



POWERFUL SELF-TALK

from
the **PSALMS**



40 DAYS TO A BIBLICAL MINDSET



  **JON GAUGER**

FOREWORD BY JERRY B. JENKINS

"In a world full of noise, *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms* helps you tune your inner voice to truth. A wise and winsome companion for anyone longing to hear—and speak—God's words over their life."

—Les Parrott, PhD, #1 *New York Times*
bestselling author of *Love Like That*

"I love this book for its practicality, its application to my heart, and its recognition that we must talk to ourselves in a better way. We must learn from David how to talk to ourselves about our need to stay focused on the Lord. When I began reading *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms*, I found myself reading it all in one sitting because one chapter made me anticipate and thirst for the next. Now I shall go through it more thoughtfully each day, letting each chapter sink into my soul.

Let me give you a suggestion: Get several copies of this book and give it as a gift to those who are spiritually weary, those who are seeking help on how to focus on the Lord, and those who are not yet Christians but are open to the idea of self-talk and prayer. Because of its relevance to our hearts, this is a book for us all."

—Erwin W. Lutzer, pastor emeritus, Moody Church Chicago

"My friend Jon Gauger has given us a great guide to transitioning from the self-talk that often compounds our sense of distress to the God-talk that brings courage, confidence, and peace amid the challenges of life! The Psalms have always been my go-to when I needed a word from God in the face of difficulty. Yet sometimes I wonder where to go given the wide expanse of the book. Thankfully, Jon has offered us a guide, with relevant insights, into the wisdom of the Psalms. *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms* provides us with a way to talk ourselves into His talk. Thanks, Jon. We needed this!"

—Joe Stowell, global ambassador and special assistant
to the president at Moody Bible Institute

"Too often that voice in your head, the one that sounds like you, is condemning and belittling. Jon Gauger wants us to know that self-talk from the Psalms is how we replace condemnation with comfort, loathing with loving, and pain with peace. Join him on the journey of discovering how to replace that troublesome self-talk with God's perfect voice."

—Janet Parshall, nationally syndicated host/author

“When it comes to talking to myself, I can’t stop it—and neither can you! But, as Jon teaches, we can change it. Jon does a remarkable job of drawing out Psalms we can use as tools to fix our broken self-talk. One I really loved was ‘sleep talk.’ As an almost Olympic-level insomniac, I was so blessed by Jon’s teaching on Psalm 4. It has been incredibly helpful, and that’s just one example of the many practical truths you’ll find in this book. So put your destructive self-talk on notice! It’s about to be out of your thoughts, vocabulary, and life for good! And I mean...for good.”

—**Jennifer Rothschild**, author of 20 books and Bible studies, including *Lessons I Learned in the Dark* and *Heaven: When Faith Becomes Sight*

“In *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms*, Jon Gauger, my good friend and radio cohost, shares bite-sized bits of wisdom gleaned from the book of Psalms to help someone respond biblically to life’s problems and pressures. This is a book you need to read slowly and carefully—perhaps a chapter a day—to give yourself time to put each truth into practice. (Jon provides very practical steps for doing so at the end of each chapter.) Follow his wise advice, and you’ll start to see your thoughts and actions parallel those of King David, who was a man after God’s own heart!”

—**Dr. Charles Dyer**, Professor-at-Large of Bible and host of *The Land and the Book* radio program, Moody Bible Institute

“I started recommending Jon Gauger’s new book to my family and friends after reading just two chapters. The reason it made such an impact on me is because I had the same struggle Jon did with negative self-talk. But Jon dove headfirst into the Scriptures and learned valuable lessons from King David himself. Who doesn’t battle with a parade of negative thoughts that often run through our mind? The enemy launches these mind-missiles nonstop at us, and they can dominate our thoughts if we don’t learn how to overcome them. *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms* is a life-preserver for your mind and soul. I highly recommend it!”

—**Tom Doyle**, author of *Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?* and CEO and cofounder of Uncharted Ministries

“What might happen at the soul level if you were to change the negative dialog you have with your heart? Jon Gauger has found transforming truth straight from the ancient poetry of the Bible. Change the script, and your life will change for the better.”

—**Chris Fabry**, author and host of *Chris Fabry Live* on Moody Radio

“You will find *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms* to be healing for the heart and salve for the soul. Jon Gauger writes fluidly—often humorously—and honestly about real issues we would rather avoid, such as turning from evil or getting back to kneeling when we pray. Wherever you are as a Christian, *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms* will stimulate your spiritual journey.”

—**Dr. Woodrow Kroll**, president and senior Bible teacher (retired), Back to the Bible International

“Some books are meant to be read; this book is meant to be lived. We all engage in self-talk, so why not fill it with the liberating truth of God’s Word? Jon brilliantly captures this in *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms*. Whether overcoming condemnation or embracing humility under God’s mighty hand, this book will realign your words and life with God’s powerful truth. I’ve witnessed how Jon’s passion for the Bible has transformed him, and I know it can do the same for you. Embrace this journey, and watch your own life be transformed!”

—**Karl Clauson**, host of nationally syndicated *Karl and Crew* on Moody radio affiliates, pastor, and author

“Reading Jon Gauger is never a slog. It’s a delight to breeze through his engaging insights. I nod my head, pause at breakthrough moments, and marvel at how he somehow knows exactly what I’m thinking. Maybe it’s because, as a longtime Moody Radio listener, I hear Jon’s voice as I read. Which works well with this book, because the Psalms are meant to be spoken, sung, and shared aloud. So, thanks, Jon. The Psalms are suddenly a fresh source of joy and encouragement for me. And, honestly, your voice in my head is not as painful as it sounds.”

—**Jay Payleitner**, national speaker and bestselling author of *52 Things Kids Need from a Dad*, *A Grand Way to Live*, and *What If God Wrote Your Bucket List?*

“It’s time to think about what you are thinking about! Instead of worrying about the news or comparing yourself to others on social media, you can choose to think about what the Bible says about your life. Your perspective will change for the better as you examine the Psalms more closely through this book!”

—**Arlene Pellicane**, author of *Parents Rising* and host of the *Happy Home* podcast

“The Psalms have ministered to me for more than 40 years. While some may not love poetry, a careful, lingering study of the Psalms is a life-changing discipline. In *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms*, Jon guides you to dwell in the structure, meaning, and application of these rich song-hymns laden with emotion, theology, and history. I am grateful Jon has worked diligently to help us get our nose in the Book.”

—**Michael Easley**, pastor, former president Moody Bible Institute

“If we want to know the will of God, it is found in the Word of God. It didn’t take long for me to meet myself in Jon’s book. The Psalms are the perfect balm needed to penetrate the pitfalls and problems in life. *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms* is so personal it feels as though it was written just for me.”

—**Tammy Whitehurst**, motivational speaker and writer

“Delightful, practical, personal, and a good way to enjoying the Psalms! Jon suggests a healthy approach to self-image and controlling our thoughts. In keeping with biblical emphasis, he helps us to govern our thought life. The illustrations he uses are instructive in encouraging us to keep our thoughts aligned with the truth of the Bible throughout the day.”

—**Dr. C. Fred Dickason**, professor emeritus
of theology, Moody Bible Institute

“Jon Gauger’s *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms* is touching and real. Between his blend of personal experiences and biblical and practical examples, I had a hard time putting it down! Reading Jon’s book felt like a close friend guiding me through real-life problems and their biblical solutions.”

—**Joslynn Jaeger**, YA novelist

“*Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms* previews the path I have seen Jon and his precious wife walk along the way. Through the years, his biblical insights and encouragement have been truly refreshing to me as our friendship has grown. This resource contains crucial life lessons that will prove to be both enjoyable and challenging.”

—**David C. Gibbs, Jr.**, attorney-at-law

**POWERFUL
SELF-TALK**
from the **PSALMS**

JON GAUGER



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
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To our children and their godly spouses:

Lynnette and her husband, Josh

Tim and his wife, Bethany

• • •

*Diana and I are grateful for you, proud
of you, and love you beyond words.*

Keep following after Christ—you and your children.

Earth is fading. Heaven approaches. Keep the faith!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A simple thank-you is too small for the investment of my wife, Diana, who tweaked the first draft of every chapter—and kindly, graciously, and selflessly lived with me through the whole process. You are amazing. (I think you're “somethen elff!”).

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- Dr. Michael Easley, whose excellent teaching planted a love for the Psalms deep in my soul.
- Godly mentors like Dr. Charlie Dyer, Dr. Bob Moeller, Pastor Jim Lennon, Russ Caforio, and Dr. Fred Dickason.
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It's an honor to team up with Harvest House Publishers again, and I will always be indebted to Kim Moore, who first opened the door for me here. Her careful and kind expertise and oversight have guided this project with the utmost class and professionalism.

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FOREWORD

JERRY JENKINS

Could it be a coincidence that for several days I'd been reminded of two of my favorite verses from the Bible before I was privileged to write a foreword to Jon Gauger's latest book?

I think not.

For decades I've believed that Psalm 91:1-2 (NKJV) comprise some of the most beautiful sentences ever translated into English.

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress;
My God, in Him I will trust."

And yes, I often use those sentiments as self-talk. What could be more thrilling, more self-assuring, more comforting than dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, and being able to say of the Lord that He is my refuge and my fortress?

Imagine my delight, then, in discovering that longtime friend Jon Gauger has made *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms* his most recent subject. I love the tack he takes that clarifies his view of himself—not a theologian, not a scholar (but I can tell you he's a pretty smart

guy), not even a master of the very effort he espouses here. Rather, he's a regular guy, a fellow struggler in the self-talk world.

But he's learned a lot—much of it the hard way. And that's what we get here. Lots of everyday, real-people stories, examples of folks we can identify with and learn from. Jon has never backed away from hard truth, and neither has he ever apologized for wanting to be more like Christ. Helping us get there too is his clear aim here.

Enjoy the journey. I sure have.

Jerry B. Jenkins

Novelist and biographer

INTRODUCTION

We talk to ourselves.

All day, every day. And a lot of those messages are self-condemning. We say things like:

- Why haven't you made more progress overcoming that habit?
- How could you think this ministry is something you could actually do?
- God might answer this colossal need for others—but don't expect it to happen for you.
- You're not smart enough, good-looking enough, or talented enough.
- What kind of a Bible study leader would say something that hurtful?
- Obviously, you're not praying right or praying enough, or this problem would go away.
- Face it. You'll always struggle with this issue.

Do any of those statements sound familiar? Of course! But how can we hope for damage control when *we* are the ones doing the

damage? We can't shut off our minds. Nor can we shut down the reality that we talk to ourselves anymore than we can keep our eyes from blinking, our lungs from breathing, or our heart from beating.

What we need is a model for better self-talk. That's exactly what David offers us. *Powerful Self-Talk from the Psalms* is a practical guide for learning biblical self-talk. I know it works (because I need it the most), and I've experienced what can happen when I talk like David.

Let me tell you a quick story. On Monday I flew from Chicago to Colorado Springs to record an important interview. Naturally, I took along my trusty iPad. During the nearly three-hour flight, I did some freelance writing, worked on a Sunday school lesson, and wrote a blog—all on my beloved device.

Upon landing, I grabbed my gear, exited the plane, and plopped my backpack on a chair to get reorganized. Only upon arriving at the interview location a couple of hours later did I realize what I'd left behind at the airport gate. You've already guessed it—my iPad.

My response? I did what ordinary people do at moments like this: I beat myself up for stupid irresponsibility. How could I have been so careless, so foolish? A net of anxiety—laced with thorny bramble—fell all over my soul, and I was bleeding emotionally.

For me, the iPad is much more than a tablet to surf the web, check email, or play a game. I practically live on it. It's my laptop. I've written entire books on it. And it contained articles, blogs, sermons, and book chapters (still unfinished) that were about to be lost forever. The thought of losing all that investment made me nauseous.

The Grand-Champion Worrywart in me started to curl up in a ball and moan. Just 24 hours previously—Sunday morning—I'd preached a sermon based on Psalm 25:15. It says this: "My eyes are continually toward the LORD, for He will rescue my feet from the net."

A light flashed in my soul, and I realized this was a moment when I needed to talk like David. Know what I did? I prayed with a friend,

quoting that verse. Next, we called the airport, filled out an online form, and waited.

All afternoon, I fought off repeated blasts of anxiety with the same indestructible weapon—the Word of God. Over and over, I said, “My eyes are continually toward the LORD, for He will rescue my feet from the net.” While I still felt a measure of concern (and guilt), this verse brought sanity and structure to a thought life under siege.

At dinner that evening, my phone rang. Again, you’ve already guessed who was on the line—the airport. Unthinkably, some honest soul had turned in my iPad, and I could pick it up at the airline baggage counter immediately. I wasted no time in reclaiming it.

Now, I’m not suggesting that God will always step in and bail us out when we do foolish things. but I am saying His Word can enable us to walk through trouble in a God-honoring way without bashing ourselves in the process. Even if God had chosen not to reunite me with that iPad, I would be able to look back at the day and know that instead of being immobilized by a net of anxiety, I had chosen to turn my eyes toward the Lord continually.

I’m sure you could tell me a few stories from your journey. No doubt you’ve heard of the blame game, but many of us play the *shame* game. We’ve become unintentional champions at bashing our souls. But aren’t you tired of trashing yourself? Don’t you long for a better way to speak to your soul? Then learn powerful self-talk from the book of Psalms.

David had real problems.

We have real problems.

The difference is David learned to speak to himself in ways that led to better thinking, better choices, and better living. So stop talking like you. Talk instead like David.

You’ll be amazed at how easy and natural it becomes to borrow his thoughts, attitudes, and very words to begin making an immediate difference in your life.

This is not a lightweight book. It's a tool kit for fixing what must not remain broken. When it comes to self-talk, we can't stop it. But we *can* fix it. And that's what this book is all about.

To be clear, this is not another commentary on the book of Psalms. Nor is it primarily a book of theology. These chapters will connect you with only a handful of the 150 psalms that make up the complete collection in the Bible. My aim was to sift through *some* of David's self-talk and apply it to modern life—yours and mine.

For me, this is much more than a book. It's become a way of life. I have committed myself for the long term to continue down this road of learning to talk like David. Speaking Scripture to my own doubts and negative thoughts is the only way I've found to correct my self-talk. I don't see this as merely helpful or important. I think this idea is urgent.

My goal for you? I want you to grab hold of these verses and prove to yourself that God's Word has the power to calm your fears, build your hope, and grow your faith. I want you to walk away from this experience utterly amazed at the very personal impact of God's Word.

This book will equip you with tools to shape biblical self-talk. And that impact will begin for you starting with the very first chapter. You cannot quote Scripture without benefiting from Scripture.

To find your self-talk in the psalms is to talk biblically. To talk biblically is to honor God. To honor God is to be blessed by God—in this life and the life to come.

Enough of our negative self-talk. Let's replace it—*all* of it—with powerful self-talk from the psalms. Because it's time to rethink your "think" and reclaim your brain.



SLEEP SAFE, LIVE SAFE

*In peace I will both lie down and sleep,
for You alone, LORD, have me dwell in safety.*

PSALM 4:8

Count on it. Anyone who claims they sleep like a baby definitely does not have one. Our firstborn was almost an only child because she virtually refused to sleep. Now, with four children of her own, she remains an incredibly light sleeper.

But, boy, do we need our sleep! Without it, we become like tall two-year-olds, right? If only sleep came (and stayed) easily.

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute estimates that between 50 and 70 million Americans have ongoing sleep disorders.¹

In America, drowsy driving causes more than 6,000 fatal car crashes annually. Who knew that insufficient sleep has an estimated economic impact of more than \$411 billion annually in the United States?²

The problem is so widespread that 56 percent of adults have consumed at least one sleep aid in the past month.³

And it's hardly a once-in-a-while problem. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 8 percent of adults say they took medication to help them sleep at least four times in the past week.⁴

Maybe you feel like the guy who reluctantly woke up, and the first mumbled words out of his mouth were, “I already want to take a nap.” But odds are, your biggest challenge is not getting up—it’s getting to sleep.

Of course, there are as many reasons for sleepless nights as there are pills to make us drowsy:

- Too much caffeine...not enough exercise.
- Too much screen time...not enough quiet time.
- We eat too often...we eat too much...we eat too late.

But I’m not here to judge you, lecture you, or even educate you. I’m here to encourage you.

If any of the usual sleep-depriving suspects are on your list, you probably already know what to do. But what about the rest of us—the most of us—who have already tried to root out the usual suspects? What if we have cut back on the caffeine, turned down the noise, and unplugged from our screens after supper, but we still struggle with sleep?

Medical issues are undoubtedly real, and there’s no reason not to go to a doctor to rule these out. But let’s say you’ve done that and sleep is still elusive. Is it possible there’s a critical component we lack? What is the one vital quality we absolutely must have for quality sleep?

That one essential quality is peace. King David put his finger on it in a fascinating self-talk secret we find in Psalm 4:8. David says, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, LORD, have me dwell in safety.”

Because this sleep problem of ours is so huge, and because so much is packed into this one verse, what do you say we take an unhurried stroll through what I like to call David’s “Sanctified Sleep Study.” In this extraordinary verse, David lets us in on his nighttime ritual before he pillows his head. It’s not just self-talk—it’s sleep talk.

Check out his first phrase, “In peace.” It’s the backbone on which the rest of the verse hangs. We’re kidding ourselves if we think we’re going to enjoy quality sleep without real peace in our heart. So where do we get it? Jesus.

Jesus said the peace He offers is “not as the world gives” (John 14:27). In other words, it’s not fake. Every year, the cash amount of counterfeit goods sold around the globe is between \$1.7 trillion and \$4.5 trillion, making knockoff products the world’s tenth-largest economy.⁵

There’s something exquisite about the brand of peace the Prince of Peace offers. This is no knockoff.

And then Jesus adds, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, nor fearful.” Bear in mind, this peace was in effect even as Jesus prepared Himself to be whipped, beaten, and crucified. Whatever it is you’re going through, it’s not as bad as that. You can have peace right in the middle of your unresolved chapter.

Next, David says, “In peace, I will both lie down and sleep.” Don’t you love the fact that he separates the two? It’s so easy to lie down—and sometimes so hard to sleep! But David says the peace given by the Prince of Peace is sufficiently rest inducing for both. In other words, His peace is enough. Enough for you. Enough to bring sleep to your sleepless nights.

As we continue with David’s sleep study, note the following phrase, “For You alone, LORD, have me dwell in safety.” Note that we don’t have occasional visits with safety. We *live* there. In Christ, and because of Christ, we “dwell in safety.” Safety is our street address.

Have you ever noticed that your address says a lot about you? Right or wrong, people make assumptions about you based on where you live. With Jesus, you’re on the safe side of the tracks. You live in a house called *Peace* on a street called *Peace* in a town called *Peace* ruled by the *Prince of Peace*.

One catch, though. David reminds himself (and us) that all this

good stuff comes from one Source, one Person—the Lord. He says, “For You alone, LORD...”

HOW TO MAKE THIS SELF-TALK YOURS

We’re not going to find this peace in conversations with our friends and loved ones. We’re not going to find this peace in the latest Christian conference or a bestselling devotional. No, the verse spells it out: “For You alone, LORD, have me dwell in safety.”

In Christ—and only in Christ—you have all the peace you need for all the sleep you need. Doesn’t that sound awesome? Say it to yourself out loud right now: “In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, LORD, have me dwell in safety.”

Next time sleep refuses to come, sing this lullaby. Just remember that it’s more than a song. It’s the essence of sleep.

Why not trade in your old negative self-talk for something biblical? Why not enjoy the rest God has promised? It’s time to start sleeping like a baby.



“ SAY IT ”

*“In peace I will both lie down and sleep,
for You alone, LORD, have me dwell in safety.”*

PSALM 4:8

“ PRAY IT ”

Prince of Peace—

I praise You that in You I am safe—and can sleep in complete confidence. I am...

- safe in my unsolved problems
- safe in my imperfect family
- safe in my health issues
- safe in my job

Most of all, I am safe in my eternal destiny because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross in paying for every wrongdoing I've done in the past and will do in the future.

Thank You that, as Jesus promised, no one can take me out of the Father's hand.

Thank You that because of Christ, I can lie down and sleep safely.

I praise You and thank You, my Prince of Peace.

Amen.