

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

The Case for the Psalms

by
N. T. Wright

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. “The Psalms are so often neglected today, or used at best in a perfunctory and shallow way” (p. 4). Do you agree with N. T. Wright’s assessment of the Psalms? How do you use the Psalms in your spiritual life? What place do they currently have in your church?
2. Before reading this book, did you think much about what role the Psalms played in the first century, the world of the New Testament? What, if anything, changes when you learn that Jesus and Paul used the

Psalms and “believed and understood within a Psalm-shaped world” (p. 11)?

CHAPTER 2: PRAY AND LIVE

1. “Ask ‘What are these poems that I have been praying and singing all this time? What have they been doing to me, or in me, or helping me to do or to become?’” (p. 14). If you, like Wright, have read and prayed through the Psalms for years, what influence have they had on your spiritual practice and life?
2. Wright mentions that the Greek word Paul uses in Ephesians 2:10 for *workmanship* translates to “poem.” How does this strike you—the idea that you are God’s poem? How might reading and meditating on the poetry of the Psalms affect the poetry of your life?

CHAPTER 3: AT THE THRESHOLD OF GOD’S TIME

1. Do you allow yourself on a regular basis to celebrate and to grieve without inhibition? If you do, do you find that art is often a conduit to achieving that depth of feeling? How do the Psalms function in a similar way?
2. “To recognize that the Psalms call us to pray and sing at the intersection of the times—of our time and God’s time, of the *then* and the *now* and the *not yet*—is to

understand how those emotions are to be held within the rhythm of a life lived in God's presence" (p. 44). How do the varied emotional highs and lows of the Psalms reflect the rhythm of life? How do they reflect the intersection of times? What is "God's time"?

3. Wright frames the Psalms in this way: "They look back to the great moments of the *past* in order to frame the pain and the puzzlement of the *present* within the hope that God will one day do again, in the *future*, what he did long ago" (p. 61). Do you find this perspective helpful? Why or why not?
4. Read Psalm 89 on pages 68–69, a somber psalm worshipping God in the midst of terrible circumstances. If you belong to a community of faith, are you able to worship God together in this way, in the darkness and the pain? If not, how could you reclaim this ability? How does the music and poetry of the Psalms lead us to remember God's blessing even in difficult times?

CHAPTER 4: WHERE GOD DWELLS

1. The Temple that God establishes is a sign that "the creator God is desiring not to provide a way to escape from the world (though it may sometimes feel like that) but to recreate the world from within" (p. 91). Have you ever found yourself wishing to escape from the world instead of be a part of its re-creation? What do you think the Psalms' insistence that we live "at the

intersection of heaven and earth, to be Temple people” means for us today?

2. “Devout worshippers, individually or corporately, can themselves become, as it were, an extension of sacred space” (p. 107). How can we become an extension of sacred space? What impact would it have on a larger scale?
3. Wright encourages us to sing select psalms in a wider context—one that considers what they have to say about Jesus, as well as about our lives, spirituality, and community today. When you do this, what changes in your reading and understanding of the Psalms? How could you incorporate these different reading styles into your spiritual life?

CHAPTER 5: ALL THE TREES OF THE FOREST SING FOR JOY

1. As Wright says, when we read Psalms that speak of the world and nature giving glory to God, what we might see as lifeless matter is actually “constantly praising its maker by being, particularly and peculiarly, what it is” (p. 120). What is your reaction to this? What does this mean for our lives?
2. Wright notes that the words of Psalm 104, “I will sing praise to my God while I have being,” were echoed many centuries later by the theologian Irenaeus: “The glory of God . . . is a human being fully alive” (p. 135).

What does it mean to be fully alive? What might that look like for you this week?

3. “The creator of the world will renew his creation, ‘judging’ it in the sense of pronouncing definitively against all that has corrupted and defaced it, and putting it right once and for all” (pp. 139–140). How do you feel about this definition of justice? Compared with popular notions of justice or the idea of justice that is often found in the church today, how does this line up?
4. Wright points out that “the Psalms themselves indicate that the human beings who sing them are actually being changed by doing so. Their very innermost selves—which includes their physical selves—are being transformed” (p. 155). Do you feel transformed by reading the Psalms in this book? If reading the Psalms is a regular practice for you, have you noticed a physical change?

CHAPTER 6: AT HOME IN THE PSALMS

1. “We should allow the flow and balance of the entire set to make their points, with the sharp highs and lows of the Psalter all there to express and embody the highs and lows of all human life, of our own human lives” (p. 166). Does this statement resonate with you? How might you allow the entirety of the Psalms, in all their diversity, to affect you on a personal level? On a corporate level with your family or faith community?

**AFTERWORD:
MY LIFE WITH THE PSALMS**

1. The author gives us many stories in which the Psalms helped him remember or realize something about himself and his life. Have you ever noticed the Psalms spark similar realizations in yourself? How might you be intentional about becoming “Psalm-soaked”?
2. What surprised you about this book? What encouraged you? How do you feel equipped to enter into the world of the Psalms and discover faith and hope in them?