

Turn Your Eyes

*A Bible Study
on the Psalms*

WINFREE BRISLEY
& SHARONDA COOPER

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A Bible Study on the Psalms

Winfree Brisley and
Sharonda Cooper

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To my parents, thank you for teaching me to love God's word and read it every day.

Winfrey Brisley

To Rob, thank you for making it possible for me to follow my every calling.

*To Sydney and Renne, being your mom is the best job ever. Keep turning
your eyes to Jesus until we are standing side-by-side in his presence.*

Sharonda Cooper

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Introduction

Some years ago, I hiked the seaside trails of Cinque Terre, Italy, on a vacation with friends. The trails connect five cliffside villages overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, and they offer spectacular views. But for the first part of our hike, the only scenery I saw was the path in front of my feet. The terrain was rugged with rocks and roots and narrow passes, so I focused on putting one foot safely in front of the other.

Eventually though, the path widened and there was space to step aside and take in the view. As I lifted my gaze and turned my eyes out over the sea, the beauty almost took my breath away. I remember telling my friends that if the fallen earth could be so beautiful, I couldn't imagine the glory to come in the new heaven and earth. My heart swelled in worship of the great God who created such beauty—and my perspective on the hike was transformed.

Sure, I still wanted to make it to the next village without falling over a cliff, but I remembered that the hike wasn't just about getting from one place to another. I kept turning my eyes to take in the beauty. I kept turning my attention to enjoy the conversation. And by the end, though my body was exhausted, my spirit was refreshed.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I walk through life the way I started that hike. I'm just keeping my head down, putting one foot in front of the other,

so focused on what's right in front of me that I miss the bigger picture of God's work in me and his glory around me. If only I would turn my eyes, if only I would catch a glimpse of the beauty and glory of the Lord, my heart would turn to worship and my perspective on my circumstances might be changed.

As the old hymn “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus” encourages us,

O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of his glory and grace.¹

If you're like me, you might be thinking, *Yes—I need that! But how can I practically turn my eyes to Jesus?* There are many ways, but the Psalms are a good place to start. Page after page, we find the psalmists turning to the Lord, telling him about their tragedies and their triumphs, asking him for help with decisions and doubts, confessing their sin and resting in his salvation. There are 150 psalms, and they engage every condition and circumstance of life.

But the Psalms aren't just in the Bible to show us that others have shared our emotions and experiences. They're divided into five books because we're meant to connect them with the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament, sometimes called the *Torah* or *the books of Moses*. The five books of the Pentateuch were written for our instruction (in fact, *torah* means “instruction”), to help us understand the story of redemption.²

1 Helen Howarth Lemmel, “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus,” 1922, <https://hymnary.org>.

2 Nancy Guthrie, interview with Mark Futato, *Help Me Teach the Bible*, podcast, March 18, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org>.

Likewise, the five books of the Psalms were written for our instruction. They teach us how to bring our emotions and experiences—all of life—to God, so our lives are transformed by his presence and wisdom.

Whatever path you're on as you come to this study—whether you're strolling down easy street, stuck in the mud, or staring at a crossroads and unsure which way to go; whether you're weeping, rejoicing, or questioning—let me invite you to turn your eyes upon Jesus, to take a look at the Savior in the pages of the Psalms. Our circumstances may not change, but we'll begin to see them in the light of God's glory and grace. And as we do, I pray we'll find life more abundant and free.

How to Use This Study

Whether you've never read the Bible, have studied the Bible for years, or are somewhere in between, we've designed this study to help you grow in your understanding of the Psalms and how they apply to your everyday life. As you might have guessed, since there are 150 psalms, we won't be able to study each one in just eight weeks. But we will be able to study each major type of psalm: wisdom, thanksgiving, lament, kingship, trust, and praise.

We'll spend the first week learning characteristics of psalms in general, and then over the following seven weeks, we'll study two psalms from each category each week. Our weekly rhythm will consist of observing, interpreting, and applying each passage of Scripture over the course of five days of study.

Day 1 will be *observation* for the first psalm of the week—reading the passage and asking the question: *What does the text say?* We'll pay attention to details like repeated words and main ideas. And we'll begin to move into *interpretation*, asking: *What does the text mean?* We'll consider aspects like figurative language and poetic structure and how they convey the psalmist's message.

Day 2 will move deeper into *interpretation* of the first psalm of the week. We'll read the passage again and continue to consider what it means by exploring its larger context in the rest of the Bible. Does it relate to an Old Testament story or prophecy? Is it quoted in the New Testament? How might it point to Christ? And how do these connections help us understand the text? As we come to understand what the text means, we'll move into *application*, asking: *How can I faithfully respond?* In light of the truths we glean about the nature of humanity and the character of God, we'll consider what it might mean for these truths to transform what we think, feel, and do.

Day 3 will follow the same pattern as Day 1, seeking to observe and interpret the second psalm of the week.

Day 4 will follow the same pattern as Day 2, seeking to interpret and apply the second psalm of the week.

Each week will end on **Day 5** with a *reflection*. After reading it, you'll find a few questions to help you reflect on what you've learned that week.

Please plan on approximately twenty minutes of study each day (or 1.5 hours each week). We recommend you have an actual Bible in front of you, rather than using an app on your phone or computer. You'll need it for cross-referencing verses, and a physical copy helps you more readily see the passage in its context. The provided Bible passages in this study are from the English Standard Version, but feel free to use a different translation.

Prayer

At the beginning of each week, you'll find a section called "Turn to God in Prayer." These prayers will include verses from various psalms to help you practice praying the Psalms. You can use the prayer provided or pray with your own words. Either way, we encourage you to take time to ask God to meet you as you study his living and active word.

Memory Work

A memory verse(s) is also provided at the beginning of each week and reprinted at the end of each day of study. Spend a few minutes each day working on memorizing it. The discipline of hiding God's word in your heart will bear much fruit in your life and the lives of those around you.

Discussion Questions

At the end of each chapter, you'll find a list of questions for group discussion. These are based on the work you've done throughout the week. There is a fun "icebreaker" question and a "warm-up" question. Both are intended to be quick and easy ways to get the group talking. Keep the answers to these short so you have plenty of time to dig into the text together.

Hymn for the Week

Each week will close with a hymn that relates to the psalm(s) studied that week. You might sing it on your own or with your group, listen to a recording of it, or use the lyrics as a prompt for prayer and meditation.

Videos

We hope to provide videos of the keynote teaching sessions from TGCW26 (The Gospel Coalition Women's 2026 conference). Each video will align with the chapters and will, Lord willing, be available after the conference in June 2026 on the TGC website (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/>).

As you turn your eyes to the Lord through the Psalms, may you come to see all seasons and circumstances of life in the light of his glory and grace.



FPO

Week 1

How to Study the Psalms

Psalm 18

You may have heard the Psalms referred to as the songbook of the Bible. Don't worry if you're not musically inclined—there's no singing required for this study! But knowing the Psalms were written to be sung informs how we read them. Just as we wouldn't read song lyrics the same way we read a novel or an email, we can't read psalms the same way we read narratives and letters in the Bible.

So this first week of study will be unique—we're going to walk through Psalm 18 as an example of how to study the Psalms. We'll learn some technical terms, consider how various features of the Psalms impact our understanding, and begin to interpret and apply the text. On days 1-4, we'll explore one aspect of Psalm 18 each day that will help us know what to look for in the other psalms we study. As we turn our eyes to the text this week, I pray we'll begin to catch a glimpse of God's glory and grace in the pages of the Psalms.

 **Turn to God in Prayer**

Father, thank you for giving us your word so we can know you and turn to you with all our emotions and experiences. Please “open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” this week (Ps. 119:18). By the help of your Spirit, “turn my eyes from looking at worthless things, and give me life in your ways” (Ps. 119:37). In Jesus’s name, amen.

 **Memory Verse**

In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears. (Ps. 18:6)

**LOOK FOR POETIC DEVICES****Psalm 18**

The Lord Is My Rock and My Fortress
To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said:

- ¹ I love you, O LORD, my strength.
- ² The LORD is my rock and my fortress
and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take
refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my
salvation, my stronghold.
- ³ I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to
be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies.

- ⁴ The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of destruction assailed me;
- ⁵ the cords of Sheol entangled me;
the snares of death confronted me.
- ⁶ In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.
- ⁷ Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations also of the mountains trembled
and quaked, because he was angry.
- ⁸ Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.
- ⁹ He bowed the heavens and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.
- ¹⁰ He rode on a cherub and flew;
he came swiftly on the wings of the wind.
- ¹¹ He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him,
thick clouds dark with water.
- ¹² Out of the brightness before him
hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.
- ¹³ The LORD also thundered in the heavens,
and the Most High uttered his voice,
hailstones and coals of fire.
- ¹⁴ And he sent out his arrows and scattered them;
he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.
- ¹⁵ Then the channels of the sea were seen,
and the foundations of the world were laid bare