



What Are the Psalms?

PSALM 1

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

Psalms 1:3

Quick prep

This session introduces the Psalms. Psalm 1 opens the book with a description of what leads to a good life for God's people. It is short and evocative. The poem frames everything that is to come in the Psalter with guidance about how to live a happy life with God and neighbor and how to avoid situations that might compromise our faith. Participants will dwell in the imagery of the psalm and imagine what it is like to be deeply rooted in faith. They will also reflect on how they both talk to God and listen for a response.

SUPPLIES

- ♦ Items found in nature: stick, leaf, or pinecone; one per person
- ♦ An audio recording of Psalm 1 being read in Hebrew
- ♦ Copies of ELW
- ♦ Items to create a worship space: candles, music, a cross

Gather (15 to 30 minutes)

CHECK IN

Perform your opening check-in ritual: Sit in a circle, light a candle to mark the space as holy, give participants a moment to breathe and settle into the silence. Then pray the prayer below. Continue with introductions: Invite participants to state their name and one piece of writing that has meant a

✿ If this group has new folks in it, invite everyone to be intentional about stating their name every time they talk. Name tags are helpful, but they can be hard to read from a distance. Repeating your name out loud each time you speak will also help folks learn pronunciation.

lot to them and why. (Before you begin, give them 30 seconds to reflect on the prompt.)

OPENING PRAYER

Holy God, you come to us in water and word, wine and bread. You also promised to send your Spirit when we gather in your name. Come, Holy Spirit—come and lead us to the word, the river of life. Plant us there and let us flourish. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

COMMUNITY-BUILDING

🌿 Invite participants to address any concerns they may have about the covenant guidelines and/or to suggest additions or revisions. Seek assent to the final covenant by consensus.

🌿 If the weather is not cooperating, or if you have folks with mobility issues or people joining online, print out pictures of different kinds of trees ahead of time. Invite participants to choose a picture or two to use as a focal point for their discussion.

Since this is the first session of these Bible conversations, begin by discussing the group covenant on page 8. Be sure to acknowledge and respect every voice. Commit together that everyone will keep personal information confidential.

This psalm describes people who spend so much time in God's word that they are like trees planted by streams of water. Fed by God's river of life, these folks nourish others with spiritual oxygen and metaphorical (and sometimes literal!) fruit. Ask participants to pair up. Invite them to talk about what it would feel like to be a tree: roots stretching deep, branches spreading far, life flourishing around it. Then have them swap partners and tell a story about someone they know who is like a tree: grounded, flourishing, and nourishing. If the weather is nice, invite them to go outside and find a tree to stand or sit under as they converse.

Dwell (20 to 40 minutes)

DWELLING IN THE WORD

Ask someone to read the text out loud, slowly. Before they do, invite the group to picture a flourishing tree. What would it feel like to be so grounded in their own life? Invite them also to listen for the way the existence of the wicked is described. How are the two existences compared? They can underline or highlight words that stand out to them if they'd like. You could also give participants a piece of a tree (leaf, stick, bark, etc.) to hold and meditate with as the text is read.

Psalm 1:1-6

¹ 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,
² but their delight is in the law of the LORD,

and on his law they meditate day and night.

³They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

⁴The wicked are not so
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous,

⁶for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

CONVERSATION

1. Invite participants to share their responses with one or two others before asking them to share with the large group.
2. Participants may need some time to process this prompt. Before you read it, ask people to take notes as they listen. Tell them you will give them a minute to free-write before you ask them to share their thoughts.
3. Come prepared with an audio recording of Psalm 1 read in Hebrew in case the question about *hagah* doesn't seem to be going anywhere (there are several available on the internet). Ask people to listen to the recording, and then see how that adjusts their understanding of "meditation" (*hagah*) in the Bible.
4. Go through the law-versus-gospel concept together slowly. Read each sentence and then ask for questions or feedback. Law and gospel can be a big concept for folks who are new to Lutheranism (or even for lifelong Lutherans), and it's important to understand it clearly.

- 🌿 If your session is slated for a shorter time frame (say, 45 minutes), choose just one of the two historical/linguistic questions. Invite participants to journal about the other question at their leisure throughout the week.
- 🌿 Leading discussion requires comfort with silence. Give people a set amount of time (such as 30 seconds or one minute) to reflect on a question, either mentally or in writing. Keep track of the time. This can promote participation and take the guesswork out of the discussion.
- 🌿 Be aware of how long your group sits. If you are gathering for an hour, invite everyone to stand at the 30-minute mark and stretch. If you are going for a full 90 minutes, establish a 5-minute break around 45 minutes to refill cups and stretch.

Engage (10 to 20 minutes)

WORD AND SERVICE

Invite participants to consider one thing they will remember or do this week. Encourage them to check out Session Recap, Going Deeper, Looking Ahead, and the journaling pages in the participant guide. Point out that they can invite someone to join them for one or more of these sessions.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

Give each of your participants something physical to hold like a stick, leaf, or pinecone. Inform online participants so they can bring something as well.

- 🌿 Decide where your group will have this worship and prayer time each week. The sanctuary is a natural place for such encounters. Wherever you choose, set up the space before you begin the session.

- ✦ For online or hybrid groups, encourage participants to do what makes sense for them in their own space to achieve a contemplative atmosphere: dim lights, light a candle, or simply close their Bible and/or workbook to signal a shift in focus.
- ✦ Sharing prayer can take up a lot of time, depending on the scenario. In this first session, decide as a group how much time you will spend on prayer each week, and then set a timer each session.
- ✦ Beginning a prayer is a lovely time to let folks settle into the prayer moment. After you say, “Let us pray,” count to 10 in your head, and listen for the breathing of the folks around you to soften before you begin.

Prayer is a wonderful way to bind a group together. Remind your participants to get permission before sharing another person’s name or concern with the group. Invite them to name a prayer concern by describing what it is doing to their (or someone else’s) “tree of faith”: blight, drought, flood, logging, etc.

If your church has a strong tradition of singing the Psalms, choose a different psalm tone each week and sing that week’s psalm together. For Psalm 1, you may want to consider psalm tone 4 on page 337 of ELW.

Close with the following prayer:

O Lord our God, in the ancient music of the Psalms, we hear the rolling echoes of your love resounding throughout generations. Let that love reverberate in us this week. May it hum in our bones, sing in our bellies, and pour out of our lips to be oxygen for a suffocating world. In your name we pray. Amen.

LOOKING AHEAD

For session 2, ask participants to bring a poem, song, or piece of writing that is meaningful to them and that they are willing to share with a partner.

Make sure to refer your people to the Looking Ahead copy in the participant guide, to help them prepare for the next study. This is an excellent time to make any necessary announcements about the time, place, and so on for the next session.

