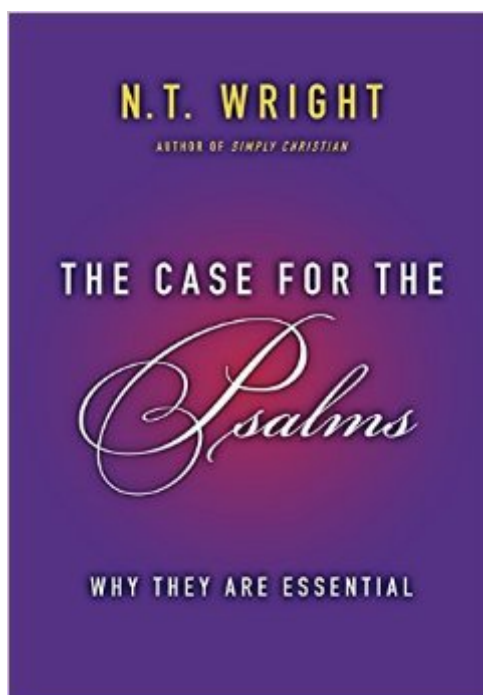


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The Case For The Psalms: Why They Are Essential



Synopsis

Widely regarded as the modern C. S. Lewis, N. T. Wright, one of the world's most trusted and popular Bible scholars and the bestselling author of *Simply Christian* and *Surprised by Hope*, presents a manifesto urging Christians to live and pray the Bible's Psalms in *The Case for the Psalms*. Wright seeks to reclaim the power of the Psalms, which were once at the core of prayer life. He argues that, by praying and living the Psalms, we enter into a worldview, a way of communing with God and knowing him more intimately, and receive a map by which we understand the contours and direction of our lives. For this reason, all Christians need to read, pray, sing, and live the Psalms. By providing the historical, literary, and spiritual contexts for reading these hymns from ancient Israel's songbook, *The Case for the Psalms* provides the tools for incorporating these divine poems into our sacred practices and into our spirituality itself.

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Customer Reviews

Five years ago, if you had asked me what my least favorite part of the bible is, I would have probably said the Psalms. I might have said the lists genealogies or Numbers, but most likely I would have said Psalms. But *The Case for the Psalms* is the third book on the Psalms I have read this year and I have moving toward a greater appreciation of the role of the Psalms, not only as illustrations of the range of biblical expression but as important centers for Christian worship and theology. I grew up low church, I remain low church, but I appreciate more all the time the liturgical parts of the Christian church and the role of the Book of Common Prayer and various other

expressions of historic worship. Not because I have an emotional attachment to them, but because I see how the role of liturgy shapes the life of the Christian. I have not completely bought into Jamie Smith's liturgical project, but I continue to struggle with how to think about transforming the overtly evangelistic worship of my megachurch to include more historic elements of Christian liturgical worship. (Not that I am a decision maker or in anyway involved in worship planning at my church.) And this where NT Wright comes in again. As a consistent voice calling for the church to maintain the importance of scripture, Wright has helped me see that a church that is not shaped by scripture is not doing the work of the church. No Evangelical churches are rejecting scripture, but there are many that while verbally upholding the importance of scripture, do not actually spend much time reading it publicly or using it as part of worship. I am all for modern worship music. I fully admit that modern worship music does not have the full theological richness of some historic hymns.

In his new, much anticipated book, *The Case for the Psalms: Why They are Essential*, Bishop N.T. Wright seeks to restore the Church's original hymnbook back to its rightful place in the life and worship of the local church. While Wright is arguing for the Psalms to have a major place in the worship of the church, he is not saying that they are the only worship songs we should have. He says, "By all means write new songs. Each generation must do that. But to neglect the church's original hymnbook is, to put it bluntly, crazy" (5). In one of my favorite quotes of the book, Wright goes on to say: "The Psalms offer us a way of joining in a chorus of praise and prayer that has been going on for millennia and across all cultures. Not to try to inhabit them, while continuing to invent non-psalmic 'worship' based on our own feelings of the moment, risks being like a spoiled child who, taken to the summit of Table Mountain with the city and the ocean spread out before him, refuses to gaze at the view because he is playing with his Game Boy" (6). Wright's overarching thesis in this book is that the Psalms have, by and large, been neglected both in the private devotion of the Christian and in the corporate gathering of the church. This book, he says, is his personal plea to attempt to reverse those trends. After introducing his thesis, Wright lays out the remaining chapters by showing what exactly the Psalms accomplish and why we should care about them. He says, "The Psalms invite their singers, as they always have, to live at the crossroads of time, space, and matter. This book explores what happens at this crossing point " or rather, these crossing points" (20).

Nt Wright has a unique ability to write on many levels. Wright is able to write to the academic and the lay person alike. Wright's specialty is within the New Testament, so I was curious as to how

he would approach a subject like the Psalms. Even though the book has six chapters, I believe it can be divided into three parts: a case for the use of the Psalms in the church and in one's daily life, the purpose of the psalms, and Wright's personal experience with the Psalms. Wright begins and ends the book in similar fashion explaining how if one were to ask him to think about how the Psalms or which Psalm has most deeply impacted his life is like asking him about a time when he was breathing. A person cannot recall a particular time he was breathing, but he is certain that he is always doing so. Wright then explains how he can recall particular Psalms which played an important role in his life. The most significant thing which I took away from the book was Wright's explanation of how the Psalms bring the church into God's space and God's time. I am going to spend the rest of my review explaining this crucial concept and what exactly it means. To understand this idea, it is helpful to begin by looking at Moses at Mount Sinai. When Moses went up to the mountain, God spoke the Law to him. At this event we see God's space invading man's space. One may think of Mount Sinai as God's universe or God's kingdom invading our kingdom. For a brief period of time the two universes intersect. This may seem more like a Fringe event, than what a person is used to when reading scripture, but Wright makes a good case for such a reading. When we pray "thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven" • this is the very thing in which we are praying for.

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