



## BIBLE TEACHING GUIDE

# Psalms

## THE BELIEVER'S PRAYER BOOK

A STUDY OF PSALMS

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# **Psalms**

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# lesson 1

# Sing and Shout to the Lord!

## MAIN IDEA

When Christians truly comprehend what God has done, they will naturally respond with praise.

## QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How do I praise the Lord?

## TEACHING AIM

To lead adults to understand different ways people can praise the Lord



# Bible Comments

## Understanding the Context

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). Jesus responded with the Model Prayer, which provides a general framework for how to speak to God (Luke 11:2-4; Matthew 6:9-13). In many ways, the Old Testament version of the Model Prayer—the Old Testament version of God teaching us how to pray—is the book of Psalms. This collection of 150 individual prayers (many of which include notations that suggest they were set to music and performed with instrumental accompaniment) provides a general framework for what it means for God's people to worship.

While the Psalms are traditionally associated with David, most of them are very difficult to connect with a particular person, place, or situation. These were songs and prayers that God's people *used*, which means they were constantly adding to them and adapting them for new contexts—similar to how we might update the word choice in an old hymn or add a new stanza to a praise chorus. What this means is that God has given us the Psalms in a way that lets us pray them ourselves, even though we aren't David or Solomon or an Israelite from thousands of years ago. These song-prayers have enduring relevance and relatability. They still teach us how to pray, and they still help us do so.

Divided into five books (poetic instruction mirroring the prose instruction found in the five books of Moses), the book of Psalms includes hymns, laments, thanksgivings, prayers for the Davidic kings, songs featuring proverbial wisdom, raw shouts of anger and doubt, and everything in between. Some of the psalms are voiced by individuals, some by the whole community. The overarching lesson of the Psalms, then, is that God wants to hear from us—no matter what we're feeling.

## Interpreting the Scriptures

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Psalm 66 is a praise psalm that gives thanks to God for His powerful works on the earth. The psalmist isn't giving thanks alone but instead repeatedly calls others—within the faith community and beyond it—to recognize who God is, what God has done, and to respond with praise. Psalms scholar Bill Bellinger likes to say that "Biblical praise is always substantive." We praise God because He has *done* things, and our worship should reflect the particular incarnations of God's work in the world and in our lives. The psalmist of Psalm 66 found reasons for praise in both the stories of God's work in history and the psalmist's own personal story.

### A Series of Calls to Praise

This psalm is divided into four major "stanzas." Each section begins with an imperative call to praise and then explains *why* God is worthy of praise.

- Verses 1–4: All the earth should praise God because of His great power to overcome enemies (those who bring harm to others, those who scoff and mock, those who perpetrate injustice and promote false worship).
- Verses 5–7: We should praise God because He led the Hebrew people out of slavery and delivered them from Pharaoh's army by parting the sea, and God continues to keep enemies in check.
- Verses 8–12: The peoples of the earth should praise God because He has cared for His people. Also notice that this loving care includes times of both discipline and hardship.
- Verses 16–20: All who fear God should praise Him because He listens to us when we pray and answers us when we call.

### Praise Because of History (66:1–12)

The first half of the psalm used plural pronouns and reflects on God's care for the community of faith. The language is largely general and could refer to any

number of moments of salvation from enemies, guidance through difficulty, and periods of corrective discipline.

**66:1–9.** At the heart of this corporate section of the psalm, the psalmist specifically named the deliverance across the Red Sea (Psalm 66:6; Exodus 14:15–31). This miracle of the Exodus is foundational for the identity of God’s people—it was a moment in which the all-powerful God heard the cries of the people, intervened to save them, and claimed them as His own. In Exodus 14, God delivered the children of Israel by parting the Red Sea and leading them safely through it on dry ground. In the next chapter, Moses and the prophetess Miriam led the people to respond to this miracle of salvation by singing praise to God (Exodus 15). The psalmist of Psalm 66 continued in this pattern of leading people to respond to God’s works by singing praises.

**66:10–12.** These verses are easy to skip over in the midst of all this celebration of deliverance. Here the psalmist led the community in speaking directly to God. “*You* have put us to the test,” the worshipers sing: “*You* laid an oppressive burden upon us. *You* made men ride over our heads” [emphasis added]. These statements seem at odds with the surrounding affirmation of God’s protection and care. They indicate the worshipers have experienced hard times, and God is the One who caused these hard times (or, at least, who let them happen). Other psalms will give voice to the pain and disorientation such experiences prompt in the moment (for example, Psalms 38, 44, and 88), but in Psalm 66 the worshipers were able to look back on these experiences and see God’s benevolent purposes. They may have experienced God’s discipline, but God never abandoned them; moreover, God restored them and “brought [them] out into *a place of abundance*” (66:12b).

### **Praise Because of Your Story (66:13–20)**

**66:13.** The second half of the psalm moves from the memory of a corporate past to the ongoing experiences of the individual. The psalmist vowed to come and worship God with lavish sacrifices because God heard the psalmist’s own prayers for help.

**66:14–15.** Notice that the psalmist admitted he or she was in trouble but also offered praise during this time of trouble. Perhaps because the psalmist remembered the story of God’s past deliverance (like the psalmist sang about in the first half of the psalm), the psalmist had confidence that God would deliver again.

**66:16–19.** The psalmist recognized that this *personal* story of God’s care and deliverance has the potential to encourage those who hear it to offer their own praises. Rather than a call to praise, this “stanza” is a call to hear the psalmist’s testimony. The psalmist described calling out to the Lord, praising the Lord, and the Lord’s gracious response.

In verse 17 the psalmist described praise as “exalted with my tongue.” The language literally refers to raising something (or someone) up high. Raising someone high puts them in a place of honor—think about a king sitting on a dais—and puts them in a place where everyone can see them. Our praise should honor God, and it should do so in a way that helps others to see God better.

Verse 18 is not saying God doesn’t hear or answer the prayers of sinners. We are all sinners. Instead, the psalmist was saying that willfully “regard[ing] wickedness in [one’s] heart” is incompatible with true worship. In other words, we cannot worship God faithfully if we see our own sin and refuse to acknowledge it or repent of it.

**66:20.** The psalm concludes with a profound statement of worship that praises God because of God’s *hesed*. Various English translations for this Hebrew word are “steadfast love,” “loving-kindness,” “faithfulness,” “mercy,” “unfailing love,” “loyalty,” “favor,” and more. Jenny Matheny describes this key character trait of God as “loyal loving-kindness that originates in God’s nature, embodying both answerability and possibility through anticipated and creative relational endeavors and expressions among God, humanity, and creation.”<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, all of our praise could be said to be a response to God’s *hesed*, which manifests over and over throughout history and our lives in countless ways. In Psalm 66, the psalmist modeled for us how to reflect on God’s *hesed* in both corporate and individual ways and how to turn from

reflection to praise and from our own praise to the work of calling others to praise.

## Focusing on the Meaning

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The plural imperatives that dominate the structure of Psalm 66 invite us to continue the pattern of seeing God's great deeds and responding with praise. When we look to history and examine our own testimonies of God's activity in our lives, we will find abundant occasions to praise and invite others to join the song.

Neither corporate history nor individual testimony is free from times of hardship, however. The experience of suffering (sickness, financial strain, mental health and anxiety, death, injustice, family brokenness, abuse, and more) does not preclude praise. And while God does not ever want to see His children hurting, we know these times can become important seasons of growth. We do not grow if we are not stretched, and we do not learn if we are not corrected. The good news is that God doesn't leave us to face this stretching and correction alone.

Just as Psalm 66:8–12 blesses the God who allows such trials, 1 Peter 1:3–7 also blesses the God who allows trials. As Christians considering how to offer up praises to God in all circumstances, these words offer a helpful benediction in the spirit of Psalm 66:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.... In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which perishes though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3–7).

**ENDNOTES** 

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer M. Matheny, *Hesed, The Seed of the Biblical Story: New Life for Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2026), 9.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** 

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Matheny, Jennifer M. *Hesed, The Seed of the Biblical Story: New Life for Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2026.

# Teaching Plans

## DISCOVERY PLAN

### Connect With Life

1. Search the internet for one of Chris Tomlin's versions of "How Great Is Our God" (preferably one with words printed on the screen) and play it for the class. Following the song, voice a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for how great our God is.
2. Comment, *Once we realize and understand what God has done for us, we will naturally respond with praise. So, how do you praise God?*

As class members share their perspectives, write their responses on a whiteboard or a large piece of art paper attached to a focal wall.

3. Say, *In today's lesson we will be reminded of how God has delivered and restored those who have faith in Him. We will also discover how Psalm 66 guides us to express praise to God in response to His greatness.*

### Guide Bible Study

4. Invite a class member to read aloud the focal passage. Point out that the psalmist shared his heart in praise to God in this passage, even though he was not perfect and often disappointed God.
5. Invite class members to gather in three groups, and use smart phones, laptops, tablets, etc. to search electronically for *Commentaries on Psalm 66* (Bible Hub, Bible Gateway, etc.). Assign each group a certain number of verses, as listed below to research how God has blessed us and how we can praise God. Allow time for members to search and gather comments, and then guide reports and discussion concerning the following verses:

- Psalm 66:1–7—(awesome works; enemies pretend to obey; earth will worship; sing praises; turned sea into dry ground; rejoice in Him; rules forever; watches the nations)
- Psalm 66:8–14—(bless Him; He keeps us in life; He keeps us from slipping; He tests and refines us; He laid burdens upon us; during tough times He gave us abundance; we offer burnt offerings and make vows to Him when in trouble)
- Psalm 66:15–20—(offer animals as sacrifices; cried out to Him in praise; our sin was confessed, and He heard our prayers; He did not withhold His favor from us)

6. Call attention to Exodus 14:15–31 and ask someone to recount the story of Moses and the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea. Use this as an example of why Israel (and we) should thank and praise God.
7. Direct members once again to verses 6–7 in the focal passage. Read the verses aloud and ask listeners: *Why do you think the psalmist included these verses in this passage?*
8. To sum up the biblical ideas detailed in this passage, provide each member with a 4x6 card and pencil, and encourage him or her to write at least two basic biblical ideas presented in Psalm 66.

## Encourage Application

9. Remind class members that, *Our daily task is to know and understand what God has done for us, and to praise Him for it. When we realize what God has done for us, it motivates us to worship Him with music, prayer, Scripture, service, and praise.*
10. Share, *Sometimes we need to ask questions related to our knowledge of God and how we will respond. However, we might need to contemplate these questions for a while.*

11. Ask the following question and share with class members that you would like for them to live with this question during the coming week: *How will you respond to all God has done for you?*

## DISCUSSION PLAN

### Connect With Life

1. Share the story in the *Study Guide* about game six of the 1975 World Series when Carlton Fisk stepped to the plate, hoping to do the improbable, forcing a seventh game against the Cincinnati Reds. (See “A Universal Invitation (66:1–4)” in the *Study Guide*). Say, *Psalm 66 is a universal call to the people of God to sing and shout to the Lord because He continues to do the impossible.*
2. Ask class members to recall and share about the first time they felt an overwhelming sense of God and what He has done for them. Ask, *How did you respond to this realization?*

### Guide Bible Study

3. Invite selected class members to read Psalm 66 aloud.
  - Reader #1—66:1–7
  - Reader #2—66:8–12
  - Reader #3—66:13–20
4. Ask the following questions for consideration and discussion:
  - What are the reasons, listed in these verses, we should praise God?
  - What are some of the ways, listed in these verses, we can praise God?

**Note:** See “Interpreting the Scriptures” in the *Teaching Guide* for ideas on how to lead this discussion.

5. Say, *Psalm scholar Bill Bellinger says, “Biblical praise is always substantive.” We praise God because God has done great things for us, and our worship should reflect God’s work in the world and in our lives. Psalm 66 finds reasons for praise in both the stories of God’s work in history and the psalmist’s own personal experience. Developing a lifestyle of praise and worship is not easy, but it is a part of becoming a disciple. And when, we begin to reflect on the work of God in our life and the lives of others, we sing and shout to the Lord for all He has done and all He will do.*
6. Point out that verse 20 in the *Study Guide* passage says it best, “Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me” (NIV).

## Encourage Application

7. Call attention to the third paragraph under “Focusing on Meaning” in the *Teaching Guide*. Lead the class in a discussion of why God allows trials in our lives and what we can learn from them.
8. Comment that this passage calls us to consider our response to God based on all He has done for us. Use a markerboard to present a simple chart to the class, asking them to first brainstorm and list considerations presented by the passage, and then how they might respond as a believer. Your chart might include some of the following,

<b>Psalm 66 tells me what God has done for me . . .</b>	<b>I will respond to the goodness of God by . . .</b>
God’s great power to overcome enemies	
God cares for His people with discipline	
God listens to and answers our prayers	

(A copy of this assignment is available in “Teaching Resource Items” for this study at [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org).)

9. A question to live with this week: *Based on all God has done for you, how will you respond to Him?*
10. Close with a prayer that asks God to guide us in appropriate ways we can express our praise and thanks to God for all He had done for us.