
THE SEE SERIES

PSALMS

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

CHRIS TIEGREEN

See
your worship
with new
eyes



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Psalms: A Devotional Commentary: See Your Worship with New Eyes

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The See Series

Human beings live by vision. We're directed by the images in our minds. We pursue goals when we can *see* them; we grow according to examples we've observed more than the knowledge we've learned; and we embrace hope, despair, and numerous other perspectives based on what we see happening around us. Even people who don't think of themselves as visionary tend to have some mental picture of where they are headed and why. It's the way we're wired.

Most of us have a big vision—a sense of ultimate meaning and destiny, or even just a dream or a goal for our lives. We want to live with purpose. We orient our lives by what we can picture.

We also have smaller visions—what's on the agenda for today, this week, this year, or even the next couple of decades—that shape our short-term decisions.

If our little visions and big vision don't align with each other, we feel frustrated and compromised, as if our lives are going nowhere and our desires may never be fulfilled. But if we can align these visions and see clearly, we grow steadily, even dramatically, into our purpose and calling.

SEE, BE, LIVE

Christian teaching hasn't always recognized our visionary nature. Much instruction over the years has been based on a know-it-then-do-it approach to Scripture—as if life change were simply a matter of learning the truth and applying it. But such an approach bypasses heart transformation and can easily become legalistic and frustrating.

Though knowing and doing are both very important, following Jesus is more than a matter of knowledge and willpower. We can never *will* ourselves to be who we need to be. We are not called simply to *do*; we are called to *be*. When we put knowing and doing before being, we end up in the same condition that many of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' time found themselves in—as pious people aiming to live godly lives without the necessary inner transformation.

Let me explain what I mean by *knowing*—an unfortunately imprecise word in English. We might read the Bible and *know* the commandments, instructions, encouragement, and truth it conveys. We receive that information and even agree with it. And if we want to be obedient, we will act on what we know. In that sense, our approach is both cognitive and behavioral—our thoughts affect our actions. But knowledge alone won't change our hearts, motives, desires, impulses, and everything else in us that needs to be transformed.

We see this phenomenon in the multitudes of people who memorize Jesus' words about faith but still lie awake all night with worry; who love Psalm 23 but still believe they are pursued by misfortune, not goodness and mercy; who agree that Jesus is Lord but don't live as though he is. Knowledge and action alone aren't comprehensive and compelling enough to reshape us.

In addition to our intellectual or informational knowledge, we also live from a particular worldview that shapes everything about us. This, too, is *knowing*, but it's a radically different kind of knowledge, isn't it? It's how we see the world, which is why I prefer words such as *seeing* and *vision* to capture it. This kind of knowledge goes well beyond information and instructions. It reflects not only *what* we know but also *how* we know and how we *respond* (perhaps even unconsciously) to what we know. It forms our sense of identity and becomes the filter for every piece of information we receive. Whereas the first kind of knowing may shape our *thoughts* to a degree, this kind shapes our *thought processes* (and therefore our thoughts) to a greater degree.

For example, if I dive into a lake or ocean and swim around for an hour or two, I experience something of marine life. I can practice different strokes, get used to holding my breath for longer periods, and work on distances and techniques. I *know* swimming. I might even start to think I swim like a fish. But if I'm a fish, moving around in the water is my nature. I don't even have to think about strokes or breath or what it takes to live in the water. I just do it. I know swimming without even knowing that I know it. It's part of who I am.

God has given us a new nature and called us to live from it. It's a radical transformation—so radical that we aren't quite sure how to do it. Many of us turn back to old paradigms, trying to live out our new life by reforming our old nature. We try to make the new ways “natural,” often by disciplining ourselves to conform to what we believe is true. In other words, we *know* and *do* by receiving information and acting on it.

But what if we really saw ourselves as new creations and gave no thought to any other possibility? What if it never even occurred to us that God might not be working in all the circumstances of our lives? What if love and worship were the default settings of our lives and we were shocked by anything else that came out of our hearts? What if our new nature was . . . well, natural?

There is no flip of a switch that gets us there, but some ways are better than others. I've experienced the futility of self-discipline born of knowing and doing (which, again, though insufficient, are still important). But I've also experienced the transformation that comes from that second kind of knowing—the radical reorientation of a worldview that shapes everything about us.

I call this radical reorientation *seeing* because we often express this deeper, more comprehensive knowledge in visual terms.

“I know you told me this would work, but I didn't *see* how.”

“I knew she cared, but now I *see* how much.”

“You can argue with me all you want, but the way I *see* it . . .”

We instinctively know there's a seeing that goes deeper than informational knowledge, and this seeing transforms vital elements of our personality—our hopes and dreams; our gut feelings; our deeply rooted attitudes, instincts, and motives. Knowing information and responding to it may or may not change our heart. A radically new perspective does.

Embracing a new worldview may be catapulted forward by visual or sensory knowledge, or by seeing in a new way. They say a picture is worth a thousand words—a *million* seems closer to the mark—and is far more memorable. That’s why the Bible is full of stories, parables, and experiences; why God inspired prophets to see visions and illustrate truth in tangible ways; and why he eventually clothed himself in human flesh to live among us. From beginning to end, God gives us images—highly visual and symbolic representations of who he is and what he does. We don’t just read his instructions; we see what living out the truth looks like. We don’t just read that he is a deliverer; we see numerous examples of dramatic deliverance. He doesn’t just tell us he cares for us; he inspires a king to portray him as a shepherd and his Son to dramatize sacrificial, unconditional love in eternally indelible ways. Those pictures and portrayals are life-changing.

If how we live flows out of who we are, being must come before doing. And if *seeing* so profoundly shapes *being*, then having this life-changing vision is vital. It is the key to the transformation we long for—that is, we become what we behold. The Holy Spirit works powerfully on the screens of our minds. We are drawn to whatever we focus on and emulate what we admire. Discipleship that begins with vision flows much more naturally into being and doing. Vision stirs us to be who we’re called to be and to live as we’re called to live.

The significance of our vision is the premise behind this devotional commentary series. The goal is to embrace a holistic, visual mode of learning. This series assumes that because we, as human beings, live from our identity and follow whatever vision we have, transformation happens by seeing in new ways. Instead of encouraging us simply to *know* and then *do*, the aim of these commentaries is to cast a vision for us to *see*, then *be*, then *live*. Like Jesus, who incorporated visual language into all his teaching, this series aims to refocus our inner eye. If we can see what the biblical writers saw and live according to that vision, we can be transformed.

THE ART OF ENVISIONING

We must train our brains to see and think in new ways. It doesn’t just happen. The biblical mandate to renew our minds implies a conscious reorientation of

our thought life. Old thought patterns are stubborn; those established neural pathways actively resist new pathways as intruders (which is why New Year's resolutions, exercise and diet plans, and quitting a bad habit can be so difficult). In most areas of life, this neurological dynamic—tapping into our established neural pathways—is helpful; we don't have to relearn everything each day. But when we've been called to reorient the way we think, we have to be relentless about it.

At a practical level, we can greatly amplify this process by (1) recognizing the vision behind biblical texts; (2) immersing ourselves in that vision (declaring the truths of Scripture out loud can help with this, as our brain is very responsive to the sound of our own voice, even if, at first, we don't think we sound convincing); and (3) practicing the art of envisioning.

This latter practice has been somewhat disparaged over the past couple of centuries because we've associated it with "imagination"—as in, "that's *only* your imagination," or "that's just a figment of your imagination," as if our internal vision is no reflection of reality. This would be news to biblical prophets, psalmists, storytellers, and teachers of parables, who all used highly visual language to express truth. Our imagination *can* be used to disengage us from reality—in fact, that's what many people do with it—but it is also our primary means of envisioning truth, which is exactly why God gave us so many stories and images and illustrations. He *wants* us to see his Kingdom—to picture his nature, his purposes, and his work in our lives. It's impossible to read Jesus' parables, study the stories in Acts or in the Old Testament historical books, or read the Psalms and Prophets without developing certain images in our minds. Our lives change when we immerse ourselves in those images.

In envisioning the Kingdom of God and all God's ways, we aren't trying to convince ourselves of something that *isn't* true—simply a figment of our imagination. We're training ourselves in what *is*. Sanctified imagination is not a flight from reality; it's a flight directly into it. We insist that our natural minds, long steeped in limited vision and distorted ways of thinking, must now conform to reality as God defines it.

That's when transformation occurs. When we see God, ourselves, our world, and his Kingdom as he does, we rarely have to discipline ourselves to live differently. We just do it.

IN THIS COMMENTARY

Because this is a *devotional commentary*, you will find material here that fits both descriptors: commentary on the text, and devotional or inspirational thoughts that apply the text to your life, specifically in the ways you see, become transformed, and live out that transformation. In this commentary, you will find

- an introduction to the biblical book;
- an introduction for each subsection of the book, explaining its place and purpose in the text, the context or background of that section, and how it fits into the big-picture vision of biblical truth;
- a series of devotionals on the text that
 - further explain context, background, meaning, and purpose,
 - offer suggestions for practical application,
 - inspire and challenge you to *re-envision*—to learn to see in new ways;
- a discussion guide in the back to help you further reflect on the Scripture passages and talk about them with others to expand your spiritual vision even more.

As you read, practice the art of envisioning. Pray for Holy Spirit-inspired perspectives. Notice what and how the biblical writers see, and immerse your heart and mind in those visions. Adopt them as your own. More and more, you will enter into the heights and depths of God's Kingdom and live in his ways.

INTRODUCTION TO PSALMS

.....

Ancient Israelites lived in a world full of gods. These gods varied from region to region, and their images took on various animal and humanlike forms. The mythology surrounding them was diverse—so were their characteristics and abilities. But human responses to these deities generally involved bowing before them, making sacrifices and offerings to them (primarily to remain in their good graces), performing various rituals, seeking their favor, and uttering blessings, curses, and incantations in their names. Many of those responses were relatively benign. Others involved sexual immorality and death.

As much as we'd like to think God's people consistently separated themselves from these influences, many of them did not. Scripture describes how some erected shrines and altars to deities other than Yahweh (the personal name of God as revealed to the people of Israel). Even those who worshiped Yahweh exclusively did so in a context of established cultic practices. Israel's definitions of worship were often shaped by ancient understandings of diverse pantheons.

But God had called his people to be holy—set apart, distinct from the nations around them—and he made it clear that he alone was to be worshiped. The Psalms major on this theme and repeatedly turn Israel's worship toward

the only true God, the Most High. Many psalmists were vying for pure worship of Yahweh not only among surrounding nations but also among their own people. Much of what we read in this worship collection comes from a felt need to emphatically declare the glories of Yahweh above all.

The idea that this God actually cared about how someone thought and behaved—notice how deeply personal many of the psalms are, compared to other sections of Scripture—made Israel’s faith downright revolutionary. Most pagan gods were seen as wanting only to be ritually appeased and flattered, caring little for morality and ethics. In this religious context, the Psalms stood out with their emphasis on a personal relationship with the one true God.

Ancient Israelites before Solomon’s reign, and sometimes after, also lived in a world that saw Israel as an upstart kingdom, a people who perhaps should not be a people (or at least should not have the influence or land that they had). The period of the kingdom’s birth and infancy was not easy. Adversaries abounded. The ancient Near East was a cutthroat world, and in any time of weakness, enemies were waiting to take advantage. For this reason, themes of protection, provision, shelter, and vindication are woven throughout the Psalter. God’s people called on him as their Rock and Deliverer, their Shepherd and Warrior, their Helper in times of need.

The Psalms were written *as* worship (the writing being an act of worship in itself) and *for* worship (to be used by individuals and the community). The Hebrew word for this worship collection is *Tehillim*, meaning “praises.” Even laments and complaints in the Psalms ultimately point toward praise, the whole point being to live the entirety of our lives—even at their messiest and ugliest places—in God’s presence.

The compilation of psalms in their current form seems to have taken place in the Second Temple era, after God’s people had returned from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (post-538 BC). For that reason, the order and organization of the Psalms serve the needs and interests of worshipers in that period. But many were clearly written much earlier than that. Many come from David’s time (and from David himself), and one is attributed to Moses. But even early psalms carry messages that resounded centuries later—leading up to the Babylonian captivity, during it, and in the

time of restoration. About four centuries passed between the time of David and the Captivity, and the people of Israel (or Israel and Judah, once they split into northern and southern kingdoms) experienced the full scope of life and worship in those years.

Some psalms may have originated for no other reason than the creative expression of the worshiper. Others were written specifically for congregational use (as seen in 1 Chronicles 16:7 and psalms designated “for the choir director”). Since few give us clues about their historical context, by design they apply to the entire range of human experiences. Regardless of their origins, the Psalms have always resonated with God’s people in the wide range of experiences they have faced.

The Psalms are full of images. For example, David didn’t just tell us that God takes care of him; he pictured God as his Shepherd who led him to green pastures and quiet streams. The Psalms are exercises in envisioning because the psalmists needed visions to cling to. They saw God as their Rock, hid in the shelter of his wings, pictured his throne above dark clouds, and saw themselves as deep-rooted trees or deer panting for God’s presence. Comforting words would have been reassuring, but images stick with us through painful, disorienting times. They have the power to dramatically change our perspective.

That’s why the Psalms have been richly treasured by so many people over the centuries. They have long played a central role in Jewish, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant worship. The New Testament tells us that Jesus sang hymns (likely psalms; see Matthew 26:30) and urges us to do so too (Colossians 3:16; see also James 5:13). In our moments of both deepest distress and highest praise, they center our lives in the glories of God.

LIFE AS AN ANCIENT ISRAELITE

If you were an Israelite during the time of David or Solomon, you might have been gratified that an established monarchy was making your nation like others (see 1 Samuel 8:5, 19-20), but you would also be aware of its precarious position surrounded by much larger kingdoms. Yes, it was still the Promised Land, and you would see your piece of it as your family’s divine inheritance. But other nations might not see it that way. Was that inheritance really safe?

You would sometimes hear the taunts of your enemies—from Canaanites still within the kingdom, or from other nations beyond it. Those taunts might be anti-Israel or anti-Yahweh or both—as in, “Where is your God?” (Psalm 42:3; 79:10; 115:2). You might cry out to God for protection or justice, whether on your own or as a nation (26:1; 43:1; 44:26; see also 135:14) and ask God to vindicate you and glorify his name (79:9). These were bold statements of faith. You’d be aware that the worship of Yahweh was central—David made that clear—but also that hidden away in many areas of the kingdom (and sometimes not so hidden away; see 1 Samuel 19:11-13) were altars and images of other gods. Declaring dependence on Yahweh and praising him above all were claims that stood out in a religiously diverse culture.

If you were an Israelite in the centuries after Solomon, the kingdom may have, at times, felt more established, but worship of Yahweh was still a point of contention. There were also times, as in the days of Elijah and Elisha, that Baal was more widely honored than Israel’s God. Small, rival nations periodically posed problems, and larger empires still loomed over the horizon. And as prophets warned, judgment was coming. Assyria sacked the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. Babylon invaded Jerusalem in 597 BC and destroyed the city and the Temple in 586 BC. These were precarious times too.

If you were an exile returning from Babylonian or Persian lands after the Captivity ended, you would have a different outlook—not one of establishing a kingdom where you were, but rather one of rebuilding a society from scratch. Your people would still be under Persian rule, your neighbors would treat you as intruders, and you’d wonder if Jerusalem and its Temple could ever be restored to their former glory. But you’d also know that God had once accomplished a miraculous exodus for his people and placed them in a Promised Land after driving out hostile people. You’d long for him to do it again. And in light of his past promises, lost hopes would be resurrected.

Psalms were written, compiled, and used in worship in all these contexts, and it’s best that they don’t always tell us which one. What comes down to us is a collection of familiar human experiences lived under the watchful eye of the God who cares about them all—our longings, pains, fears, victories, defeats, joys, griefs, guilt, shame, and hopes for now and forever. When we freely express these to God and invite him into the experience, he shows

up—just as he did long ago. He redirects our focus, stretches and strengthens our faith, and opens our hearts more and more to who he is so we can experience him in deeper ways. The Psalms are a veritable training manual in how to see with spiritual eyes and live life fully in God’s presence.

THE LITERATURE OF PSALMS

We don’t know who authored many of the psalms. We can be sure that many were written by David, although we might wonder if all attributed to him were by him. “Of David,” broadly understood, can mean by him, about him, for him, in his honor, or in his tradition. The same is true for psalms of Asaph or any other named person. Some psalms of David speak of the king in the third person, suggesting they were written about him (though it’s possible he referred to himself that way). Because the attributions were likely not in the original text, and because these attributions can have multiple meanings, the following devotionals and commentary will sometimes refer to the author simply as “the psalmist” to cover all the possibilities. Regardless of who wrote them, they are versatile enough to apply to a wide range of experiences, both in the reigns of kings and in the faith of everyday people throughout history.

The Psalms are written in a variety of genres and forms, and they focus on a variety of topics. In terms of genre, they can be individual or communal laments, hymns of praise, thanksgiving psalms, royal psalms, Torah or wisdom psalms, and processions, among other genres. Thematically, they can include messianic themes and prophecies, complaints, curses, celebrations of the king’s enthronement, and much more. Structurally, some are acrostics (in which each line, verse, or stanza begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet), and many are organized into groupings that share a common purpose.* The collection as a whole is divided into five books, each with a somewhat distinctive outlook, though connecting with overarching themes throughout. Many of these genres, forms, and themes will be introduced throughout this book.

* You may have come across different numberings for the Psalms. The Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek translation of it (the Septuagint) differ. Orthodox traditions follow the Greek version; most Protestant Bibles (and this devotional commentary) follow the Hebrew numbering.

Most of the key themes will be explored further in the following pages, but some of the major ones can be summarized as follows:

- Several psalms, including the first, extol the **Torah** and call God’s people to delight in his instruction. The righteous (who love the law) and the wicked (who ignore it) are on different paths, and those paths lead to very different outcomes.
- **Kingship** is a repeated theme throughout the book, as we will see in several royal psalms. The backdrop to most of these is the Davidic covenant—God’s promise to establish David’s throne forever—and some of these psalms foreshadow a messianic ruler. The Psalms embrace both human and divine kingship, with the two sometimes merged into one. From a Christian perspective, Jesus is both the exemplar and the fulfiller of many royal psalms.
- Many psalms recall **redemptive history**, particularly the exodus from Egypt, but also with an eye to a second exodus, from captivity in Babylon. God’s great works in delivering his people from Egypt into the Promised Land were landmark events in Israel’s history.
- Many of God’s promises to Israel involved **land and inheritance**. Each covenant in Israel’s history, from Abraham’s calling to the establishment of David’s everlasting kingdom, was land-based. There’s a marvelous ambiguity in the Hebrew word for “land,” which can also mean “earth.” While the Israelites often understood God’s promises to apply to the specific land—its abundance, fruitfulness, renewal, and kingdom character—we can see them applying to the entire earth as well.
- The Psalms reveal many facets of **God’s nature** and call him by many names. He is the Creator, Redeemer, Rescuer, Rock, Shepherd, Fortress, and much more. These not only tell us who God is but more specifically who he is *for us*—practically. God is not content just to describe himself. He shows his people who he is through their experiences.

- Several psalms focus on **creation**—the majesty and glory of God’s works, his self-revelation through what he has made. God brings order out of chaos and beauty out of brokenness. If he has created so miraculously, he can re-create miraculously too—a profound comfort to any reader of the Psalms who is in need of renewal and restoration.
- **Shalom** is a Hebrew term that is hard to translate but involves the fullness, wholeness, completeness, satisfaction, and peace of life with God. Included in that concept are many personal blessings but also a just and righteous society. Many psalms calling for shalom (usually translated “peace”) therefore emphasize justice, relief for the poor, and defense of the helpless.
- Many psalms begin in deep need and end with fulfillment, or at least hopes for it. This interplay between **need and fulfillment** demonstrates God’s presence and power in the lives of his people. He answers the cries of the human heart and meets us in our brokenness—spiritually and practically.
- Some psalmists discover who they are as they pour out their hearts to God. As we read the Psalms, our vision of our **identity** is reoriented; we come to see ourselves as his people crowned with glory and honor, his sheep, the delight of his eyes, his intricate creations who are fearfully and wonderfully made. As the psalmists demonstrate, God often shifts our perceptions of who we are before he leads us to act or gives us his plan for our lives.
- Above all else, the Psalms demonstrate the **primacy of praise**. This is what we were created for and how we find our deepest, highest fulfillment.

The Psalms provide an occasion for us to immerse ourselves in God’s presence and the nature of his Kingdom. We can read the Bible and listen to sermons all day long, but the truth that we read or hear just fades away after a few days, unless we are cultivating the Kingdom within us. The soil of our hearts needs to be right. Otherwise the seeds never grow; or they grow for a little while and then wither and die (Matthew 13:1-23). This is why Paul urged

his readers to sing psalms; it's one way to stir up a Kingdom environment within us (see Colossians 3:12-17). In many respects, this is what the Psalms are about. They are case studies in truth taking root in the heart, where God ultimately wants his Word and his Spirit to dwell.

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BOOK 1: PSALMS

1-41

Ancient Israel was planted in a world that generally assumed subjection to the whims of capricious storm gods, fertility goddesses, and a multitude of other deities that might—but might not—harness the forces of nature for mere humans. Early psalmists (primarily David) were living at a time when Israel was being established as a kingdom, separating from ungodly influences around it (with mixed results). They were trying to subdue threats—both internal opposition from remaining Canaanites and external opposition from neighboring peoples like Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Aram—and were experiencing conflict on several fronts. In their divinely ordained sense of identity, the people of Israel were not just members of any nation; they were God’s people, and their kingdom was God’s Kingdom on earth.

BACKGROUND

Most of the psalms in Book 1 are attributed to David, who reigned not long after the period of the judges, when everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25). Though God was establishing a human kingship over his people—at their request—and consolidating Israel as a kingdom embodying his rule, it was still very much a work in progress. Idolatry was widespread, and loyalties were split among rival kings (David’s supporters at first against Saul’s former supporters, then against competing movements like Absalom’s). Some tribes were only loosely connected to Jerusalem, David’s declared center of the kingdom. Dissent was common.

This context of power struggles, idolatry, and territorial disputes is evident in many of the psalms of Book 1. So are affirmations of God’s supremacy, compassion, and help. Currents of confrontation flow through this book—at least one commentator sees this as its dominant theme.* As we read, we should see this conflict in terms of God’s promises to David to establish his dynasty forever and to establish Mount Zion as God’s dwelling place among his people. Attacks against David were not just personal affronts; they were attacks on God’s purposes.

This dynamic in the Psalms portrays David as an “anointed one,” a type of messiah (the Hebrew word from which we get *messiah* means “anointed one”). From a New Testament perspective, David points to the Messiah to come. He was at times extraordinarily merciful and at times violently opposed to those who violated God’s purposes. Though he sometimes misdirected his passions, he was always zealous for God and his sanctuary. The anointed king was an anointed worshiper.

Was God ruling *over* David and Israel or ruling *with* David and Israel? This distinction is not clear in the Psalms; the divine and human thrones are often seen as in sync. In fact, this convergence of divine and human rule is an important development in Israel’s history and worship. The beginning of the Psalter emphasizes David as king, and the end emphasizes God as King; but both are honored as king throughout.

* O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 52–53.

THE BIG PICTURE

The claims of the Davidic psalms are remarkable when we consider their context: an age in which Israel was trying to establish an earthly king and kingdom resembling the heavenly King and Kingdom—and doing so in the midst of pagan, idolatrous nations. It’s quite a landmark statement in such a setting to say that God’s love endures forever (lesser gods loved selectively, if they loved at all, and changed their minds often), or that Israel’s God was above all gods (most nations honored deities that had power in their regions but not beyond). Ancient readers did not have centuries of theological creeds behind them to make these statements sound commonplace. These declarations were bold assertions of a reality different from what the world knew.

We need to recapture that sense of boldness and grasp how unique these declarations were. We don’t live in the world of the psalmists, but our belief in Israel’s God is increasingly challenged in our time. Like the psalmists, we make choices about which king and kingdom we will honor and which source of help we will depend on. The times have changed, but the ways of a fallen world have not. In the crucible of life, we call out to God just as the psalmists did.

You’ll probably never fight any Philistines or try to survive a coup; but you will face challenges. You may be betrayed, go through an intense relational conflict, desperately pray for a loved one to turn to the Lord, suffer severe discouragement or depression, feel besieged by every situation and person around you, or simply struggle with daily life. Whatever hardships you find yourself facing, the psalms of this book are for you.

PSALM 1: A PICTURE OF FRUITFULNESS

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

1:3

The Psalms begin with a blessing. But this blessing doesn't apply to everyone who reads them; the joys it speaks of are given not to those who follow the ways of unrighteousness but to those who delight in God's instruction. In essence, Psalm 1 affirms God's law. It's a Torah psalm, a call to remember the covenant given at Mount Sinai, a promise that when our lives are aligned with God and his purposes, we will flourish. In other words, if you're looking for wholeness, fulfillment, fruitfulness, and joy—this is the key.

The central image for this psalm, a tree planted by a stream, sets the stage for all that is to come in orienting readers to God's purposes. This tree is deeply rooted in the land of promise, drawing from the refreshing flow of God's resources. It may have to weather storms, but it doesn't strive to achieve or overcome; trees don't search for their nourishment but rest in the nourishment of their environment. Neither does it grow impatient. A strong, productive tree will bear fruit in season. It simply lives, grows, and thrives.

RE-ENVISION YOUR ROOTS

Believe it or not, that's your calling—to live, grow, and thrive—and your self-perception is vital to it. Wherever you go, whatever you experience, however

far your journey takes you, envision yourself as a flourishing tree. Choose God's truth daily, root yourself in his promises always, and draw from his Spirit constantly. You will take on his good, faithful, loving, true character. Trees are always shaped by their environment, and with good soil and proper nourishment, they grow increasingly stable, fruitful, and strong. You'll need to be patient for the seasons of life to unfold—a genuine challenge in a world addicted to instant gratification—but they will. And in one way or another, as the psalmist assures, you will prosper in all of them.