

Studying the Psalms

Prepare your heart to hear from the Lord

1. Begin in PRAYER, asking the Lord to open the eyes of your understanding. (Psalm 119:18) It is crucial that you do not skip this step. Reading and studying the Bible is unlike any other study. You are walking into an encounter with the Living God in this time – a two-way communication with the Almighty.
2. Read the full Psalm at least once without making any notes. If you read it multiple times, use different translations.

Observe the text

3. Identify the type of psalm (genre). Based on what you see in the psalm itself and information in the title of the psalm if there is one, make note of any clues you find as to the use of the psalm (private, public, in the worship service, sung by a choir, etc.), as well as historical background.
4. Read the psalm again. Note the overall theme of the psalm, as well as a brief summary of each stanza. Make note of any turning point in the psalm, as well as the flow of thought throughout the psalm.

These next observation steps are best done stanza by stanza, keeping the flow of thought in mind.

5. Read the psalm again making note of main people/ subjects, events, and places mentioned in the psalm. Take note of what you learn. (Who, What, When, Where)
6. Read the psalm again, noticing any key words or phrases. Highlight these phrases in a distinctive way and note what you learn. (Who, What, Where, When, Why, How)
7. Make note of general observations such as the emotions expressed in the psalm, comparisons and contrasts, cause and effects, parallels and imagery. (Why, How) Notice the flow of thought from one stanza to the next.

Interpret the text

8. Find original word meanings of any important words in the psalm, as well as background information on imagery used in the psalm. Note how these impact the message of the psalm.
9. Allow Scripture to interpret Scripture by looking into cross-references. If the psalm refers to a historical event, read the account of that event and compare it with what you see in the psalm.
10. Investigate any questions you may have about the psalm. Use trusted commentaries as needed, after you have completed your own study.

Apply the text

11. How do the instructions, warnings, or wisdom that are shared in this psalm impact your life? Is there an action to take, or a belief to change? How does this psalm reflect on your relationship with the Lord?
12. PRAY this psalm back to the Lord. Use the words from the psalm as the basis for your prayer, adding your heart's cry to the Lord.