
STUDY GUIDE

PSALMS I

Catherine Upchurch

The book of Psalms is a unique collection of the song-prayers of God's people. To study the psalms is to study prayer, ultimately to enter into prayer. The questions in the Study Guide challenge us to reflect in a particular way on our own prayer and life experiences.

Psalms I will make use of the first half of the commentary, *Psalms for All Seasons*, by John Craghan. In this study we focus on a selection of twenty-eight psalms grouped into three categories:

Psalms of Descriptive Praise (Lessons 1 and 2)

Psalms of Trust or Confidence (Lessons 3 and 4)

Wisdom Psalms (Lessons 5 and 6)

Other categories are explored in *Psalms II*, which makes use of the last half of the same commentary by John Craghan.

Note: The chapter and verse numbers follow those of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. The verses are numbered as in the Hebrew text. Many other English translations are a verse number behind the Hebrew because they do not consider the superscriptions for each psalm as a verse.



LITTLE ROCK SCRIPTURE STUDY

*A ministry of the Diocese of Little Rock
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DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Sacred Scripture is a wealth of inspired wisdom expressing Christian truths which challenge us to deepen our relationship with God. Although the Bible can be intimidating, it is important that we study God's word in the Scriptures, because it is the basis of our faith and offers us the thoughts and experiences of Christians past and present. It is God speaking to us through the insights of Church fathers and later saints.

I am pleased to present this study guide from Little Rock Scripture Study to serve as an aid for reflection and contemplation in your reading of Scripture. At the same time, the guide will give you insight into how to apply what you have read to your life today.

I encourage you to read Sacred Scripture slowly and reflectively so that it can penetrate your heart and mind. It is my hope that the Word of God will empower you as Christians to live a life worthy of your call as a child of God and a member of the body of Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,

✠ Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock

Sacred Scripture

“The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy. She has always regarded the Scriptures together with sacred tradition as the supreme rule of faith, and will ever do so. For, inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it remains the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life.”

Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 21.

INTERPRETATION OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

“Since God speaks in sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

“Those who search out the intention of the sacred writers must, among other things, have regard for ‘literary forms.’ For truth is proposed and expressed in a variety of ways, depending on whether a text is history of one kind or another, or whether its form is that of prophecy, poetry, or some other type of speech. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances as he used contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture.

4 Instructions

For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of perceiving, speaking, and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the customs men normally followed in that period in their everyday dealings with one another.”

Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 12.

Instructions

MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY

This Study Guide: Psalms I

Commentary: *Psalms for All Seasons*, by John F. Craghan (Liturgical Press, 2013), is used with this study. The assigned pages are found at the beginning of each lesson.

Bible: We highly recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible* (Liturgical Press), although any version of the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE), or the New Jerusalem Bible will suffice. Paraphrased editions are discouraged as they offer little, if any, help when facing difficult textual questions. Choose a Bible you feel free to write in or underline.

WEEKLY LESSONS

Lesson 1—Psalms 117, 33, 104, 8, 19

Lesson 2—Psalms 29, 100, 65, 113, 145

Lesson 3—Psalms 23, 11, 27, 63, 16

Lesson 4—Psalms 121, 131, 62, 125, 91

Lesson 5—Psalms 1, 112, 128, 127

Lesson 6—Psalms 32, 34, 37, 49

YOUR DAILY PERSONAL STUDY

The first step is prayer. Open your heart and mind to God. Reading Scripture is an opportunity to listen to God who loves you. Pray that the same Holy Spirit who guided the formation of Scripture will inspire you to correctly understand what you read and empower you to make what you read a part of your life.

The next step is commitment. Daily spiritual food is as necessary as food for the body. This study is divided into daily units. Schedule a regular time and place for your study, as free from distractions as possible. Allow about twenty minutes a day. Make it a daily appointment with God.

As you begin each lesson read the indicated pages of the commentary and the appropriate Scripture passages where indicated. This preparation will give you an overview of the entire lesson and help you to appreciate the context of individual passages.

As you reflect on Scripture, ask yourself these four questions:

1. *What does the Scripture passage say?*
Read the passage slowly and reflectively. Use your imagination to picture the scene or enter into it.
2. *What does the Scripture passage mean?*
Read the footnotes and the commentary to help you understand what the sacred writers intended and what God wanted to communicate by means of their words.
3. *What does the Scripture passage mean to me?*
Meditate on the passage. God's Word is living and powerful. What is God saying to you today? How does the Scripture passage apply to your life today?
4. *What am I going to do about it?*
Try to discover how God may be challenging you in this passage. An encounter with God contains a challenge to know God's will and follow it more closely in daily life.

THE QUESTIONS ASSIGNED FOR EACH DAY

Read the questions and references for each day. The questions are designed to help you listen to God's Word and to prepare you for the weekly small-group discussion.

Some of the questions can be answered briefly and objectively by referring to the Bible references and the commentary (*What does the passage say?*). Some will lead you to a better understanding of how the Scriptures apply to the Church, sacraments, and society (*What does the passage mean?*). Some questions will invite you to consider how God's Word challenges or supports you in your relationships with God and others (*What does the passage mean to me?*). Finally, the questions will lead you to examine your actions in light of Scripture (*What am I going to do about it?*).

Write your responses in this study guide or in a notebook to help you clarify and organize your thoughts and feelings.

THE WEEKLY SMALL-GROUP MEETING

The weekly small-group sharing is the heart of the Little Rock Scripture Study Program. Participants gather in small groups to share the results of praying, reading, and reflecting on Scripture and on the assigned questions. The goal of the discussion is for group members to be strengthened and nourished individually and as a community through sharing how God's Word speaks to them and affects their daily lives. The daily study questions will guide the discussion; it is not necessary to discuss all the questions.

All members share the responsibility of creating an atmosphere of loving support and trust in the group by respecting the opinions and experiences of others, and by affirming and encouraging one another. The simple shared prayer that begins and ends each small group meeting also helps create the open and trusting environment in which group members can share their faith deeply and grow in the study of God's Word.

A distinctive feature of this program is its emphasis on and trust in God's presence working in and through each member. Sharing responses to God's presence in the Word and in others can bring about remarkable growth and transformation.

THE WRAP-UP LECTURE

The lecture is designed to develop and clarify the themes of each lesson. It is not intended to be the focus of the group's discussion. For this reason, the lecture always occurs *after* the small group discussion. If several small groups meet at one time, the groups may gather in a central location to listen to the lecture.

Lectures may be presented by a local speaker. They are also available in audio form on CD, and in visual form on DVD.

LESSON I

Psalms of Descriptive Praise

Psalms 117, 33, 104, 8, 19

PSALMS FOR ALL SEASONS, PAGES 1-19

Day 1

1. In your life experience, what are two or three lessons about prayer that have remained with you from childhood?
2. What are some of the benefits of prayer discussed in chapter 1 of the commentary?
3. Why are the prayers of ancient Israel effective prayers for modern Christians and for all times?

Day 2—Psalm 117

4. What is the connection between praise and an awareness of being dependent on God?
5. Why is God's mercy and faithfulness to Israel a cause for all nations to give praise (117:1)?
6. List some of the ways that God's loving-kindness and loyalty have been demonstrated in your life in the past week (117:2). (See 1 John 4:9-12.)

Day 3—Psalm 33

7. How does Psalm 33:6-9 describe the effects of God's word, and why is this reason to give praise? (See Gen 1:3-31; Ps 104; Prov 8:22-31.)
8. There are two contrasting notions of security in 33:16-19. In what areas of our life in this world does it seem most difficult to trust God with our security? (See 44:7-9; Jer 17:5-8.)
9. The psalmist waits for God's action with rejoicing, trust, and hope (33:20-22). Describe a time when these attitudes helped you or someone else "wait for the Lord."

Day 4—Psalm 104

10. How do the descriptive phrases found in 104:1-8 help to produce a visual image of God's creative intention?
11. The significance of water in creation is described in 104:6-18. How do such passages (see also 23:2; Isa 55:1) help to lay the groundwork for the use of water in the church's sacraments and liturgy? (See John 7:37-39; Acts 8:36-39.)
12. What are some ways that we as Christians can share in the work of God and help to "renew the face of the earth" (104:24-30)? (See Gen 1:26; Luke 12:15.)

Day 5—Psalm 8

13. When was the last time you were struck by the awesomeness of God at work in the world or in your life (8:2, 10)?
14. The psalmist describes the awe that is felt when we consider God's mission for human beings in the care of creation (8:4-7; see also Wis 9:2-3). How do you balance in your own life an honest sense of humility as one of God's creatures, and a sense of dignity as one who is "little less than a god" (8:6)?
15. How are the words of 8:3 used by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew? (See Matt 21:12-16.)

Day 6—Psalm 19

16. In what ways did Israel adapt a pagan hymn to speak about the glory of God (19:2-7)?
17. a) What are the seven attributes of God's law found in 19:8-10?
b) How could an understanding of God's law as wise instruction affect one's attitude toward the divine law?
18. The psalm closes by praising God as "my rock and my redeemer" (19:15). At this time in your life, complete a line of praise to God with your choice of images: my _____ and my _____.

