

S T U D Y   G U I D E



# Learning *to Love* *the Psalms*

W. Robert Godfrey

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

*Renew your Mind.*

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# Introduction (Part 1): Attractions & Difficulties

## INTRODUCTION

The Psalms have a Godward direction, being God's words to us to give back to Him. In this lesson, Dr. Godfrey discusses the uniqueness of the Psalms as well as the difficulties that must be overcome if we are to learn to love them.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To highlight the unique place of the Psalms in the Christian life
2. To introduce the five difficulties we have when reading the Psalms
3. To address the first difficulty by showing how the Psalms are structured

## SCRIPTURE READING

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

—Psalm 1:1-2

## LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. This series is titled *Learning to Love the Psalms* because Christians today have become increasingly detached from the Psalms despite their attractions.
  1. The Psalms have been a tremendous comfort to God's people historically and remain something with which we can richly connect.
  2. The poetic nature of the Psalms continually unveils things previously unseen every time we read them.
  3. The Godward direction of the Psalms make them uniquely helpful; they are God's inspired words to us to give back to Him.

4. The Psalms are a rich resource for the Christian life, but they present some challenges worth overcoming so that we might learn to love them more.
- B. The Psalms present a challenge to us because of five main difficulties.
1. The Psalms are a collection of 150 poems that at a glance do not appear to be organized, which makes it difficult to interpret in terms of the whole book.
  2. The Psalms have a poetic literary form that requires us to slow down and meditate on them, contrary to our fast-paced, non-poetic age.
  3. The Psalms require that we understand who is speaking to us in them.
    - a. The Psalms are God's words to us to speak back to Him, but they must be understood within the appropriate context.
    - b. Psalms like the imprecatory psalms make it difficult for Christians to understand how they relate to the context of the New Testament.
  4. The Psalms must be read with an understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament in order to see their relevance.
  5. The Psalms are difficult to outline.
    - a. Some books of the Bible have a clear outline, but the Psalms are difficult to outline even when considered individually.
    - b. Psalm 95 is an example of how an individual psalm can shift thematically from a call to worship to a solemn and severe warning.
- C. The Psalms are divided into five books with a clear movement and destination.
1. The title of the Psalms when translated from the Hebrew is *The Book of Praises*, and the book has always been divided into five parts.
    - a. The title of the Psalms should inform us of its movement as a whole, even though there are different genres of psalms.
    - b. The organization and movement of the Psalms is further seen in the progression of its fivefold division.
  2. Book One can be titled "Confidence in God's Care."
    - a. The psalms in Book One tend to be personal, reflecting some level of distress that quickly resolves into confidence in God.
    - b. They are where you should look for comfort in distress, being psalms for those who are oppressed, sick, or suffering.
  3. Book Two can be titled "Commitment to God's Kingdom."
    - a. The psalms in Book Two are less personal but more community oriented.
    - b. They take into consideration the whole people of God and how God is providing for His people.
  4. Book Three can be titled "Crisis Over God's Promises."
    - a. The psalms in Book Three are the emotional heart of the Psalms, containing the most distressful psalms in the Psalter.
    - b. They represent a great crisis in the life of the psalmist, a spiritual crisis of doubt and disillusion in the promises of God.

5. Book Four can be titled “Comfort in God’s Faithfulness.”
  - a. The psalms in Book Four reflect on God’s work in creation and His covenant with Abraham.
  - b. They set out to answer the cry of the psalmist in Book Three by proving that God is faithful to His promises.
6. Book Five can be titled “Celebration of God’s Salvation.”
  - a. The psalms in Book Five are a review of Israel’s history and show that God has had a plan throughout the history of Israel, even amidst exile.
  - b. They further prove that God is a promise-keeping God and culminate in psalms of praise toward the end of the book.
7. The structure of the Psalms demonstrates that it is a cohesive collection of 150 poems that have not been put together randomly.
  - a. Psalms 1 and 2 serve as personal and cosmic introductions to the book, respectively, and the psalms of praise in Book Five are its conclusion.
  - b. The movement of the Psalms mirrors the lives and experiences of the people of God, giving us the language to pray to God when in crisis and reminding us of His faithfulness so that we might praise Him.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

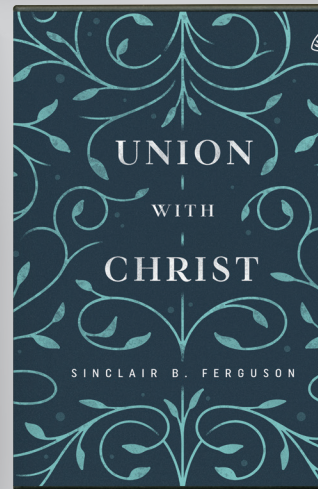
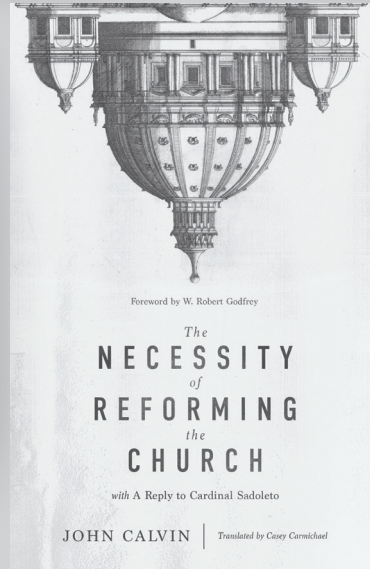
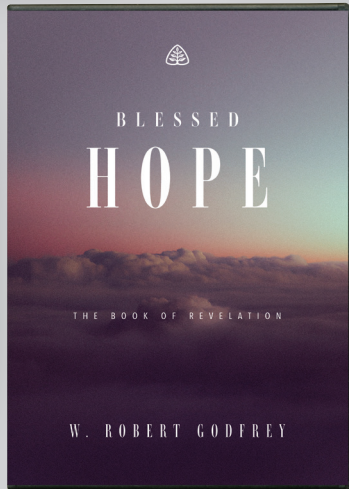
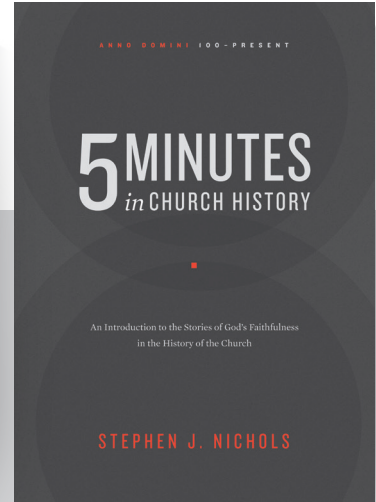
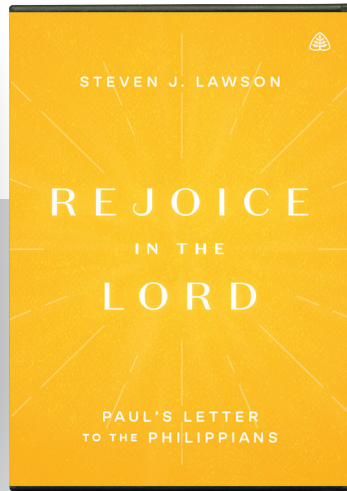
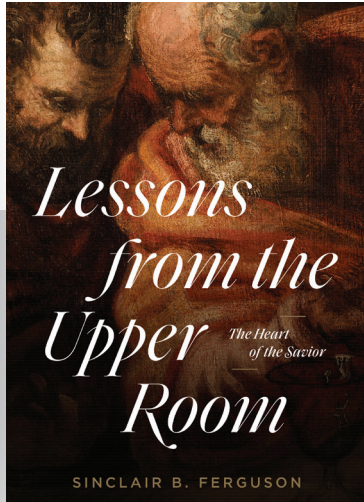
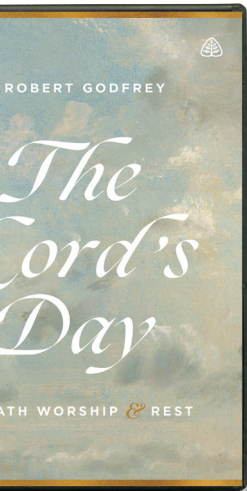
1. Slowing down to meditate on the structure of the Psalms is difficult because of the age in which we live.
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. Why should Psalms be considered a unique book of the Bible?
  - a. Because of their poetic literary form
  - b. Because of their Godward direction
  - c. Because of their structural cohesion
  - d. Because of their apparent difficulty
3. The spiritual distress found in Book Three of the Psalms is a result of doubting which of God’s qualities?
  - a. His goodness
  - b. His sovereignty
  - c. His promises
  - d. His power
4. Book Five is the emotional heart of the Psalms because it is the longest book of the Psalms.
  - a. True
  - b. False

- 5 In which book of the Psalms are the psalms characteristically less personal and more community oriented?
  - a. Book One: Confidence in God's Care
  - b. Book Two: Commitment to God's Kingdom
  - c. Book Three: Crisis of God's People
  - d. Book Five: Celebration of God's Salvation
  
6. What is challenging about the fact that the Psalms are a collection of 150 poems?
  - a. It becomes difficult to see the relevance of the Psalms.
  - b. It becomes difficult to see the profundity of the Psalms.
  - c. It becomes difficult to see the wholeness of the Psalms.
  - d. It becomes difficult to see the perspective of the Psalms.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the reasons Dr. Godfrey titled this series *Learning to Love the Psalms*?
  
2. Why are the Psalms uniquely helpful in the Christian life and how do they progress in a way that mirrors our lives and experiences? Describe a time in your life when the Psalms were a great comfort to you in time of need.
  
3. What would be some benefits to memorizing the titles Dr. Godfrey gave to each book of the Psalms?
  
4. In what ways should the Psalms inform and embolden our prayers? How would the content of our prayers be deprived without them?

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