


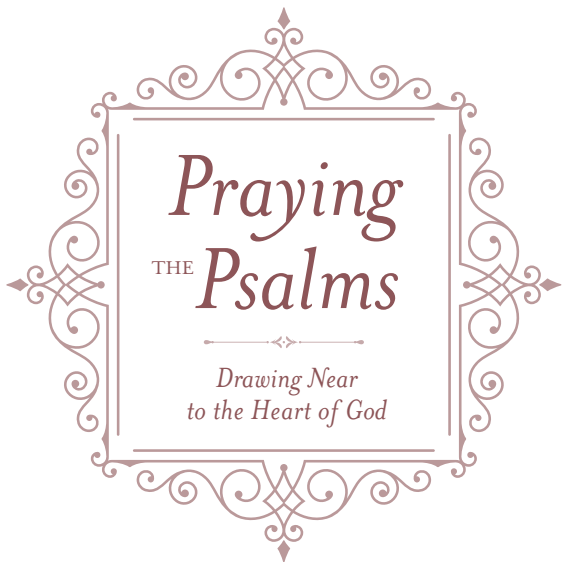
*Praying*  
THE *Psalms*

*Drawing Near to the Heart of God*



PRAYING THE PSALMS





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THE Psalms

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*Drawing Near  
to the Heart of God*

BEN PATTERSON



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*Praying the Psalms: Drawing Near to the Heart of God*

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## *Introduction*

*PRAYING THE PSALMS* is a beginner's guide to learning to pray the Psalms. My aim is not to tell you what to pray, but rather to say just enough about each psalm to stir your heart and imagination to lead you into prayer.

There is no better place in all of Scripture than the Psalms to learn to be with God and to see with the eyes of faith the face of the one who longs to form us fully in his image. The Psalms are God's prayer book, and they teach us to talk to God in his own language. To be taught by the Bible to pray is to learn to want and feel what the Bible expresses. Those who have practiced this kind of prayer over time make a surprising discovery: As they learn to feel what the Psalms express, their hearts and desires are enlarged.

God invites us to pour out our hearts to him,

and the Psalms, which John Calvin called “an anatomy of all parts of the human soul,” can help us do that.<sup>1</sup> All the joys, pleasures, hopes, fears, despairs, doubts, heartaches, terrors, and longings of which we are capable are mirrored, clarified, sanctified, and transformed in the Psalms, as are all the ways we may pray: supplication, intercession, praise, thanks, lament, and meditation. The Psalms, as many have said, are a mirror; they will reveal you. Yet they are much more. Read them and they will read you. Pray them and they will change you.

I invite you to begin this journey of praying the Psalms, and see how you are changed.





PSALM 1



- <sup>1</sup> Oh, the joys of those who do not  
follow the advice of the wicked,  
or stand around with sinners,  
or join in with mockers.
- <sup>2</sup> But they delight in the law of the LORD,  
meditating on it day and night.
- <sup>3</sup> They are like trees planted along the  
riverbank,  
bearing fruit each season.  
Their leaves never wither,  
and they prosper in all they do.
- <sup>4</sup> But not the wicked!  
They are like worthless chaff, scattered by  
the wind.
- <sup>5</sup> They will be condemned at the time of  
judgment.  
Sinners will have no place among the  
godly.
- <sup>6</sup> For the LORD watches over the path of the  
godly,

but the path of the wicked leads to  
destruction.



GET READY. As we begin this journey, there are two choices—just two—that are spoken of only in brief outline in this psalm, but which will present themselves full blown in the psalms that follow. In Psalm 1 we know them as the path of the godly and the path of the wicked.

These paths are not merely two separate directions, one going east, the other going west, and never colliding. They are two different ways of life, implacably opposed to one another. Neither will tolerate the other.

So get ready. The first two psalms have been called the gateway to the book of Psalms. Strictly speaking, they aren't even prayers but preparation for prayer—meditations on the nature of things in the universe, the world we move in when we pray. So take note and be forewarned: The world of prayer is a world of intense conflict. The enemy is

never far away when we pray. Prayer is not escape; it is engagement, and the Psalms are the prayers of a warrior, the Warrior.

The question is not whether you'll be in the fight . . . but on whose side you'll fight.



**Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. (1)**

Examine your life: what you listen to and look at, whom you associate with and identify with. There seems to be a progression in this verse—from listening to acting to outright mocking what is true and good.

Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke compares listening to the advice and ways of sin to looking at the Greek mythological figure Medusa. One look at her and you freeze.<sup>2</sup> To have a frozen heart is to be cold and hard, not only toward God, but also toward other people.

Stop now. Confess the ways you are frozen hearted—toward God or others.

**But they delight in the law of the LORD,  
meditating on it day and night. (2)**

Again, examine your life. Do you spend quality time in the Word of God? Is it your delight? Pray that it will be.

Sin is directional: It only looks around horizontally, but not up. The advice of the wicked, the society of sinners, is all it knows. Righteousness is directional too: It looks up to God and meditates on his ways, his truth, his law. It sees things from heaven's point of view. Heaven's perspective is breathtaking and delightful!

To pray is to meditate, to hear God and answer God. To hear well is to pray well. We would never speak to God if God had not first spoken to us. Your prayer life will never go further than your grasp of God's Word.

Right now—ask the Lord to speak his Word with “its full and proper impact”<sup>3</sup> into your life.

**They are like trees planted along the riverbank,  
bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never  
wither, and they prosper in all they do. (3)**

Remember, since life is war, you must be sustained

for the long haul. Pursue the life of meditation and prayer the way tree roots seek water.

Your choice is either to flourish like a well-watered tree or to allow yourself to be blown about like chaff, to be a person of substance or to be shallow and hollow inside. Pray that God will help you choose well.

