

**The world is noisy and disorientating.
Our hearts need beauty and truth.**

Through the medium of art and words, artist and Bible teacher Heather Holdsworth shares an illustrated journey into the Psalms. *Landscape of Hope* takes passages that have become familiar—perhaps too familiar—and reveals their soul-strengthening, heart-restoring power.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

AMAZON 

APPLE BOOKS 

BARNES & NOBLE 



GOOGLE PLAY 

CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 



WALMART 

TARGET 

Contents

	Introduction	6	The boundary of hope	52	Psalm 6:	
	Psalm 1:		Ambushed	54	A Prayer for Mercy—	
	A Picture of Faithfulness—		Hand on the gavel	56	A Penitential Lament of David	88
	A Song of Wisdom	18	Before the end of the story	58	The silent brawl	92
	Pull up a chair	24	Psalm 4:		Keeping the audio	94
	What we're made for	26	A Night Prayer of Distress—		Towels not tissues	96
	Weight watcher	28	A Lament of David	60	Bring tea . . .	98
	Outfoxing God	30	Friend or whisperer	64	. . . and cake!	100
	Psalm 2:		Heresy in fragments	66	Voldemort to Vader	102
	The Kingdom of the Son—		Unexpected request	68	Psalm 7:	
	A Royal Song	32	And they lost	70	A Meditation about Slander—	
	Stones in our shoes	36	Psalm 5:		A Lament of David	104
	Shoving castles	38	A Prayer for Direction—		Eggshell casings	108
	Sweet and sour	40	A Lament of David	72	Star Wars and olive branches	110
	Choices, choices	42	Where air is thin	76	Package deal	112
	Royal chambers	44	Night and day	78	Gutsy move	114
	Psalm 3:		Waiting for rain	80	Sleeping in stairwells	116
	Fleeing from His Son Absalom—		Dead men walking	82	Poetic justice	118
	A Lament of David	46	Volume spike	84	Power plays	120
	Shields up	50	Personal protective equipment	86		



	Psalm 8: The Glory of God and the Dignity of People	122
	African skies	126
	Soft skin	128
	Lamplight and stars	130
	Birds and beasts	132
	Thumping tables	134
	Psalm 9: Prayer of Thanks for Justice— A Lament of David	136
	“You are incredible”	140
	The startling statement	142
	Direction and drift	144
	Held	146
	Righting wrongs	148
	Grim gates	150
	Author IDs	152
	Abuse of power	154
	Skyscrapers and canyons	156
	Psalm 10: Why Are You Far Away?— A Lament of David	158
	To be frank	162

	An intervention	164
	A fair amount of swagger	166
	Where’s my sticker?	168
	Tea and scones	170
	Identity theft	172
	Rocks in the ocean	174
	Faith whispers	176

	Psalm 11: Trust in God, the Hater of Violence— A Lament of David	178
	Seeing in the dark	182
	Swords on the ground	184
	Where you’re held	186
	Church mischief	188
	Climate change	190

	Psalm 12: The Vanishing of Goodness— A Lament of David	192
	Vanishing act	196
	Losing your “brave”	198
	Hoodies and cupcakes	200
	Promises, promises!	202
	Sweating the small stuff	204

	Psalm 13: How Long?— A Lament of David	206
	Step 1: Cry out to God	210
	Step 2: Make your complaint	212
	Step 3: Make your request	214
	Step 4: Remember the past	216
	Step 5: Make a promise of praise	218

	Psalm 14: The Reckless and the Refuge— A Lament of David	220
	Return to sender	224
	From the sublime to the ridiculous	226
	Breaking bread	228
	Running scared	230
	Chain splitter!	232
	Conclusion	234
	Acknowledgments	236
	Notes	237

The waiting congregation rises to sing as the keyboard begins an earnest tune. A hymn of trust, joy, and surrender beams at us from the screen to carry us into the program.

I'm not ready. My heart is still thumping from the fist-shaking man outside, upset when I stupidly pulled into a no parking zone. The morning news was appalling . . . the brutality of that gang, and little Emma Green is still missing. And on the way into church, I bumped into someone I was meant to meet up with last week. Trust, joy, surrender? I come feeling flustered, guilty, and unwashed, with last week's grime still glued to my soul.

Come stand by my side . . . let my heart settle . . . take me slowly to God. Walk with me softly; let me find beauty and mystery. Allow me time to understand there is something more . . . there is someone far greater than us. For if you feed me a script and speed me to an altar, the ritual will float over my life and leave me untouched, removed.

Psalms 1 and 2 are the doorway to the Psalter, the welcome that ushers us into these poems. At this threshold, there is time. Time to remember who we are and what things are about. It's a meditation in the presence of our divine Friend.

Later, we'll walk through this door and settle into its rooms, and speak of struggles and failures, oppression and strife. And we'll meet the characters, themes, and questions of the Psalms that are introduced in these first eighteen verses.

But first, we stand in this liminal space.

We're told the Psalms are "a teaching manual for worship and prayer"¹ and "for spirituality, for relationship with God."² If this collection is all about prayer, you'd expect that to be where it starts. But Psalm 1 is not about speaking with God—it's the wisdom song to show us where praying begins.

We have a tendency to run for the answers, to tune in to sound-bites, find the key 1, 2, 3s. We're busy people with networks to maintain, media to update, and information to pass on in ten seconds or less.

But God is in no hurry. In Psalm 1, He shows us how we can meet; and it's the same way He met people in the early Bible stories.

When the Israelites walked from the clay ovens of Egypt, there were weeks of hiking along arid tracks. Their whip wounds and memories mixed with freedom and hope as they followed Moses, the old shepherd, once prince. They rounded a bend, and their horizon filled with Sinai, the Mountain of God.³ And then came lightning and sulfur and terror and trumpets and explosions and trembling and smoke! These days would hold God's epic revelation of a new society where virtue would trump power; where a higher law would stand over governments and kings: the Ten Commandments would change the world.

As we're gripped by the story in Exodus 19, the action pulls us in; we brace for the meeting between Moses and the Almighty and the writing on tablets of stone. But something takes place before the encounter, before Moses sets off on his climb up the hill. We read that a gift is given to the people who gathered, and that gift is the gift of time.

The slaves were not dragged to the mountain to make hasty commitments; this was no power ambush. The meeting with God would be three days away, and each person was to be dressed in clothes that were clean.

Three million tunics in the desert of Sinai sank into basins of water. Bloodstains and dirt from building sites in Rameses released their hold on the linen and poured away. And all around the encampment, floating on guy ropes between family canvases and hanging from poles, the washing blew, like a sea of white surrender in the wilderness heat.

At dawn on the third day, little ones and teenagers, mums and dads, all came washed to the mountain. They waited there. The astonishing sea-splitting, locust-growing, frog-forming, death-defying, darkness-making God gave them space to think, to wait, to take off the grime and make themselves ready.

Psalm 1 doesn't race up the hill to get the key information, doesn't give hasty solutions we can quickly apply. Yes, it holds structural beauty, symmetry, artistry, and a great deal of poetic punch; yes, it's put together with intention and its themes weave through the Psalter to end in bursts of praise. But it is far more than this. Its claims reach into us to show us the path to flourish in our humanity. Psalm 1 shows the route to deep satisfaction, and the ways that joy can be lost.

It maps the things that diminish a life, that break it down to chaff. It speaks of the places we take our bodies, the people we choose as friends. It studies the disintegration of kindness and how we use our minds. We may expect Psalm 1's advice to a life that is shrinking would be to simply reverse the choices we make: get advice from good people, hang out with the virtuous, make sure we do things that are kind.

We can be brilliant at evaluating our goodness—a few behavior modifications and we're right on track! But that is not the opposite of the life that falls apart. This poem is far more constructive than that. The counsel that's given is not to hide among others; it's to marinate in the wisdom of the Word of God. To savor it, relish it, be nourished by its beauty, and be taken into the bliss of God.

Psalm 1 is overflowing with grace; there is beauty, the righteous are blessed. The God we imagine to be irritated with our patchy prayer life or excuse for devotion sees us, not through frustration, but with generous love. We can stop studying our feet and look into His face. His welcome invites us to joy.

Undeserved kindness changes things.



There were two Liams in Miss Craven's class. One wrote extra sentences, helped those who were weaker, tidied his station, and was a delight. The other Liam was a nightmare. He was. If he made it to class on time, he ducked about in the line, pulling girls' hair or throwing rocks at their bags. Come lunchtime, there was fighting over shoes, over lies, over football, over anything. It never stopped.

With the first parent-teacher meetings scheduled for that night, Miss Craven collected the pile of misdemeanors. She had much to say to the second Liam's folks. The other Liam's workbooks were bursting with stars, and smiled up at her from a neat pile in the tray.

A weary mum, with a toddler on her hip, slumped into the chair in front of the teacher. With a deep sigh she mumbled the name of her son. Miss Craven was ready, pulling over the books, her face lighting up as she spoke of the boy. The mum's head shook in wonder. She brushed a tear from her cheek; things were at last looking up. She hugged her Liam at the gym hall door, relaying his teacher's gushing praise. Miss Craven looked up, to see her scamp of a pupil studying his mum's flushed, happy face.

The teacher reeled at her mistake, but the next parents were waiting, and she didn't have time to fix the slip. The following morning she wasn't sure what to do, when a young boy, shirt pressed, hair combed, face shining,

stood waiting at the front of the line. He'd smoothed his workbook flatter and had painstakingly finished each of his homework sentences. Stunned at the change, she smiled toward his desk. He made his way over, and looking up, whispered, "I never knowed, Miss. I never knowed you thought I was all right." Liam thrived that year. And the next, and the one after. His teacher's accidental approval changed the path of his life!



In the stunning poetry of Psalm 1, we see a human being flourishing, taken up into the life of his Creator. The joy causes him to meditate more, the meditation causes more pleasure. There is purpose and strength, growth and a future. The image pulsates with acceptance.

Psalm 1 finds us looking up, whispering for joy, "We never knowed, Master. We never knowed You thought we were all right!"

DAY AND NIGHT
HE MEDITATES
IN HIS LAW

Pull up a chair

PSALM 1

*Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.*

PSALM 1, VERSES 1 AND 2

The opening psalm in this three-thousand-year-old collection is the preface to the whole book of Psalms. It's the trailer that offers a sneak peek at the adventure without giving too much away! The psalmist has chosen the setting, the characters, and the tensions that lie between them. He introduces four concepts that will develop throughout the next 149 poems: God, the wicked, the righteous, and himself. We watch as he unrolls the blueprint for the entire Psalter, and he does it with a story of contrasts . . .

We are introduced to a pathway, shadowed by scorn, darkened by conceit. To travel it is to keep in step with those

whose lives are vain. Companions on this road are slow moving; they are comfortable standing aloof. They easily pull up chairs to jeer at those who look weak.

And we wonder: What is the result of a life that sits down with these advisers as friends?

We're invited to consider an alternative route that is startling in its contrast. The atmosphere along this way shimmers with delight. The Guide on this path speaks to us through a text that values peace over popularity, humility over pride. Its wisdom pours stability into his frame. It gives purpose to his days and, rather than scrutinizing others, lets him see their needs. His mind comes alive. He discovers deep rooted contentment—"blessing."

The conclusion to this song reverberates through the Psalter—sitting around belittling those who aren't us, that's absurd. Today, let's turn to the psalmist's source of joy, and live the life we've been gifted.

DAY AND NIGHT
HE MEDITATES
IN HIS LAW

DAY AND NIGHT
HE MEDITATES
IN HIS LAW

What we're made for

PSALM 1

*He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.*

PSALM 1, VERSE 3

There was a year I drew trees: giant redwoods, gnarled oaks, palms, magnolias. I think I drew every tree in Edinburgh's botanic garden! Even going to get groceries, I'd stop the car by an oak, pull a sketchbook from my bag and trace out the majesty. What captivated me? It was the strength of their trunks. They weren't going anywhere. Rain or shine, they stood calm. Unfazed. I was drawn to their solidity at a time when there was little.

There are a handful of trees in the biblical writings, and the description in verse 3 is one of the most beautiful. It pulsates with energy, does what it's made for; it flourishes! The solidity of it draws us in—the seasons, the river, the fruit, the green.

The strength it describes comes from a choice not to stop growing; not to spend days mocking those who pass by (verse 1). The health comes from long meditation on wisdom that works, on values that honor—we can drink deeply of that life-giving stream. It's where we will grow; he sings, and where we'll find peace.

On this riverbank, we become what we're made for.


Weight watcher



PSALM 1

*The ungodly are not so,
But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.
Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.*

PSALM 1, VERSES 4 AND 5



When we think of an apocalyptic judgment day, an image of people being blown away by the wind is not what comes to mind. We imagine trumpets and terror and fire and storm; at least that's how the movie makers portray it! But the ancient songwriter crafts a different image.

We're at the end of time and all the peoples of the earth are gathered on an endless plain, trembling, waiting, listening. They look largely the same standing side by side, still. How can they be tested, evaluated, known? How will they be distinguished, one from the other?

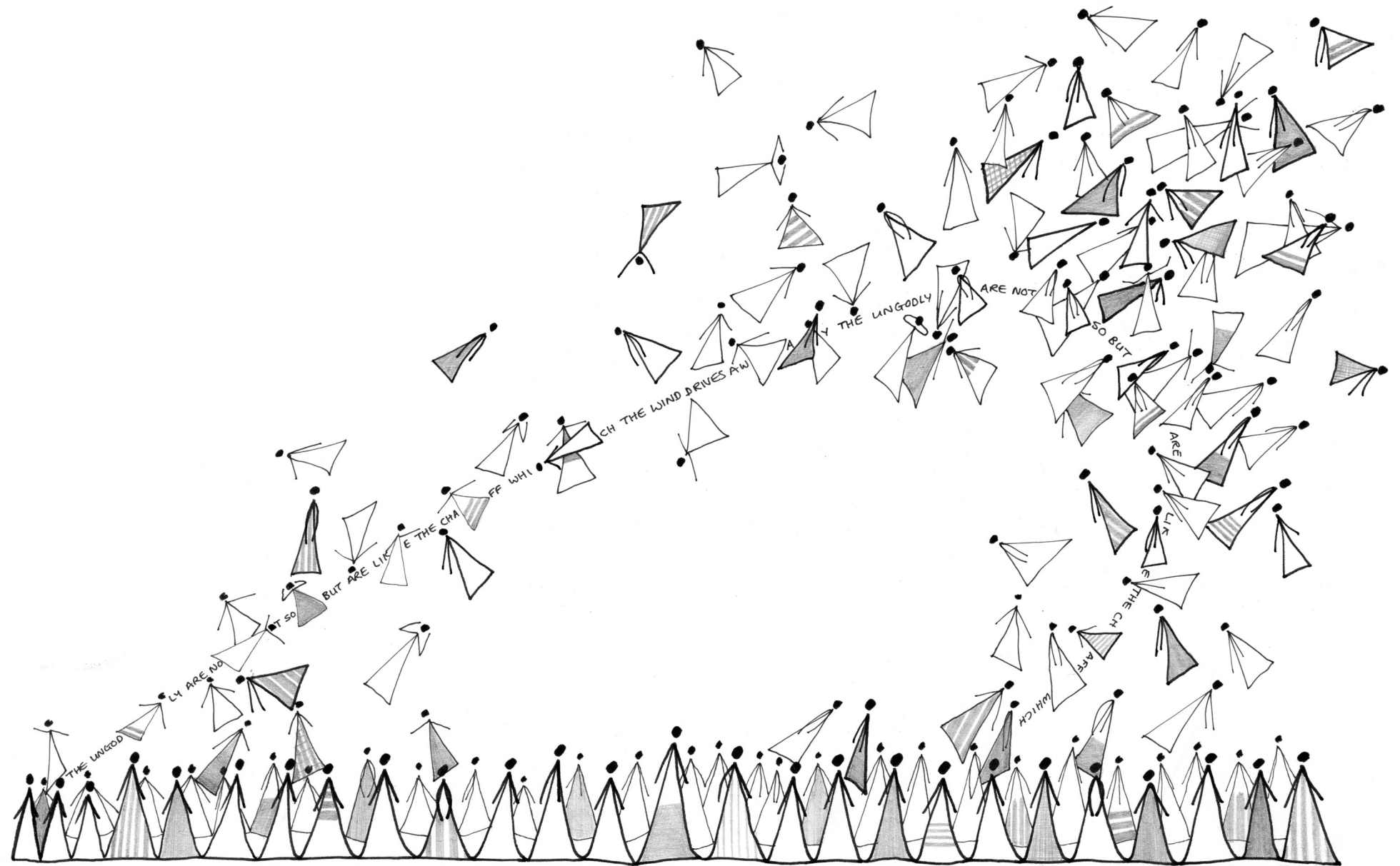
He writes that the judgment of our souls comes not by fire and trumpets, but by a sifting wind. He draws on a rural picture, a harvest.

All the days of each plant are wrapped inside their seed. The kernel holds promise and consequence. It is filled with life, with plans for a future—this is how the psalmist identifies “the righteous.” They are energized by God, giving their whole being weight.

The chaff is dry casing. It is blown from the grain because there's no substance to it. It is hollow. There are no roots to spread and no tree to grow. Nothing connects it to the future, and so, holding no life, the husks and shells disperse on the wind. Discarded.

This seems a more chilling judgment than the movie drama.





Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

Outfoxing God

PSALM 1

*For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.*

PSALM 1, VERSE 6

As the days and years pass in the life of each person, character is revealed. With each step through time, integrity and vice are exposed in the community. Here we stand, this song declares, a result of decisions made and ambitions followed. Nineteenth-century philosopher-poet Ralph Waldo Emerson captured it well: “The force of character is cumulative. All the foregone days of virtue work their health into this.”⁴

Every movement made is recorded through time, clearly seen by the eternal Onlooker. There’s no hiding or projecting of a canonized self! We are seen; we are known.

The path of the righteous, states the psalmist, is in an eternal connection, a living bond. The way of the wicked, their desires and dreams, are cut off from this union, this life.

The contrasts in this song pull us to the tree by the river (verse 3), refreshed, rooted, and fruitful. They invite us to make choices on this day, in this hour, to strengthen those roots.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

[MOODY PUBLISHERS](#)[AMAZON](#)[APPLE BOOKS](#)[BARNES & NOBLE](#)[GOOGLE PLAY](#)[CHRISTIANBOOK.COM](#)[WALMART](#)[TARGET](#)