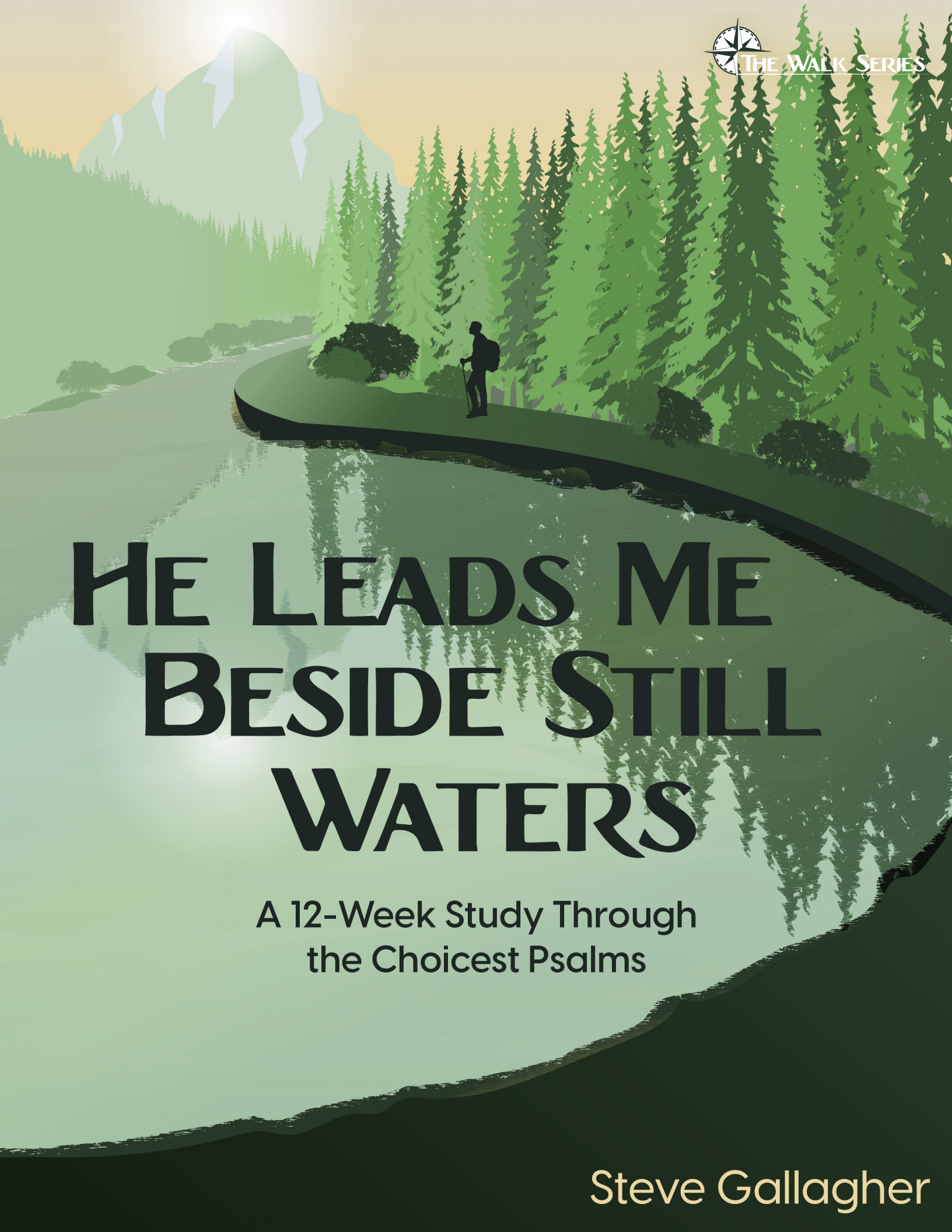




THE WALK SERIES



HE LEADS ME BESIDE STILL WATERS

A 12-Week Study Through
the Choicest Psalms

Steve Gallagher

HE LEADS ME BESIDE STILL WATERS

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the Choicest Psalms**

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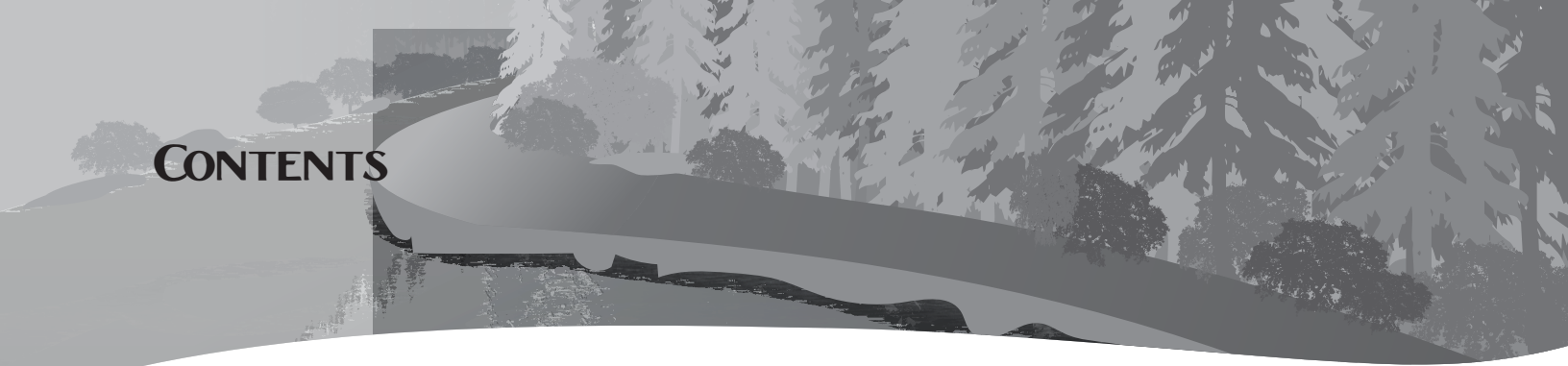
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He Leads Me Beside Still Waters

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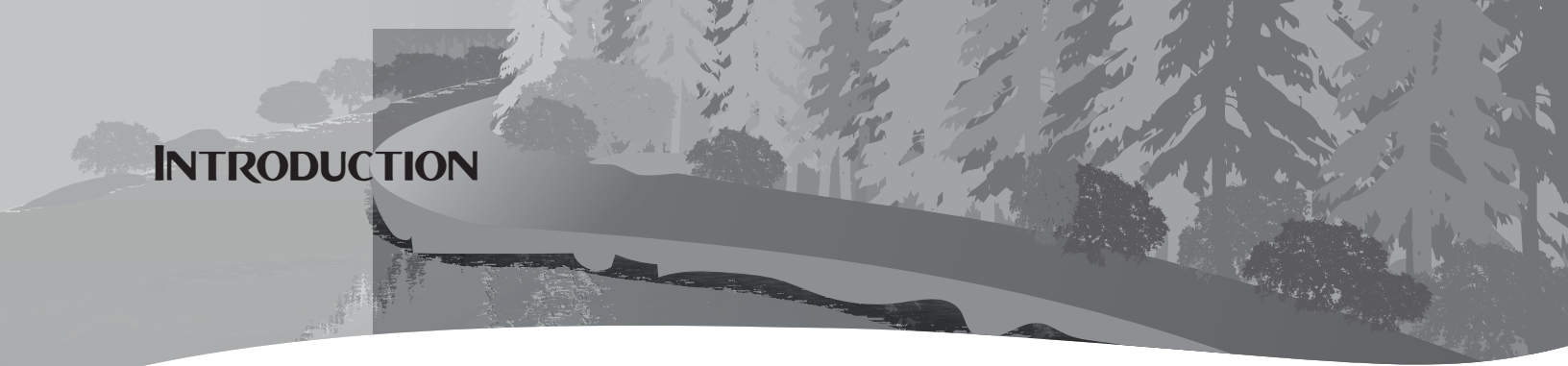


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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	7
WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS.....	9
WEEK 2: MY ALL IN ALL.....	21
WEEK 3: HE LEADS ME.....	31
WEEK 4: BATTLING ENEMIES.....	41
WEEK 5: THE LOVINGKINDNESS OF THE LORD.....	53
WEEK 6: MY KEEPER AND REFUGE.....	63
WEEK 7: IN SEARCH OF YAHWEH.....	73
WEEK 8: A DWELLING PLACE OF GOD.....	85
WEEK 9: THE GOODNESS OF GOD.....	95
WEEK 10: THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.....	103
WEEK 11: GOD REIGNS.....	115
WEEK 12: OH, PRAISE HIM!.....	127
BIBLE TRANSLATIONS.....	137
NOTES.....	139



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.”¹

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.”²

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.³ It is “a record of the workings of the heart,” states another.⁴

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, unexpected doors will be

¹ 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).

INTRODUCTION

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.² 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!*

GETTING STARTED:

How to Use This Study and the Study of Psalms



² 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



Day One

Scan For



This Week's Video

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 1 (supplemental reading: 1 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.

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS



Day One: continued

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

Seat - The Hebrew word (*mowshab*₄₁₈₆) 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.¹

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS



Day Two

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.

a. Psalm 32:10

b. Psalm 36:1

c. Proverbs 3:33

d. Proverbs 5:22

e. 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.

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS



Day Two: 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."² 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)

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS



Day Three

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.
 - a. Psalm 1:4a (contrast of 1:3)
 - b. Psalm 1:4b
 - c. Psalm 1:5a
 - d. Psalm 1:5b
 - e. Psalm 1:6b
5. The term *chaff* (Heb. *mots*₄₆₇₁) 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*₃₅₁₉), 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.

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS



Day Four

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 2 (supplemental reading: Ephesians 1).
2. Psalm 2 contains one of the most incredible glimpses provided by Scripture inside the heavenly council. In this short passage, we hear about a mysterious "decree" which has been issued forth regarding the Messiah. This decree (or at least some part of it) is revealed in God's words quoted in Psalm 2:7b-9. Write out what God said to His Son.

3. In eternity past, a decree was issued in the "council of the holy ones," (Psalm 89:7) which encompasses all of God's providential dealings with man. The psalmist states that this is "a decree which will not pass away." (Psalm 148:6) This great and immutable plan was settled before Creation. "My purpose will be established," declares Jehovah, "And I will accomplish all My good pleasure." (Isaiah 46:10)

Psalm 2 highlights certain aspects of this official edict, viz., that God would establish a kingdom which would be ruled by Messiah—His only begotten Son. This wonderful psalm foretells the Day of the Lord when all things will be brought into subjection to the Christ—"under His feet." (Hebrews 2:8) But Psalm 2 also anticipates man's unwillingness to submit to Christ's authority. Using the following outline as a guide, write out an explanation of this Plan to an unbeliever.

The Creation of Man

- His free will
- His probationary status on earth
- His eternal destiny

The Plan of Redemption

- The foreknowledge of man's rebellion against God's authority
- A temporary atonement for sin provided by the Law, appropriated through the sacrificial system
- The first advent of the Messiah and His Kingdom
- The final atoning work of Calvary appropriated by faith & repentance

The Second Coming of Christ

- The conclusion of "man's day"
- The advent of the "day of the Lord"
- The subjection of all enemies—demons and men

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS



Day Four: continued

The Judgment

- Eternal damnation of rebels
- The marriage of the Son and His Bride
- Bema Seat Judgment of the redeemed (II Corinthians 5:10)

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS



Day Five

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 2 (supplemental reading: 2 Thessalonians 2).
2. Write out Psalm 2:1-2.
3. Psalm 2:1-2 was a prophecy about the Messiah which was explained by the disciples in Acts 4:25-28. Look up this passage and then explain from memory the story the disciples are referring to.
4. In Psalm 2:3, the psalmist broadens the scope of his prophecy to include all mankind. This verse reveals something about the Lord's dealings with man and man's reaction to it. Explain what you learn about both in this verse.
5. Read what Jesus said in Matthew 11:27-30 and explain in your own words how His statements correspond to the decree mentioned in Psalm 2 and man's reaction to it.
6. In Psalm 2:4-5, we are told that the Lord laughs, scoffs and speaks to rebellious mankind in anger. This is human language describing how man's rebellion leaves God undaunted, for He will judge all rebels in a controlled and systematic manner. What does this say to you regarding God's sovereignty and omnipotence?
7. Read Psalm 2:11 and explain how it is possible to "worship with reverence" and "rejoice with trembling."

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS



Day Six

1. Read and meditate on Psalm 36 (supplemental reading: Proverbs 1).
2. Read Psalm 36:1-2 in the following translations (and paraphrases) and explain what you learn and how it affects you.

Psalm 36:1

(NLT) Sin whispers to the wicked, deep within their hearts. They have no fear of God at all.

(NET) An evil man is rebellious to the core. He does not fear God,

(Liv) Sin lurks deep in the hearts of the wicked, forever urging them on to evil deeds. They have no fear of God to hold them back.

(Har) Rebellion flares up stubbornly in the mind of the wicked; reverence for God has no place in such an outlook.

Psalm 36:2

(NIV) For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.

(NLT) In their blind conceit, they cannot see how wicked they really are.

(NET) for he is too proud to recognize and give up his sin.

(Jer) He sees himself with too flattering an eye to detect and detest his guilt.

3. Review Psalm 1:5-6 and Psalm 2:5, 9 and 12. These verses are primarily describing the judgment of the ungodly. Look up the following verses and explain what you learn about the judgment of the wicked.

a. Matthew 25:30

b. Matthew 25:41

c. Romans 2:4-5, 8-9

d. 2 Thessalonians 1:7b-9

e. Hebrews 10:31

f. James 2:13

g. Revelation 20:11-15

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS



Day Seven

1. Read and meditate on Psalms 1 and 2 (supplemental reading: 1 Samuel 15).
2. There is a great two-fold truth found in Psalm 1:1 that the reader must deal with if he is to enter the deeper life represented in the book of Psalms:
 - The human heart is extremely impressionable to outside influences.
 - You will receive blessings or curses in your life depending, in large part, upon the type of people you allow to influence you.

Review your homework for Days One and Two and explain how your life in the future will be affected by what you have learned.

3. Reread the paraphrase provided in question 3 in Day Three's homework. Explain how these blessings may motivate you to spend more time reading, studying and meditating in God's Word.

4. Read the following commentary by Matthew Henry and explain the importance of being submitted to the authority of God in your own life. Also describe the level of your submission to God in your daily life.

They will be content to entertain such notions of the kingdom of God and the Messiah as will serve them: if the Lord and his anointed will make them rich and great in the world, they will bid them welcome; but if they will restrain their corrupt appetites and passions, regulate and reform their hearts and lives, and bring them under the government of a pure and heavenly religion, truly then they will not have this man to reign over them, Luke 19:14. Christ has bands and cords for us; those that will be saved by him must be ruled by him. Why do men oppose religion but because they are impatient of its restraints and obligations?³

WEEK 1: THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE GODLESS



Day Seven: continued

- Review your answer to question 7 in Day Five's homework. Have you ever worshiped and rejoiced like this? Have you ever witnessed those who have? Write out Psalm 2:11-12 in the first person vernacular (i.e., using I, me, my) as a personalized commitment from yourself to the Lord.
- In light of what you have learned today, rewrite Ephesians 2:1-3 in your own words, regarding your own past life.