



Course Syllabus
WYB2331H– The Psalms: Praise,
Prayer, and Instruction for Life in
Christ
Wycliffe College
Toronto School of Theology
Fall 2022

****Note there is a short reading and writing assignment due before class the first day (readings available on Quercus)**

Instructor Information

Instructor: Lissa M. **Wray Beal**, PhD, Professor of Old Testament
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Office Hours: Appointments by zoom or in-person. Please email to arrange.

Course Identification

Course Number: WYB2331H
Course Format: In-person
Course Name: The Psalms: Praise, Prayer, and Instruction for Life in Christ
Course Location: Wycliffe College
Class Times: Five Saturdays (9:00-12:00 and 1:00-3:00; September 17, October 1, 15, 29, November 12)
Prerequisites: None

Course Description

The Psalter has been the Church's treasured prayer book throughout history, and today is being reclaimed for devotional and pastoral use. This course engages the Psalter—that "anatomy of all parts of the human soul" (as Calvin testified)—through historical, literary, theological, pastoral, and trauma-studies lenses. Within this intentionally-shaped book, and as it engages the larger canon, the psalms draw our attention to God. Reviewing select psalms, we will consider how human words become God's words for humans, and the varied and creative ways psalms can be utilized in the church's life and worship, and one's private devotional life. An interactive class engaging students through lectures, art, music, small discussion groups, readings, and assignments as listed below.

Course Resources

Required Course Texts/Bibliography

The textbooks for this course are available through the U of T Bookstore's website, which offers shipping or in-store pickup for physical texts. Enter your UTORid into the Bookstore's textbook tool at

https://uoftbookstore.com/buy_textbooks.asp to get a personalized list of all the textbooks for the courses you're enrolled in.

- Denise Dombkowski Hopkins, *Journey Through the Psalms* (Rev'd and Expanded edition). Chalice Press, 2002. ISBN-10: 0827217145.
- *Net Abide Bible Journal: Psalms*. Thomas Nelson. ISBN-10: 0785237070. (This volume is in a workbook style that you will use for one of your assignments).
- A modern translation of the Old Testament is also required, e.g., the *New Revised Standard Version*, the *New International Version (2011)*, *Tanakh: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*.
- Additional readings as noted on the course outline below, and posted to Quercus.

Recommended Books and Resources

- Irene Nowell, *Pleading, Cursing, Praising: Conversing with God through the Psalms*. Liturgical Press, 2013. ISBN 9780814635179. An engaging and practical guide for honestly praying the psalms by a Benedictine scholar, spiritual guide, and teacher.
- Carmen Imes, *Praying the Psalms with Augustine and Friends*. TUMI Press/Samuel Morris Publications, 2021. ISBN 9781955424028. A daily devotional companion that works sequentially through the Psalter, pairing each psalm with a reading excerpt from interpreters through history.
- An audio version of the Bible is available for download here: <http://www.bible.is/apps>.
- <https://thebibleproject.com/> This is a crowd-funded project with great video presentations of biblical books and other topics. It will be helpful to watch the video for each biblical book before you read it and the textbook.
- For help in building your OT library see <http://bestcommentaries.com/>. Great guides to classic commentaries include two older works: Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Books for Pastor and Teachers* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) and Charles Spurgeon's *Commenting and Commentaries: A Reference Guide to Book Buying for Pastors, Students, and Christian Workers* (reprint ed.; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1988).
- Check out another great resource www.bibleodyssey.org

Course Website(s)

- Quercus: <https://q.utoronto.ca/>

This course uses Quercus for its course website. To access it, go to the UofT Quercus login page at <https://q.utoronto.ca/> and login using your UTORid and password. Once you have logged in to Quercus using your UTORid and password, look for the **My Courses** module, where you'll find the link to the website for all your Quercus-based courses. (Your course registration with ACORN gives you access to the course website in Quercus). Information for students about using Quercus can be found at: <https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10701>.

Course Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Wycliffe College

BD Level

Students successfully completing this course will be able to demonstrate the following learning outcomes.

AREA OF OUTCOME	COURSE OUTCOMES By the end of this course, students will	ACHIEVED THROUGH COURSE ELEMENT This outcome will be achieved through these course elements
IN RESPECT OF GENERAL ACADEMIC SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -critically analyze and evaluate a thesis and its presentation -demonstrate basic-degree-level writing skills -assess and debate differing viewpoints -develop primary and secondary resource research skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -assessment of Dombkowski Hopkin’s argument; final project (option 4) -preparation of initial assessment of Dombkowski Hopkins, prayer journal reflection; final project -in-class seminars on readings -final project
IN RESPECT OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTENT OF ONE OR MORE THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -identity the content, structure, canonical and historical role, and themes of the Psalter -identify, describe, and assess role of genre, metaphor, parallelism, and structure within the psalms -evaluate the presentation of God in the psalter -evaluate and illustrate key meaning and emotive aspect of the psalms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -textbook and additional readings; final project -textbook and additional readings; final project -textbook and additional readings, prayer journal -final project (option 1)
IN RESPECT OF PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -discuss the means of personal spiritual formation effected by the psalter -use and experiment with different spiritual practices for prayerful reading of the psalter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -prayer journal reflection -prayer journal reflection
IN RESPECT OF MINISTERIAL AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -evaluate the use of the psalter within the church -illustrate creative use of the psalms in preaching and teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -initial response to Dombkowski Hopkins; class discussion and seminars -final project

Evaluation

Requirements

- Attendance is mandatory and expected. Consistent lateness or absence can result in penalty up to and including course failure.
- Preparation for each class is also expected, and will enrich in-class discussion as well as your experience and that of your colleagues. See the course outline for assigned biblical text, textbook, and additional readings.
- All written assignments are due at the beginning of the class on their respective due dates or as otherwise noted, and submitted on quercus.
- Plagiarism is a serious offense. The minimum penalty for a plagiarized paper is the grade of zero. If you borrow ideas or distinctive phrases, you must acknowledge your source(s) properly.

The final grade for the course will be based on evaluations in four areas:

(1) **Participation (10%)** – This class is designed to be highly interactive. In addition to participating in the regular activity of the class, including the reading of the required texts, students are expected to contribute to in-class discussions and seminars. A rubric for participation assessment is found at the end of this syllabus.

(2) **Initial Reflection on Dombkowski Hopkins, chs. 1-2 (20%; due before class September 17;** 3-4 pages typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins). In ch. 1, the author makes a case that the church has lost its psalm's heritage and on p. 14 she notes: "In order to understand who we are as worshipping Christians, we must reclaim our psalms heritage." Examine and assess whether Dombkowski Hopkins makes her case that the church has indeed lost its psalms heritage, noting 2-3 specific arguments or examples she provides and whether you find them a true depiction of the church's engagement with the psalter or not. Be sure to preface and conclude discussion with a brief introduction and conclusion. NB – this assignment will inform discussion in the first class, and the chapters will be posted to ensure they are available before the class begins.

(3) **Discovering God through Praying and Journaling the Psalms (30%; due before class on Saturday, November 12;** 2.5-5 pages typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins). Before the due date, reflect on no fewer than 20 psalms in the *Net Abide Bible Journal*. You might set aside a 5-week period and reflect on 4 psalms a week, or space them out evenly throughout the semester, or do even more than 20 reflections! The idea is to work consistently throughout the term, rather than bunch all 20 reflections up in the last week. For each psalm, find a quiet place where you can settle and reflect without distraction. Read the psalm over slowly, prayerfully, and reflectively using the method suggested for that psalm in the *Abide Bible*. You can work sequentially through several psalms, or pick and choose psalms throughout the psalter (be sure not to pick psalms that all use the same reflective method). As you work through the 20 (or more) psalms, be aware of what you are discovering about God and how he relates to you (or you to him).

After each 4 psalms, prepare a ½ to 1-page typed reflection on the experience (so, a total over the 20 psalms of 2.5-5 pages). Comment on your experience of prayerful reflection on the 4 psalms, particularly around things such as: (1) what you have discovered about God; (2) what you have discovered about how he relates to you; (3) what you have discovered about your response to God; (4) what (if anything) has troubled you in the reflection on these psalms. As this is a personal exercise, feel free to write in first person and speak candidly. Know that what you share will be read only by me, and will be kept in strict confidence.

(4) **Final Project (40%; due by 5 pm, Monday, December 5, 2022)**. Pick *one* of the project options listed at the end of this syllabus.

Grading System - Basic Degree Students

1000, 2000 and 3000 level courses use the following numerical grading scale (see section 11.2 of the BD Handbook):

90-100 (A+)	Exceptional
85-89 (A)	Outstanding
80-84 (A-)	Excellent
77-79 (B+)	Very Good
73-76 (B)	Good
70-72 (B-)	Acceptable
0-69 (FZ)	Failure

Please see the appropriate handbook for more details about the grading scale and non-numerical grades (e.g. SDF, INC, etc).

Late work (BD). Basic Degree students are expected to hand in assignments by the date given in the course outline. Under exceptional circumstances a student may request a short extension to be negotiated with the instructor. Instructors are not obliged to accept assignments that are late. If the instructor chooses to accept an assignment, where an extension has not been requested and approved before the due date, then one percentage point per day will be deducted. The absolute deadline for the submission of assignments is the examination day scheduled for the course or the last day of exam week for the semester in which the course is taught, whichever is sooner.

Students with documented medical or compassionate difficulties or exceptional reasons (e.g., a death in the family or a serious illness) who are unable to submit their work by the end of the term are requested to consult with their instructor and request an SDF. The form is available on our website at this link <https://www.wycliffcollege.ca/sites/default/files/Basic%20Degree%20Request%20For%20Extension.pdf> or can be collected from the registrar's office. An SDF request must be submitted, with instructor approval and with an agreed deadline, to the registrar's office no later than the last day of the exam week or the last day of class in which the course is taken. The SDF, when approved, will have a mutually agreed upon deadline that does not extend beyond one year. If a student has not completed work and has not been granted an SDF, a final mark will be calculated that reckons a grade of zero for that component of work that was not submitted.

Course grades. Consistently with the policy of the University of Toronto, course grades submitted by an instructor are reviewed by a committee of the instructor's college before being posted to ACORN. Grades are not official until they are posted to ACORN. Course grades may be adjusted where they do not comply with University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy found at <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/grading-practices-policy-university-assessment-and-january-26-2012>, policies found in the TST conjoint program handbooks, or college grading policy.

Policies

Accessibility. Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>. The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist.

Plagiarism. Students submitting written material in courses are expected to provide full documentation for sources of both words and ideas in footnotes. Direct quotations should be placed within quotation marks. (If small changes are made in the quotation, they should be indicated by appropriate punctuation such as brackets and ellipses, but the quotation still counts as a direct quotation.) Failure to document borrowed material constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic, professional, and Christian ethics. An instructor who discovers evidence of student plagiarism is not permitted to deal with the situation individually but is required to report it to his or her head of college or delegate according to the TST *Basic Degree Handbook* and the Graduate program Handbooks linked from <http://www.tst.edu/academic/resources-forms/handbooks> and the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>. A student who plagiarizes in this course will be assumed to have read the document "Avoidance of plagiarism in theological writing" published by the Graham Library of Trinity and Wycliffe Colleges: <https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/library/research/theology/avoiding-plagiarism-in-theological-writing/>

Other academic offences. TST students come under the jurisdiction of the University of Toronto *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>.

Back-up copies. Please make back-up copies of essays before handing them in.

Obligation to check email. At times, the course instructor may decide to send out important course information by email. To that end, all students in conjoint programs are required to have a valid utoronto email address. Students must have set up their utoronto email address which is entered in the ACORN system. Information is available at www.utorid.utoronto.ca. The course instructor will not be able to help you with this. 416-978-HELP and the Help Desk at the Information Commons can answer questions you may have about your UTORid and password. Students should check utoronto email regularly for messages about the course. **Forwarding** your utoronto.ca email to a Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo or other type of email account is not advisable. In some cases, messages from utoronto.ca addresses sent to Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo accounts are filtered as junk mail, which means that emails from your course instructor may end up in your spam or junk mail folder. Students in non-conjoint programs should contact the Registrar of their college of registration.

Email communication with the course instructor. The instructor aims to respond to email communications from students in a timely manner. *All email communications from students in conjoint programs must be sent from a utoronto email address.* Email communications from other email addresses are not secure, and also the instructor cannot readily identify them as being legitimate emails from students. The instructor is not obliged to respond to email from non-utoronto addresses for students in conjoint programs. Students in non-conjoint programs should only use the email address they have provided to their college of registration.

Course Schedule

Week 1

Sept 17

Before class, please spend a few minutes viewing the following introduction to the Psalms: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/psalms/>

Topics today: Course introduction; Psalms as Christian Scripture; Who's Speaking?; "Say it again, and draw me a picture!"

Seminar on Dombkowski Hopkins, chs. 1-2

Reading: Dombkowski Hopkins, chs. 1-2; Psalms 1-2

Due: Initial Assessment of Dombkowski Hopkins statement

Week 2

Oct 1

Topics today: Which Psalter?; Reading genres; Misplaced titles and *leDavid*; the Shape of the Psalter; Wisdom and History – Praying to be Wise, Praying the Past

Reading: Dombkowski Hopkins, chs. 3-4; Psalms 78, 105, 106

Week 3

Oct 15

Topics today: God in the Psalter: The Lord is King! Praise from Humans and All Creation

Reading: Dombkowski Hopkins, ch. 7; Come prepared to discuss the following articles: Fretheim, "Nature's Praise of God"; Van Leeuwen, "Why do the trees of the Forest Sing a New Song?"; Schifferdecker, "'And also many animals': Biblical Resources for Preaching About Creation"; Psalms 93, 95-99, 148

Week 4

Oct 29

Topics today: Lament: When Life (and God) Hurts; Imprecation: "Curse Them, Lord!"

Reading: Dombkowski Hopkins, chs. 5-6; Come prepared to discuss the value of the psalms of lament and imprecation, informed by the textbook and the following readings: Ellington, "Why Should We Cry Out?"; Lewis, "The Cursings"; Nowell, "Dealing with our Enemies"; Wray Beal, "Biblically Sanctioned Hate Speech?" at <https://catechesia.com/2020/08/12/biblically-sanctioned-hate-speech-the-psalms-we-avoid/>; Psalms 6, 35, 58, 88, 109,

Week 5

Nov 12

Topics today: Messiah in the Psalter; Reading Psalms as Men and Women; The Costly Loss of Praise

Reading: Mays, "Old Testament Psalm, Cry of Jesus, and Christian Prayer"; Firth, "Preaching Praise Poetry"; Psalms 16, 22, 110

Due: Prayer Journal

Monday, December 5 **Final Project Due by 5 pm today.**

Participation Rubric

CLASS PARTICIPATION Guide and Rubric	5 - Excellent Participation	4 - Good Participation	3 - Average Participation	2 - Below Average Participation	1 - Unacceptable Participation
Class discussion/ Peer interaction/ Pair work	Consistently and actively supports, engages, listens and responds to peers. Takes initiative in interaction. Participates in a meaningful way in class discussions. Stays on task.	Makes a real effort to interact with peers daily but does not take initiative. Some active participation in class discussions. At times deviates from task.	Some effort to interact with peers but does not take initiative. Minimal participation in class discussions. Sometimes deviates from task.	Limited interaction with peers and rarely participates in class discussions and/or does not stay on task.	Virtually no interaction with peers and does not participate in class discussions.
Preparation	Arrives fully prepared at every class session.	Arrives mostly, if not fully, prepared.	Arrives generally prepared.	Preparation is inconsistent.	Rarely or never prepared.
Contributes in a meaningful way	Comments often advance the level and depth of classroom <u>dialogue</u> ; elicits the contributions of others.	Relevant comments are based on assigned material; elicits the contributions of others.	When prepared, (which is most of the time) relevant comments are based on assignments.	When prepared, some relevant comments are based on assignments, some comments not relevant and deviate from assignments.	Class contributions lack relevance or almost never comments.
Attention	Consistently attends to instruction and presentations; does not disrupt others ability to listen. Always pays attention.	Mostly attends to instruction and presentations and does not disrupt others; does not do other work during instruction and pays attention well.	Sometimes attends to instruction and does not disrupt others; does not do other work during instruction and/or pays attention some of the time.	Sometimes disruptive of others during instruction; sometimes does other work during instruction and/or lacks attention sometimes.	Frequently disruptive during instruction and/or does other work during instruction; rarely pays attention.

You may positively affect your participation grade by:

1. Attending class and actively participating in a meaningful way.
2. Preparing for each class.
3. Making effective comments that raise overall level of discussion. (Comments that are off task and disruptive will negatively affect your grade).
4. Assisting and helping other classmates during active class work and staying on task.

5. Asking thoughtful questions that will enhance discussion and engage peers.
6. Asking questions when you don't understand or would like a second explanation. Often there are others that will benefit as well.
7. Listening carefully to, supporting, and engaging your peers in discussion. This will essentially improve other's learning experience and your own.
8. Taking care never to make negative, offensive, and/or disrespectful comments during discussion.
9. Being respectful and kind towards every person in the class.

(With permission for use from Professor Catherine Rust-Akinbolaji, Providence University College)

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Final Project Options

Pick **ONE** of the following options for your Final Project:

1. Present a psalm **through an original work of artistic visual media** (this must be created by you and could be media such as painting, sculpture, textile work, videography, photo-stills, etc). Choose a psalm and research its genre, images, parallelism, structure, location within the Psalter and the canon, and the meaning discerned through these considerations. Produce an artistic work using the media of your choice that clearly represents a core meaning, concept, or emotion of the psalm. In addition, prepare a 5- page typed, double-spaced paper that engages your research and shows how various psalm elements noted above support that core meaning, concept, or emotion; in an additional page or two, comment on elements of the artistic work by which these elements are communicated. **Provide a bibliography** of your research in Turabian style (at least 8-10 master's-level sources). This assignment's assessment is based on (1) how well the written portion details how the psalm points to the core meaning, concept, or emotion, and (2) the artistic work's ability to capture and communicate the core meaning, concept, or emotion detailed in your written work. (You will need to provide the original artistic work for assessment. This may require you to mail or courier it to arrive by the due date. Should you wish the item returned, this can be arranged with your professor and will be at your own cost. Should you prepare something with videography or sound, consult with me as to the best method of delivery).
2. Prepare a full 60-minute lesson plan with a teen or adult audience in mind (briefly describe your audience at the beginning of the plan). Your lesson should demonstrate teaching that engages the genre, literary techniques, canonical placement, and historical background of a particular psalm and how these contribute to an understanding of the psalm's meaning. For this, you must engage in research and **provide a bibliography in Turabian style** (at least 8-10 master's-level sources). Your lesson plan should include a brief statement of the main meaning of the psalm, your pedagogical goals, any devotional notes, opening exercises, lesson points and subpoints, examples of group activities, and closing exercises/take aways. This assignment's assessment will be based on two things: (1) how clearly and deeply you show engagement with the selected psalm and your research; and (2) how the lesson's clarity and structure work toward the plan's pedagogical goals, and the extent and clarity of the lesson plan.
3. Prepare an annotated, 60-minute service outline for either a church service of lament, or a church service of celebration. Do so with a particular church in mind, and at the top briefly describe the size and make-up of the gathering. Your service outline must include two psalms whose genre and content are appropriate to the type of service. Your outline must include all elements you include such as openings, hymns or choruses, readings (scripture or otherwise), sermon placement, Lord's Table/Eucharist, etc. List each item in a box in the left-hand column of a table. In the corresponding box in the right-hand column of the table, provide annotations for each item that include the anticipated time for each item, *why* you have selected this particular item, *why* you have placed it at this particular point in the service, and *what* you hope to achieve through each service element. In separate addenda include the text of the hymns/choruses you use, and a sermon outline based on one of the psalms read in the service. **Provide a bibliography in Turabian style** of at least 8-10 master's-level resources that contribute to your understanding of the psalm in preparation for preparing the sermon outline. This assignment's assessment will be based on (1) how well each service element works together to address the type of service, (2) evidence of thoughtfulness in your sermon outline and how it communicates the main message of the selected psalm, and (3) the thoughtfulness and theological acumen of the annotation observations.

4. Prepare an exegetical paper (10-12 pages excluding title page, contents page, and bibliography, typed in 12-point font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins) on one psalm (you are best to choose a shorter, rather than longer psalm so as to be able to provide adequate exegetical engagement). Use at least 8-10 master's level resources and **provide a bibliography in Turabian style**. Your initial engagement should work primarily with the psalm and investigate its various elements: its genre, placement in psalter, structure, parallelism, metaphors, and any key words (word studies are particularly for those with Hebrew skills). After completing your primary engagement with the psalm and drawing conclusions as to its message and how it communicates that through the various elements examined, you should then engage your secondary resources for further insights. When writing your paper, you will need to selectively discuss those elements of your investigation that clearly demonstrate how they contribute to the psalm's message, and this discussion should be in support of your stated thesis of that message. Brief consideration of the psalm's use in the church and its relevance for today can conclude the paper.

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