



LYDIA BROWNBACK



SING



A



New Song



A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO THE



Psalms

“What an exceptional book! First, its scope is different from other books in that it focuses exclusively on the Psalms—all 150 of them. Second, its format is unique because the author presents each divinely inspired song with creative divisions such as ‘Musical Notes’ (how the psalm reveals God and his grace) and ‘Sing the Song’ (suggestions for personal application). If you’re a woman looking for a fresh approach to your study of Scripture, you’ll find it in Lydia Brownback’s *Sing a New Song*.”

Donald S. Whitney, professor of biblical spirituality and associate dean, School of Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* and *Praying the Bible*

“I’m grateful for this call to read the book of Psalms straight through! Lydia Brownback has distilled the various themes and offers great encouragement for readers to delve into the prayers and praises of God’s people given in his Word. How good to be reminded that the psalms speak into all the moments of our lives, giving us a song for each one.”

Kathleen B. Nielson, author; speaker; senior adviser,
The Gospel Coalition

“Not only do we need to embrace our emotional side as humans, but as Christians we want to learn a vocabulary that can make our feelings for God be contagious to others. Enter the Psalms. God not only gave us a whole book of Scripture for learning the language of the heart, he also made it the longest book of all. Join me in making it a daily habit to open your Bible first to the Psalms each morning, and let Lydia Brownback help your reading and meditation stay true and go deep. *Sing a New Song* is a valuable companion for a lifelong journey through the ups and downs, joys and griefs, praises and laments of God’s own inspired book for the Christian’s heart.”

David Mathis, executive editor, desiringGod.org; pastor, Cities Church, Minneapolis; author, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines*

“Lydia Brownback brings ‘the heart of the Old Testament’—the Psalms—to the hearts of her readers. If you desire to deepen your walk with the triune God of the Psalter, Brownback’s brilliant book will shed light on the brilliance of our Lord’s providential purposes for his people. It will inspire you to read and reread the Psalms. To use them devotionally. Pray them. Sing them! See them as a mirror to your soul and a reflection of the greatness of our God.”

Douglas Sean O’Donnell, senior pastor, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Elgin, Illinois; author, *The Beginning and End of Wisdom*; editor, *The Pastor’s Book*

“Sisters in Christ, come journey through the book of Psalms and gaze afresh at our God of steadfast love and covenantal faithfulness. Lydia Brownback has given us an instructive, strengthening gift for heart and mind. Study the biblical text; discover the fulfillment of promises in the New Testament; bring your praise, laments, joys, and fears; pour out your heart, trusting his care and grace for us.”

Jane Patete, former coordinator of women’s ministry, the Presbyterian Church in America

Sing a New Song

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Joy: A Godly Woman's Adornment

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A Woman's Wisdom: How the Book of Proverbs Speaks to Everything



Sing a New Song

*A Woman's Guide
to the Psalms*

LYDIA BROWNBACK

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With gratitude to the Good Shepherd
for leading me to green pastures, still waters,
and paths of righteousness
through faithful men:

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Sinclair Ferguson

Allan Fisher

Richard Gaffin

Mark Goodrich

Jonathan Inman

Jeff Mills

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Preface

Sing a new song! The call is sprinkled throughout the psalms to express the joy of new blessings received from God's hand. Those blessings weren't limited to the psalmists' days; they are meant for us as well. That's one reason Psalms is the most universally loved book of the Bible. Its appeal isn't so much the poetry or the musical aspects but what it conveys about God himself—that he welcomes the honest outpouring of his people's hearts. Joy, sorrow, anger, fear, perplexity, discouragement, and longing—the entire spectrum of human emotions—are reflected in the psalms and taken to God in prayerful song. And each psalm reveals particular facets of God himself.

Sing a New Song is a springboard, a launching-off place, for going deeper into the psalms in all kinds of ways. Here are a few suggestions:

- *Build confidence in prayer.* The heartfelt prayers of the psalmists build our confidence to approach God with our personal pleas and pains. They also guide the substance of our prayers. We don't know God's will in all its particulars, but we can be sure that the prayer requests of the psalmists are God's will because they are part of Scripture, and we can adapt them to our own situations. How did the psalmists pray in a crisis, and what did they ask for? How did they approach God after a fall into sin? How did praying give them perspective in difficult relationships? Scan each entry in *Sing a New Song* for prayer aids.
- *Prepare a Bible study.* Gather a group of women to study the psalms (see appendix 1 for group study suggestions), and use *Sing a New Song* to help you prepare for discussions. In all our Bible studying, we want to be faithful to the biblical text, which requires examining the original context. We want to know the *who, what, where, when, why,* and *how* of the psalmists before we apply what we read to our own

circumstances. Looking at the original context provides us with an accurate view of God, which is necessary for real spiritual growth.

- *Journal your emotions.* Let's face it—we women are emotional creatures. And we don't have to apologize for that fact. After all, God designed us this way, and from the psalms we see that God works in and through our emotions to draw us closer to him and to mature us spiritually. As you read each entry in *Sing a New Song*, track the dominant emotions in the psalm. Do they fluctuate from beginning to end, and if so, why? Where is God in the midst of depression? How is anger expressed and dealt with? What causes joy and happiness? If you'd like to get a better handle on your own emotions, consider journaling your way through the psalms. Appendix 2 provides you with an idea for creating such a journal.
- *Weave Psalms with hospitality.* As you will see, the psalms were sung primarily in gatherings of God's people. *Sing a New Song* provides clues about how each psalm was used, and some of what we see can be adapted for use with your own friends and family. During a celebratory season, host a gathering at which each participant reads aloud a portion of a thanksgiving psalm. Or when believers you know suffer rejection or persecution for their faith, gather together to pray one of King David's laments. There are so many possibilities here!

Those are just a few ideas. However you use *Sing a New Song*, the primary aim is to deepen your faith by glimpsing how the psalms shed light on the multifaceted character of our great God and his overarching purposes for his people.

For each psalm you'll find the following sections:

- *Theme.* A one-sentence overview of the psalm.
- *Harmony.* Something about the nature of the psalm and how it fits into the big picture of the Psalter.
- *Singing in Tune.* A verse-by-verse breakdown of the psalm.

- *Musical Notes*. How the psalm reveals God and his grace.
- *Sing the Song*. A suggestion for related Scripture reading and personal application.

On a personal note, this is the most challenging book project I've undertaken to date. The discipline of drawing out the relational nature of the psalms while being faithful to their original context—and doing so 150 unique times—has shown me what a long way I still have to go in my understanding of God and his Word. Challenging as the process has been, the spiritual rewards have been enormous—and surprising. It is my prayer that *Sing a New Song* will profit you in the same way.

The
PSALTER

Book 1

Psalm

1

A Blessed Life

THEME

Pursuing God’s path leads to flourishing, but following the way of the wicked leads only to destruction.

HARMONY

Psalm 1 has lots of similarity to the teaching and wording of the Bible’s Wisdom Literature, primarily the book of Proverbs. The psalms that mirror the wisdom teaching found in Scripture are called “wisdom psalms.”

SINGING IN TUNE

Blessed. The very first word of the very first psalm reveals what God wants for his people—blessing. Nothing compares to the reward of living out a close walk with him. Such a walk entails a continual rejection of one way and a wholehearted embracing of another. Truly blessed people are those who guard their hearts from the allure of the world (v. 1) and fixate on the ways of God (v. 2). Turning from worldliness isn’t a one-time choice; it’s constant—every moment of every day. Whose counsel will guide us? What will fill our time, and with whom will we fill it? The psalmist makes it seem so simple, and it actually *is* that simple—it’s just not easy. But by fixating on God’s Word, it gets easier. That’s because we’re changed in the process. Over time, the pull of worldly power is weakened, and our delight in God’s ways grows stronger (v. 2). So does our wisdom, for we realize that delighting in God’s ways isn’t something

to do as a way to get more blessing—the delight *is* the blessing. Even so, as we drink in the water of God’s Word and ways, we become like a well-watered, fruit-producing tree, and we find that every part of our lives and work and relationships prospers in practical, tangible ways (v. 3). To know this blessing for ourselves, it helps to see the world as it really is. The promises of easy pleasure and avoidance of pain inevitably evaporate into nothing (v. 4), and those who choose that path, rejecting God and those who love him, will be gone (v. 5). In the meantime, the Lord intimately “knows” his own, which means we aren’t left to ourselves as we seek to walk with him (v. 6).

MUSICAL NOTES

God’s Grace

It’s a struggle at times to fixate on God’s Word and avoid falling into worldly temptation. There is only one person who ever did—Jesus. He is the only One who has ever lived out Psalm 1 as God intends. But in union with him, we can become the flourishing tree we find in this psalm, because in him are the streams of water that well up to eternal life (John 4:14).

God’s Attributes

- all-knowing
- nurturing
- righteous
- wise

SING THE SONG

Read Proverbs 1–2. What similarities to Psalm 1 do you find in those chapters?

Psalm

2

Kiss the King

THEME

The king of God's choosing is celebrated because he is a channel of blessing for God's people.

HARMONY

God appointed a line of kings, beginning with David, to lead God's people in his ways. And God promised that through this kingly line would come his greatest blessings (see 2 Sam. 7:12–17). Sure enough, when the kings served faithfully, all the people were blessed. But ultimately they were all failures in faithfulness—every last one—and all God's people suffered for it. Even so, some of the psalms, like Psalm 2, are songs of rejoicing about the king, which can mean only one thing—despite the royal failures, there was still hope. Humans—even kings—fail, but God does not. He always keeps his promises. The ideal King was still to come. Psalms that rejoice in the king are called “royal psalms.”

SINGING IN TUNE

Psalm 2 was written in a time much like ours—morally corrupt and politically unstable—yet a note of confidence runs all through it. Threats loom and evil leaders rise, but no plot or plan devised against God and God's people will ultimately succeed (vv. 1–3). In every age, the desire to “cast away” God's authority is lodged in the hearts of some who abuse their power, and underneath their politically correct lingo, they harbor

a special hatred for God's people. There is no need for fear, however, because God can break any power in an instant. Evil authorities may strut around with delusions of control, but God isn't wringing his hands with worry about how to uphold his honor. In fact, he laughs at their attempts to be rid of him (v. 4). Lasting security comes not from a strong economy or military might or even from a morally upright society. It comes from taking refuge in God's anointed King, the Son (v. 12). We need not fear who sits on any earthly throne, because Jesus sits enthroned in heaven.

MUSICAL NOTES

God's Grace

Even good leaders fail to live up to their promises, so we cannot rely on them to keep us safe. This was true in the psalmist's day, when even King David (the man anointed by God to lead his people) broke God's law and violated the people's trust. And so did all the kings who came after him. From ancient days up to the present, it's clear that broken human beings are incapable of providing all we hope for in a leader. Only a divine ruler can provide the safety and security we so desperately need and conquer every evil power that threatens (vv. 7–9). King Jesus is that ruler. He is everything that Israelite kings failed to be and that our modern leaders pretend to be. King Jesus will never fail, and his rule will never end. Every other governing authority is temporary, and they possess wisdom to govern only to the degree that they bow before the ultimate authority of King Jesus (vv. 10–12).

God's Attributes

- authoritative
- holy
- powerful
- protecting

SING THE SONG

Describe how Acts 4:24–28; 13:32–39; Hebrews 1:5–8; and Revelation 19:15–16 reveal Jesus as the fulfillment of Psalm 2 and the underlying reason for the victorious confidence so evident among those who sang it.

Psalm

3

Nothing to Fear

THEME

God helps and strengthens his people when they are troubled.

HARMONY

Psalm 3 is a lament composed by David.¹ Laments express perplexity, anguish, and even discouragement during times of overwhelming circumstances. Yet they also reflect the confident hope of those who trust their compassionate and faithful God. The psalms of lament teach us that God welcomes boldness and honesty when we cry out to him, and we need not fear that he won't hear, because he has promised never to turn away from those who truly seek him. The particular crisis in view here is recounted in 2 Samuel 15–16.

SINGING IN TUNE

Hated and hunted—that was the plight of King David, and he was at a loss as to how to cope with it. Worst of all, it was his own son who sought to harm him. So real was the threat to his life that David had to flee his home and hide (v. 1). His enemies seemed greater and more numerous than his friends—and what about God? He heard the taunts: “There is no salvation for him in God” (v. 2). But the taunts weren't true. God *was* his protector. God had promised to be faithful no matter what, and his promise included not only protection but also restoration (vv. 3–4). Most of us have never been in David's shoes—hated and hunted by a family

member—but no doubt we’ve been on the receiving end of anger, whether justified or not. At such times, nothing we say or do works to calm the situation and restore reason, and we feel utterly helpless. But we don’t have to wait to get to that point to do what David did. He cried aloud to God (v. 4). He poured out his heart, and because God had faithfully answered him in the past, David knew God wouldn’t leave him without help in the present (v. 5).

MUSICAL NOTES

God’s Grace

After pouring out his heart, so confident was David of God’s involvement in his trouble that he was able to get a good night’s sleep (v. 5). That’s what casting our cares on God really looks like. When evening anxieties are raging, do we hand them over to our heavenly Father? If so—if we have really entrusted our cares to God—we won’t lie awake all night with worry. Real trust banishes fear (v. 6), and it inspires even bolder prayer (vv. 7–8).

God’s Attributes

- listening
- protecting
- saving
- sustaining

SING THE SONG

Explain how John 14:1, 27 and Romans 8:14–17 can help you sing Psalm 3.

Psalm

4

A Cry for Help

THEME

Those who trust God during difficult seasons are able to wait for his deliverance.

HARMONY

Psalm 4 is a lament, but it is also characterized by restful confidence. This type of psalm reflects the hope of those who trust their compassionate and faithful God. Fear is overruled by faith in the One who has promised never to turn away from his people. Here in Psalm 4, David shows confidence by leaning on the Lord at the end of the day. In this evening prayer he models the security of those who trust.

SINGING IN TUNE

In the midst of difficulty, David cries for God's help, and he remembers how God has relieved him from past distress (v. 1). It seems evident that his distress was prolonged, as ours sometimes is. "How long?" he asks. How long will he have to bear with people who challenge his commitment to the Lord? Despite these pressures, he knows he's safe, because the Lord has claimed him as his own and hears all his prayers (vv. 2–3). David's confidence in God enables him to encourage others to persevere and to resist the desire to retaliate. It's right to be angry when evil gets a foothold, but all too easily, our anger against sin turns *into* sin because we take it personally. Keeping anger in a righteous place requires

humility (v. 4). It also requires a trusting heart and a surrendered life (v. 5). Temptation to doubt God's care assails God's people, but they can escape the temptation by asking God for a fresh glimpse of his goodness (v. 6). David well understood what stress is all about. Yet because his confidence rested in God rather than in people or his self-made solutions, he was able to live in peace both day and night (v. 7). We are never more out of control than when we attempt to be *in* control. If a man like David, a king with vast responsibilities, could simply go to bed and fall asleep, then so can we, if we but trust in the Lord.

MUSICAL NOTES

God's Grace

Secure children talk to their parents. They say what they think and express what they feel. And when they want something, they just ask. They don't stop to ponder how to package their words or manage impressions. One reason is that they lack the sophistication to communicate any other way; more importantly, they trust. Whatever they ask and whatever the answer, they know they are loved and cared for. God welcomes the same candor from all those he has set apart for himself in Christ.

God's Attributes

- comforting
- joy-giving
- listening
- trustworthy

SING THE SONG

Sanctify is another word in the Bible for "set apart" (v. 3). From 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:9–11; Ephesians 5:25–27; and 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24, explain how God sets apart his people.

Psalm

5

A Morning Prayer

THEME

Focusing on God changes our perspective on our troubles.

HARMONY

As the king of Israel, David was called to lead God's people in God's ways and to model a godly life of faith. Here in Psalm 5, he leads them in a prayer for the destruction of wicked people. This was no personal vendetta on David's part; he desired the triumph of righteousness over evil. For that reason, psalms that include prayers for destruction are called "imprecatory psalms." In praying this way, David is upholding God's just and holy character. And since the psalm was sung in public, the evildoers might hear of it, be warned, and turn to God themselves.

SINGING IN TUNE

The morning routine. Getting up and ready for the day ahead consumes an hour or two, even when all the details come together like clockwork. It's likely, however, that King David had more on his plate than the busiest among us. We have meetings to lead and homework to check, shirts to iron and lunches to pack, but David had a nation to run. Yet his morning routine included the Lord—not a pass through the verse of the day and a prayer for the hours ahead but an orienting of himself and his life and his troubles upward to God (vv. 1–3). Spending time in God's presence shaped his thoughts and prepared him to view the day ahead from God's

perspective. In keeping, as we listen to God in his Word, we are freshly sensitized to the evil of sin (v. 4) and reminded that God's righteousness will prevail in the long run (vv. 5–6). The majority of our waking hours are spent out in the world, not in a quiet room with an open Bible, which is another reason why morning time with the Lord is a precious gift, not a burdensome obligation. Through it we are gifted with the discernment we need to distinguish between truth and error, good and evil, and to pray that God will not allow evildoers to succeed in their sin (vv. 9–10). The Lord, our righteous guide and merciful protector, is always waiting to meet us in the morning.

MUSICAL NOTES

God's Grace

God is so holy that evil cannot dwell with him (v. 4). Because that's true, only his grace enables us to pray with confidence. David knew this, so he took refuge in that grace (v. 11), as we must. As we do, God covers us (v. 12) with the shield provided by Jesus's payment for our sins on the cross. Even the worst evildoer will be spared from God's righteous wrath if she turns to Jesus in faith.

God's Attributes

- just
- merciful
- righteous

SING THE SONG

Read Jesus's parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1–13) and his teaching that follows in Matthew 25:31–46. Where do you find both warning and hope in his words, and where in the teaching is God's mercy revealed?



“How good to be reminded that the psalms speak into all the moments of our lives, giving us a song for each one.”

KATHLEEN B. NIELSON

author; speaker; senior adviser, The Gospel Coalition

“What an exceptional book! If you’re a woman looking for a fresh approach to your study of Scripture, you’ll find it in Lydia Brownback’s *Sing a New Song*.”

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