

Near to the Heart of God



A Journaling Study

by
Kay Daigle

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A Study of Selected Psalms

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A Study of Selected Psalms in Journaling Format
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What to know about this Study Guide

What's the difference between the journaling & classic formats?

You have a choice of formats for this study: classic and journaling.

The classic format divides each week's study into five days of homework with approximately five specific questions to answer each day. Those doing the classic format will have more verses and questions to consider.

The journaling format is divided into three parts per week. Instead of very directed questions, open questions encourage you to wrestle over them yourself with God, journaling about the verses and God's message.

See beyondordinarywomen.org for previews or for information on large group downloads.

Discussions including people doing journaling format & others doing classic format

These discussions are best led toward the journaling study rather than the classic study. Those doing the classic study will have opportunities to share additional verses they studied if they choose, but the questions will be directed to everyone. (Leaders, see Tips for Leaders in the Appendix for guidance.)

The simplicity of journaling doesn't equate to shallow

This study demands your involvement. Although the layout is simple, how deeply you go depends on you. As you spend time talking to God and journaling your thoughts, he may lead you to other cross-references, but he will certainly give you insights into the verses. Don't stop with initial surface answers, but ask God to clarify and speak to you from it. The time you spend in the scriptures with God gives him space to speak. Listen well, journal your thoughts, share them with your small group, and glean from others' insights.

Studying through three parts a week

If you like doing a little study at a time, the study is set up in three parts, but feel free to study through it in any way that works best for you. If you prefer daily time in the Word, either use the traditionally formatted study or consider spending two days on each part, journaling about the optional starred section the second day. You may be amazed at what you see by reading the same passage multiple times. If you prefer to do the week's study in one sitting, you may want to read all the passages first and then journal at the end. Of course, it's great to be in God's Word each day, but you may have other ways of doing that. Stick to what works for your schedule.

Additional reading and background information

I often insert background information pertinent to your understanding. Feel free to do your own research when you have interest or questions, but focus the group conversation on the passages studied by everyone.



A star identifies optional verses or suggested study for those with time and interest. The additional reading may help you wrestle with deeper insights into the passages.

God's Heart for You

The verses that begin each week's lesson are great choices for memorization.

What you need

- A quiet place, if possible:)
- A Bible that you can understand. If you don't have one, ask your group leader for suggestions, or email us at info@beyondordinarywomen.org. Modern versions are available as downloads, through Bible apps, or in print at any bookstore. (We are using lumina.bible.org which is a free online Bible translation with study helps.)
- A notebook, laptop, or tablet to use as a journal which can be taken to your group meetings. If you prefer paper attached to the lesson, add a blank piece of paper or notebook paper after each lesson. (See Journaling 101 in the Appendix.)
- The commitment to listen to God and write out what you hear as you read and pray
- Someone, or even better a group of women, to discuss this with you and provide support, encouragement, and spiritual challenge

Best practices for your group get-togethers (See Appendix & Videos)

Plan a regular place, time, and leader.

The leader should—

- read the section “Tips for Leaders” in the Appendix.
- watch the free, short video [Tips for Leading a Journaling Study](https://vimeo.com/190999125) at <https://vimeo.com/190999125> and the video series [Listening Well](https://vimeo.com/album/4065298) at <https://vimeo.com/album/4065298>.
- start on time, not waiting for late arrivals.
- move the group along, being sensitive to God's Spirit.
- encourage everyone to share without forcing it.
- be a great encourager.
- avoid dominating the conversation.
- keep the focus on the women, not herself and her own thoughts.
- provide time for the group to think and share from their journals.
- contact absent group members to encourage them.
- email the group weekly to remind them of the upcoming meeting, and share her excitement.

As a group—

- come prepared and on time with your study, journal, and Bible.
- share freely and honestly.
- encourage one another.
- don't interrupt the speaker.
- love one another.
- don't try to fix the other members of your group or their problems by giving advice.
- pray for one another and entrust each other and your problems to God.
- be honest and vulnerable, but wise in how much detail you share personally.
- stay in touch with each other between meetings for support and encouragement.

If your group meets within a larger group in a church setting

- Look for a woman who is gifted in teaching God's Word to teach a short time after the small group discussion. Watch the short, free video [Why Use Live Teachers, not Video?](https://vimeo.com/209323216) at <https://vimeo.com/209323216>. (For help in preparing to teach, see our collection of videos at <http://beyondordinarywomen.org/bible-teaching/> or [contact us.](#))
- Because the discussion isn't about the teacher's comments but focuses on the members' personal study, the discussion should precede the teaching time.
- The teacher may spend 15- 25 minutes adding to the background of the lesson, beginning and ending within the allotted time frame. The majority of the time together should be invested in small groups.
- The teacher's role is to clarify and extend what the group has studied, not to retell what they have discussed.

Stories

Each week's study includes a true story that relates to the lesson at the end. Some of our journaling studies have such stories on video, but these are part of the lesson. The names have been changed in some cases to protect people involved in the stories.

Introduction

Because Psalms is the perfect vehicle to grow deeper in relationship with God, this study is devotional in nature rather than simply academic. It focuses on relating certain psalms to life experiences rather than on their structure and genre. The Appendix in the back, however, provides more detailed information about literary forms of psalms if you are interested. Throughout the study I have cited a few of the many good commentaries which provide more information.

By the end of this study, my hope is that you will draw near to God in any situation, expressing well your feelings and longings. May we all grow deeper in our relationships with the God of the universe.

My special thanks go to Becky Hunt, who worked through the original study, and Evelyn Babcock and Irish Kinney who helped edit the journaling study which brought positive revisions to this one. I am also grateful to Sandy Sparks for using her gifts to paint the artwork for our cover to reflect the three types of psalms, and Deborah Herring who created the cover to surround it. God has raised up a great team of volunteers who all use their gifts for his glory.

Kay Daigle

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Near to the Heart of God

Week One Study: Psalm 37, a psalm of confidence

God's Heart for You

Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.
Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD,
Trust also in Him, and He will do it.

Psalm 37:3-5 (NASB)

God's people have always loved the psalms. Their words give us faith, hope, and comfort, often in times of distress. We identify with the emotions of the psalmists and their cries to God for help. We love the pictures the psalms paint in our minds and the feelings they evoke in us.

My prayer is that the psalms we study will enable us to draw near to God in any situation and turn to the psalmist's words to express ourselves when our own words fail.

Part One Study

We begin with our study with some background as we approach the Psalms.

The book of Psalms is a compilation of individual poems which were written over a long period of time. The Hebrew word used for them is tehillim, meaning praise. Our word psalm comes from the Greek word for the music of a stringed instrument and gradually came to mean a song of praise. Although some psalms are more focused on praise than others, they all include that element. In Old Testament days they were essentially the hymnbook of the people of Israel in their temple worship.¹

Just like our songs and hymns today, the psalms are poetic and, therefore, contain beautiful imagery. They paint memorable and tender pictures of God, such as the shepherd of Psalm 23. Such images can become personal and precious to us through the years as we share the psalmist's experience.

¹ Sam Storms, *More Precious than Gold: 50 Daily Meditations on the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 261.

According to Dr. Ron Allen, “A poem may have a message (and the poems of the Bible certainly do). But it is a mistake to look first and foremost for the message, and miss the experience. . . . Poetry is to be felt . . . Our reaction to the reading of the Psalms ought to be such that we feel with them so deeply that we cannot think of these words without some response.”²

Dr. Sam Storms explains: “Whereas most of Scripture speaks to us, the psalms also speak for us. In the psalms we find inspired examples of what we can and should and must say to God. They are a perpetual reminder that God welcomes our deepest desires, our most unnerving of fears, our anxiety and adoration, our celebration, and our confusion.”³

R. E. Murphy considers the psalms to be our teachers in this regard: “The psalms form the heart of Israel’s prayer. In fact, they are a ‘school of Prayer’ in the sense that they teach one how to pray The variety of Psalms conveys the entire range of human emotions before God Prayer is not simply asking for things: it is the varied expression of the human condition in the presence of God.”⁴

So that we approach the Psalms in a personal way rather than simply academically, we will focus on three types of psalms, categorized by the life perspective of the psalmist. There are other ways to approach them and other types of psalms, but this particular path leads us into intimacy with God. Each psalm will be noted as one of these types: “psalms of confidence”, “psalms of complaint”, or “psalms of celebration,” based on Walter Brueggemann’s book Praying the Psalms. His categories relate the journey of life as “1) being securely oriented [our word confidence], 2) being painfully disoriented [complaint]; and 3) being surprisingly reoriented [celebration].”⁵

For the next four weeks we will look at some psalms of confidence. What do we mean by that? Dr. Brueggemann identifies this type of psalm as arising out a sense of being “well-settled, knowing that life makes sense and God is well-settled in heaven, presiding but not bothering.”⁶ In other words, when our emotions arise out of faith that God is good and in control, these psalms ring true, and we interpret the world and its problems through the lens of a great and mighty God.

² Dr. Ronald B. Allen, *And I Will Praise Him: A Guide to Personal Worship in the Psalms* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 45-46.

³ Storms, 17.

⁴ R.E. Murphy, *The Psalms are Yours* (New York, Paulist: 1993), 113.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, Second Edition (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 2.

⁶ Brueggemann, 3.

Journal as you consider this question:

Describe a period of your life when it felt like the whole world, despite its problems, was in order because you expected God to work all things out in his goodness and according to his justice.

Before you read the first psalm, practice this: Sit quietly before God, trying to eliminate all distractions from your mind. Remain still until you are able to sense his presence or peace. Listen for his voice. You may want to journal about your experience during this time. Was it difficult? How long did you sit still without trying to fill the void? Were you able to sit still without filling the void? Plan to share your experience with your group. Embracing total quiet and solitude are rare in our society, and often we simply don't know how to do this. Consider making this your practice as you begin your study.

Now read Psalm 37, our first psalm of confidence.

Read it slowly, thinking through each line and the psalmist's message. You may want to read it aloud, allowing it to sink in. Let God speak and minister to your heart. You may find it helpful to read the psalm in more than one translation. If you don't have more than one Bible at home, go to lumina.bible.org to read it in the NET Bible. For today's journaling, simply write about your first impressions or specific verses that grab your attention.

Part Two Study

Sense God's presence by stilling your soul in solitude as described above.

Reread Psalm 37, focusing on vv. 1-22.

You may want to read several translations to find synonyms used by other translators for "fret."

Consider these questions as you journal about your reading:

- Describe the life situation the psalmist describes and your own experience with it.
- Describe the basis of the writer's trust in God and hope for the future.
- What do you learn about dealing with similar emotions or situations from the contrasts between what the psalmist suggests we do and not do?

- Add anything you sense God saying to you personally through this psalm.



David, who is identified as the psalmist of Psalm 37, experienced many evil attacks. Read or skim the story of Saul's attempts to find and kill David in 1 Samuel 18-30. Journal any insights.

Psalm 37 became very precious to me some years back when I was slandered. There was nothing I could do to fix the situation, and it looked like the perpetrators had won in a sense. Talk about fretting—I spent a lot of time doing that. Eventually, I began to pray Psalm 37. God uses the various psalmists' poetic language to apply his insight and love to our very different situations, as he did for me. To help you use a psalm as the basis of your prayer, here is my prayer from vv. 1-9:

Father, I will not fret although _____ and _____ seem to succeed. I will not envy them. You have said that they will dry up like grass and wither away like plants. Give me the grace to trust in you and do what is right in the midst of this situation (not gossip about them but forgive and pray for them). Give me the grace to settle in the land, staying where you have planted me rather than flee, and to maintain integrity right here in this church where they have attacked me. Despite how I feel, I will delight in you, O LORD, and I know that you will answer my prayers. I will commit my future to you and trust you. Act on my behalf and vindicate me in broad daylight; publicly defend my just cause, as you have promised. I will wait patiently and confidently on you, O LORD. I will not fret over the apparent success of these who carry out wicked schemes. Give me the grace not to be angry or frustrated and not to worry, which leads to trouble.

Part Three Study

Begin by drawing near to God in solitude and silence.

Read Psalm 37, aloud slowly at least once, and then journal about vv. 23-40 with these questions in mind:

- How do the contrasts in this section affect your thinking about a situation you have dealt with or are still experiencing?

- What aspects of God's character and actions in these verses increase your confidence in God and hope for the future?
- What is God saying to you personally about yourself or your relationship with other people from this psalm?



Journal about the imagery used in this psalm and how those pictures relate to your own experiences of physical or verbal attack.

At this point you may be thinking that life doesn't always work out like this. Remember, this is a psalm of confidence. The psalmist expresses his faith that God will act and all will turn out right. I am sure that each of us could tell stories of situations that didn't ever work out fairly, when God appeared to be absent. For now keep in mind that we will get to those psalms in a few weeks. In the meantime, take the psalms of confidence and pray them as expressions of your faith in a great God who someday will right all wrongs.

Each week's study will include at least one true story. I so appreciate the honesty and transparency with which the authors write. As you will see, Dakan's story parallels that of the psalmist of Psalm 37.

Dakan's Story

I worked with an unbeliever for eight years, at which point she desired my position and I was asked to leave. I was shocked! My anger threw me into a tailspin! I was in a daze not believing what had happened!

But my sweet Heavenly Father knew I needed his intervention and my dependence on him in a situation I could not get through on my own. He knows me all too well; I don't handle anger easily; I am too prideful; I don't easily forgive or acknowledge that I need to; and the list goes on. I began to read psalms and take comfort in God's word. I pleaded with God to take my anger away, give me relief from these negative hateful feelings, to show me right from wrong.

God began putting the former co-worker on my heart, telling me to call her to ask how she was doing. I ignored God. Once again he told me. As God's unfailing love began to cover me, the anger subsided and I was able to see the situation more clearly: perhaps she needed the extra

financial help; perhaps God's plan for her was to be influenced by the other Christians in the office.

One day I told myself I wasn't leaving the house until I had spoken with her. I called, she answered, and we visited. As it turned out, weeks earlier she had left the job because it wasn't what she expected. She apologized for taking my position and said she couldn't even get an interview in the industry because of the manner in which she left. I don't know if she is working again; however, I was asked to come back to work at my former position. Only because God had been teaching me about forgiveness and faithfulness was I able to say yes. God gave to me bountifully the wisdom I needed to deal with my anger and to do the right thing.

"For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face." Psalm 11:7 (NIV)