of the different versions utilized may be found in the Appendix at the back of this book.

The purpose of Sunday's homework is to challenge the reader to personally apply what he or she has learned from the week's lessons (which explains why they may, at times, seem disjointed).

Finally, I want to encourage you to put your heart into each day's lesson. For instance, when you are asked to look up various passages and tell what you learn from them, try to resist the temptation to impatiently rewrite what has been stated. Think about what is being expressed in that verse, carefully pondering each word. Consider the verse in light of the psalm you are studying. Most of all, prayerfully ask the Lord to open the Word to your heart.

The months that I have spent meditating upon this incredible book have been greatly enriching and tremendously inspiring. I hope that by the end of the next twelve weeks, you too will be able to say with conviction, *He Leads Me Beside Still Waters!*

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<sup>†</sup> For an exhaustive study on how the spirit of this world is affecting believers, please see my book, *Intoxicated with Babylon*.

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS

---



*Monday*

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 1 (supplemental reading: I John 2).
2. One would expect the book of Psalms to open with a rich description of life in God, but surprisingly, it opens with a negative statement. It doesn't say what the blessed man does but what he doesn't do. It is simply a fact that the Christian life is as much about what you don't do as it is about what you do. No matter what positive things you may do to seek God, your efforts will be nullified if you keep the door open for the enemy. Write out Psalm 1:1.

3. The psalmist indicates three definite progressions in Psalm 1:1. They are indicated by verbs and nouns. The verbs indicate the type of activity involved (walk, stand, sit). The nouns describe what the activity is involved in (counsel, path, seat) and the type of people involved (ungodly, sinners, scoffers).

In reading the poetical books of the Old Testament, it is important to understand that the Jewish writers had a different style of writing than we employ. For instance, it is very common to find verses in Psalms and Proverbs that contain two phrases making the exact same point using different terms or, at other times, the two phrases will describe opposite subjects (e.g., righteous, godless).

In Psalm 1:1, the author uses a less common "Hebraism." It is the linking of verbs and nouns together in a way that should not be taken beyond their original intention. In other words, in the Jewish mind, these different terms were interchangeable with each other.

Choose one of the nouns employed in Psalm 1:1 and write out the verse using only that noun in each of the phrases (e.g., "*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of the wicked, nor sit in the seat of the wicked.*")

4. Notice the progression of nouns in Psalm 1:1. I will provide a working definition of these nouns. Please describe in your own words how these definitions help you to understand what the psalmist was saying.

*Counsel* - Mindset; maxims, ruling principles; perspectives one can expect from such people.



*Monday* - continued,

*Path* - Lifestyle; patterns of behavior; the general course of a person's life.

*Seat* - The Hebrew word (*mowshab*<sub>4186</sub>) is usually employed to describe the place where one dwells. This is what he has settled into in life.

5. Rewrite Psalm 1:1 utilizing some of the synonyms or definitions found in the preceding question.

6. Read the following commentary by Albert Barnes and describe what you learn.

There is, first, casual walking with the wicked, or accidentally falling into their company; there is then a more deliberate inclination for their society, indicated by a voluntary putting of oneself in places where they usually congregate, and standing to wait for them; and then there is a deliberate and settled purpose of associating with them, or of becoming permanently one of them, by regularly sitting among them.<sup>1</sup>



*Tuesday*

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 1 (supplemental reading: Ephesians 2).
2. Yesterday we looked at the type of activity mentioned in Psalm 1:1. Today we will examine the three types of people he mentioned. The first we will look at are “the wicked,” (NASB, NIV) or “ungodly” (KJV, NKJV). Please describe in your own words what you learn from the following definition.

*The Wicked* - This is a description of those who live without God. They aren't necessarily people involved in evil behavior; they simply live their lives without any sense of concern about God or eternal issues.

3. Look up the following verses and explain what you learn about the ungodly.

Psalm 32:10

Psalm 36:1

Proverbs 3:33

Proverbs 5:22

Proverbs 15:9

4. Please describe in your own words what you learn from the following definition.

*Sinners* - People who are actively engaging in some form of behavior clearly prohibited by Scripture.



*Tuesday* - continued

5. Matthew Henry wrote: “When the services of religion are laid aside, they come to be *sinner*s, that is, they break out into open rebellion against God and engage in the service of sin and Satan.”<sup>22</sup> How does his interpretation of “sinners” line up with what you typically hear in the Church today? Explain your answer.

6. Please describe in your own words what you learn from the following definition.

*Scoffers* - Mockers; those who hold a flippant attitude about the things of God and minimize the dangers and wrongfulness of sin. Over time they become hardened in their rebellion to God’s authority until eventually they come to hold Him in contempt.

7. The book of Proverbs has much to say about scoffers. Using the following summations, write out your own description of this person.

- Delight in their scoffing (Proverbs 1:22)
- Dishonors and hates the wise man who attempts to reprove him (Proverbs 9:7-8)
- Will have to bear the weight of his behavior (Proverbs 9:12)
- Cannot find wisdom (Proverbs 14:6)
- Mocks at sin (Proverbs 14:9)
- Will face judgment (Proverbs 19:29)
- Is full of pride (Proverbs 21:24)
- Causes strife (Proverbs 22:10)
- Is an abomination to mankind (Proverbs 24:9)



*Wednesday*

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 1 (supplemental reading: Ecclesiastes 2).
2. Write out Psalm 1:2-3.
3. The following is my paraphrase of Psalm 1:1-3. Read this passage and write out what fresh insights or perspectives you gain.

“Oh, the spiritual blessing that comes to the man who avoids the soul-deadening influences of the world: the realm of rebels who are flippant about the things of God and are given over to sin. One of the great pleasures of his life is to spend time soaking in the Word of God: something he does habitually and consistently. He can be compared to a tree whose roots have reached deeply into a fresh stream; a tree which is full of life and bears luscious fruit for others. Yes, this man has a rich and prosperous inner life with God.”

4. List the five things which are said of the “wicked” (or sinners) in Psalm 1:4-6.

Psalm 1:4a (contrast of 1:3)

Psalm 1:4b

Psalm 1:5a

Psalm 1:5b

Psalm 1:6b

5. The term *chaff* (Heb. *mots*<sub>4671</sub>) is a biblical concept describing those who are empty of substance; whose lives have no value. An interesting contrast is the word “*honor*” (Heb. *kabowd*<sub>3519</sub>), which literally means heavy; it is used in Scripture to describe a man with godly, or weighty, character. Explain the difference in these two terms regarding the righteous and the godless.