



drawing near

spiritual renewal
through the psalms

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	page 1
Understanding and Interpreting the Psalms	page 3
Psalm 63: Seeking God for God Himself	page 6
Psalm 119: Letting God’s Word Shape Your Life	page 8
Psalm 32: Repentance and Richer Fellowship with God	page 11
Psalm 57: Growing Closer to God through Adversity	page 13
Psalm 62: Waiting for God Alone	page 15
Psalm 95: Drawing Near in Worship.....	page 18
Psalm 102: How to Complain to God.....	page 21
Psalm 16: Contentment in God’s Presence	page 24
Psalm 73: Nearness to God and Clearer Vision	page 27
Psalm 27: One Thing.....	page 29
Sources Cited	page 31

INTRODUCTION

God does a remarkable thing when He regenerates a human being. The Bible says we were “dead in our trespasses” when God “made us alive” (Ephesians 2:5).¹ When God does this for us, He actually makes us members of His spiritual kingdom. He transfers us from the “domain of darkness” into “the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13). God even comes to dwell within us, so that He can say, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Moreover, the apostle Paul wrote that those of us who know Jesus have been blessed with “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3). Suffice it to say that our lives should be different when these things happen!

Our lives usually are different after coming to faith in Jesus. But over time, many Christians tend toward spiritual complacency. Despite having God’s forgiveness and fellowship, we often live below the privileges of His presence. We may find it a struggle to pray and to trust God. We may find that our love for pleasure, wealth, and popularity seems stronger than our love for Christ. In this world in which we live, there is much that works against zealous devotion to Jesus Christ. Spiritual apathy seems to be the default human condition.

Because of this strong human tendency, Christians often need the work of God’s Spirit to bring renewal, or revival. This should not surprise us—because God’s people throughout history have needed His reviving work. The Old Testament is filled with accounts of the people of Israel turning away from God and being brought back by His mercy. God’s words to King Solomon demonstrate His willingness—even His eagerness—to restore His wandering people to Himself: “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

The New Testament Book of Acts gives us a picture of the church alive with the Spirit’s work. In this record of the early church, we see united prayer, care for one another, empowered evangelism, repentance, and holiness. God has provided us with this record of early church life in order to show us what life can be like when His Spirit is powerfully at work in His church.

God is sovereign in the ways and times He pours out His Spirit upon His people. But He allows—even invites—us to seek the outpouring of His Spirit upon our lives and churches. In both the Old Testament promise of 2 Chronicles 7:14 and the New Testament pattern of Acts, we see that God works in response to the prayers of His

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are in the English Standard Version.

people. In the simplest terms, God's willingness to renew and revive His people is found in James 4:8: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

This study of selected psalms is intended to help us draw near to God and to experience His renewing work individually, in our families, and in our church. The Psalms are rich in invitations to seek the Lord—to worship and learn from Him, even in times of great trial and suffering. The Psalms teach us to draw near to God and to learn to love Him more. As we begin our study of the Psalms, may the Holy Spirit create in each of us a greater desire to seek, know, and love the Lord. May we experience His holiness and joy to such a degree that it overflows into our families, our church, and our world!

In His great love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David Beaty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D' and a stylized 'B'.

David Beaty
Pastor, River Oaks Community Church

UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING THE PSALMS

The Book of Psalms is a special gift from God to us. The Psalms teach us, encourage us, guide us, and comfort us. They help us to know God better and love him more.

One reason the Psalms move us so deeply is that they reveal God's presence in the midst of our suffering. Many of the psalms are "laments"—honest accounts of the hardships of the writer. Yet almost all of the psalms contain a note of praise to God. The abundance of praise has made the Psalms a hymn book for God's people. In fact, the Hebrew title of the book is "Tehillim, which means "praises." A key Hebrew term in the Psalms is "mizmor," which means "to sing with stringed instruments." This word is translated as "psalmos" in Greek, giving rise to our English title, "Psalms."

An understanding of the Psalms is vital to our understanding of the Bible, for the Psalms help to tie Scripture together as a unified whole. The Psalms look back to God's work in creation (Psalms 8 and 104). They recall God's power in delivering the Israelites from bondage in Egypt (Psalm 77). They warn us not to emulate the disobedience of the Israelites as they journeyed toward the Promised Land (Psalm 95). The Psalms also look ahead, and they contain many references to the coming Messiah. (Psalms 22, 69, and 110). New Testament writers quote from the Psalms more than any other Old Testament book. The Book of Hebrews reveals Jesus speaking in the Book of Psalms (Hebrews 2:12, 10:5-7). In a post-resurrection conversation with his disciples, Jesus reminded them "that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).

Fourteen of the psalms have historical notes in their headings, and these notes give specific detail regarding the time or circumstances of the psalm's composition. For example, the heading of Psalm 3 reads: "A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son." These headings should be considered part of the Scripture itself. Dr. Bruce Waltke, in his lectures on the Psalms, notes that there is no manuscript of the Hebrew Bible that does not contain these superscriptions, or headings. He explains that they are as much a part of the Bible as any other part of the Bible.² When the Holy Spirit has provided us with information in the heading of a psalm, we can be sure He wants it to aid us in our understanding of that psalm.

The content of a psalm often helps us understand the circumstances surrounding its composition. Sometimes it is clear from the content that the writer of a particular psalm is going through hardships (e.g., "I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart" [Psalm 38:8].) Sometimes the writer is celebrating God's deliverance (e.g.,

² Bruce K. Waltke, *Book of Psalms*, lecture 3 (Grand Rapids: Institute of Theological Studies, Division of Outreach, Inc., 1972).

“He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog” [Psalm 40:2].) Many psalms are prayers (e.g., “Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me” [Psalm 86:1].)

Our understanding of a psalm may also be helped by knowing who wrote it. King David is listed as the composer in the headings of 75 of the 150 psalms. But there are other authors as well. They include:

- Asaph (a leading singer and musician during the time of David) – Psalm 50 and Psalms 73-83.
- The sons of Korah – Psalms 42-49, 84-85.
- Solomon – Psalms 72 and 127.
- Ethan the Ezrahite – Psalm 89.
- Moses – Psalm 90.

There are several Hebrew terms found in the headings of psalms that can help us know why the psalms were written. These terms include:

- mizmor – This word occurs 57 times and probably indicates that the psalm was to be sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments.
- shir – A common word for “song,” which sometimes occurs with mizmor.
- maskil – Found in the heading of seventeen psalms. This word may mean that the psalm has a teaching purpose.
- mitkam – This word may indicate “a psalm of atonement.” It is used in six psalms.
- tehillah – This word means a song of praise. It is found in the heading of only one psalm (145), but is the term given to the whole Book of Psalms.
- shiggayon – Found only in the heading of Psalm 7, this word may mean “wail,” indicating a psalm of mourning.³

Though not found in the headings of psalms, the word “selah” is sometimes found in the body of a psalm. Selah comes from a Hebrew word that means “to lift up.” Therefore, it probably carries the idea of saying something emphatically, like “hallelujah,” “lift it up,” or “say it out loud.”⁴

³ Ernest C. Lucas, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Psalms & Wisdom Literature* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 23-24.

⁴ Waltke, lecture 2.

<p>PSALM 63 SEEKING GOD FOR GOD HIMSELF</p>

Background

The heading of Psalm 63 tells us that David was the author. The psalm is tied to a particular time in David's life: "When he was in the wilderness of Judah." The Bible describes two times when David fled to the wilderness, or desert. The first was when he fled from Saul (1 Samuel 23:14-15; 24:1). The second was when he fled from his own son, Absalom (2 Samuel 15:23, 28). The latter seems more likely to be the setting for Psalm 63 since David was officially a king at this time (and he refers to himself as such in Psalm 63:11). Read 2 Samuel chapter 15 in preparation for this study.

Understanding the Psalm

1. Given the circumstances of 2 Samuel chapter 15, what might reasonably have been David's attitude toward God, who had called him to be king?
2. Where is David's emphasis in this psalm?
3. What has David learned in the past about God?
4. Note the personal words of verses 6-8. How would you describe David's relationship with God as revealed here?
5. Why does David express such confidence in verses 9-11?

Applying the Psalm to Your Life

6. How can the teaching of this psalm guide you when suffering?
7. How can the psalm help you in your daily devotional life?
8. What do you find most encouraging in this psalm?

Why?

Drawing Near

Memorize Psalm 63:1.⁵

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

⁵ Although Scripture references for this study are in the English Standard Version, feel free to memorize verses in another version if you prefer.

<p style="text-align: center;">PSALM 119 LETTING GOD’S WORD SHAPE YOUR LIFE</p>

Background

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. With its 176 verses, it is even longer than some of the biblical books! The psalm is made up of twenty-two stanzas of eight verses each. Each stanza is headed by one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in sequence. In each stanza, the first word of each verse begins with the Hebrew letter found at the heading of that stanza. Psalm 119 is a remarkable composition.

More importantly, Psalm 119 celebrates the authority and effect of God’s Word. Almost every verse contains some reference to God’s Word, using several different terms to refer to God’s law.

Understanding the Psalm

1. Psalm 119 uses a number of terms to refer to God’s Word. List below the ones you can identify.

2. Why does the psalm use a variety of synonyms to refer to Scripture?

3. What are some of the benefits noted in Psalm 119 for those who honor God’s Word?

4. Read verses 97-99. Explain what you think it means to meditate on God’s law.

5. According to this psalm, what benefits come to those who meditate on God's law?

Applying the Psalm to Your Life

6. How can a better understanding of Psalm 119 help you to love God more?
7. Which verses seem especially important for your spiritual growth?

Why?

8. Identify three or four verses in Psalm 119 that would be helpful prayers for you to regularly pray.

Drawing Near

Using several verses from Psalm 119, compose a prayer to express your desire for greater love for God's Word.

Example:

Lord, please teach me to walk in your law (v. 1). Help me to store up your Word in my heart so I won't sin against you (v. 11). Help me to delight in your

testimonies as much as in all riches (v. 14). Help me to meditate on your law so I will gain much wisdom (vv. 97-99). May your Word be a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (v. 105). And Lord, please help me to have the great peace that comes to those who love your law (v. 165).

In Jesus' Name,
Amen

Bonus Question (This is to challenge your small group leader!)

Which verses, if any, of Psalm 119 do not refer to God's Word, and why?

<p style="text-align: center;">PSALM 32 REPENTANCE AND RICHER FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD</p>

Background

Psalm 32 is one of seven psalms known as the “penitential” psalms. (The others are Psalms 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.) Written by King David, Psalm 32 teaches us about the blessedness of the one who openly acknowledges his or her sin to God. David contrasts this blessedness with his suffering when he “kept silent” about his own sin. The psalm is a powerful teaching about the need for honest and ongoing repentance by those who want to enjoy close fellowship with God.

Understanding the Psalm

1. In verses 1-5, three different words for sin are used. What are they, and what is God’s action in regard to each when confessed?
2. Why is it important to be a person “in whose spirit is no deceit” (v.2)?
3. What happened when David tried to hide his sin from God?
4. What do verses 5 to 9 teach us about the importance of complete openness and honesty before God?

Applying the Psalm to Your Life

5. Why do we sometimes try to deny or hide our sin, even from God?

6. What encouragement does the psalm give you about acknowledging your sins to God more quickly and completely?

7. What hope does the psalm give you about being kept from recurring sin?

Drawing Near

Take four or five minutes to:

- Pray aloud the words of Psalm 139:23-24.
- Ask God to show you any sin you need to acknowledge and confess to Him.
- Wait quietly before the Lord.
- Close by praying the words of Psalm 19:14.

<p style="text-align: center;">PSALM 57 GROWING CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH ADVERSITY</p>

Background

The heading of Psalm 57 connects its composition to David's flight from Saul when he was "in the cave." Commentator James Boice suggests that this was the large cave of Adullam.⁶ The circumstances of David's escape to this cave are recorded in 1 Samuel 22:1-4. Read this passage and note the group who came to join David in the cave (1 Samuel 22:2). How would you like to start an organization with a group of people like this?!

Understanding the Psalm

1. God is referred to approximately twenty-one times in the eleven verses of Psalm 57. Given David's circumstances in the cave, what accounts for his focus on God?
2. Upon what characteristics of God is David focused?
3. In light of the circumstances detailed in verse 4, why does David make the prayerful exclamations found in verses 5 and 11?
4. Note the references to "the peoples" (v. 9), "the nations" (v. 10), and "all the earth" (v. 11). Why does David desire that others come to know God?

Applying the Psalm to Your Life

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 474.

5. Note David's personal language about taking refuge in God (twice in v. 1). How does the gospel of Jesus Christ enable us to take refuge in God?
6. Why is it important that we turn first to God when we face a crisis?
7. How can we experience greater love for God as a result of facing trials?
8. Read Matthew 28:16-20 and verse 11 of this psalm. Why should our love for God overflow in love for people who do not yet know Him?
9. How can you pray more faithfully for the gospel to be spread to the unreached peoples of the earth?

Drawing Near

Take several minutes to journal about a time when you experienced God's presence and power in a crisis. Note how this event helped to shape your spiritual development and love for God.

If you haven't yet had an experience like this, that's okay. Encourage one or two people in your small group to share their experiences when your group meets.

<p>PSALM 62 WAITING FOR GOD ALONE</p>

Background

Psalm 62 comes from a time when King David was being attacked by enemies. In verse 3, he describes himself as “a leaning wall, a tottering fence.” His enemies sought to “thrust him down from his high position” (v. 4). Their attacks against him included deceptive speech and the spreading of “falsehood” (v. 4).

Despite these circumstances, there is no request made of God in this psalm. David simply expresses his trust in the Lord, for whom his soul waits.

Understanding the Psalm

1. Note the words “alone” and “only” in verses 1, 2, 5, and 6. How are the words used in these verses?
2. Why is it significant that David’s trust was in “God alone”?
3. The English Standard Version translates verse 1: “For God alone my soul waits in silence,” but the New International Version reads: “My soul finds rest in God alone.” How can each of these translations help us better understand what it means to trust God alone?

Applying the Psalm to Your Life

4. The ESV rendering of verses 1 and 5 refers to waiting “in silence” for God alone. Do you find it difficult to spend time quietly in God’s presence?

Why or why not?

5. In verse 8, David exhorts us to trust God, but also to pour out our hearts before Him. Why is it possible to do both at the same time?

6. Read verse 10. Why is it so tempting to set our hearts on riches?

How can we overcome this? (See 1 Timothy 6:17-19.)

7. Why do we have an even better basis for trusting God than David had? (See Hebrews 8:10-12.)

Drawing Near

Memorize Psalm 62:1-2. Take three minutes each day this week to quietly and prayerfully meditate upon these words.

For God alone my soul waits in silence;
From him comes my salvation.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
My fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.

<p>PSALM 95</p> <p>DRAWING NEAR IN WORSHIP</p>
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Background

Psalm 95 is a psalm of worship. But it is also a teaching psalm. Verses 8-11 look back upon the rebellion of the Israelites recorded in Exodus 17:1-7. This passage reveals the unbelief of the Israelites when they failed to trust that the Lord would provide for them. In Exodus 17, Moses used the words “Meribah,” for quarreling, and “Massah,” for testing, to refer to the rebelliousness of the Israelites. Read Exodus 17:1-7 as background for our study.

Psalm 95 plays an important role in the New Testament. The writer of the Book of Hebrews quotes extensively from the psalm, and warns believers not to harden their hearts as the Israelites did. The concept of entering God’s “rest” (Psalm 95:11) has important application to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Read Hebrews 3:7-4:13 as additional background for our study.

Understanding the Psalm

1. List some of the ways the writer of Psalm 95 refers to God.
2. What reasons are given for worshiping the Lord?
3. How does Psalm 95 teach us to express our worship to God?
4. Notice the progression in the psalm from joyful singing to kneeling to responding in obedience to God’s voice. Do you see any significance in this order?

Why or why not?

5. Why must our hearts be included in worship? (See Matthew 15:8-9.)

Applying the Psalm to Your Life

6. Have you typically included praise and worship in your devotional time?

If so, what difference has it made in your time with God?

If not, how can you begin to incorporate worship into your devotional life?

7. Do you ever kneel before God?

Why might this posture be helpful as a form of worship?

8. How can Psalm 95 help you come better prepared for corporate worship on Sundays?

Drawing Near

Take five minutes each day this week to worship God at home. If you find it hard to get started, begin by reading aloud a psalm of praise to the Lord. (e.g., Psalm 96, 97, 98, 99, or 100)

<p style="text-align: center;">PSALM 102 HOW TO COMPLAIN TO GOD</p>

Background

Bible commentators have categorized psalms into several literary types. The largest group, with approximately fifty-eight of the 150 psalms, is the “lament” category. Psalm 102 is one of these.⁷ The heading of the psalm lets us know it is “a prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord.”

Like many psalms, Psalm 102 has a messianic component, meaning that it points to the coming Messiah. Verses 25-27 of the psalm are quoted in Hebrews and applied to Jesus Christ. Read Hebrews 1: 8-12 in preparation for our study.

Understanding the Psalm

1. What five requests does the psalmist make in verses 1 and 2?

2. How would you describe the psalmist’s affliction?

3. Verse 12 seems to be a turning point in the psalm. What truth(s) about God form the basis for the psalmist’s confidence (seen in verses 12-22)?

4. After verse 12, the psalmist speaks confidently about God’s future work for Zion (Jerusalem) and the nations of the earth. Why is this significant?

⁷ Allen C. Myers, ed., *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 858-859.

5. Compare verses 25-27 to Hebrews 1:10-12. What do these passages teach us about Jesus?

Applying the Psalm to Your Life

6. Is it possible to complain to God and express faith in Him at the same time?

If so, how?

7. When faced with great suffering, some people turn away from God, but others draw near to Him. What accounts for different responses to God in suffering?
8. Read verse 12 again. How can a good grasp of this truth help you grow closer to God in suffering?

Drawing Near

Memorize Psalm 102:12.

But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever;
You are remembered throughout all generations.

<p style="text-align: center;">PSALM 16 CONTENTMENT IN GOD'S PRESENCE</p>

Background

The heading of Psalm 16 tells us that David wrote the psalm as a song. Verse 1 lets us know that David's life was in danger. The setting was likely during those years when David had to flee from King Saul.⁸

The psalm provides important teaching about the resurrection of Jesus. The apostle Peter quotes from Psalm 16 in his great sermon on the day of Pentecost. Peter makes it clear that verse 10 of the psalm—"For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption"—is a prophecy about Jesus Christ (Acts 2:25-32). When the apostle Paul preached in Antioch, he also used verse 10 to explain the resurrection of Christ (Acts 13:34-37).

As you study Psalm 16, remember that joyful contentment in God's presence, both now and in the life to come, is available to us because of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Understanding the Psalm

1. What is the significance of David's affirmation in verse 2?
2. What is David's commitment expressed in verse 4?

How is this commitment connected to his affirmation in verse 2?

3. Read Psalm 63:5-8 and compare these words to Psalm 16:7-9. Why is David's relationship with God, expressed in both of these psalms, so deeply personal?

⁸ Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 1, 131.

4. What does David mean by the words, “I have set the Lord always before me,” in verse 8?

Applying the Psalm to Your Life

5. Read these verses from the Gospel of John: John 14:15-17, 25-27; John 15:26; John 16:7. How does the Holy Spirit enable us to experience God’s presence?
6. How would you explain to someone what it means to enjoy God’s presence?
7. Why is it necessary to turn away from all false gods (Psalm 16:4) in order to enjoy God’s presence?
8. How can you “set the Lord” always before you (Psalm 16:8)?

Drawing Near

Memorize Psalm 16:8. Review it daily this week, along with the other verses you have memorized for this study.

I have set the Lord always before me;
Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

<p style="text-align: center;">PSALM 73 NEARNESS TO GOD AND CLEARER VISION</p>
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Background

Psalm 73 was composed by Asaph, a priest whom King David appointed to oversee worship. It is likely that the psalm was intended to be put to music and used in worship.

As you read the psalm, be sure to notice the change in pronouns used. In verses 4-12, Asaph focuses on “they.” In verses 13-17, he refers to “I.” In verses 18-20, he addresses “You.” In the final verses, 21-28, he combines “You” and “I.”⁹

Understanding the Psalm

1. Is there significance to the change in pronouns throughout the psalm?

Why or why not?

2. What brought about a change in Asaph’s perspective?
3. How does his view of the prosperity of the wicked change?
4. List several things Asaph knows about God.

⁹ Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 2, 165.

5. What does Asaph learn is most important for himself?

Applying the Psalm to Your Life

6. Why does envy of others distort our view of God's goodness?
7. Read Jesus' words in Matthew 16:24-27. Why is it so important to keep an eternal perspective about life?
8. What truths from Psalm 73:23-26 can especially enrich your fellowship with God?
9. How can you more intentionally live "near God" (v. 28)?

Drawing Near

Take five minutes to prayerfully read aloud verses 23-28, asking the Lord to use His Word to enrich your fellowship with Him.

PSALM 27 ONE THING

Background

The heading of Psalm 27 simply tells us it is “Of David.” Most likely the psalm is connected with the time when David fled from Saul. The references to “evildoers,” “adversaries,” “foes,” and “enemies,” indicate David’s life was in danger.

David’s longing to be in God’s temple may mean he “was shut out from the house of the Lord” at the time of these events.¹⁰ God’s temple, or house, was a tent (2 Samuel 6:17). The magnificent temple constructed by Solomon was not yet built.

Understanding the Psalm

1. In verse 1, David uses three different words to express what God is to him. What are they?

Why is each one important?

2. What is David’s greatest desire?

3. Why does David love God’s house? (See Psalm 26:8, along with Psalm 27:4.)

4. What does it mean for David to “gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.” (v. 4)?

¹⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 1, part 2 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 1.

Applying the Psalm to Your Life

5. How can you seek God's "face" (v. 8)?
6. Why is it important that we be willing to be taught by God during adversity (v. 11)?
7. What are the benefits of learning to "wait for the Lord" (v.14)?

Can you share about a time when your faith has grown by waiting for the Lord?

Drawing Near

Memorize Psalm 27:1.

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life:
Of whom shall I be afraid?

*Each day this week, review all of the verses you have memorized for this study.
Congratulations on completing it!*

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