



An Invitation to the Book of Psalms

My next bible study journey begins in the book of Psalms. I am surrounded with study! Before me are several translations of the Bible, books and book references, research notes from digital sources, not to mention my journals and several pens and pencils. I comb through my mound of books and notes, then stop for a moment to read the cover of a book: *Speak, Lord* by Vic Black, gifted to me from a book seller after my recent order from her store.

I open the book to the introduction page that reads:

“Waiting. There is a freedom and peace in waiting, listening, and soaking in a psalm. Allow God to speak. Trust Him. Give yourself permission to listen and not put words in God’s mouth.”

When I read these words, I recall one of my favorite Bible verses from the book of Psalms.

He says, “Be still, and know that I am God.”
Psalm 46:10 (NIV)



Like you, I often have to remind myself to slow down and to be still. (I even have a keepsake stone with this verse on it that my friend Bev gifted to me.)

I open my journal to a page with some penned notes that God had spoken to my heart. I start to quietly sing words of a song I learned in my church worship team as a child. To this day, the melody is *still etched on my heart*.

*“The Lord is my true Shepherd,
no fear I know,
He leads me to safe passages
and I will follow.
Good and kindness will follow me
for the rest of my life”.*

I realize that the words I am singing are from Psalms 23. I have prayed this Psalm through tears, joys, hurts, and celebrations. It reminds one’s soul that the Lord, our God, is always with us and will always protect us.

I encourage you to read the full Psalms to fill your soul.

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
3 he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name’s sake.

Psalms 23: 1-3 (NIV)

And, verse 6:
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.



Some of my favorite verses from Psalms 23 inspired this painting.



I don't think one can read these beautiful writings and hymns without moments of praise and worship to God for his artistic orchestration that is like a passage of wisdom, guiding us through our daily lives.

I turn to Terry Glaspey's *Discovering God through the Arts*, in which he shares how Irish rock band, U2, took over the soundwaves for many years with their song, "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." The song is about their struggles and search for faith. U2's Joshua Tree album has always been one of my favorites. Glaspey goes on to say that members of U2 have been outspoken about their faith, and commonly used biblical tropes and references in their songs. They are also open about their failings and temptations of being rock stars.

Their lead singer, Bono, admits he was not a very good advertisement for God. Yet, Bono had a particular love for the book of Psalms because it "gives a voice to praise God and is honest about the struggles of living faith in our world." Bono once said in an interview, "I'm holding out for Grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross." Bono shows us that we may not have all the answers for the ups and downs of our life journey.



Glaspey also writes about legendary country musician Johnny Cash who sang to prisoners because he could identify with their stories of violence and darkness. He could belt out a gospel song with complete conviction at one of Reverend Billy Graham's great crusades. Glaspey adds that when Cash would sing the gospel songs, there was no conflict in his life. Cash's story is a reminder of how we may find ourselves facing

challenges of our own creation before we emerge to the light of God's grace.

I put my books and journal down and play U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I am Looking For." As I dance through memories, I realize that when we turn to God, *we have found what we are looking for.*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3-5YC_oHjE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wH83oo4kTk>

Our God is our Hope. He always has a bigger agenda for our lives, if we turn to him. This doesn't mean that the challenges and uncertainties will disappear. It means that, as we choose to put God in the center of our lives, He will always guide us "with the light of His grace."

As it says in the book of Isaiah, in the bible, God is with us to strengthen us and guide us through all season of life.

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
Isaiah 41:10

These stories of artist journeys always speak to me as a reminder for us to follow our creative hearts for God. Art can create a life journey that leads us from comfort to courage and from courage to hope.

I listen to music for a while and sketch out some thoughts and ideas before I return to my study of Psalms.

I read the introduction notes on Psalms in The Passion Translation Bible authored by Brian Simmons and his translation team. They suggest that a contemporary title for the book of Psalms is “Poetry on Fire.” These 150 poetic masterpieces give us an expression of faith and worship. They become a mirror to the heart of God’s people in our quest to experience God’s presence.

In the words of Brian Simmons, “Much of Christianity has become so intellectualized that our emotions and artistic creativity are often set aside as unimportant in the worship of God. The Psalms free us to become emotional, passionate, sincere worshipers. It is time to sing the Psalms!”

Simmons goes on to state that the Psalms become the fuel for our devotional life. Each psalm is a prayer. The early church recited and sang the Psalms regularly. Many contemporary worship songs have been inspired by this book of prayer-poetry.

Simmons adds that the Psalms unlock mysteries and parables. The wisdom of God is contained in these 150 “keys” and you have a key chain with master keys to unlock God’s storehouse of wisdom and revelation.

***“I will break open mysteries with my music,
and my song will release riddles solved.”***

Psalm 49:4



I invite you to unlock the door to your heart and experience more of God’s creativity through the Book of Psalms -- one of the longest books in the bible and one of the most richly-filled and melodic books of wisdom.

You may ask, *why should I spend the time to read through this book?* As you begin your journey, you will see how the Book of Psalms provides instruction and songs to lift our praise to God. But perhaps most importantly, as singer and songwriter Matthew West points out, the Psalms help believers understand how their deepest and strongest emotions fit in a relationship with God.

Enjoy your creative journey with God: You are an original and extraordinary masterpiece of God’s loving creativity!

Let's sing, shout and praise God together through the book of Psalms:

“Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.” (Psalm 95:1-7)



Directives:

Take time to reflect upon this poetic journey.

Read slowly through the rhythm of the Psalms.

Write down your favorite verses. Sing the words. Draw images of the words.

What was one of your favorite Psalms? How did it speak to you?

Suggested reading notes to begin your journey:

Study notes from Psalms “Poetry on Fire” The Passion Translation by Brian Simmons

Outline: The book of Psalms is really five books in one. Moses gave us the five books of the Law called the Pentateuch; David gave us the five books of the Psalms. Each division ends with a doxology that includes the word “Amen!” The last division ends with Psalm 150 as the doxology, forming an appropriate conclusion to this “Pentateuch of David.” These five divisions have been compared to the first five books of the Bible:

Psalms 1-41 (Genesis) — Psalms of man and creation

Psalms 42-72 (Exodus) — Psalms of suffering and redemption

Psalms 73-89 (Leviticus) — Psalms of worship and God’s house

Psalms 90-106 (Numbers) — Psalms of our pilgrimage on earth

Psalms 107-150 (Deuteronomy) — Psalms of praise and the Word

The Psalms find the words that express our deepest and strongest emotions, no matter what the circumstances. Every emotion of our hearts is reflected in the Psalms. Reading the Psalms will turn sighing into singing and trouble into triumph. The word praise is found 189 times in this book. There is simply nothing that touches my heart like the Psalms. Thousands of years ago my deepest feelings were put to music—this is what we all delightfully discover when reading the Psalms!

