

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciplinarians, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge to understanding to application. Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Before Small Group

Readings for May 12-18

Numbers 21-27 and Psalm 60-71

Where We Are In The Story (Numbers)

Background of Numbers: Within two years of leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrive on the fringes of the Promised Land and enthusiastically send in twelve spies to scout the land, but instead of trusting in God's promises to give them the land, the people fearfully rebelled and made plans to return to Egypt (Num. 14:1-4). Written by Moses, this book contains the record of what happened to the Israelites during the forty years of wilderness wanderings that occurred because of their disobedience and doubt. The English title of Numbers refers to the prominent census accounts in the book that reflect the fulfillment of God's promise that none of the people who had experienced God's deliverance from Egypt would enter into the Promised Land, except for Caleb and Joshua (Num. 14:20-35).

Structure of Numbers:

- Numbers 1:1-10:10 occurs while Israel is still at Mt. Sinai, and it picks up where Exodus leaves off.
- Numbers 10:11-12:16 describes the Israelites' journey from Mt. Sinai to the outskirts of the Promised Land.
- Numbers 13:1-20:13 contains significant accounts of disobedience by the nation, a Sabbath-breaker, Korah, and Moses, and it includes God's response and instruction in light of those events.
- Numbers 20:14-22:1 tell of Israel's military victories against several hostile nations and emphasizes God's preservation of His people.
- Numbers 22:2-36:13 concludes the book with a census of the people, a reiteration of the laws and feasts given by God, and a transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua as the people prepare to enter the Promised Land after their wilderness wanderings.

This Week in Numbers: As the Israelites wander in the wilderness, they encounter enemies (the king of Arad, King Sihon, and King Og), and they experience a foretaste of God's fulfillment of His promises to protect them, to fight for them, and to give them the land (Num. 21:1-3, 21-35). They received a taste of what could have been theirs sooner had they only trusted God in Numbers 13-14.

In between accounts of God-given military victories, Israel complains against God who disciplines them with a plague of fiery serpents with lethal venom (Num. 21:4-9). Their only means of salvation was to look at a golden serpent that Moses fashioned and placed in the center of the camp. The bronze snake did not heal the people; the Lord healed those who heeded His instructions. The Israelites preserved the bronze snake as a memorial, but centuries later, the people turned to worshipping it, which led King Hezekiah to destroy it (2 Kings 18:4). Jesus referenced this same event in John 3:14-15 as He made a comparison between the bronze serpent and Himself. As the people looked upon the bronze serpent and were healed of their physical

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pain because of their sin, so those who look to Christ are saved from their sin and its effects. As the bronze serpent was raised on a pole, Christ was raised on a cross in order to provide a means of forgiveness and restoration.

Numbers 22-45 contains the oracles of Balaam, a diviner (Josh. 13:22), when the king of Moab sought his services to put down the Israelites as they journeyed through Moab. Although attempting to curse the Israelites, God prevented him from doing anything other than blessing them and prophesying what *God* put in His mouth, which included the destruction of Moab and the rest of Israel's enemies in the land. Despite God's miraculous intervention, the people began to "whore" with the women of Moab and to worship their gods with them (Num. 25:1-3), and twenty-four thousand Israelites died as a result of their apostasy. One Israelite man blatantly attempted to make amends through fornication with a Midianite, but although sex was part of temple life and worship practices in other religions, such practices oppose God's design for both sex and worship. Because Phinehas, a priest and a grandson of Aaron, responded swiftly and righteously to this man's sin by executing both him and the Midianite woman, God honored him by assigning the position of high priest to his line of descendants (Num. 25:10-13).

With such a high death count after the plague, God instructs Moses to take another census of the men who were twenty years of age and older and who were able to go to war (Num. 26), and God set forth that the list from this census would be used when dividing the inheritance of land among the twelve tribes. The instructions regarding inheritance transition to a situation where an Israelite father died without a son but with five daughters. These daughters of Zelophehad requested that they be given their father's name and portion to carry on instead of his line ending with his death. God directed Moses to transfer the father's inheritance to the daughters and created a precedent for how to handle similar matters in the future (Num. 27:1-11). Numbers 27 closes with a ceremony in which Moses commissions Joshua as his God-ordained successor.

Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (Psalms)

Background & Structure of Psalms: God used many different writers to write Psalms: David, Moses, the sons of Korah, Asaph, etc. The book is arranged in five parts, and this arrangement occurred after the people of Israel returned to the land after the Babylonian exile. A doxology concludes each book or arrangement of psalms (Psalm 41:13 for Book 1, Psalm 72:18-19 for Book 2, Psalm 89:52 for Book 3, Psalm 106:48 for Book 4, and Psalm 150:6 for Book 5), and the entire book of Psalms climactically ends with a grand doxology of several psalms (Ps. 146-150).

- Book 1: Psalms 1-41
- Book 2: Psalms 42-72
- Book 3: Psalms 73-89
- Book 4: Psalms 90-106
- Book 5: Psalms 107-150

This Week in Psalms:

- King David wrote Psalm 60 as a communal lament offered after defeat in battle, likely by Edom since the superscription describes a time when the Israelites were fighting the Aramaeans in the north and were attacked by the Edomites in the south. The psalm acknowledges God's sovereignty over Israel's success and defeat in battle, and it pleads for God's deliverance and recalls God's words that Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah belong to Him (v. 7). These were all portions of Israel, and by naming them, the psalmist reiterated that *God* owned the land of Canaan, not the enemies of the Israelites who are listed in verse 8. As the psalmist lamented the nation's defeat, he also anticipates God to give victory to His people because of His promises (vv. 6-8, 12).
- Because Psalm 61 prays for the life and reign of the king, it is a royal psalm. In it, King David indicates that he is in some sort of trouble, and he cries out to God, the rock of protection who is exalted over all (vv. 1-2). The psalmist recognizes God's protection in the past (v. 3), petitions for

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access to God's presence (v. 4), prays for His continued support (v. 4), and promises to praise Him for His faithfulness (v. 8). The vows that the psalmist mentions are vows of praise, and they were part of the peace offering. When the offering was made, the worshipper would grab the horns of the altar and declare to those in the sanctuary what the Lord had accomplished. The faithful respond to God with praise for what He has done.

- In Psalm 62, the psalmist expresses confidence in the Lord's character and deliverance in the midst of others attacking him; knowing this about God is how the psalmist can wait in silence (v. 1). Organized into three stanzas of four verses (vv. 1-4, 5-8, 9-12), each stanza presents an overarching truth. (1) While the wicked attempt to assail the righteous, believers can trust God to act and rely on Him for strength (vv. 1-4). (2) Those who trust God direct others to place their faith in God and in His care (vv. 5-8). (3) The power and riches of the wicked will fade, and God will judge the wicked. Therefore, it is foolish to trust in anything other than the Lord (vv. 9-12).
- When David wrote Psalm 63, he was in the wilderness because of some sort of danger (v. 9), and he longed to be in the Lord's sanctuary in Jerusalem (v. 2). In verses 1-2, the psalmist states his desire for God, comparing his physical need for water in the wilderness to his great need for God, and he recalls when he worshipped God in His sanctuary. This meditation leads the psalmist to describe God's sufficiency and to praise of God as the one who truly satisfies (vv. 3-8). At the same time, this God will destroy those who oppose Him and His people, and the righteous can anticipate this day and praise God for His victory (vv. 10-11).
- David wrote Psalm 64 as a prayer for protection as he faced a threat on his life. However, even in the face of great danger, he displayed confidence in God's ultimate destruction of his enemies. While we may not all experience life-threatening situations like King David did, we can approach God with confidence in justice and in His ability to protect His people, and we can expect Him to act in His perfect timing and celebrate when He enacts His perfect justice.
- Psalm 65 focuses on God's provision for the life, particularly in enriching the earth, sending rain, and causing crops to grow. As Creator and Sustainer of all life, He deserves our thanksgiving for these things that we so often take for granted. Divided into two parts (vv. 1-8 and vv. 9-13), the first part describes why God's people owe Him their praise, and the vows that verse 1 references are the same vows that Psalm 61 references (see above).
- Psalm 66 is a declarative praise psalm because it begins with a proclamation of praise (vv. 1-4), a report of what God had done (vv. 5-12), a renewed vow of praise (vv. 13-15), and a description of what God has done (vv. 16-20). Ultimately, this psalm exalts God because He has delivered His people from bondage.
- Psalm 67 begins by citing Numbers 6:24, which is the blessing God gave Moses to speak over Aaron and his sons as the priests. Here, the psalmist directs the blessing to the Israelites, and the purpose of that particular prayer of blessing is for the world to know God's saving power (vv. 1-2). As a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6), God tasked Israel with being a light to the nations. God also calls believers under the new covenant priests (1 Pet. 2:9), and like the Israelites in the Old Testament, we are supposed to proclaim God to the nations.
- Overall, Psalm 68 focuses on the Lord's triumphant entry into His sanctuary, and it traces His leadership of the people from Egypt to the wilderness to the land of Canaan and, ultimately, to Mt. Zion, which was the site of the sanctuary in Jerusalem. God chose Zion as the site of His sanctuary over all other mountains and places (vv. 15-16), and the image of Him ascending that mount is one of a conquering King with other kings and nations submitting to Him and bringing tribute to Him. The psalmist celebrates the Lord's power and victory and calls others to join him in praising God (vv. 32-35). What is described in Psalm 68 was a literal reality for Israel, and Ephesians 1:20-23 and 4:7-10 presents the reality for believers in Christ who has conquered sin, death, and Satan and has ascended on high.
- Facing enemies who hated him without cause (v. 4), the psalmist claims that he bears reproach because of his zeal for the Lord and for His sanctuary (vv. 7-9). Even when suffering for his faith, the psalmist continued to pray to God and to praise Him, and as with the psalmist, God's people will face opposition because of their faith and obedience. Its many petitions for the wicked's destruction classifies Psalm 69 as an imprecatory psalm. This psalm, along with the other imprecatory psalms, were sung in the sanctuary because they expressed a hatred of sin, a zeal for God, and a desire for

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God's righteousness to be vindicated in the face of wickedness. The New Testament references this psalm in descriptions of Christ (Ps. 69:10, 22; Matt. 27:34-48; Mk. 15:36; Lk. 23:36; Jn. 2:17), of Judas (Ps. 69:26; Acts 1:20), and of the spiritually blind (Ps. 69:23-24; Rom. 11:9-10).

- Psalm 70 repeats the concluding five verses of Psalm 40 as it petitions God for help and for the destruction of enemies.
- Psalm 71 expresses the faith of an aging believer who looks back on God's provision in his own life (vv. 5-6) and who continues to trust Him as he looks toward the future (vv. 14-24). As one who had walked with God from his youth and has seen God work in the past (v. 17), the psalmist voices his confidence and trust in the Lord.

During Small Group

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives: Praise God for His grace and mercy in our lives. Confess and repent of any sin and ask and thank God for His forgiveness. Thank God for His everlasting love and ask Him to increase your reliance upon His love in every aspect of your life. Pray for God to be known and praised throughout all the world. Pray for those you know who reject Christ to come to know Him as Lord and Savior. Pray for God's redeeming power in the lives of those we know who have wandered from the faith.*
- *Pray for Our City: As we celebrate the mothers in our lives this week, we want to focus our prayers on them and the other women in our church who are serving women outside Brook Hills in our city. Women from Brook Hills are serving women alongside ministries like WorkFaith Birmingham, Jessie's Place, King's Home, Lovelady Center, Olivia's House, Pathways, The WellHouse, Sav-a-Life Vestavia, Sav-a-Life Shelby, Widows First, Hearts in Hands, etc. Our women also support local women's prison ministries at the Birmingham City Jail and Tutwiler Work*

Release Center. We are also praying for Shades Mountain Baptist Church and Danny Wood, Pastor.

- *Pray for Our World: For the next two weeks, we will spend our time highlighting and praying for the people of Turkey. This was our highlight at Secret Church, and we as a faith family want to join the thousands around the world who are praying for Turkey. Join us this week as we pray for the Kurds of Turkey. This week, we are also praying for our Short-Term team serving in Detroit.*

MAIN TRUTH, WHY IT MATTERS, AND NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

From May 11-June 15, the preaching will focus on Psalms, and each Worship Gathering on Sunday will have a different psalm preached. All three sermons will be available on the website and on radical.net on the following Monday, but in light of the three sermons and the "psalms potluck" each Sunday, we have adopted a different Small Group Guide structure for these six weeks. Instead of the sermon outline, message summary, digging deeper, and group discussion questions that focus on the sermon, there are three options for Small Groups included below. As the leader, feel the freedom to take all or just some of the content in this guide and do what is best for your group. Whichever option you choose for the week, avoid simply focusing on knowledge acquisition related to the various psalms. Direct the group to focus on how God wants to use what they have learned to transform their thinking, affections, will, relationships, purpose, and mission.

Option 1: REAP

Using the REAP (read, examine, apply, pray) outline for studying Scripture, the group can take one or both passages from that day's readings and discuss them. So if the group meets on Monday, then you could pick one or both of the passages for Monday. This also helps those who are new to studying the Bible or who struggle with doing so learn how to study it.

READ

Read the psalm together slowly, carefully, prayerfully, thoughtfully, humbly, and joyfully.

EXAMINE

After you read the psalm, spend time reflecting on what it says and means. Ask the following questions and discuss some of your thoughts in response. You don't necessarily have to answer every question. Just use them as a guide to help you examine what you have read.

- What is happening in this passage?
- What words, phrases, or ideas seem particularly important?
- What does this text teach you about the gospel?
 - (Character of God) What does this text teach you about God?
 - (Sinfulness of Man) What does this text teach you about man?
 - (Sufficiency of Christ) What does this text teach you about who Christ is and why we need Him?
 - (Necessity of Faith) What does this text teach you about trusting and following Christ?
 - (Urgency of Eternity) What does this text teach you about the hope of heaven or the horror of hell?

APPLY

After examining the Word, apply it to your life. Ask the following questions based upon the text(s) and discuss your thoughts in response. Again, you don't have to answer every question.

- What sin(s) do I need to repent of and/or avoid?

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- What truth(s) do I need to believe?
- What command(s) do I need to obey (what do I need to give up, stop doing, start doing, or continue doing)?
- What principle(s) need to change the way I think, speak, and/or act, and how will I implement this change?
- What relationship(s) do I need to establish, strengthen, or change?
- By the power of God's Spirit, what can I do *today* to apply God's Word to my life?

PRAY

Pray together according to your examination and application of the text(s), asking God to change your heart, mind, attitudes, actions, and relationships based on the time you've spent in His Word. Let this specific praying lead you more generally to...

- Praise—Worship God for who He is.
- Repent—Confess your sin to God and acknowledging your need for Jesus.
- Ask—Intercede for particular needs in your life and other's lives.
- Yield—Surrender your life to following Jesus wherever and however He leads you.

Option 2: Discuss the Sermons & the Bible Readings for the Week

If you prefer to continue discussing the sermons and/or the Bible readings for the week, included below are general questions that you can use to guide your time together, especially if group members do not all attend the same Worship Gathering.

- What sermon did you hear preached on Sunday? What psalm did the sermon exposit?
- What was one thing you learned from that sermon? What was one takeaway you walked away with?
- How will you apply that takeaway to your life, beginning this week?
- How should that truth change how you think? How should it shape your desires? How should that truth influence your relationships? How should it affect what you say and how you act?
- How should the truth(s) gleaned affect how you pray and what you pray for?

Option 3: Read, Study, & Pray a Psalm Together

This option differs from REAP in that more attention is given to learning how to study Psalms based on the literary form of the selected psalm. There are different types of psalms: lament psalms, praise psalms, pilgrim psalms, songs of Zion, hallel psalms, enthronement psalms, royal psalms, and wisdom psalms. This guide will include what type of psalm each Worship Gathering walked through as well as how to study and take next steps with that psalm and ways to pray through that psalm as a small group. With this structure, it might be helpful to choose one of the Psalms from Sunday's sermons.

- To begin this first week, ask the group to share how they currently approach reading and studying the Psalms.

MAIN TRUTH

- Read the selected psalm together. If the superscription (the introduction to the psalm that tells who wrote the psalm or gives other information related to the psalm) gives any information related to the events surrounding the psalm, read those related passages as well since they provide a context for the psalm. For example, 2 Samuel 11:1-12:15 is the backdrop for David's confession in Psalm 51.
- Based on the reading of the psalm, ask the group to identify the overarching message of the psalm. What is the main truth expressed by this psalm?
- As a group, identify the structure or the outline of the psalm. Some psalms, such as laments, have a clear outline of an introductory cry, the reason for the lament, a confession of trust in God, the

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psalmist's petition, and the psalmist's vow to praise God. With other psalms, you will trace the argument or the psalmist's thought process throughout the chapter. The portions below will provide some assistance with this, but it is important to equip group members to know how to do this on their own. Also, the outlines provided with the chapters below are not the only way to divide the chapter; they are simply one way to do so.

- Making an outline of the passage helps with summarizing each section. Based on the structure you identified as a group, walk through each section and identify the main truth of that section. In that section, what is a universal truth or a general principle from that section? How would you summarize what that section says as well as its main idea? The point here is to identify timeless truths that fit both the original audience as well as believers today. For example, Psalm 51:1-2 demonstrates that believers can turn to God for forgiveness of sin because of His character.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

- As you discuss the main truth of each section, discuss why that truth is important. What are the implications of this truth and the theology that the psalm is communicating?

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

- How can you apply the truths gleaned from this section? Be specific in your application.
- What needs to change in your life based on what this psalm is saying? How will you take steps this week to grow and to change?
- Psalms were originally used in the sanctuary for both individuals and Levitical choirs to use both in prayer and in song. In light of this purpose for the Psalms, how can this psalm or this one section of a psalm guide how you pray and/or what you pray for?

Psalm 51

- As a penitential or lament psalm, Psalm 51 records a prayer of David regarding his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband (2 Sam. 11:1-12:15).
- Outline of the Psalm
 - Introductory Cry (vv. 1-2)
 - Confession of Sin (vv. 3-6)
 - David's Petitions (vv. 7-12)
 - Vow of Praise (vv. 13-19)
- This psalm provides instruction on confession for the worshipper. As a small group, discuss what this psalm communicates about how God views sin, our attitude towards our sin, why confession is important, how God responds to sinners who confess, how to approach God, how to address areas of temptation, how to deal with regret and guilt we may feel for sin that we have already confessed, and the joy of restoration.
- What does confession and repentance currently look like in your relationship with God? Is it even something that is done regularly? How can you incorporate confession into your time with Him? Knowing that we can confess our sins to God and that He is faithful to forgive (1 Jn. 1:9), how can you transition from confession to praise of God in your prayers to Him? Why is this important?

Psalm 52

- The superscription of Psalm 52 informs the reader that Doeg is the person David had in mind when writing this psalm, and 1 Samuel 22:17-23 provides the background for Psalm 52. This psalm warns of God's judgment of the wicked, and it speaks to both God's character and man's response to His steadfast love.
- Outline of the Psalm

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- A Description of the Wicked (vv. 1-4)
- God's Response to the Wicked (vv. 5-7)
- The Response of the Righteous (vv. 8-9)
- How do verses 1-4 characterize the wicked? A person's speech indicates the status of a person's heart (Mt. 12:34; 15:18). Think back on conversations you have participated in this past week. What does your speech indicate about your heart? If your speech and the thoughts and attitudes behind it were not honoring to God, take time to confess this sin to God. Also, how can you, by the power of the Spirit, become more disciplined with your thoughts and with your speech?
- What do verses 5-7 teach about God's judgment on the wicked? How do the righteous respond to this judgment (vv. 6-7)? This laughter does not express contempt for the wicked but jubilation over being forgiven as well as satisfaction in God executing perfect justice. While He often permits the wicked to prosper on earth, they will face His judgment. How should believers respond to the wicked, especially when they seem to be thriving? Identify such people either in your life or in the world today. Knowing their ultimate fate, how can you pray for them?
- Discuss the symbolism of the flourishing olive tree in verse 8. Where does this tree reside? How does this symbolism relate to believers? Based on this psalm, how can believers flourish and bear fruit in their relationship with God (see also Jn. 15:1-17)? What does this psalm express with regards to the actions of the righteous? How can these actions specifically play out in your life?

Psalm 57

- The events of Psalm 57 describe a time when David hid in a cave when he was fleeing from King Saul, and 1 Samuel describes two times when David hid from King Saul in a cave – at Adullam (1 Sam. 22) and at En Gedi (1 Sam. 24). While we do not know for sure which occasion this psalm specifically references, both 1 Samuel 22 and 24 provide insight into what David would have felt and thought when penning such a psalm.
- A lament with praise, Psalm 57 includes a recurring refrain in verses 5 and 11 as well as a repetition of words in verses 1, 3, 7, and 8.
 - "Be merciful" (v. 1)
 - "He [God] will send" (v. 3)
 - "My heart is steadfast" (v. 7)
 - "Awake" (v. 8)
- Outline of the Psalm
 - Introductory Cry (vv. 1-3)
 - A Description of the Psalmist's Circumstances and a Refrain for God to be Glorified (vv. 4-6)
 - Thanksgiving for God's Protection and Deliverance with the Refrain for God to be Exalted (vv. 7-11)
- Whether or not we experience a situation like the author of this psalm, what does this psalm teach us about how to live for God's glory in this world? What does this psalm teach us about the character of God? What does it mean to appeal to God for mercy? How does God want us to respond in times of turmoil? How can we respond with faith and faithfulness when our situation appears hopeless? How can we cultivate greater trust in God?
- Why is it important to praise God? Warn against our public praise of God being greater than our personal praise of Him, and ask the group to share what praising God looks like in their time alone with Him. How can you give thanks to God "among the peoples" (v. 9)? How are you joining with God in advancing the gospel, and how can you grow in this area?
- How should this psalm inform how you pray, how you praise God, and what you pray for?

Psalms Resources

As we study Psalms, listed below are helpful resources that can assist you in further study of this book.

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- *A Commentary on Psalms* (Vol. 1 & 2) by Allen P. Ross
- *Psalms 1-72* by A.A. Anderson
- *Psalms 73-150* by A.A. Anderson
- *Commentary on the Psalms* by J.J. Stewart Perowne
- *Psalms 1-50* by Peter C. Craigie
- *Psalms 1-72* by Derek Kidner
- *Psalms 73-150* by Derek Kidner
- *Reflections on the Psalms* by C.S. Lewis
- *An Introduction to the Old Testament* by Tremper Longman III & Raymond B. Dillard
- *Old Testament Theology* by Paul R. House
- Radical (radical.net) – Listen to previous Brook Hills sermons, and search by Scripture, date, or topic.
- Ligonier Ministries (ligonier.org) – This site provides a helpful list of top commentaries for each book of the Bible.
- The Gospel Coalition (thegospelcoalition.org) – Use their Scripture index to download sermons from trusted pastors on almost every chapter in the Bible.
- Desiring God (desiringgod.org) – Listen to or read sermons by Pastor John Piper.