

DISCOVERING HOPE IN THE PSALMS



PAM FARREL & JEAN E. JONES
author &
illustrator **KARLA DORNACHER**



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In the beginning God CREATED...(Genesis 1:1).

To all those creatives who love to weave the beauty of Scripture with the beauty of art to allow God to create the ultimate loveliness of life-change:

May these psalms exquisitely paint your future with hope's splendor.

To all the God-loving artists who bravely pour your heart onto pages, papers, and canvasses when inspired by the Word of God: Thank you.

-All of us



To the God of Hope who inspired the psalmists
to pen poems of magnificent authenticity:

Bless you, this writer is forever grateful.

- Pam



To Clay, for his incredible love and support

- Jean E.



To Michael,
who never gave up hope on me even during the darkest hours

- Karla



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Introduction

Do You Want Hope?

Do you want the hope that takes you through the dark valleys of life's journey? The world and our lives can seem crazy and disappointing and often dark and despairing; dreams dissolve; cancers ravage; friends betray; loved ones wound; we fail.

The psalmists faced distresses, too, but they cultivated hope by praying psalms of hope and resting in God's promises. Their writings nurture that hope in us today by leading us to God's presence so we experience his mercy in new ways.

Why We Wrote This Discovery Book for You

The three of us, with our different paths and gifts, have connected over our love for interacting with God's Word and encouraging others to experience the hope of his promises and faithfulness.

Our desire to share the riches of hope from Psalms with you is the inspiration behind the creation of this journey. By the end of our time together, you'll know how to pray and hope in dark times and how to rejoice and act wisely at all times. You'll grasp eight hopes from Psalms that will draw you closer to God and will brace you in troubling times. You'll confidently interpret the psalms and hold on to their messages as lifelines.

We can't wait to join you for this adventure.

Jean E.

Twenty years ago the women's ministry director of my church asked me to write a homework-style Bible study on Psalm 71 for a large group of women. I immersed myself in that psalm for months and realized the psalmist knew something I didn't know: how to pray with hope. My prayers were often worry sessions that left me no more peaceful than I was before I prayed.

I wrote my own prayer psalm based on Psalm 71 and realized this activity could benefit everyone. At the time I was a systems analyst writing training materials and teaching computer software, and I knew the benefits of hands-on exercises. So in the study, I walked the women through writing a psalm without telling them what they were doing until they were done. The next time we met, excited chatter filled the room: "Did you get to the last page? Did you realize we were writing our own psalm?" They loved it, and they couldn't wait to share their psalms with each other.

Through that experience I discovered that most people don't know how to pray the psalms and don't realize prayer was the purpose of these amazing writings. That realization became my inspiration to connect with Pam and Karla to guide women into discovering hope in the Psalms through in-depth study, inspiring devotionals, and optional creative experiences designed to help each of us experience Psalms in a new, transforming way.

Pam

The Psalms have always been my inspiration at the critical turning points of my life. One of the first passages I memorized as a child was Psalm 23. Psalm 37 held the confirmation I needed to happily say "Yes!" to marrying my husband, Bill. In times of struggle, doubt, and hopelessness, the Psalms have kept me emotionally afloat.

So when my friend Jean asked me to advise her on her Bible study on the Psalms, I was excited and intrigued. Jean and her husband, Dr. Clay Jones, have been friends and encouragers to our *Love-Wise* ministry for several decades, and I knew of Jean's strong Bible teaching skills. But when I had the wonderful opportunity to read her work, I experienced the power of her ability to help women dig a little deeper to discover gems in the Word. So I championed the creation of this project wholeheartedly.

While I worked my way through the study, I longed to express what I was learning. I enjoy connecting the beauty of art with the beauty of Scripture, so I drew out the rich meanings and applications I was learning in my journaling Bible and in my art journal. I suggested offering the reader a variety of artistic and creative options, and this led to me calling one of my favorite artists, Karla Dornacher, to see if she would create coloring pages to go with these psalms. I know from personal experience that this unique study is life-changing.

Karla

I know what hopelessness looks like. I've walked in that pitch-black tunnel where there was no glimmer of light. More than once, I believed suicide was my only way out of the darkness that imprisoned me.

I grew up with a narcissistic mother and a stepdad who was mentally and emotionally abusive. I ran away from home at 17 only to return the next day, knowing it was wrong. Shortly after that my mother legally disowned me and I became a ward of the state. She refused to speak to me for seven years.

During those years, my constant companions were hurt, confusion, and anger. Pain and strong emotions kept spilling out onto the two people I loved the most: my husband and baby girl. I knew I had problems; there was no hiding it. In a desperate attempt to find hope and a purpose for living, I sought help from all the wrong sources—everything from spiritual gurus to self-help remedies.

In the fall of 1980, I was invited to a neighborhood Bible study, and there I discovered hope: hope in Christ, and hope in his Word. The truths of who God is and who he says I am *in* him brought light into my darkness and slowly began to replace the lies I had believed as a child. I remember the first time I read Psalm 27:10: "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in." And he did. And I had hope.

I soon realized my artistic ability was a gift from God, and I asked him if he would someday allow me to use my art to glorify him and help other women discover his hope. And he has, even now, through this discovery book.

The Treasures in Each Chapter

Your path through every chapter unfolds with an engaging study on one or two psalms of hope. It will also guide you in writing your own prayer psalm and will give you options for creatively immersing yourself in Scripture.

Why? The more ways we immerse ourselves in a passage, the better we'll remember its message. We all have different learning styles, so the tool that works best for you might not be the tool that works best for your closest friend. And we know you'll have a blast trying new creative options and delighting in others' ideas and experiences.

We collaborated on this discovery book to inspire you. Here's what you'll find from each of us in every chapter.

Jean E.

Daily Lessons

You'll hear from me throughout this journey. The opening page of each chapter tells you the hope we'll look at and the key question we'll answer.

Next, the psalm selection we'll study in each chapter is printed for you and is illustrated by Karla. The

translation is English Standard Version, but I use indentations, line breaks, and stanza breaks from a variety of scholars to fit our discussions better. Refer to these printed psalms to answer the lesson questions.

After the psalm are the five daily lessons, each answering the key question from the opening page and centering on the hope that the psalm selection gives us in God. Each lesson will take around 25 minutes to complete. The first lesson introduces the psalm's genre and ends with options for creatively experiencing the psalm's hope. The chapter's final lesson on Day 5 will guide you in a private time of worship, using at least three psalms, including your own.

The lessons use three icons:

- 🎵 A quarter note represents a personal question designed to help you apply what you're learning to your life one note at a time. If you're in a small group, your group leader will ask for volunteers to share their answers. The personal questions will promote a rich discussion and help everyone learn and grow from others' experiences.
- 🎶 The beamed notes represent an activity which will walk you through writing a prayer psalm based on the one you're studying. We encourage you to share your finished psalm with your small group and on social media.
- ⏸ An activity marked with a fermata (for sustaining a note further) indicates that additional and relevant instructions, insights, and resources can be found at www.DiscoveringHopeInThePsalms.com. Come visit us there!

The Little Details

Along the way, you'll see sidebars titled "The Little Details." These are extra insights for both seasoned Christians and seekers who thrive on details.

My Psalm

After the five daily lessons, I've added a page—My Psalm—for you to write your own, personal prayer psalm. You can illustrate it and embellish the page any way you wish.

Pam

Hope Alive

My unique contribution is the Hope Alive section in each chapter, where I share honest, personal examples of how studying these psalms has kept hope alive in my own life and how this study will encourage and equip you to hold on to hope. I also offer a bridge to the artist within many of you with my Creative Biblical Expressions. You'll find more examples of these on our website along with more Scripture, more hope, and more art so your journey of knowing God's love can continue long after the pages of this discovery book are read, filled, and colored.

Karla

Creative Connection

You'll hear from me at the end of each chapter in the Creative Connection that follows My Psalm. I'll share inspiration and ideas to help you see God's Word through your own creative lens and express it through your unique artistic talents. You'll be encouraged to use the creative moments you have during this study as opportunities to hear God's heart for you as well as hide his Word in your heart. And you'll discover a few design, coloring, and hand-lettering tips to jump-start your own creative journey through the Psalms.

Illustrations

You'll see my illustrations throughout the discovery book. I designed the full-page graphics at the end of each chapter to give you the opportunity to creatively express yourself with color as well as spend time meditating on God's Word. Use colored pencils or markers to color—just remember to slip a sheet of blank paper behind the page in case your markers bleed through. The bookmarks in the back of the book are for you to cut out and color or slip under a page in your Bible, sketchbook, or gratitude journal for tracing. Look for tracing tips and other helps in the Creative Connection sections.

From All of Us

At the end of each chapter's first daily lesson, we list ideas on how to creatively express the psalm you're studying and the hope it gives you. These become ways to meditate on the psalm's message throughout the time you work through each chapter and to share your hope and experience with others. Choose any that interest you, or come up with your own. Of course, if the creative options aren't your thing, that's okay too!

To help you memorize Scripture, we have provided the Tips for Committing Scripture to Heart section at the end of the book's primary content. What a gift it is to have the hopes in Psalms treasured in your mind, heart, and spirit. We encourage you to try each of the ideas once so you can discover the method that works the best for you. And if you have personal methods for memorizing Scripture, share those with us and other readers at the Discovering Hope in the Psalms Facebook group.

Our website, www.DiscoveringHopeInThePsalms.com, has even more ideas and instructions, along with links to help you share your creative projects and gather inspiration from others.

How to Use *Discovering Hope in the Psalms*

This discovery book is designed for both small groups and individual study.

Ideas for Small Groups

Begin with an introductory meeting where you hand out discovery books, go over what to expect, and provide time for everyone to introduce themselves. Use icebreakers such as these:

- Which creative hobbies have you tried or enjoyed?
- Does the idea of having creative options in this study sound scary or exciting?
- How have you used creativity as (a) a conversation starter; (b) a means to share the gospel; or (c) a way to encourage someone?
- Do you draw in your Bible? Why or why not?
- Describe a time in your life when you needed hope.
- Name one thing in the news that discourages you.
- What area of your life needs the healing of hope?
- Name one benefit you hope to embrace during this study.

Each time you meet, carve out time to worship with psalms in song or spoken-word poetry. Consider providing demonstrations of ways to creatively interact with psalms. Ask for volunteers or bring in artists for a special event.

For the final meeting, consider having a potluck so participants can bring gifts of food to share as they read

one of the thanksgiving prayers they wrote. Set aside time for participants to share creative projects they've finished but have not yet shared.

Nine-Week Option

One way to go through the lessons is to cover one chapter a week. The first week, begin with an introductory meeting. During each of the following eight weeks, discuss the personal questions and a few key questions from all five daily lessons of one chapter. Encourage participants to share their psalms and the creative endeavors they've begun.

Seventeen-Week Option

To extend your group's time of exploration, you could cover one chapter every two weeks. Begin with the introductory meeting and end with a potluck at the last meeting. For instance, participants could complete three daily lessons and begin a creative project the first week, and the second week complete the final two lessons and their psalm, and continue with their creative project. The first discussion centers on the three lessons and the projects begun, while the second discussion finishes the lessons and gives everyone time to share their prayer psalm and progress on creative projects. Those who want to can explore other psalms of the same genre (usually listed in a Day 1 sidebar).

Inspiration for Individual Study

You can work through the lessons at your own pace, spending as much or as little time as you'd like on the creative options. We encourage you to share your creative endeavors on social media so you benefit from the community you'll find there. You're not in this journey alone, even if you decide to do this as an independent study. Visit us through the links at www.DiscoveringHopeInThePsalms.com so we can see your creations and answer your questions. We have come alongside you for this journey of hope and would love to keep in touch. Are you ready to join us in discovering hope in the psalms? Turn the page and let's get started!

Jeanne Pam Karla

Chapter 1

Psalm 1: The Hope of God's Blessing

What should I do to have a blessed life?

Day 1

Introducing the Book of Psalms

Would you like to be like a tree planted by streams of water that yields fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither? Would you like to prosper in all that you do?

We'll learn how as we start our journey of hope in Psalms. First, let's explore how this amazing book of the Bible came into being and why it is so inspiring.

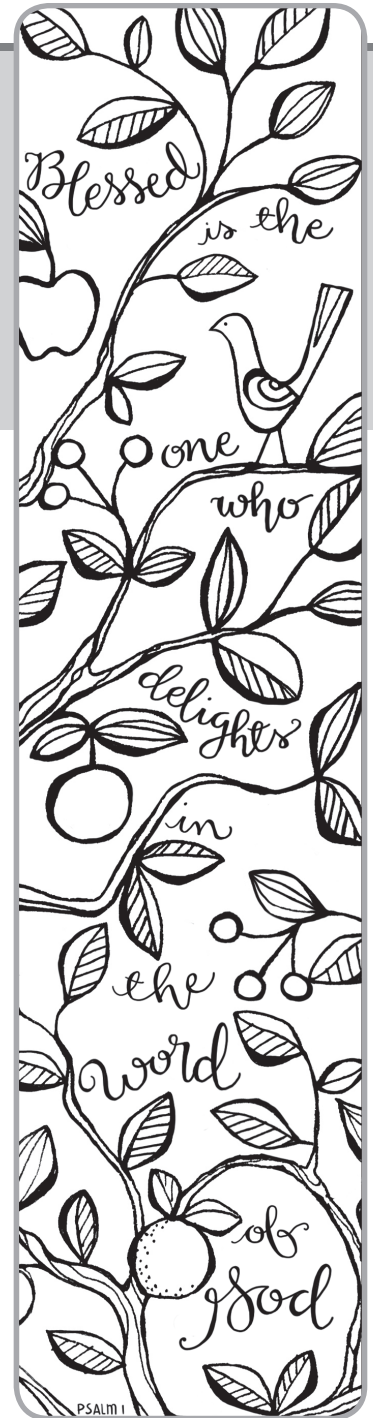
Hebrew poets penned the praises and prayers they worshiped God with as psalms. Psalms are poems meant to be sung, so the poets at times gave their psalms to the temple choir-masters. The choir-masters gathered the psalms into collections. What we know today as the book of Psalms is a collection of these collections.

For thousands of years, followers of God have worshiped him by singing and praying the psalms in the Psalter, as the book of Psalms is also known. It's no wonder. The Psalms extol God's goodness and power. They voice our gratitude and hopes, our sorrows and longings. When we sing or pray them, they teach us eternal truths and commit us to godly actions and attitudes. They draw us near to God.

And there's more.

Although worship is our gift to God, when we worship with psalms, something happens within us: Hope soars, and we are transformed. The psalms proclaim the hopes to which we have been called, and in our attempts to bless the living God, we find ourselves blessed.

In this first chapter we will look at a psalm that places before us the **hope of blessing**. It answers the question, *What should I do to have a blessed life?* Take a moment to ask the Lord to speak to you through his Word, and then read Psalm 1 printed for you on the next page.¹



Although worship is our gift to God, when we worship with psalms, something happens within us: Hope soars, and we are transformed.



Psalm 1

- 1 Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
- 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.
- 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season
 and its leaf does not wither.
 In all that he does, he prospers.
- 4 The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
- 6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.

Initial Thoughts

1. 🎧 What stands out to you most from your initial reading of this psalm?

The Big Picture

Just as today we hear many types of songs—love songs, anthems, lullabies, ballads, and more—so the ancient Hebrews heard many types of psalms—wisdom songs, laments, thanksgiving songs, hymns, confidence songs, royal psalms, and more. Knowing a psalm’s type helps us to know how to read it.

Psalm 1 is a **wisdom psalm** written to instruct us in God’s ways.² This particular type of wisdom psalm is called a **Torah psalm**, a psalm that extols God’s instructions to us. (*Torah* means “law” or “instructions.”)

Psalm 1 tells us what to do to have a blessed life. Being *blessed* isn’t quite the same as being happy; it’s “the joyful spiritual condition of those who are right with God and the pleasure and satisfaction that is derived from that.”³

The psalm contrasts the ways of two types of people.

2. Who are these people, according to the psalm’s concluding verse (Psalm 1:6)?

Psalm 1 introduces the first of the two main themes of the Psalter: the way of the righteous. But what do the psalms mean by “righteous”? The Bible uses the term *righteous* in several ways. It tells us the standard for righteousness is God’s righteousness, and that no person is righteous on his or her own. However, Scripture calls some people *the righteous*: those whose faith in and love for God causes them to order their lives according to God’s laws (Psalm 1:2). God bestows righteousness on them because he counts faith as righteousness. In the New Testament, God makes righteous those who put their faith in Jesus. In both the Old and New Testaments, the righteous aren’t sinless, but when they sin, they seek God’s forgiveness, and God cleanses them of unrighteousness (more on this in chapter 3).

Beeson Divinity School professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, Allen P. Ross, puts it this way:

The basic meaning of “righteous” has to do with conforming to the standard; in religious passages that standard is divine revelation. The righteous are people who have entered into covenant with God by faith and seek to live according to his Word. The covenant that they have makes them the people of God—God knows them, and because God knows them, they shall never perish. They may do unrighteous things at times, but they know to find forgiveness because they want to do what is right.⁴

The wicked, on the other hand, are those who live as they see fit. The word translated



The Little Details

Stanzas

In poetry, a **stanza** is a group of related poetic lines. It’s similar to a paragraph, which in prose is a group of related sentences. Some modern Bible translations break psalms into stanzas to make them easier to read.

Psalm 1’s first stanza (verses 1-3) describes the righteous, the second (verses 4-5) describes the wicked, and the last (verse 6) draws a conclusion about the two.

Scripture calls some people *the righteous*: those whose faith in and love for God causes them to order their lives according to God’s laws.



The Little Details

Psalms: A Collection of Collections

The Bible's book of Psalms is actually five books of psalms collected over 1000 years.⁷ Moses wrote its oldest psalm around 1400 BC. David, who reigned around 1000 BC, authored more of its psalms than anyone else. Some psalms date to around the time of Ezra—approximately 400 BC.

It was about 400 BC when compilers arranged the Psalter into the form we have today, placing Psalms 1 and 2 as its introduction. Together they announce the two major themes threading throughout the Psalter: the way of the righteous and the rule of the divinely appointed king.

wicked in Psalm 1:1 can refer to those who simply don't love God, or to those who reject God's laws,⁵ or even to those dedicated to violence and oppression.

3. In the following verses, underline what both the Old and New Testaments tell us about our ability to be righteous without God's help.

No one living is righteous before you (Psalm 143:2).

None is righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:10).

4. Why can't we be righteous on our own (Romans 3:23)?

5. (a) In Matthew 22:37-38 below, underline the command that those without faith in God always break. (b) Circle what Jesus called that command.

And [Jesus] said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."

6. Underline what the righteousness from God comes through in Philippians 3:9 below:

...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

When reading Scripture, it's important to differentiate between righteous living—ordering one's life by God's commands, including the command to love God—and righteous standing—the righteousness God gives people who live by faith.

Righteous living without faith is simply keeping a moral code and never leads to righteous standing because no person is sinless and because God gives righteous standing to only those with faith in him (Romans 3:20,23). Remember, those without faith in God always break the greatest command: Love the Lord your God.

On the other hand, righteous standing always leads to righteous living because those with faith in God love and trust him enough to obey him (albeit imperfectly on earth), and because God works in them to change them.⁶ It may take time to overcome weaknesses and old habits, but the Holy Spirit will produce growth.

7. Read Luke 6:46-49. (a) What question does Jesus ask in verse 46? (b) How would you reply? (c) Summarize what Jesus says about righteous living (that is, doing what he says) in verses 47-49.


According to Jesus, we must build our lives on the foundation of obeying his words if

we want to be blessed. Those who call him “Lord, Lord” but don’t obey him are building a house without a foundation, and that house will fall. It’s a different analogy with the same message.




Experiencing Psalm 1 Creatively

Throughout this series, we’ll introduce you to a variety of ways to interpret psalms using creative biblical expressions. Some of these may be new to you.


The arts played a big part in Israel’s worship of God, including visual, performing, literary, and even culinary arts. Experiencing Scripture through multiple means helps plant its message in us so we can remember its truths even better than if we just read it. It also gives us more ways to draw near to God in worship.

Below you’ll find ideas for engaging with psalms using the various arts. Mark any that interest you and consider doing at least one in the weeks to come. A few are specifically for engaging with Psalm 1, but most will work for any psalm. Find instructions for items marked  at www.DiscoveringHopeInThePsalms.com.

Visual Arts Options

- Find techniques for expressing Scripture with art in Karla’s Creative Connection at the end of each chapter.
- Color Karla’s full-page illustration at the end of each chapter.
- The bookmark on the opening page of each chapter is reproduced at the end of the book. Color and cut it out for yourself or to give it as a gift.
- For this chapter’s psalm, Psalm 1, create a container garden with a small plant pruned like a tree and tiny rocks suggesting a stream. Use this as a conversation starter and as a visual inspiration for your personal time of prayer and study.
- Write part or all of a psalm in calligraphy.
- Create an art journal: sketch, paint, and affix photos and words from magazines.
-  Overlay a verse on top of a photograph.
- Create a diorama, sculpture, or piece of jewelry.
- Create fabric art using cross-stitch, embroidery, or appliqué.
-  Scan the bookmark, use photo editing software to color it, and print it on printable fabric to use as is or to embroider.
- Create greeting cards or T-shirts to encourage others.
-  In a journaling Bible, choose one verse to illuminate in the wide margin.

Performing Arts Options

-  Find a musical version of the psalm to play or sing.
- Act out the psalm as you read or recite it aloud to music (spoken-word poetry).
- Write music and lyrics based on the psalm.
- If a psalm tells you to do something, do it!



The Little Details

Visual Arts

In biblical times, Scripture adorned the doorposts and gates of homes, providing teaching opportunities. But where the visual arts really stood out was at the temple. There, wood carvings, gold inlays, intricate embroidery, and bronze statues reminded worshipers that this was the temple of the Creator of all in heaven and earth. He was holy, and they drew near to him through sacrifice. The artistry reminded people who God was so they could worship appropriately.

Literary Arts Options

- Form a psalm's message into a poem of any type you like.
- Write an encouraging letter to someone based on the hope you find in the psalm.
- 🎧 Write a wisdom psalm similar to what you're studying, using what you learn about Hebrew poetry. Here's an example of such a psalm based on Ephesians 4:29,31.

Blessed are those

*who whisper not secrets about friends,
nor murmur rumors about acquaintances,
nor shout lies about foes.*

*But they delight in building up others,
and on ways to give grace they ponder.*

*They are like master craftsmen with fine tools
who repair and strengthen weak fittings,
and wipe away grime that hides beauty.
In all their relationships they prosper.*

*Gossipers are not so,
but are like vandals who mar and destroy.*

*Therefore gossipers will not keep close companions,
nor slanderers the trust of the wise.*

*For the Lord brings friends to encouragers,
but the friendships of the slanderer will collapse.*

Culinary Arts Options

- Celebrate a Christian holiday with a feast, where you talk about the meaning of the holiday.
- Celebrate answered prayer with a meal, where you publicly give thanks (more on this in Chapter 8).

Sharing Options

- Share your creations with your small group.
- 🎧 To inspire others, post recordings, writings, and pictures in the Facebook group Discovering Hope in the Psalms.
- Also share on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter with #DiscoveringHopeInThePsalms.



Hope Alive

We all want to be blessed by God, right? But do we desire to place ourselves in line to receive the blessing? Psalm 1 begins with that word we all deep down hope for: *blessed*. We long for the fruit of being blessed; and we hope to be a tree that “yields fruit” and to “prosper” in all that we do. Verse 2 reveals the key that unlocks such blessing is that “his [or her] delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”

When people ask me how I have overcome traumatic family-of-origin issues or how my husband, Bill, and I have formed a lasting love and parented with creativity, my response is the same: “The power is in the Word.” I share how I dig into the Bible daily. I admit that I struggle to memorize Scripture, but I keep at it because it’s life-changing. God wants us to delight in our journey to the blessing with our focus on him.

A friend and I recently hiked five miles up a mountain to take photos on the famous Potato Chip Rock in California. Our push to the top unveiled inspiring, snapshot-worthy views of lakes, rock formations, the valley, and the distant Pacific Ocean shore. I was equally encouraged by the deep conversations I had with my friend. Precious memories were made not only at the peak, but along the trail.

In the same way, God gave me personal gems along my journey through these psalms, even though I’ve studied them many times before. This time through Psalm 1, I pondered what it would mean in my life to be a tree planted by streams of water with a leaf that never withers. Following the research trail, I discovered the “streams” mentioned are irrigation canals common in the Middle East. Fruit trees, especially the nutritious and delicious date palms, were planted near these waterways to ensure prosperity. I conducted word studies on *tree*, *planted*, *yields fruit*, and *prosper*. I responded to God with prayer and praise. I penned a poem in my own psalmist-like way. I prayerfully savored the fruit of these studies on walks down my tree-lined driveway. I sketched a tree with deep roots. In short, I sat in the shade of this Psalm 1 tree and reflected on my own life.

Then, in God’s perfect timing, a tree on our property fell. A strong wind or a raging storm didn’t topple it. No, the cause was a beetle that can do its damage only in drought conditions. In California, we’ve been on strict water rationing because of a nearly decade-long drought. The tree appeared healthy, but because of lack of water, it was dead inside. It was a vivid reminder of what kind of tree I did *not* want to become! And “living water”—and lots of it—would be the difference!

Turn on the soaker hose, pull out the sprinklers, and get out your watering can by reading, memorizing, worshiping with, meditating on, and creatively responding to the psalms God is placing along your path. This study will deepen the roots of your life and help you find and hang on to hope. As you trek through the forest of verses, make note of the towering evergreen trees (you and other students of the Word) made strong by the streams of study. We know you will enjoy the journey up to the mountain peak of HOPE. Take it from a fellow explorer: You will love the view from up top!

Pam³

Two Ways

I wasn't raised in church. A girlfriend gave me my first Bible when I was a high school freshman: a *Good News for Modern Man* paperback New Testament illustrated with striking line drawings. I read it carefully, putting my faith in Jesus as Savior while reading the Gospel of John.

As I continued reading, I realized the way it said people should live was quite different from the way I had been raised. I felt as if I'd finally been given the proper instruction manual for living.

I set out to learn God's instructions and discard the mistaken notions I'd relied on from intuition and the advice of family and friends unfamiliar with God's ways. I didn't know it then, but I was doing what the writer of Psalm 1 describes: delighting in God's instructions.

The Way to Avoid

Psalm 1 tells us whose advice to ignore and whose to follow if we want a blessed life.

8. What three things should a person shun to be blessed (Psalm 1:1)?

The psalms are easier to understand if we know a little about Hebrew poetry. A Hebrew poem's basic unit is a **poetic line**. Most lines have two segments, although some have three or four and a few have only one. In the psalms printed in this workbook, the first segment starts at the left margin and the rest of the segments are indented to show their relationships.

Most line segments in Hebrew poetry use **parallelism**. They say something similar in multiple ways, giving us different ways to grasp the poet's meaning. The best part about parallelism is that it translates well, so we don't have to know Hebrew to enjoy it. God was planning ahead when he helped the Hebrews develop their poetry!

Here are the parallel elements of Psalm 1:1 lined up:

a	Blessed is the man		
b	who walks not	in the counsel	of the wicked
c	nor stands	in the way	of sinners
d	nor sits	in the seat	of scoffers

Notice that I've labeled the line segments *a–d*. Throughout this discovery book, if I place a letter after a verse number, I'm referring to a particular line segment. For example, "Psalm 1:1c" refers to the third line segment: "nor stands in the way of sinners."

I felt as if I'd finally been given the proper instruction manual for living.

When you find parallelism, compare the parallel elements to see how they relate. In this case, they intensify.

First, contact with the corrupt group progresses from walking with, to standing with, to

sitting with. Next, involvement progresses from listening to their advice, to following their advice, to becoming one of them. The third intensification depends on the meaning of the word *wicked* in segment 1b. If by *wicked* the psalmist means “ungodly,” then the progression is from the ungodly, who lack faith in God; to sinners, who habitually go against God’s will; to scoffers, who scorn God-followers, mock the law, and shun correction.

But if he means the violent and oppressive, then the progression follows what we do when we’re enticed. We begin by listening to those who act wickedly. Then we step into sin as we tell ourselves, “At least I’m not as bad as they are.” But later we become enmeshed in the same deeds, and then it’s a small move to scoffing at all who don’t do likewise.

The Way to Take

The psalmist next moves from the way to avoid to the way to take.

9. What are the two ways the righteous respond to the law of the Lord (Psalm 1:2)?

The word translated *law* is *Torah*. It could also be translated *instructions*. The “law of the LORD” includes all of God’s instructions to us in Scripture,⁸ for Scripture is “breathed out by God” for our benefit (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Let’s look more closely at verse 2.

10. (a) In verse 2 below, circle “his delight is” in segment 2a and “he meditates” in segment 2b. Draw a line between the two circles. (b) Draw a box around “in the law of the LORD” in 2a and “on his law” in 2b. Now draw a line between the two boxes.

But his delight is in the law of the LORD,

and on his law he meditates day and night.

Notice how your two lines form an *X*? Like verse 1, verse 2 uses parallelism, but this time the parallel elements are placed in a pattern called **chiasm** (KEY-asm; *chi* is the Greek name for the letter *X*). We illustrate verse 2’s parallelism like this:

- A his delight is
 B in the law of the LORD
 B’ on his law
 A’ he meditates

The righteous so delight in the Lord’s instructions that they meditate on them all the time.



The Little Details

Poetic Lines

A **poetic line** is not the same as a sentence. Lines can have multiple sentences (such as verse 3), and a single sentence might be made up of multiple lines (such as verses 1-2). A line is not the same as a verse, either. Sometimes our modern verse numbers don’t correspond to a psalm’s poetic lines.

Just as Bible versions sometimes differ as to where they put sentence and paragraph breaks, so they sometimes differ as to where they put line and stanza breaks.

Line Indentations

Your Bible may indent Psalm 1 differently than we do in this discovery book. Many Bible versions place the first line segment at the left margin and indent the rest of the segments about one-quarter inch. A third level of indentation, to about one-half inch, means the line was too long to fit within the margins so it wraps.

Since this discovery book has wider text than most Bibles, it can display multiple levels of indents where called for while avoiding line wraps, so I show more levels of indent.



The Little Details

Parallelism

We can symbolize parallelism by using letters to represent units and a **prime mark** (') to show how many times a unit has been repeated.

Normal parallelism

(verse 5):

A B / A' B'

Incomplete parallelism

(verse 1):

A / B C D / B' C' D'
/ B'' C'' D''

Chiastic parallelism

(verse 2):

A B / B' A'

We naturally think about what delights us. Delight brings meditation, and meditation increases delight.

The Hebrew word translated *meditates* has a broader meaning than our English word. Meditation includes pondering God's instructions, devising ways to follow them, and saying the commands aloud quietly. The word is often translated *utter* or *mutter*. Isaiah used it to describe doves cooing (Isaiah 38:14) and a lion growling over its prey (Isaiah 31:4). This last reference provides an apt image: As a lion growls over the prey he devours, refusing to abandon it to the shepherds who attempt to scare him off, so we should utter God's words as we devour them, refusing to abandon them to mockers.

11. (a) According to Joshua 1:8, what is the goal of meditating on God's instructions? (b) What blessing would then follow? (c) Can we obey God if we don't know what he wants us to do? (d) Can we obey if we don't meditate on how well our lives correlate to God's instructions? Explain.

12. 🎯 How can you delight yourself in God's instructions?

13. Look back at Psalm 1. Complete the following chart by comparing the wicked in verse 1 with the righteous in verse 2. (Remember, the letters *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d* refer to line segments within the verse.) The first line is filled in for you.

	Wicked	Righteous
Source of counsel	1b: <i>The wicked</i>	2a: <i>The law of the LORD</i>
Practices	1c:	2b:
Attitude toward God's will	1d:	2a:

 We naturally think about what delights us.

Jesus taught something similar: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28).

Salvation is not found through obeying God's laws. No one but Jesus has ever lived a

sinless life, and salvation is purely a gift from God. But obeying God brings blessings, both because God watches over and blesses those who obey him even when it costs them and because God’s laws are laws of love and living according to them brings blessings in itself.

How often I’ve watched the truth of this borne out in my life and in the lives of those I know. Couples who made forgiving an essential part of marriage grew closer, while those who held grudges broke apart. Friends committed to honesty matured spiritually, while those who hid sins behind lies stagnated. Gossipers lost friendships, while those who built up others gained friends.

14. ● (a) What’s an instruction from God that you’ve seen bring blessing to people’s lives? (b) How do those who follow this instruction bless others? (c) How are they themselves blessed by following this instruction? (d) Without using names, what are ways you’ve seen people hindered by not following this same instruction?

Psalm 1 describes the importance of meditating on God’s words. Let’s write a simple psalm that will help us prayerfully meditate on Psalm 1. We’ll write four stanzas, each using a specific type of prayer: praising, confessing, asking, and thanking. Don’t worry about how “good” your words are—the goal isn’t to be as eloquent as our psalmist but to worship God from your heart by proclaiming truths about his words.

15. 🎵 Read Psalm 1 again while watching for what it says about God’s character and his care for you. (a) Turn to the My Psalm page at the end of the chapter and write your name to the right of “A Psalm of.” (b) Below the word “Praising,” write a line or two praising God’s character.

There! We’ve begun a psalm that we’ll finish by the end of this chapter. On Day 3 we’ll conclude the psalmist’s description of the righteous person and then move on to how he describes the wicked.



The Little Details

Literary Arts

Moses, Miriam, and other men and women in the Bible wrote songs for others to sing so they would remember God’s instructions and mighty deeds. At least one shepherd boy, David, wrote psalms for use in personal worship. Later, worship leaders wrote psalms to be sung by the choirs and recited by the masses. Some wrote histories and testimonies to teach others about God. Church leaders wrote letters to encourage, admonish, and bless.

Worship God from your heart by proclaiming truths about his words.

Two Comparisons

The psalmists often paint word pictures to help us understand them. In the next two verses, **imagery** vividly displays the righteous and the wicked.

16. Read Psalm 1:3-4. (a) In one word, what are those who delight in the Lord's instructions like? (b) What about those who scoff at the Lord's commands?

A Well-Watered Fruit Tree

The psalms are rich in images common to ancient Israelites, but some are not so familiar to today's reader accustomed to modern conveniences and different climates. To understand the imagery of Psalm 1, we need to know what ancient Palestine was like and the significance of trees and chaff then.

The Palestinian climate is arid, with a five-month dry season (mid-May to mid-October) followed by a seven-month rainy season. In some areas, temperatures are high during the dry season but mild during the rainy season. The months during which the two seasons transition bring scorching east winds that whip dust clouds and wither plants. Because of this, in ancient times land was often treeless except near springs, rivers, and manmade canals.⁹

A well-watered tree that could withstand hot, dry seasons and withering east winds provided people and animals with dependable food, shade, and protection, and birds with a place to live (Daniel 4:12).

17. (a) What is the person who delights in God's instruction like (Psalm 1:3a)? (b) What does the tree yield seasonally that benefits people and animals (1:3b)?

How does this relate to us? Followers of God bear fruit in at least two ways. We bear spiritual fruit as we grow more like Christ (Galatians 5:22-23), and we bear fruit in good works (Colossians 1:9-10).

18. (a) What else is significant about the tree (Psalm 1:3c)? (b) Why was that important? (Hint: Glance back at the introduction to this section.)

Life is hard, and much in it can cause us to wither if we do not have our roots drinking deeply of God's words.¹⁰ Having deep roots that constantly draw in the water of God's

words gives us shady leaves that don't wither and that can help others seeking respite from the scorching sun of hardship.

In the line's final segment, the psalmist explains the tree imagery.

19. (a) The tree just described is important, valuable, and beneficial. What does this tell us about the person who is like this tree? (b) What happens to this person (Psalm 1:3d)?

The psalmist doesn't mean nothing will ever go wrong or nothing will be hard for people who follow God; in fact, plenty of psalms address hardships befalling godly people. But living God's way results in better relationships and better success overall.

As a tree flourishes when it draws in water, so we flourish when we draw in God's instructions. Just as a tree withers when it stops drawing in water, so we wither when we stop drawing in God's words.

Wind-Blown Chaff

The psalmist now describes the wicked, beginning with another word picture. This one is of chaff at harvest.

Chaff is the worthless husks and stalks that have to be separated from grain. In ancient times, after farmers harvested grains, they threshed it by beating or trampling it to separate the grain from its husk. Winnowers then tossed the crushed stalks into the air with winnowing forks, allowing the wind to blow away the lighter chaff while the heavier grain dropped to the ground.

20. (a) What is the wicked person like (Psalm 1:4)? (b) What does a light breeze do to chaff? (c) How does that differ from what the scorching east wind does to a well-watered tree? (d) Compare the value of chaff to that of a fruitful tree.

God calls us to be fruitful. Those who shun God and refuse that calling lack eternal value (Matthew 7:19; 25:30).

Take a look at how the Gospels build on this figure of speech.

21. What did John the Baptist say about Jesus (Matthew 3:12)?



The Little Details

Imagery and Similes

The psalmists paint many word pictures. They use such **imagery** to describe difficult abstract concepts in a way that touches our emotions and helps us understand multiple layers of meaning through mental images.

The imagery in Psalm 1:3 is called a **simile**. A simile is a comparison between two different things that uses the word *like* or the word *as* to describe a similarity: "He is *like* a tree." When a simile grows into a story, it's called a **parable**.

The book of Psalms contains many similes but no parables in this sense. Jesus, however, often spoke in parables, and his parable of the barren fig tree in Luke 13:6-9 has similarities to Psalm 1.

Life is hard, and much in it can cause us to wither if we do not have our roots drinking deeply of God's words.



The Little Details

Culinary Arts

Worship included feasts with elements that often symbolized an aspect of God's care. For example, the spring Passover feast included lamb to represent the Passover lamb slain that they might live, and unleavened bread to signify how hastily the people fled Egypt (Exodus 12:39). Thanksgiving celebrations included a feast for friends, family, priests, and the poor.

John refers here to the end of the age when Jesus will send the angels to separate the unrighteous from the righteous as winnowers separate chaff from wheat.

22. 🎵 What can you do this week to be like the tree drinking deeply of the water streams nearby?

Let's write the next two stanzas of your psalm.

23. 🎵 Read Psalm 1 while considering if it convicts you of anything you want to confess and turn from. (a) Turn to the My Psalm page. Beneath the word "Confessing," write a line confessing what convicts you and expressing your desire to change. Omit personal details. (b) Write a line thanking God for forgiving you because Jesus died to pay for your sins.

24. 🎵 Read Psalm 1 again while looking for one thing it challenges you to do. (a) On the My Psalm page beneath the word "Asking," write a line asking God to help you do this. (b) Write a line expressing why you want to do this.