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## SESSION ONE

### Psalm 1

#### Learner Session Guide

#### Focus Statement

We are surrounded by difficult choices in life. Being fed by daily streams of living water helps us stay alive in Christ and faithful to God's path.

#### Key Verse

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.  
Psalm 1:1-2

## Two roads diverged in a yellow wood . . . Which one will I take?

#### Focus Image



Which road for me? © Westend61 / SuperStock

#### “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel them both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that, the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,*

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### Robert Lee Frost

(March 26, 1874–January 29, 1963) was an American poet who received four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry during his lifetime.



### Notes

*And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

## Gather

### Check-in

Welcome to our six-session conversation on various psalms from the lectionary season of Pentecost that have truly become the “songs of the faithful.” As you gather, pause for a moment of silent reflection to prepare your heart and center your mind on learning and growing together in this session of decision and discovery.

### Pray

*O God, we eagerly open your scriptures in order that you might speak a new word to us through them. Open our hearts that we might welcome your presence anew and see where we have taken a wrong path. Open our minds that we might understand why we find ourselves on wrong pathways again and again. Open our eyes to see how you are constantly at work, helping us get back on track and able to follow your steadfast path that does not disappoint. Amen.*

### Focus Activity

Read Robert Frost’s beautiful poem, “The Road Not Taken.” As you ponder the words of the poem and look at the Focus Image above, consider the following questions:

- Where in your life have you encountered two divergent paths and been unsure which one to take? What was the outcome of your choice?
- Do you think it’s possible to change course if you find yourself on an unexpected or undesirable path?

## Open Scripture

Read Psalm 1.

- How do you react to the word *happy* at the beginning of verse 1?
- After reading the entire psalm, do you feel uplifted, challenged, convicted, uncertain? Are there other words that better describe your initial reaction to Psalm 1?
- How do you react to the word *perish* at the end of the psalm?



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## Join the Conversation

### Historical Context

The Psalms are the first hymns and prayers of the church. They are the songs sung by real people, faithful people, living with the pains and challenges of real human life. We aren't sure who wrote Psalm 1, but scholars agree that this is a wisdom psalm used for instructional purposes. It contrasts the assembly of the just with the assembly of the wicked. This reiterates the separation begun in the book of Genesis, where the harmonious and just life God intended for creation is eternally disrupted when human pride enters the story.

1. In what ways is Psalm 1:3 reminiscent of the Garden of Eden? Compare this verse with Genesis 2:6. In what ways does Jeremiah 17:8 provides a parallel to Psalm 1?
2. Water is a critical element throughout Scripture. It represents God's steadfast love for us, and it is a metaphor representing our constant, divine source of refreshment and nourishment. But water can also be devastating when it gets out of control. Consider the following passages and discuss how water serves divine purposes:
  - Genesis 7: How is water used by God in response to humanity's sinfulness?
  - Exodus 2: How is water used to fulfill a divine purpose?

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- John 4:1-29: How is water used metaphorically to symbolize something greater than an ordinary element?

- Acts 8:26-40: How is water used as a sign of God's promises?

How do these examples of God's presence and active work through water compare with the "streams of water" mentioned in Psalm 1?

3. Psalm 1:2 emphasizes the value of meditating on the law of God, but what does it mean to "meditate"?

- Brainstorm as many words or ideas related to meditation as you can.

- In what ways do Joshua 1:8 and Deuteronomy 17:18-19 add to your understanding of meditation in the Bible? Where else can you find models of meditation in Scripture?

- Is there something in Psalm 1 that can especially serve as a focal point for your personal meditation?

### Literary Context

The Psalms are also poems—poems that can be used for individual devotions, but also for corporate and liturgical practices when the assembly gathers together in worship and song. Psalm 1 is considered a didactic or instructional poem that charts the path to happiness. Along with Psalm 2, Psalm 1 serves as the poetic introduction to the entire Psalter.

1. As a group, list the metaphors in Psalm 1 that enhance its poetic character.

2. Revisit Frost's poem. Explore what metaphors he uses to convey the central message of the poem. Where do you hear similarities between the metaphors in Psalm 1 and "The Road Not Taken"?

3. Compare Psalm 1:1 with Psalm 2:11. Why do you believe these two Psalms were selected to be the very first in such an important book?

### Lutheran Context

Straying from the path he knew God desired for him, and his inability to correct this sinfulness on his own, was very much a part of Luther's own spiritual struggles. As a result of this, he came to the realization that there must be another way. This is where Luther's theme of grace alone through faith in Christ Jesus alone took on powerful meaning for him. Luther understood that the law is meant to help give our lives boundaries. Yet the gospel