

# **DELIGHTING IN GOD'S WORD THROUGH MEMORIZATION, MEDITATION AND PRAYER**

A 10-WEEK STUDY GUIDE FOR PSALMS 1, 16, 51, 139, & 96

BY KVETA ROSE

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# INTRODUCTION

## MY HOPE AND PRAYER FOR THIS STUDY

Welcome! For the next ten weeks we are going to be taking an in-depth look at five beautiful psalms. Each one of the 150 psalms in the Bible is worthy of hours and hours of study and reflection. Because this study is only ten weeks long, I have chosen to focus on five psalms that will help deepen our understanding of some foundational truths about God as well as bring clarity to a Christian's relationship to the word of God.

If you have spent any time at all studying the Bible, you will agree that we could spend ten weeks just studying one psalm! We need to read the Bible both broadly, cover-to-cover, and in-depth, sometimes reflecting on the same verse for one whole week. My aim in this study is for you to become so attracted to the word that you desire to do both.

I hope that this study will offer you some tools that you can utilize when this study is over and when your daily Bible reading and prayer time is self-directed. Bible studies help us study particular passages in-depth and have the element of group discussion, however I believe that they should also serve the purpose of equipping people in self-directed, personal Bible study, so that whether you are participating in a Bible study or not you are able to study God's word with confidence and fulfillment. In this study we use a variety of tools to help unpack the meaning of the text, such as marking key words, marking segments, picking out themes, reading verses in different Bible translations and looking up cross references.

Whether you are a seasoned studier of the Bible, or this is brand new to you, there is one key truth I want you to keep in mind every day: What we learn, we learn from the Lord through the word with the help of the Holy Spirit. God has written the truth about himself and his world in his word, and Jesus tells us that "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things ..." (John 14:26a). I hope and pray you will experience revelation by means of the Holy Spirit as you study these five psalms over the next ten weeks.

## MEMORIZATION, MEDITATION, AND PRAYER

This study has a heavy emphasis on memorization, with many of the days also including the instruction to meditate on a particular verse. In our first week when we study Psalm 1, we will learn what meditation is, and over the course of the ten weeks it will become clear how memorization, meditation, and prayer are entwined, and necessary components to "delighting in God's word" as the title of this study states.

Each day of study will usually include a question that will lead you to pray, yet I still want to emphasize the importance of spending a few minutes every day in prayer during your study time. Please do not rush to get through all the questions and neglect to pray. Only God can take what your mind has studied and have you experience it deep within your soul. Without the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit there will be a disconnect between what we study and the state of our hearts, our hopes, and our desires. If you are feeling that you cannot possibly get through all the questions in addition to working on your memorization and giving time to prayer, please skip some of the questions rather than skip your memorization or prayer time. If you have the words memorized in your head, you will be able to ponder them throughout the day. If memorization is intimidating to you, please go to the following links and be encouraged by how it is of great importance.

- <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/memorizing-scripture-why-and-how>
- <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/bible-memory-as-ministry-to-others>

There are a variety of scripture memorization methods. Some people find repeating the verse aloud helpful, others prefer to write it out numerous times or make the words into a song. Choose which ever method works best for you. The following links have suggestions for how to go about Bible memorization:

- <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2013/03/ten-tips-for-memorizing-bible-verses/>
- <http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/spiritualformation/10-tips-to-start-memorizing-scripture.html?start=2>
- <http://unlockingthebible.org/2016/04/how-to-memorize-scripture-bible-verses/>

I do not think it is an overstatement to say that memorizing scripture will change your life. The Book of Psalms is an excellent place to start in learning how to meditate and pray scripture because the psalms were written to be prayed, recited and sung. They are meant to lead us into prayer, shape our prayers, and become our prayers.

## WHAT IS THE BOOK OF PSALMS?

The Hebrew title of the Book of Psalms book is Tehilim which means “praises” or “hymns.” The psalms are a collection of poems that were designed to be put to music and sung by the Israelites as they worshiped God in their sanctuary.<sup>1</sup> Most of the psalms were written by David (who reigned as king of Israel from 101-971 BC), yet they stretch over a huge period of history with the earliest psalm written by Moses in 15th century BC and the latest psalm written after the Israelites’ exile from Babylon in approximately sixth or fifth century BC.<sup>2</sup>

How easy is it for you to remember the lyrics to a song that you have heard or even sang numerous times? The Israelites knew many of these psalms off by heart. The words of the psalms were ingrained in their minds perhaps more than any other scriptures. Jesus quoted more from the Book of Psalms than he did any other Old Testament book, perhaps partly because he knew how familiar the Israelites were with it, and also because the Book of Psalms is fully and completely all about him.

Martin Luther, the famous reformed theologian, called the Book of Psalms a “mini Bible,” because of how extensively it covers all the major themes of the Bible, as well as a great number of historical references. Tim Keller, renowned author and pastor, writes that the psalms are “the best possible guide for practical living,” and states that they are to be done not merely read.<sup>3</sup> As we devote time to thoroughly understanding these five psalms, it will quickly become apparent how the psalms indeed offer straightforward application to our daily lives.

## CONTENTS OF THE STUDY GUIDE

Every week we will be looking at a particular psalm, and the study time is divided up into five days, with each day requiring about 30 minutes of time to go through the various questions. Every week ends with optional further study questions. In order to retain the verses you have memorized, I highly recommend setting aside time to recite them every day, perhaps before you go to bed, or during a meal. It may be helpful to set an alarm a couple times a day to trigger you to recite your memory verses. As they become more ingrained on your heart you will be encouraged at how they spontaneously come to mind!

In the Appendix, you will find Worksheets of the five psalms. These Worksheets are for you to mark up and make notes on the psalms as you study. You are welcome to mark them up as much as you like, and you will also receive specific directions for when you are circle a particular word, or underline a certain phrase on the actual Worksheet.

1 Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (Vol. 1, p. 345). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

2 MacArthur, J. (2005). The MacArthur Bible Commentary (p. 595). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

3 Keller, Tim.

In the Appendix you will also find a chart titled “Theme and Takeaway Chart.” This is where we will write down the theme of each psalm, as well as a personal truth that we want to carry with us long after this study is over. We will fill this chart out during our discussion time each week.

# Week 1: Psalm 1

MEMORIZATION GOAL: PSALM 1:1-3

## DAY 1

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1. Take a moment to ask God to quiet your mind so that you can fully focus on his word for the next 30 minutes. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you as you read and reflect.
2. Read Psalm 1 aloud. Read it again, but at a much slower pace, and mark (circle, underline or highlight for example) on your Psalm 1 Worksheet words that are repeated. Read Psalm 1 a third time and mark any comparisons (two things that have similarities, often indicated by the word "like") and contrasts (two things that are very different, often indicated by the word "but"). You may find it helpful to jot down notes from your study time directly on your Worksheets.
3. We are going to begin memorizing our first memory verse! You may utilize any memorization method of your choice. For example, you could read the psalm ten times and try moving around as you read the psalm – walking, standing and sitting – to help your mind grasp the verses. Then try to say Psalm 1:1 ten times without looking at the words. Take as much time as you need and move on to question 3 only when you are confident you can recite verse 1 from memory. It will help you greatly if you also say this verse to yourself a few times throughout the day. Perhaps set a couple alarms on your phone to remind you to practice reciting the verse.

## DAY 2

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1. Take a moment to ask God to quiet your mind so that you can fully focus on his word for the next 30 minutes. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you as you read and reflect.
2. Recite Psalm 1:1 from memory. If you don't have it memorized, give time to working on memorization now.
3. Read all of Psalm 1.
4. The word "blessed" can be translated as "happy is the one" or "the one with a deep sense of well-being." Who is the psalmist saying is blessed and how can we experience this state of blessedness also? Read the following cross references:

- Psalm 32:1-2 Who is blessed? What has this person received from God?

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- Luke 11:28 What does Jesus say about living life in a blessed state?

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5. Take time to think about whether verse 1 describes you. Pray and ask God for his help that you may better understand what it means to be described as “blessed” in this way.

**DAY 3** 

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1. Begin with asking God to reveal his truth about the verses we will study today.
2. Recite Psalm 1:1 from memory. Work on memorizing Psalm 1:2. It may be helpful to emphasize aloud a different word each time you recite the verse.
3. The word “counsel” in Hebrew is “esah” and is defined as: a way of thinking or a state of mind that affects the decisions we make. We can be formally counseled through a conversation, or subtly counseled by media and culture. Read the following cross references and note: What do these verses tell us about who we are to receive counsel from?

- Psalm 16:7

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- Job 21:16

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4. How are you to know if the counsel you receive is consistent or inconsistent with the truths in the Bible? Are you on guard for how movies, television, advertising and social media promote messages about fulfillment, love, romance, and success that are contrary to the counsel of God in the Bible? Take some time to reflect on these questions, and allow this time of reflection to lead you into a time of prayer. Ask for God’s help and guidance as you think about these questions. Write down any thoughts that come to mind.

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## DAY 4

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1. Begin in prayer. Thank God for this time and ask him to show you the truths he alone knows you need impressed on your heart.
2. Recite Psalm 1:1-2 from memory. Spend time working on memorizing Psalm 1:3. You may want to read it ten times, and then try say it ten times from memory.
3. What is the first word of verse 2? It emphasizes the contrast between the wicked/sinners/scoffers in verse 1 and the one who is blessed. If you didn't mark this contrast in Day 1 question 1, mark it now. Let's look at the following cross references:

- According to Psalm 37:4 and 37:23 who and what is to be the source of our delight?

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- According to Joshua 24:26, what is the word "law" referring to?

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4. Mark the word "law" in verse 2 on your Worksheet. Our relationship to the law is to be one of consistent meditation. Think of a couple in love, sadly separated by war. Their only contact, their only way of "knowing" each other is through the letters they write to one another. When they receive each letter, they pour over it and re-read these words written by the object of their affection, inadvertently memorizing passages. This is how the psalmist is referring to delighting in the law of the Lord.

If the idea of meditation is new to you, the following explanation may be helpful:

*The word "meditation" in Hebrew means basically to speak or to mutter. When this is done in the heart it is called musing or meditation. So meditating on the Word of God day and night means to speak to yourself the Word of God day and night and to speak to yourself about it.<sup>4</sup>*

The purpose of savoring, reciting and reflecting on God's word in this way is to bring further understanding to how the text applies to our lives. Meditation is a means through which the word takes root in our heart so that it may then transform our hearts. Meditation is often explained as a bridge between Bible study and prayer. After taking time to read scripture and study its meaning using our minds, we meditate on the word by reflecting on how these truths apply to our hearts and shapes our thoughts. Then, after this time of reflection, we are equipped to come to God in prayer, asking for his help to live out the truths that we have meditated on and studied.

Does the time you spend reading, reflecting on, and learning from God's word display that you believe true "blessedness" (a state of well-being and happiness) is found in getting to know and obeying the words of

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/meditate-on-the-word-of-the-lord-day-and-night>

the Old and New Testament? If someone were to observe you for a day, what would they say is the source of your happiness?

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**DAY 5**

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1. Take a moment to thank God for what he has taught you in the last days of study and how he is helping you commit his word to memory. Ask God to help you continue to be disciplined in your memorization, and that he would increase your delight in studying his word.
2. Recite Psalm 1:1-3 from memory. If you haven't fully memorized this passage, take time now to focus on the verses you still need to memorize. You are committing God's word to memory, which is going to equip you to meditate on his word at any time in the day or night. So be encouraged as you persevere!
3. Today we are going to focus in on Psalm 1:3. Review your notes from Day 1 question 1. Who is being compared to the tree? Which came first, the tree or streams of water?

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4. Read John 4:7-15 to help unpack the meaning of Psalm 1:3 and write down what you learn.

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5. What then is the relationship between water, a tree, and the tree's fruit and leaves?

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6. Read 1 Cor. 15:58. Like a strong, sturdy healthy tree planted by nourishing water, we will be steadfast and immovable in our faith if we are nourished by God's word. This is what the psalmist means by "prosperous" in verse 3.
7. Meditate on Psalm 1:1-3 by reciting them to yourself. Ponder what God has taught you so far in your study of Psalm 1. In this time of meditation, admit if you struggle with delighting in God's law, and if you would rather spend your time doing other things. Allow this time to lead you into a time of prayer. Ask God to help you see his holy word as a source of delight. Ask God to plant these words of truth deep into your heart so that your deep sense of well-being (or "blessedness") rests in regular reading of, meditating on, and praying out God's word. Write your thoughts down if that is helpful.

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*Continue to recite your memory verses from Psalm 1 each day.*

**For Further Study** (This is optional, perhaps for you to do on Day 6 & 7)

1. Write down any questions you have, or any verses or concepts you would like further clarity on.

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