

40 DAYS IN PSALMS:
A Guided Exercise in Spiritual Growth

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Preface

The original “31 Days with God” is a website created by Russ Harless and Gregg Strawbridge to promote a daily devotional time of prayer and study of God’s Word. We first did 31 days in Psalms, then “in the Reformation,” and then “in the Proverbs.” For a short time the site addressed Advent, the preparation for Christmas, following readings from the Revised Common Lectionary. This booklet is an extension of the original “31 Days in the Psalms” content.

Russ Harless serves as a minister in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (in Columbia, SC). Gregg Strawbridge is the pastor of All Saints Church (CREC in Lancaster, PA). Russ disciplined Gregg in their college days in the context of the Navigators ministry. Included in this study are three other contributions, from Reverend Jon Herr, Reverend Jared McNabb, and Reverend Michael Shover, sent for ministry from All Saints Church. These appeared in the original form on our devotional site (<https://revisedcommonlectionarydevotional.wordpress.com>).

How to Use this Guide

Plan a time to do this study each day (morning, lunch, or evening). Be ready with your Bible, or the Bible on your favorite device. We encourage you to keep a journal (paper or digital) in order to write out the answers and prayers.

- Begin with a journal entry that honestly expresses where you are in your faith, your walk with God, your confidence in knowing the truth of the Christian faith, and your sense of God hearing your prayers (in a paragraph or so).
- Commit to do each of the 40 days so that by the end of this season you will have actually completed it.
- When you have completed the 40 days, write a follow-up entry in your journal. Did this spiritual discipline affect your walk with God?

Before you begin, also take a minute to bookmark the 40 Days in the Psalms music page, as each day has accompanying music for worship and reflection.

www.wordmp3.com/psalms

About the Psalms

The importance of the psalms is difficult to overstate. The words of the Psalter are known by billions today and have been loved and cherished over thousands of years. When I was a teen in high school band, we had a simple liturgy before doing a performance - together, we all recited Psalm 23. With some prompting, I think almost every Christian from all traditions could do this. But there is more to the psalms than, “The Lord is my Shepherd...” Just as there’s more to prayer than, “Our Father...” If you desire to grow in your relation to the God of the psalms, then commit to do this devotional for these 40 days.

Let me spell out a few truths about Psalms that should be running in the background as you read them, write about them, and pray them. There are five books, or collections, within the Psalter.

- Book I: Psalms 1-41
- Book II: Psalms 42-72
- Book III: Psalms 73-89
- Book IV: Psalms 90-106
- Book V: Psalms 107-150

This is reflective of the five foundational books of Moses (the Pentateuch). These psalms were collected over a long period and finally arranged during the post-exilic time of Haggai and Zechariah. The times of the authors of the individual psalms range perhaps 1000 years: From Moses (circa 1400 BC) to the unnamed author of Psalm 150 (circa 400 BC). The writers include David, Solomon, Asaph, Ethan, Heman, the Sons of Korah (Psalm 42), Haggai and Zechariah (Psalm 148 says the LXX), and others not named.

Of the 150 psalms (in the English Bible) there are five basic kinds of psalms. You can remember these categories using a PSALM acrostic.

- P: praise psalms
- S: study psalms
- A: admission psalms
- L: lamentation psalms
- M: messianic psalms

For example, Psalm 146 is a “Praise” psalm (e.g., 111:1 112:1 113:1 117:1), and is one of the five closing, or final, “Hallel” psalms (146-150).

The musical poetry of ancient Hebrew is not what developed in the English rhyme/meter tradition, it is the poetic structures of various kinds of parallelisms:

“O LORD, how my adversaries have increased!”

Now a parallel restatement:

“Many are rising up against me” (Ps. 3:1).

Parallelism includes structural parallels, called chiasmus (A B C B' A'). For example, note the outline of Psalm 146 (W. VanGemeren, *Expositors Bible Commentary*).

- A. Call to Praise (vv. 1-4)
- B. God the Creator (vv. 5-6)
- C. God the Sustainer (vv. 7-9)
- B'. God the Great King (v. 10a)
- A'. Call to Praise (v. 10b)

The exact arrangement of the books of the Psalter and chapters within each book is not obvious. There is no clear thematic or content arrangement. Modern readers

may see this as “so random.” However, nothing in the Word of a sovereign God is actually “random” or accidental. Modern readers tend to dismiss what is not available on the first glance. Ancient literature was written to be heard, studied, and memorized. In a world of instant information, there is little need for memorization and meditation. But, blessed is the man whose “delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2).

Modern readers hardly expect the Psalter to be arranged by numerology. Aside from “666” or “7,” we hardly see any significance in numbers. However, the ancient world of literature often includes numerological symbolism: 8th day; 153 large fish; 12 tribes; 5 books of Moses; 14 generations; 7 days of creation, etc. The best explanation for the arrangement of the five books of the Psalter are combinations of three important biblical numbers: 17 (5 + 12 or 10 + 7), 10 (5 + 5), and 12. These all have numerological significance, simply decoded: 17 = nations; 10 = completeness; 12 = Israel. So for example, Books 3 & 4 contain 17 psalms each, while Book 2 contains 17 + 12 psalms. Some psalms usually numbered separately in the English Bible were united originally; there were apparently only 146 Psalms in the original Psalter.* Let me pour gasoline to the speculation by noting that 146 (the original number of psalms) is actually an octahedral number (based on an 8-sided figure). The point is that there is a lot more to God’s Word than we may see on first glance. Scriptures calls for a lifetime of study, prayer, devotion, and fidelity which is required to unlock its treasure.

None of this numerological discussion is necessary for growing through using the Psalter. However, noting the differences in our thought and the thought of ancient Hebrew believers will be needed so as not to dismiss the radical and often quite foreign content in the Psalter. The Psalms do not lead to a “Precious Moments” version of devotion: “How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rock” (Psalm 137:9).

Brace yourself for the psalms of God!

*This theory has been proposed by various scholars, including James B. Jordan in “Rite Reasons” 54, available at www.biblicalhorizons.com.

Day 1: Source of Growth

Read Psalm 1

In this first day of our 40 Days with God, reflect upon the source of our growth. This very first Psalm begins the book of Psalms with a vivid picture of the source. Godly people are like fruitful trees that drink in the water of God's Word. They don't wither; they prosper. It also pictures wicked people as chaff, the dry and scaly husks which blow away. Many Psalms speak simply of the righteous and the wicked, but this psalm shows the source of their faithfulness. The righteous are nourished by God's Word. The roots of their lives reach down into the pure water of God's revealed Word. The righteous receive the counsel of the Law - Word of God. They do not take counsel from the wicked. Such people do not obey God's Word. They have dried up and become husks. The result is the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor in the congregation of the righteous. The wicked will perish.

In your own words, respond to these questions:

- In verse one, the blessed person's life is contrasted with three unwise actions. Are these actions speeding up or slowing down? What does this direction mean?
- In verse two, the blessed person "delights" in the law of the Lord. What are three ways you could show more delight, affection, or love for God's word?
- Draw or imagine a picture of the godly person in the psalm using the image of a tree by a stream. List a few ways you could be more like this tree.

Pray. Write out a short prayer using the text and ideas of these verses in the psalm. Express your heart to God as you respond to his word and ask him to help you to apply the truth of this psalm to your life.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 2: Growing Closer Through the Word

Read Psalm 19

Have you written down your spiritual diagnosis and assessment? If not, do it now: begin with a journal entry that honestly expresses where you are in your faith, your walk with God, your confidence in knowing the truth of the Christian faith, and your sense of God hearing your prayers (in a paragraph or so). Day 2 continues the theme of the Word of God.

Do you have any books that come in two volumes (Vol. I and Vol. II)? The “book” written by God comes in two volumes: God’s revelation in the world and God’s special revelation in Scripture. Psalm 19 covers both of these. Verses 1-6 deal with the general way that God reveals himself in the wonders of nature around all of us, especially in the vastness of the stars of heaven. This “general revelation” leaves people “without excuse” as to God’s existence and presence (Romans 1:20). Verses 7-11, the heart of this psalm, focus on the special revelation of God’s Word to us. They are law, statutes, precepts, commands, fear, and ordinances. Each of these things speaks of authority, but also of guidance and connection. The psalmist takes us from the general revelation of God to his special revelation in his Word, and then finally takes us to the place where it all finds a home, our heart (vv. 12-14).

In your own words, respond to the questions:

- List several results or benefits from the use of God’s Word (vv. 7-9)? e.g., “refreshing the soul”
- What results from our encounters in the Word of God (vv 11-14)?
- The psalmist has several descriptions of sin: errors, hidden faults, willful sins, and great transgression. Honestly confess any sins in these categories to the Lord and ask for forgiveness through Jesus Christ who paid for sins, once for all.

Pray Psalm 19. Write out a short prayer of your own. Respond to God’s offer of making his Word active your life. Ask him to keep you “from willful sins” and not let them “rule over” you, as well as to let “the words of [your] mouth and the meditation of [your] heart be pleasing” to him.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 3: The Masterpiece of God’s Word

Read Psalm 119:1-16, 169-176

Have you ever personally seen a great work of art, a masterpiece? Dozens of books and hundreds more chapters and articles describe and portray Leonardo Da Vinci’s, “Mona Lisa.” One can study a great work of art from many perspectives, looking for every angle, contour, and hue. This psalm takes as its subject just such a work of art: God’s revealed Word. The psalm expresses the many excellencies of the verbal revelation of God to us. It is the longest Psalm, by far. The value of God’s Word is praised in 176 verses.

It is arranged in an acrostic, moving through each letter of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in eight stanzas. The first eight verses begin with the letter Aleph (א), the second (vv. 9-16) begin with the letter Bet (ב), etc. This is to say that from A to Z, God’s Word is beautiful and amazing. Even more, the Word changes us because through it we know the Triune God as he is revealed in Scripture. Many people upon viewing a great work of art in person express that it “speaks to them” differently than

Alef	Bet	Gimel	Dalet	He	Waw/Vav	Zayin	Chet	Tet	Yod	Kaf
א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ
Lamed	Mem	Nun	Samech	Ayin	Pay	Tsade	Oof	Resh	Shin	Tav
ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ	ק	ר	ש	ת
	ם	ן			ף	ץ				

a replica or photograph of the same work. Because of God’s Spirit present in believers, God speaks to us through his Word as we open our lives to him.

In your own words, respond to these questions:

- The first description of the person who walks in the Word is “happy.” List a few ways you could be happier if you spent more time growing in the masterpiece of God’s Word.
- In vv. 9-11, the writer explains a way of overcoming sin. How does treasuring the Word (v. 11) in your heart help you avoid sin?
- Despite all the glories of God’s revealed Word expressed by the psalmist, the last verse of this psalm acknowledges going astray (v. 176). Write down a few failures in your recent experience and seek forgiveness from God.

Pray Psalm 119:1-16, 169-176. Write out a short prayer using the text and ideas of these verses in the psalm. Express your heart to God, believe in his promises, and commit to be faithful.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 4: A New King in Town

Read Psalm 2

Since the dawn of human civilization a conflict has been brewing. The powers of this world have declared war with God and those that follow him. Psalm 2 relates the ultimate futility of this course of action. Those who truly walk in the way of the Lord will have tension with the world. In the course of this conflict, there was One who walked perfectly according to the will of God. He came to earth and faced the ultimate in resistance from the earthly powers of his time. He was sent into world to endure this brutality and to overcome it. He came then as a lamb (John 1:29), but he will come again as a lion (Revelation 5:5). Psalm 2 speaks of the evil intent of the world, the Son who endured this evil and overcame it, and his present rule in triumph over the world from his heavenly throne (Acts 2:33ff). Even now his kingdom grows. The rulers of this world are warned to act now and commit their allegiance to him before they encounter his wrath.

In your own words, respond to the questions:

- How does the world now rebel against the rule of God?
- How do you participate in that rebellion?
- What are at least three actions you can take to align yourself more on the side of his kingdom?

Pray Psalm 2. Write out a short prayer as your response to the truth of this psalm. Praise God for his power and authority.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 5: The Way Back to Life

Read Psalm 16

Have you ever been locked out? Perhaps of a building, or even your own house? In one sense the whole story of the Bible is the story of man being locked out of God's presence, and most importantly, God making a way back. This psalm is Messianic. Peter cites this psalm in Acts 2:25-28, which applies vv. 8-11 to the resurrection of Jesus. God will not give up the body of Jesus to rot in the grave. Rather, God raised Jesus to the right hand of power, into his presence. Before Christ, those like David the writer of this psalm, called on the Lord and by faith were given refuge. God provided an elaborate system of sacrifices to show a path of blood on the altar and not only the death of the animal, but a fiery transformation of the victim into an acceptable offering. All of this was preparation for the true path of life which came through Christ's blood and ultimately his resurrection and ascension (with a true human nature) to the right hand of the Father. This psalm testifies to Christ. And now through Christ we can say confidently,

“You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

In your own words, respond to the questions:

- Our greatest challenge is often our heart's idolatry. Write in your own words the thought: “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.”
- God takes pleasure in his people, his saints, “in whom is all my delight” (v. 3). This is even more clear of those who are united to Jesus by faith (Romans 8:31-39). How might you think of yourself differently as result?
- What are a few ways that you could grow in experiencing God's presence in your daily life?

Pray Psalm 16. Write out a short prayer using the text and ideas in the psalm. Express your heart to God as you respond to him and ask him to help you realize his presence in your life.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 6: Crucifixion and Victory After Death

Read Psalm 22

The most striking thing about this psalm is the theme of suffering. Many specific details of this suffering are cited in the passion of Jesus (in the Gospels). The mocking mentioned in v. 7 is found in Matthew 27:39-40. The division of his clothing in v. 18 is found in Mark 15:24. As extreme as all of this physical suffering was, Martin Luther was moved most of all by v. 1: Why did God forsake his Son? These are the words of Jesus on the cross, as found in Matthew (27:46) and Mark (15:34). Luther realized that the Son, Jesus, experienced something at that moment that he had never experienced in his entire infinite existence – separation from the Father. As tormenting as the physical pain was, nothing could compare with that sensation of separation from the Godhead. Jesus experienced the wrath of the Father for the sin of those he was to save.

This psalm truly is about the greatest torment that was ever suffered, but it is not primarily the physical suffering that should bring us to our knees: it is understanding that to which Jesus surrendered and experienced in separation from the other persons of the Godhead. That is true sacrifice. No one else could offer it. But it doesn't end with Christ on the cross. Rather, this horrific suffering somehow leads to worship in all the world: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you" (v. 27).

This is easier to see now. Christ not only suffered, but also rose again, and ascended to reign from the right hand of God. Now people from all nations gather to sing praise to the King who paid for sins and was victorious over death.

In your own words, respond to these questions:

- The passion of Jesus happened about 1000 years after this psalm was written. Knowing this, how does it make you respond to God?
- Have you ever lost someone whom you loved? Consider the pain you felt due to that separation, and imagine the loss felt by Jesus as he experienced separation from the Father for the only time in eternity. How can you apply this pain to your walk with him?
- Knowing that Christ died for your sins, rose victorious over death, and now sits at God's right hand, how can you become a better worshiper?

Pray Psalm 22. Respond with your heart to God by writing out a prayer to him based on your key thoughts from Psalm 22.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 7: The Goodness of God

Read Psalm 23

As we begin day 7, don't be discouraged if you have missed a few days. But do keep the commitment to do the psalm each day from now on. Also, keep writing down your thoughts and prayers, even if only a short comment. Your journaling will be a record of your interaction with the Lord in these 40 days.

Just as David was a good shepherd, nourishing and protecting the flock of Jesse, Yahweh (the covenant name of God revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14-15) was The Good Shepherd (1 Samuel 17:34ff). This is one of the most memorable passages in Scripture, and has been the comfort of God's people for over 3000 years. When God looked on David's heart, by his grace, David was the kind of believer that placed his trust in Yahweh as Shepherd of his people. This caused David to sing and play psalms of praise to his Lord.

In your own words, respond to the questions:

- What is the most comforting line of this psalm for you?
- This psalm starts in the pasture, but where does it end? Why so?
- What is your greatest fear? Who do you fear? Who is troubling you? With these fears in mind, take a few moments and meditate on the **first five words** using this technique: emphasize a different word in the first line of Psalm 23.

- ❖ **The Lord is my shepherd.** That is, the one and only Almighty God is the One who cares for me.
- ❖ **The Lord is my shepherd.** He is not a vague deity. He is the Covenant Lord (Yahweh) of Israel revealed in Jesus, a covenant keeping God who has committed himself to the care and full salvation of his people.
- ❖ **The Lord is my shepherd.** Now he IS ever existent and will always be, at any time I call upon him.
- ❖ **The Lord is my shepherd.** He is certainly the Almighty God, unlimited in his power to save, but I confess now that he is my personal shepherd who cares for me.
- ❖ **The LORD is my shepherd.** Not only is he the Almighty God, but he saves me not as a tyrant, but as a loving shepherd. Therefore, I can claim boldly,
“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

Pray Psalm 23. Respond with your heart to God by writing out a prayer to him based on your key thoughts from Psalm 23.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 8: Surrounded by Death and Despair

Read Psalm 31 (focusing on vv. 1-5, 15-16)

In many respects this is a cry of despair and desperation. David takes on the voice of one who is in the midst of great suffering, under attack and oppression from all sides. Certainly we know of death. We have seen loved ones pass on. We all die a little each day as bodies start to break down. All those aches and pains are reminders that your time here is limited. As James says, “You are a mist that appears for a little while then vanishes” (4:14). However, the focus of this psalm is not on us, but on him, on the one who truly suffered and who truly committed his way to God. Jesus said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Just as Jesus trusted God the Father and committed his spirit to him in that moment of great despair, so we too must all commit our spirits to the Father as well. It is through his death and resurrection that we too are able to commit ourselves into the hands of the Father. Death will come to each of us, and our comfort is that we can safely commit our deepest selves (spirit) to him. If we can trust him in death, how much more can we also trust him in life.

In your own words, respond to the questions:

- How often does your sense of mortality enter into your thoughts? How does this effect your decisions?
- Are you able to say now, through your faith in Christ, that you are ready to commit your spirit to God should he will to call you home? What things should be set in order in your life before you could be at peace?
- If you are spiritually prepared to stand before the Lord in the righteousness of Christ, then how should you now live?

Pray Psalm 31. Write out a short prayer expressing your response to this psalm. Commit your spirit to him who is able to truly comfort and save.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms Day

Day 9: The Purpose of God's Blessing

Read Psalm 67

Have you ever listened to a songwriter explain the background of a song that you enjoy? This psalm has a background. The psalmist is reflecting on one of the great themes in the promise God made to Abraham. God not only promised Abraham a land and a seed, but that somehow "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Psalm 67 makes a prayerful praise song from this. It explains the reason that blesses his people: [In order] "that Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations." The overflow of Israel's blessings is to the nations. This has been on God's heart since Genesis 12.

The good puritan Matthew Henry rightly draws out three truths intended from this. We are blessed:

- 1) That divine revelation might be sent among [the nations].
- 2) That divine worship may be set up among [the nations].
- 3) That the divine government may be acknowledged and cheerfully submitted to [among the nations].

"Let the nations be glad!" Missions exists because worship doesn't (says John Piper). Blessings to us exist so that missions should. God provides us with blessings so that we can proclaim the goodness of God to those who do not yet share in that goodness. So why has God blessed you? "God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear him" (v. 7).

In your own words, respond to the questions:

- What are several blessings God has given to you?
- What kinds of blessings has God given to your community, your church, your home?
- What blessings do you think the Lord desires to extend to other nations and ethnic groups you know about?
- Can you think of any ways you can support such opportunities to send forth blessings to others? List some missions efforts that you could include for prayer or financial support. Ask God to lead you and help you grow in missions.

Pray Psalm 67. Write out a short prayer expressing your response to this psalm.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 10: I Waited Patiently for the Lord

Read Psalm 40

Psalm 40 is a Psalm attributed to David, but it is known to many because the band U2 performed a version of it on their 1983 album, *War*. It's no secret the song was a success. Despite the centuries and cultural differences that separate its original context and ours, there are universal themes that anyone faces in the pilgrimage that is the Christian life.

The psalm provides a wonderfully simple formula for spiritual encouragement and sustenance. First, look back on God's past faithfulness.

“I waited patiently for the Lord, he inclined to me and heard my cry.”

“You have multiplied...your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us.”

Second, realize that spiritual transformation comes from the inside out. As Jesus says, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matthew 15:19). A heart broken and contrite before God leads to celebrating God's deeds with our lips and our lives.

Looking back on God's constant faithfulness and grace, delighting in God in our hearts, flowing over into our vocation to be his witnesses - these are surefire ways to press on with godly confidence to the hope of glory.

In your own words, respond to the questions:

- Verse 4 says: “Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie!” Where has God's grace covered you even when you have wandered after lies? Are there lies that keep your heart captive right now? Idols that need to be smashed?
- “For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me” (v. 12). These could have been the very words of Jesus in his passion. In what ways does the vicarious suffering of Christ for you make you want to “tell the glad news” in the church and in the world.
- Who do you know that needs the encouragement and glad news concerning the God who inclines and hears his children's cries, tabernacling with them in the flesh. List two people and pray for them by name, and for guidance as to how to encourage or evangelize them.

Pray Psalm 40. Write out a short prayer expressing your response to this psalm.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 11: Salvation and Celebration

Read Psalm 116

Psalm 116 is a deliverance Psalm which is cited in the New Testament in several places (2 Corinthians 4, Romans 3). Its shape is very Messianic. It pictures the righteous man who loves the Covenant Lord (Yahweh) and calls out to him. This man is trapped, snared in death, but he calls for God to save him and deliverance comes. This psalm includes a beautiful verse regarding the death of believers: “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones.” In light of his deliverance he asks, how can I repay the Lord? But of course there is no repayment of grace, or else it is not grace at all, it is “works.”

The answer shows the true nature of delighting in the Lord. He will delight in the cup of salvation. He will give thanks with joy in the presence of the people of God. Christ was encompassed by death and evil men, but was delivered through resurrection and lifted up the cup of salvation on the first day of the week. For the original setting, paying a vow with a thanksgiving sacrifice included an offering of an animal, then a sacrificial meal which was a way to celebrate God’s goodness. In this rite, the sacrificial animal(s) must be eaten on the same day (Lev. 7:15). This implies (given the amount of food) that it required family, friends, and even the poor, to participate in this celebratory meal. Christ began a meal of thanksgiving prior to his death, and after he was raised he ate and drank with his disciples (Acts 10:41). The meal he established is often called the Eucharist (from the Greek word for “thanksgiving”). After God’s full and complete deliverance in Christ, we are to celebrate the feast with thanksgiving.

How do we repay the Lord for our salvation? We cannot repay him; we can only rejoice and give thanks in his presence, lifting with joy the cup of salvation. Deliverance leads to joy in celebration.

In your own words, respond to the questions:

- List at least three of the many occasions God has given you temporal deliverance, safety, healing, restoration, keeping you out of trouble, etc. Give thanks to the Lord for a few of these.
- When you realize the deliverance you have in Christ, what are some ways you can respond with joy and thanksgiving?
- This week how can you lift up the cup in joy in your daily walk? How can you “pay the vow” of a thanksgiving offering with your family, friends and the needy, extending the table of thanksgiving?

Pray Psalm 116. Write out a short prayer expressing your response to this psalm.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 12: Our Majestic Creator

Read Psalm 8

This psalm is overtly musical. It contains a musical directive at the beginning in its instruction from the director of music to use the instrument called the “gittith” for accompaniment. It seems to have originated in Gath. In an ancient version (Targums, Aramaic version of the psalms) it says, “For praise, on the lyre that he brought from Gath.” David praises God and prophesies of Christ with a Philistine musical instrument because David incorporates instruments from other nations into his musical praise (1 Chronicles 23:5). David believes that all the treasures of all nations are to give praise to the true LORD. This psalm is about worship. It begins with a phrase of worship, “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” Sandwiched in between these phrases is great truth about who God is and what he has done.

Take the time each day to offer your voice to him in worship. It is not the grandness of your music or your voice that pleases him. God seeks those who worship in spirit and in truth.

Answer these questions in your own words:

- Why is God interested in “all the earth” recognizing the majesty of his name?
- Why should the God who created and sustains all things desire to be mindful of you?
- How should we respond to the initiative of this creator God who approaches us for relationship and fellowship? What are some ways that you can personally respond to him?

Pray Psalm 8. Write out a short prayer expressing your response to this psalm.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 13: This is the Day

Read Psalm 118

You might hear these words in American political contexts, “We hold these truths to be self-evident...” Psalm 118 was like a founding document to the early Christian apostles. It was sung by travelers coming to Jerusalem to worship (after the exile). It focuses upon the goodness of the Lord for those entering into his presence in his house. It is used by worshipers on the original Palm Sunday and since then in the Church to mark that time: “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you from the house of the LORD,” Psalm 118:25–26. This psalm includes some marvelous prophetic words that Jesus cited in the temple area during Holy Week. Jesus was the chief cornerstone, but the builders rejected him. Yet through this rejection, God has acted. The latter verses in the psalm make it clear that God was doing something marvelous by the rejection of Jesus. The rejection of the chief cornerstone, means the building will be rebuilt. The religious leaders of Jerusalem in the first century rejected Jesus as the cornerstone of the holy temple of God. They were trying to build a different building. Their foundation was their works done in self-righteousness, their dead rites, and their political collusion. Their unrighteousness becomes clearer and clearer as they successfully plot the murder of Jesus. When Jesus went to the temple in fulfillment of Psalm 118, he announced, in the words of Jeremiah 7, that this temple would be no place of refuge for them. Not one stone would be left standing on the other. Jesus was intent on building another house, another temple of living stones from all nations.

Answer these questions in your own words:

- From your knowledge of history, why do you think God let Jerusalem’s temple be destroyed in 70 A.D.?
- The Apostle Paul wrote to Christians, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). What are a few things you could do to strengthen your own part in the Church?
- This psalm speaks of the worshiper who enters into the gates and give thanks (v. 19). How can you enter into God’s house with this same spirit? Are there ways you could be better prepared for worship (arriving promptly, resting well the night before, learning about the Word to be taught or preached, learning music, etc.)?

Pray Psalm 118. Write out a short prayer expressing your response to this psalm.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 14: Cry Out to the Lord

Read Psalm 130

Road trip! What do you do when you travel to a familiar destination? When our kids were young, we would sing, read, listen, and do just about anything else to keep the peace. Psalm 130 is a Psalm of Ascents. These were sung by those journeying to worship in Jerusalem to celebrate annual festivals. Some were penitential, calling out to the Lord for mercy. In this case, the psalmist cries out to the Lord, recognizing that no one can stand on their own righteousness in God's presence. But he is rich in forgiveness. So the psalmist waits for the Lord. Israel is to hope in the Lord because God will redeem Israel from all their iniquities. The Psalms teach us the full range of prayer, praise, and even complaints that we may properly express to God, not only individually, but corporately. In Psalm 130 we have a call for God's presence, along with a recognition of our unworthiness, "If you should mark iniquities..." We are sinners and saints at the same time. We have no inherent righteousness whereby we can demand a holy God's presence and power in our lives. Yet, he forgives and now we see the full basis for that forgiveness through Christ's death and resurrection. Despite our natural unworthiness, it is right and good that we still call upon him to be present. We should be those whose "souls wait for the Lord." We need a thirst for God that is just as eager as those awaiting the safety of morning light in the dark night of battle. The promise is that "with the Lord there is mercy" and "abundant redemption."

Answer these questions in your own words:

- Do you sense God's abundant presence in your life now, or are you awaiting more of his presence like the psalmist? Cry out to the Lord in prayer to ask for his presence.
- What iniquities could the Lord mark in your life? Confess them to the Lord and ask for abundant forgiveness through Christ.
- Believe and keep believing that you are forgiven through Christ's abundant redemption. Believing this, how will this shape your actions and attitudes today?

Pray Psalm 130. Write out a short prayer expressing your response to this psalm.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 15: Enter His Rest

Read Psalm 95

One of my favorite Christian songs has the line, “I swear there must be blisters on my heart; so hold me Jesus, cause I'm shaking like a leaf” (Rich Mullins). The “hardness of heart” that we experience in life is indeed a serious callus to our spiritual health. Psalm 95 memorializes an episode of Israel’s callus heart. It begins with a call to worship in God’s presence, to thank him and praise him with song. He is the Maker of the world so we should worship him on bended knee. But even more, he is our Shepherd and we are the sheep of his hand. This means that our Shepherd feeds and cares for us by his hand. The psalm ends acknowledging Israel’s failure as they grumbled and showed hard hearts at Meribah and Massah in the wilderness. The consequence is that many did not enter into their rest from the wilderness. Psalm 95 turns the experience of the Israelites (Exodus 17) into a song, like dark version of the Star Spangled Banner, or a Battle Hymn of the Republic. We want to completely wash hard episodes in life from our memories, especially sinful and shameful things we have done. But, Israel did not get to sweep their sin “under the rug.” Israel’s failures were written into their history and their hymns. True worship arises from truth. Proper worship arises not only from knowing God’s power and love, but from reflecting on our failures. Let us shout to the “rock of our salvation,” while we also know that we must not harden our hearts like rocks.

Reflect on this psalm by answering these questions in your own words.

- If you were to write a song that recounted your disobedience, what would it say and where did it happen?
- Being as honest as possible, is your heart hard now? If so ask God to soften your heart before him, remember that he is your Creator and your caring Shepherd. He wants you to enter into rest by faith and trust in him.
- Are there some ways that you could enter into the Lord’s rest which you are resisting?

Pray Psalm 95. Using the main ideas of this psalm write a prayer to the Lord.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 16: Whom Shall I Fear

Read Psalm 27

Do you suffer from anxiety? Do you worry about the present, the future, or even the past? Mark Twain once remarked that he had lived through many terrible things, some of which had actually happened. This psalm's theme is confidence in the presence of God in the face of fear. This can be seen from the outline, or structure, of this psalm. One of the literary aspects of the psalms is parallelism. Parallels do not just affect one line compared to another: "Whom shall I fear?/Whom shall I dread?" These parallels extend to the outline or structure of the entire psalm. This psalm is in two sections (vv. 1-6, 7-14), and these sections form a mirrored parallel:

- A) Confidence in God's Presence (vv1-3)
- B) Praise for God's Presence (vv4-6)
- B') Prayer for God's Presence (vv7-12)
- A) Confidence in God's Presence (vv13-14)

(This kind of parallel structure is called a chiasm or chiasmus.)

We should have confidence in God because he is our light, our deliverance, and our defense (v. 1). The result of this is faith, not fear; rather we worship instead of worry. Fear comes when that which we trust fails. Anxiety is produced when our "light" is not the Lord. This psalm speaks to our tendency to have worry and anxiety. Worry uses the same faculties as worship: emotions and imaginations. Worry is the futile use of imagination. But worship is using all of our faculties aright. If we have confidence in God because he is our light, deliverance, and defense; and if we have prepared by worship (meditation, God's beauty, and praise), then despite our "day of trouble," we will return to confidence in God's presence. True spiritual discipline is to practice patience and prayer instead of anxiety and fear.

Reflect on this psalm by answering these questions in your own words.

- In recent days have you found yourself trusting in your resources (money, your natural abilities, or other people (spouse, family, friends, leaders, government, etc.) more than the Lord? In what ways?
- Despite your confessed faith, write down a few anxieties that haunt you.
- What would peace and patience ("waiting," v. 14) look like in your life? List at least three ways you could demonstrate peace and patience because of God's presence.

Pray Psalm 27. Write out a prayer which is about your life now, including the themes of this psalm.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 17: My Help

Read Psalm 121

The Beatles famously sang, “Help, I Need Somebody.” We all need help through out lives. We could not feed ourselves as infants, nor attend to ourselves in our final days. We are dependent beings. Upon reflection we are dependent on the Independent Being, the Triune God. Psalm 121 expresses and focuses that dependence. One phrase of this text has been frequently used as a call to worship: “From whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.” This God has promised to bring about his covenant promises and will bring protection. Since God is the maker of the world, the elements of the world will not harm us. We can sleep with ease, because the elements of nature (sun, moon) will not hurt us. We are defended from enemies on all sides. This psalm is a benediction upon God’s covenant people. To the unbelieving, every difficulty is a sworn witness against God’s goodness and his willingness to bless his people. But we know that all things work together for good because he is conforming us to the image of Christ. This psalm calls us to look to the Lord for goodness. We are to trust that the Lord will preserve us from all evil. In believing this, we can weather trials and hardships because the Lord who is sovereign overall does not intend these as evil, but for our eternal good.

Reflect on these truths by answering these questions in your own words.

- What are some ways you could use or share such blessings and benedictions on others in your life?
- If God will preserve you from all evil, does that mean no evil things can come into your life? What are your thoughts or questions on this?
- If you were to fully trust God as meaning and intending only eternal good for you, how might you respond differently to difficulties today?

Pray Psalm 121. Turn the words of this psalm into a prayer offered to the Lord.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 18: My Hiding Place

Read Psalm 32

Have you ever really messed up? Did something terrible? How did you respond? Psalm 32, like Psalm 51 is the intentional, written confession which became a liturgical response of King David to his own adultery, leading to murder (the attempted cover-up of the pregnancy of Bathsheba), and then several entangled murders to effect a final cover-up (2 Samuel 11:21). Only after the well-known confrontation of the prophet Nathan, does David accept responsibility and make confession. Thus, Psalm 32 likely follows Psalm 51 as a testimony to his restoration. David apparently kept silent for some time prior to his brokenness after the confrontation with Nathan. He praises the blessed state of forgiveness. Three words for sin used here in vv. 1-2: transgression is rebellion (pesha), sin is missing the mark/way (chata'ah), and iniquity is inward perversity (awon). He testifies that his transgression is “forgiven” (taken away, Exodus 34:7), his sin is “covered” (as in re-clothed), and his iniquity is not “imputed” or reckoned against him (see Romans 4).

Answer these questions in your words as you reflect on the truths of this psalm:

- What truths does David express from his own personal experience in his relationship with God?
- How would these truths connect with your life in your moments of struggle?
- What truths come from the voice of the Lord in this psalm, and how do we appropriate these promises in our life?

Pray Psalm 32. Write out a short prayer expressing your own response to these truths. Pray in response to the general truths in this psalm. Pray in response to David’s own personal statements. Pray in response to what the Lord promises in this psalm.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 19: Under the Mercy

Read Psalm 91

What do you worry about? What do you fear? This psalm describes the peace that comes from resting in God's protection. God shelters his people like a bird who spreads its wings over its chicks to keep them from prey. Those who trust in God should not fear, night or day. The Lord is our God. Verse 11 is part of Satan's temptation of Christ, and the psalm has a Messianic quality after these verses. In verse 14, the voice of the psalm moves from the writer to God himself speaking. God promises that he will deliver, protect, and always be with his people in their troubles. He promises to answer those who call out to him, and promises to send his salvation. Nothing happens beyond God's power and God's purpose. The Father's care for the Son which led to Christ's resurrection and ascension is a pattern for us to remember. God does promise deliverance in the first place to Jesus, and through his deliverance, we are all to be fully delivered in the resurrection.

Reflect on this psalm with these questions.

- Taking this psalm to heart, when you are in trouble, what should you do? In the past few weeks have you faced trouble or hardship? How did you respond?
- How might thinking about God's protecting care in Christ change how you responded to your hardships? Based on this how will you deal with the next problem?
- Give praise to God since he will ultimately deliver you through Christ in resurrection.

Pray Psalm 91. Use these thoughts and ideas to write a prayer with Psalm 91.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 20: Blessing the Lord in Troubled Days

Read Psalm 34

It is deeply admirable when a person won't back down for righteousness sake. In Job saying, "...even if God kills me I will still praise him;" in the three Hebrews going into the fiery furnace saying, "...even if our God doesn't deliver us, we will not bow down;" in the countless martyrs for Christ saying, "Jesus is Lord." The spirit of this is in this ancient psalm which begins with an affirmation that God's praises are in my mouth regardless of those who are persecuting me.

This psalm contains a mixture of ideas, but there are a couple of key themes that run throughout. First, times of trouble come. Second, seek the Lord in these times of trouble. Third, he will answer our cries for help in these times of trouble. Have you ever faced a time of overwhelming trouble? If you have not, chances are very good that you will. This is life. Maybe you or a person you love will suffer a tragic situation. Probably you have heard someone say to another person who was suffering, "it will be all right." The good news is that this is very simply the way it is for those of us who belong to him. In our very worst moments, we can cry out to him and he will look at us and comfort us with the truth that it will in fact be alright. This is not a comfort available to the rest of the world. They have only fate, often cruel fate, to count on things working out. As we learn to trust him in the small problems of life this builds us up and prepares us to trust him in the larger issues of life.

Answer these questions as means to reflect on Psalm 34:

- In what ways does the psalm describe trouble?
- What trouble do you, or could you possibly, face in life? What is your worst fear?
- In what ways could you respond as David did? What would it look like in your behaviors?

Pray Psalm 34. Use David's prayer in this psalm to pour out your heart to him prayer. Let him know those things that trouble you and commit yourself to trust him with this. Let him know your worst fears and commit yourself to trust him come what may. Write out this prayer in your own words.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms
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Day 21: Thirsting for God

We're halfway through! Remember, keep journaling, keep praying the psalm, and keep singing. Sometimes you may have to do the devotional silently, but I encourage you to try to sing audibly whenever possible. Make a joyful noise!

Read Psalm 63

In this guide, I have emphasized singing the psalm because this is a simple way to write the truths on the tablet of your heart. Sing it! The film, “Master and Commander” includes a tune used for this psalm (see the link below). Once you connect this tune to this text, you will know it forever. It is the “Tudor Psalm,” and quite beautiful. David, in a time of trial, “seeks” earnestly and his “soul thirsts” for the Lord. His flesh “yearns” for the Lord (v. 1). He sees literally and metaphorically (in the desert) that everything else is dry and weary. David thirsts for the Lord because he has seen God in the sanctuary. He has seen God’s power and glory (v. 2). Seeing God as he is has led him to see that the covenant love (hesed) of the Lord is “better than life.” The result is that the Lord is to be “blessed” and worshiped. The experience of authentic worship brings the realization that “My soul is satisfied” as with literally “fat food.”

David seeks God in his “down time” (“on my bed”). In the restlessness of troubled times he contemplates (meditates) the Lord’s salvation/deliverance. God has been his help, his cover, and his strength (vv. 7-8). David knows that the enemies that hunger to destroy him will be “delivered over” to his Covenant Protector. Their mouths will be stopped. Those who would prey upon him will become prey because David prays. The result of hungering for the Lord is to glimpse his glory. “Everyone who swears by him will glory” (v. 11).

Reflect on this psalm by answering these questions.

- Why does David begin this psalm with the image of thirsting?
- Remember God’s kindnesses and covenant love for you. Name a few of them.
- Do you have any enemies, those that may be seeking to do you harm? How did David view his enemies in this psalm? (v. 9ff) Why so? (vv. 6-8)

Pray the psalm. Write a prayer from Psalm 63 that expresses your heart to God.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms
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Day 22: Don't Labor in Vain

Read Psalm 127

A few years ago, I got the idea that I would like an ornamental pond in my backyard. I spent money, time, and effort getting everything together. It turned out to look and be totally ridiculous. Within a few weeks after the attempt I abandoned the project completely. It was “in vain:” the money, time, and effort were futile. This psalm asserts that all of life can be in vain without the Lord. We must actively depend on the Lord in building our lives. The first verse of this psalm addresses the God-condition on which our plans fail or succeed. We must also actively depend on the Lord in building and protecting our lives. Building and guarding are two basic activities that we are doing throughout life. In these we must acknowledge the Lord in the pursuit of these activities. Building or protecting apart from the Lord will result in futility or fruitlessness. This psalm makes clear that we must actively depend on the Lord to avoid futility and fruitlessness. In the last verses there is a benediction on children who are “gift,” a “reward,” “like arrows,” and many are desired since they succeed us “at the gate” (the place of judgment and transaction). God accomplishes his building and guarding through our children. It is critical that we transfer our faith (and kingdom building/guarding) through them.

Reflect on this psalm using these questions.

- The Lord is not doing the building or guarding without our asking him to do so. Invite the Lord into your home and life (once again) today.
- The Lord is not doing the building or guarding when we are not following his blueprint. Can you list areas of disobedience in your life? If so ask him to grant you repentance.
- Children are a gift and reward. Purpose to take time to bless the children in your life today. They need affirmation, kindness, and good examples.

Pray Psalm 127. Turn Psalm 127 into a prayer.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 23: Is No One Faithful?

Read Psalm 12

When I was about 16, I had a motorcycle which worked but did not have a battery, breaks, lights, a clutch, or a kickstarter. To drive it, I had to roll it in neutral, then get on and kick it into 2nd gear. I had it for years and never did any (not any) maintenance on it. I must say that this Honda XL 250 is still my vehicle of choice for the zombie apocalypse. The scene is that I (stupidly) decided I could ride between two lakes on a strip about as wide as a sidewalk. These were two gravel pits, like a quarry where excavation leads to a deep lake, only these were beside each other. I swerved and dropped down almost into the water on a lower ledge. When I stopped, the bike was about a foot from dropping into a bottomless lake. It was too heavy for me to lift up to the land bridge. I was pretty desperate. I had to get my stepfather to help me. Truly desperate! This illustration of desperation is trivial in comparison to actual goodness in a world of evil. This psalm has a strong sense of desperation. David feels alone in a world of evil. He feels as if godliness is a lost cause. He sums up the situation and then offers a prayer. Then in verse five the Lord himself speaks through the voice of David in answer to the prayer. If we look around our world today it can often seem that the cause of godliness is lost. However, we should take comfort. God is in control. His words are flawless. It is true that many evil ideas are common thought now. What is often honored among men is vile, but the cause of the Lord will triumph.

Answer the questions in your own words:

- Why is David so pessimistic about the cause?
- In what ways can you see the same things today?
- As you consider verses 5 – 7, what is encouraging about the promises of God to us as his people still in this world?

Pray Psalm 12. Write out a short prayer to the Lord in your own words.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 24: Praise with Music

Read Psalm 47

In “Music in the Bible, Music on the Radio and Music from the Church,” I argue that musical instrument technology is a cultural transformer:

“Another facet of this prism is instrument technology. Music makers make sounds with the particular instrument-technology available. Further refinements culturally and technologically necessitate different musical sounds. Before the technology to make valves for brass instruments or hinged keys for woodwind instruments was available, wind instruments had a different sound with limitations in range and technique.... These sorts of technological changes alone account for vast transformations . . .”

Music both leads and follows cultural and technological change. One of the great musical and worship revolutions in Scripture was when David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). At this stage, a new kind of worship began with music and praise at the Tabernacle of David, while animal sacrifice worship continued at another location, Gibeon. Throughout David’s life, he worshiped at this Tent/Tabernacle set up for the Ark with musical praise and worship. Note: This was before Solomon built the temple and united sacrifices and musical praise. This psalm reflects the great event of bring the Ark to Jerusalem. Verse 5 says, “God has gone up with a shout,” i.e., gone up to Jerusalem. David remembers Uzzah (2 Samuel 6:5-11) and was afraid of the Lord, and so reminds the peoples that God is to be feared (v. 2).

Two ideas dominate this psalm: 1) All peoples are to offer praise to God, because, 2) he is the great King over all the earth. The promise that God made to Abraham (v. 9) that all nations through him would be blessed, is the foundation rejoicing that God reigns over all peoples, and not just Israel. Because of God’s universal kingship, all peoples are to clap their hands and shout to God with joy. God is highly exalted!

Reflect on this psalm using these questions.

- Count the commands to worship God in this psalm. How many are there? List the ways you are to give God praise (clapping, shouting, etc.).
- Think of what God’s kingship means in your own life. How does God extend his rule to you?
- In your daily life and at church, does your worship look and sound like what this psalm commands? How could you increase your physical participation in worship?

Pray Psalm 47. Write out a prayer based on Psalm 47.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 25: Blessings

Psalm 128

In Chinese food there is a dish called, “Happy Family.” What do we mean by a happy family? Can this be defined? To the ancient people of Yahweh, this psalm is a direct description. This is the quintessential picture of what it means to be blessed by God. The blessed man will prosper from his own labor (Deuteronomy 28:1-6). His wife will be a bringer of joy like wine to the home (Psalm 104:15), and the mother of his children. These children will be lively and full of promise and hope for the future, and like olive oil, they will be an anointing of blessing and glory to you. This is not to say such blessings come automatically, for this picture is itself the result of fearing God and walking in his ways. Hard work, loving your spouse, and faithfully training your children in the ways of God is what the family life of a blessed requires. These are the blessings from Zion/Heaven. May these blessings overflow from our own homes to the whole city of God – New Jerusalem, and may we see this prosperity all the days of our life. God’s covenant blessings extend to many generations, blessing us with the gift of grandchildren. A long life and a large family are great blessings from God. With such multi-generational covenant faithfulness and blessedness, shalom (Peace/Wholeness) will indeed be upon God’s people.

Reflect on this psalm with these questions:

- “Happy Wife, Happy Life” - Husbands, what are some practical ways you could love your wife better so that she naturally brings joy and fruitfulness to the home?
- Children are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Our cultures’ general outlook on children is a negative one. Do you see your children as a blessing from God? Take the time now to pray for your children’s future faithfulness, and your children’s children.
- Pray that the church would fear God, walk in his ways, and that God will bless all the families of the church (Peace be upon the new Israel).

Pray Psalm 128. Write a prayer based on Psalm 128.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 26: Bless the Name

Read Psalm 145

Can you sing the song, “a b c d e f g . . .” to the tune, “Twinkle, Twinkle”? This psalm’s structure is not visible in the English version, but in the original Hebrew it is an acrostic based on the alphabet, like Psalm 119. The first verse begins with Aleph (a), the second with Beth (b), Gimel (c), etc. It extolls the attributes and salvation works of the Lord (Yahweh, the “Covenant Lord”) from A to Z, or from Aleph to Tav (Hebrew letters). It is in a parallel structure as well:

A – The Greatness of His Redemptive Works (vv. 1-10)

B – The Glory of His Redemptive Kingdom (vv. 11-13)

A’ – The Goodness of His Redemptive Character (Name) (vv. 14-21)

The greatness of our heavenly King is recognized by the redeemed, and we are to “say so.” We must speak of his greatness to the next generation. You must speak to your kids about his redemptive works (“mighty acts”), after you take time to “meditate” on his character and work (v. 5). In verses 11-13, the kingdom means when “God reigns as king.” The kingdom of his rule is glorious and cannot be stopped. Especially in the light of fullness of the Resurrection and Ascension, we are to be hopeful and optimistic. Jesus reigns regardless of our national or personal problems! It is in seeing the glory of this reign that we may have the confidence to endure all manner of hardship. The Lord’s goodness has already been asserted (v. 9), but in verses 14-21, his compassionate deliverance is described. He raises the lowly and feeds the hungry. He satisfies the needy. He is kind and fulfills the desires of those who cry to him. He “keeps” (guards) us. We are to bless his Holy name forever.

Reflect on this psalm by answering these questions.

- Are you eager to speak of his greatness since you have been redeemed (v. 7)? Look for opportunities to give praise to God today.
- Do you grumble about life or do you glory in the kingdom?
- What would you do differently today if you were to walk in the spirit of blessing his name (character) for his kindness?

Pray Psalm 145. Turn this psalm into a prayer.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 27: Sin, Repentance, and Restoration

Read Psalm 51

When was the last time your sin caused you, or someone else, great pain and loss? Sin is a destructive force. In our age of toleration we often fail to hate sin. We lose sight of the harm it does. In this psalm David was hit with the full force of what he had done. The wise prophet Nathan cleverly presented the truth of the situation to David by telling him the story of the man who owned a lamb and of his neighbor who coveted the lamb. As David's anger burned against the covetous neighbor in the story, Nathan revealed to him that he was, in truth, that neighbor. This psalm reflects repentance. This is the true spirit of deep sorrow and regret over sin we have committed as we see the damage it has done to others and to our relationship with a holy God. In repentance we can truly seek grace and forgiveness and we can find it. Explore the heart of repentance as you read this psalm and meditate on it.

Answer the questions in your own words.

- When did your sin last hurt others or damage your relationship with God?
- In reflection of your own sin, which verses of this psalm most connect with your feelings of repentance?
- What fruits of repentance come forth in your own walk with God?

Pray Psalm 51. Write out a brief prayer of repentance in your own words using Psalm 51 as an example.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 28: Jesus Reigns

Read Psalm 110

A few years ago a Ukrainian pastor came to our church. He and I were both guitarists. On the day I was giving him a tour, I took him to Guitar Center (naturally). Though he had little English facility, when we sat down with guitars we easily played, “Stairway to Heaven.” And we rocked it. This song is likely the most well-known pop tune for guitarists on the planet. What’s the most well-known psalm - song? As it turns out, Psalm 110 is cited in the New Testament by far more than in Old Testament passage (at least 28 times). Why so? Because the Apostles concluded that this psalm was the most important direct prophecy of Messiah Jesus and especially of his Ascension. For example, on the Day of Pentecost Peter preached: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God. . . For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (Acts 2:32–35). Paul wrote, “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death” (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). This means that Jesus is reigning from the right hand of the Father. He will subdue all of his enemies and then will come the Resurrection at the end of history.

Reflect on this psalm by answering these questions in your own words.

- From your knowledge of Christian history, what are three examples of advances in the Kingdom Reign of Jesus (from the Ascension until now)?
- The last enemy to be overthrown at the Resurrection is death. Name a few current “enemies” (ideologies, practices, powers) of Christ in the world?
- If Christ is now reigning as a Priestly King with assured victory, how should this affect your attitude in daily life as you face challenges?

Pray Psalm 110. Using the main ideas of Psalm 110, write a prayer.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 29: Sing a New Song

Read Psalm 98

Many people are familiar with the first answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which states, “Man’s chief end [main purpose] is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” We can glorify God in many ways. We can do so by obeying him and by performing good deeds. One very important way we can glorify him is through our worship. Psalm 98 speaks of putting our whole being into our worship of God. We are to use all means of expression. We are to sing. We are to play music. We are to shout. The shouts are to be filled with joy and the songs are to be jubilant. We are to be energetic and enthusiastic in worshipping him because he has done marvelous things. The word ‘enthusiastic’ comes from the Greek word “enthous” which means to be possessed by a god. He is worthy of our worship and when we worship him we are fulfilling that for which he created us. God is not only calling us to worship him, but for all nations to do so. His revelation of himself in Christ is to the nations, to the very ends of the earth. He will judge the whole world and bring justice or equity to the nations. Therefore, all the world is called to praise and worship our God.

Answer the questions in your own words:

- What are the characteristics of the worship we are to offer God?
- What are the foundational truths upon which our worship is based?
- What can you do to bring your personal and corporate worship up to a higher level?

Pray Psalm 98. Write out a short prayer of praise and worship to him.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 30: Whom I Have in Heaven

Read Psalm 73

This psalm has lines that fit into an ultimate collection of quotes: Jesus' "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?"; St. Paul's "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain"; St. Augustine's, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee"; John Newton's, "I'm not what I was...but I am what I am by the grace of God."

This psalm says: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And besides you, I desire nothing on earth" (73:25).

A lot of Psalms are written in the midst of a trial. This psalm however, is written after the trial has past with the psalmist looking back. What does he see when looks back? He sees that he was envious of the wicked men all around him, since they were rich, beautiful, and carefree. By contrast, the psalmist saw his life as one of rebukes followed by bad luck. He desired to be like the wicked, to have what they have. The Covenant God's existence began to make little difference in the world. This all changes in verse 17, when he went to the sanctuary. In worshipping God, his whole perspective changed. He saw that the wicked are not blessed just because they have material things now, but rather their lives are heading toward destruction and judgment. The psalmist also no longer maintains his innocence and righteousness as he did in verse 11; he confesses his sinfulness to God (v. 22). What is most striking is his change in attitude toward God. He no longer sees God at fault for not blessing him with material goods. Rather, he understands that having God himself is the greatest conceivable blessing a person could hope to have. If we have God, how can we be envious of other people? We possess the greatest treasure in heaven or on earth. If we have God and we are in relationship with him, if he is our loving Father, then what else on earth can we desire?

Reflect on this psalm by answering these questions in your own words.

- In your life, are there wicked people that seem have good things in their lives?
- When has God shown his loving presence to you even in the midst of your sinful attitude toward him?
- What are some things you desire besides God (in contrast to v. 23)? How should you view them?

Pray Psalm 73. Use the key ideas in this psalm to write a prayer.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 31: Praise Him

Read Psalm 148

We are creatures. We are not the Creator. This obvious fact is important. Almost no person reveled in creation and being part of creation more than St Francis. He wrote the Canticle of the Sun (“All Creatures of Our God and King,” AD 1224) on reflection of Psalm 148. He wrote:

Praised be you my Lord with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun...
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
Praised be you my Lord through Sister Water,
Praised be you my Lord through Brother Fire,
Praised be you my Lord through our Sister, Mother Earth
Praised be you, my Lord through Sister Death

The psalm has two sections:

- I. Hallelujah! from Heaven (vv. 1-6): heavenly beings and heavenly bodies.
- II. Hallelujah! from Earth (vv. 7-12): creatures great and small.

Reflect on this psalm by answering these questions in your own words.

- In what ways do you invoke calling the heavens to praise God? (e.g., the Sanctus: “angels and archangels...”)
- In what ways do you see creatures in your world praising God?
- What plans do you have to experience God’s good and beautiful creation?

Pray Psalm 148. Use the key ideas in this psalm to write a prayer.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 32: Great David's Greater Son

Read Psalm 72

A confident, godly leader is a hero for justice and mercy. We long to see righteous leaders in the face of our politics in America. Of course we cannot trust “in Princes” (Ps. 146) or presidents. It should drive us to long for the true Messiah, though anointed King. In this psalm we have one of those tremendous portraits of great David's Great Son.

The Character of the King's Reign (vv. 1-4): Psalm 72 ends Book II of the Psalms. This “royal” psalm is an idealized vision and prayer of the King of Israel and suggests a messianic fulfillment. Certainly no Israelite King fulfilled this vision (not David, not Solomon, etc.), but it suggests the characteristics of an ideal monarchical messiah. This ideal vision includes righteous judgments, justice, peace, vindicating the needy, and punishing oppressors. Biblical righteousness overturns unjust oppressors, rather than assuming power is injustice.

The Comprehensiveness of the King's Reign (vv. 5-11): The extent of the reign of this ideal King is expressed poetically, both in time and space, e.g., while the sun and moon endure and in territory; from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth, the sheiks of the desert, the kings of Tarshish (Spain), and the islands (Britannia), Sheba (Arabia/Yemen) and Seba (Egypt, Genesis 10:7). All kingdoms and all nations will serve him (v. 11). David, Solomon, and especially the kings following, never even approached the shadow of fulfilling this. This highlights the messianic expectations of this psalm.

The Consequence of the King's Reign (vv. 12-19): He will save the needy, afflicted, poor, and oppressed. Even more, their lives will be precious in his sight (v. 14). The emphasis on justice and overcoming oppression is matched by the promise of prosperity (v. 16). Even the tops of mountains will be fruitful with an abundance of grain and fruit shall abound in the country and the city. There will be bread and wine for all. Even more, this will result in the praise and blessing of the God (v. 18). Under the rule of this righteous King, the whole earth be filled with YHWH's glory.

Pray Psalm 72. Use the key ideas in this psalm to write a prayer.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 33: Ascending to Zion

Read Psalm 124

Another road trip Psalm! Have you ever climbed a mountain, traveled over a mountain range, or visited a summit? A few years ago my friend Russ Harless and I, along with our wives, took a motorcycle excursion in the Blueridge Mountains. I remember that chilly evening in June, riding, up and up, to the highest point east of the Mississippi. We were chilled to the bone, and when we arrived, we all laid down on the black pavement to warm up from the radiant heat.

Psalm 124 is one of fifteen psalms in the category of “Songs of Ascent,” Psalms 120-134. In them are frequent references to going up to Jerusalem, Zion, and Israel. The term “ascent” is the word for “step.”

- a) It is, in fact, a physical ascent to get to Jerusalem and the temple mount. Israelites were to ascend to the high place in Jerusalem several times a year (Exodus 34:23). Consider, the last walk of Jesus from from Jericho (846 ft below sea level) to Jerusalem (2400 ft above sea level). It is over a 3000 ft climb (and only 14 miles as the crow flies).
- b) It is also a spiritual ascent to travel as a pilgrim to festal worship. The Mishnah indicates that these psalms correspond to the fifteen steps that led from the Court of the Women to the Court of the Israelites. Each year Israelites traveled to Jerusalem for the feasts of Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles. This “procession” to Zion is appropriated in the new covenant as ascending in worship before the Triune God (Hebrews 12:22-24): “But you have processed/drawn nigh to Mount Zion even the City of the living God, Jerusalem in the heavens, with millions of angels in solemn assembly for the festival, with the Church of the Firstborn whose names are inscribed in the heavenly register, and to God the Judge of all, and to the departed who were faithful, who have been made perfect, and to the new covenant Mediator, Jesus, and to [his] covenant blood which is much greater than the shed blood of Abel” (GS translation).

Pray Psalm 124. Use the key ideas in this psalm to write a prayer. Be sure to include the idea of ascending to the summit of the heavenly Jerusalem in worship and the deliverance of Yahweh.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 34: Do Not Trust in Princes

Read Psalm 146

I learned this psalm in my university days when leading worship for a college group. We took this metrical psalm version from the 1912 Psalter and gave it a celtic style. I have since recorded this a few times (one is linked below). Psalm 146 is obviously a “Praise” psalm and is one of the five closing, or final “Hallel,” psalms (146-150). These Psalms likely were used as part of the worship at the temple after the exile, like a kind of “Doxology” or “Gloria Patri” for daily worship. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) attributes this psalm to “Of Haggai and Zechariah.”

Praise Yahweh! (vv. 1, 10): “Hallel” in Hebrew means “joyous praise,” “to boast in God,” or “to act madly or foolishly.” The “Yah” part of the word is the first two letters of the covenant name of God, “Yahweh” or “Jehovah” (YHWH). “Hallelujah” is a command for the congregation to give “joyous praise” to the Covenant Lord. It is used 24 times in the Hebrew Old Testament, most often translated “Praise the Lord!” and is transliterated as “alleluia” four times in the New Testament. In Psalm 146, we are to praise YHWH and sing to him (zamar) throughout all of life: “while I live” and have “my being” (v. 1). He reigns forever and all generations of God’s people are called to praise him (v. 10).

Trust Yahweh! (vv. 7-9): The psalmist argues that on the basis of God’s character and actions that we should trust him for several reasons:

- a) There is no salvation is apart from him (v. 3).
- b) The hardness and frailty of the human condition is to put our “trust in princes” (rulers, kings, prime ministers, presidents, etc). However, men and their leaders are transitory; God is eternal. (v. 4).
- c) Blessing rests on those who trust and hope in him (v. 5).
- d) God is the Maker of all and he is faithful. Because YHWH is sovereign creator, we can trust that he is in full control.
- e) He is just and serves the needy, the afflicted, the righteous, the foreigners, the fatherless and widows, yet he opposes the way of the wicked (vv. 7-10). God is both great and good, so he is worthy of our trust.

So, the final word in this psalm is, “Hallelujah”

Pray Psalm 146. Use the key ideas in this psalm to write a prayer. Include expressions of both praise and trust.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 35: Praise the Covenant Lord

Read Psalm 33

Do you conceive of creation as a mechanistic clock of a sort? Would this cosmos run on just fine if God died? Or, is reality a living, dynamic, mysterious creation immediately sustained by a Triune God revealed in Scripture? This psalm addresses both God's sovereignty and the working of creation. The Bible represents God's relationship to nature as faithfulness to his Word, his Oath. So far from the evolutionary and secular concept of natural law is this idea — it is God's faithfulness which keeps the world turning. Therefore, we should praise him.

The Response of Praise to the Sovereign Covenant Lord (1-3) - Make time for joyful praise: "Sing for joy." Princetonian theologian, J.A. Alexander says, "the Hebrew verb...originally means to dance for joy, and is therefore a very strong expression for the liveliest exultation." Prince of preachers, Spurgeon says, "To rejoice in temporal comforts is dangerous, to rejoice in self is foolish, to rejoice in sin is fatal, but to rejoice in God is heavenly. He who would have a double heaven must begin below to rejoice like those above."

The Reason of Praise to the Sovereign Covenant Lord (vv. 4-7): "For the word of the Lord is upright [straight]." Eugene Peterson paraphrases this as, "For Yahweh's Word is solid to the core." Because all his work is done in faithfulness, "He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Lord." The Hebrew word for lovingkindness, *hesed*, denotes "covenant loyalty." St. Augustine says, "lest any think that by the merit of works he hath arrived at faith, when in faith are done all the works which God himself loveth."

The Resolution of Praise to the Sovereign Covenant Lord (vv. 8-17): His counsel cancels out the schemes of empires: "The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; he frustrates the plans of the peoples" (v. 10). His plans are eternally coming to pass (v. 11). As Proverbs 21:30 states, "There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD."

The Rejoicing of the Praiseful/Hopeful in the Sovereign Covenant Lord (vv. 18-22): The conclusion of the psalm is again the note of praise, but very intimate for the believer. God has a special care and love for those who hope in him. "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him" (v. 18). God delivers us (v. 19).

Pray Psalm 33. Use the key ideas in this psalm to write a prayer. Compose this prayer following the outline above: response, reason, resolution, rejoicing.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 36: Education in God's Word

Read Psalm 119:33-40

Refer back to the comments on Psalm 119 (Day 3). Psalm 119, like a few other psalms, is set as an acrostic using the Hebrew alphabet. So the first 8 verses begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (aleph), then the next 8 verses begin with the second letter (bet), etc. In order to capture this, below is a paraphrase of these verses, using the English alphabet (now we are up to the letter "E" in our language).

Consider my paraphrase:

33. Educate me, oh Lord, in the way of thy statutes,
and I shall observe it to the end.
34. Enlighten my understanding, that I may observe thy law,
and keep it with all my heart.
35. Eagerly cause me to walk in the path of thy commandments,
for I delight in it.
36. Encourage my heart with thy testimonies,
and not to dishonest gain.
37. Extinguish my desire to gaze at vanity,
and revive me in thy ways.
38. Establish thy word to thy servant,
as that which produces reverence for thee.
39. Exonerate me from dreaded reproach,
for thine ordinances are good.
40. Even now, I long for thy precepts;
revive me through thy righteousness.

Reflect on this psalm by answering these questions in your own words.

- How could you grow in knowing God's Word?
- How does God's Word change you from the inside out?
- Why does this psalm move through the alphabet? Why does it go from "A to Z"?

Pray this portion of Psalm 119. Use the key ideas in this psalm to write a prayer that includes at least three of these verses.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 37: Shepherd of Israel

Read Psalm 104

It is interesting that this psalm is used for Pentecost. We are reminded of God's old creation, when the Spirit of God brought the pattern of Heaven down to Earth. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes again, this time bringing the life and love of Heaven to Earth. This is the New Creation. According to verse 30, the Spirit of God was given to man for the purpose of "renewing the ground." Man was placed in the garden to cultivate it and guard it. Today, the Spirit of God sends us on a mission to cultivate and guard all of life, and to restore paradise again on earth. This is part of what it means for Jesus Christ to be the Savior of the World. And with his ascension to Heaven, he was given all authority to disciple the nations. On Pentecost, the Spirit empowers us to do so. So let us go forth in the power of the Spirit of God, and renew the face of the ground, wherever the curse is found. Amen.

Charles Spurgeon calls Psalm 104 "a poet's version of Genesis." The psalm taken as a whole is a praise to God which loosely takes the shape of the seven days of creation. Verses 1-6 describe the work of the days one and two of creation; praising God for the light and the separation of the waters in the firmament from the waters below the firmament (Genesis 1:1-8). Verses 7-18 easily move to the separation of the waters and the land on the third day, along with the creation of plant life and vegetation (Genesis 1:9-14). The psalmist sings of the fourth day of creation (Genesis 1:14-19), praising God for the sun and the moon in verses 19-23. The fifth and sixth day are included in verses 24-30, in which the sea creatures are created (even the sea monster, Leviathan, is mentioned!), and the land beasts. Man is thought to be absent from the list, because we most likely are to see him included in the fact that man is the author of the psalm. Man is said to go back to the dust when he dies, and man is given the spirit of God for breath, and man is the agent of renewal for the earth (Genesis 2:6-8). Finally, the psalm closes with a seventh day Sabbath hymn of praise, foreshadowing the final day of judgment in verse 32 when the whole history of God's creation comes to an end and man will be judged.

(Contributed by Rev. Michael Shover.)

Pray Psalm 104. Use the key ideas in this psalm to write a prayer.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 38: God the Lord

Read Psalm 50

Think back to last Christmas. Do you remember any of the gifts you received? Were you thankful for that gift? By now, the excitement of opening that present has probably worn off, and you may not have looked at it in a little while. Very often, we forget the good things we are given. The Israelites had this very same problem: they forgot to be thankful to God for his bringing them from Egypt to Canaan, and instead disobeyed God and offered sacrifices without being thankful to him. This was not pleasing to God, and so in this psalm, he is a righteous judge who calls on them to be faithful to him and offer their sacrifice with thankfulness instead of forgetfulness. God loves to save his people, but he also wants them to remember it and glorify him! Do you do anything just because it is “what you always do”? Do you go to church “just because”? Do you eat and drink at the Lord’s Table “just because”? Next time you come to the Lord’s Table, remember that God has blessed you in Jesus Christ, and be thankful that Jesus the Light has come into the world!

This passage shows an instance of God’s “coming” to judge his people. “God the Lord,” or the “God of Gods,” shining forth from Jerusalem, calls a court session with the earth and heavens as his witness in which he indicts his covenant people, Israel, with whom he is present (v. 2). These were people who had cut a covenant with God (v. 5). Because of his nature as just, God is a righteous judge of his people (v. 6). Beyond this passage, the charge laid is sacrifices enacted by his people with an insincerity of heart, and accompanied by lawlessness (vv. 16-22). Though the psalm as a whole is directed to Israel, it looks ahead to the coming of Christ who in his calling of all nations to himself “shines forth from Zion” as the Light of the World. His people are those who will enter covenant with him and bring sacrifices of thanksgiving to him (v. 23, Romans 12:1). In this passage, God’s attributes of might, creational authority, light, covenant faithfulness, righteousness, and justice are especially highlighted.

(Contributed by Rev. Jon Herr.)

“Before the coming of Christ, the Flesh and Blood of this sacrifice [that of Psalm 50:23] is promised by victims offered as likenesses thereto; in the Passion of Christ it is rendered in very truth; after Christ’s Ascension it is celebrated by sacramental memorial.” – St. Augustine

Pray Psalm 50. Use the key ideas in this psalm to write a prayer.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 39: The Mercy of the Lord

Read Psalm 126

One of the field studies we took while I was in Israel was a tour through the Negev region (which in this psalm, is spelled Negeb). There are a couple of words that come to mind in trying to describe the Negev. Dry. Dead. Barren. Colorless. Silent. The entire mountainous landscape was made up of sand-colored rocks, sand-colored earth, and sand-colored sand. No one in their right mind would try to live there, or could live there, unless they knew the secret. At one of the stops we took, our bus parked, we got out, and we began following our professor down a path. As we turned a corner into a valley, the entire landscape changed. This valley, or “Wadi,” was fed by some sort of spring, and we hiked along the stream for about an hour, through small plants and trees, watching lizards scurry around and ibex nimbly negotiating the cliffs on the other side. Water made all the difference. Just around the corner where there was no water, there was absence of life. Here, where there was water, there was abundance of life. Psalm 126 captures this image vividly for us. When the Lord “restores the fortunes” of his people, blessing them and abundantly providing for them, it is like streams in the Negev: life and joy appear where once there was death. So have faith, and call upon the Lord with your requests: he is the only one capable of turning the natural world upside-down!

This is the 7th of the Songs of Ascent, Psalms 120-134. Often read communally, especially on certain feast days, these psalms emphasize localized Yahweh worship, at the temple in Jerusalem, as well as national identity as a people.

In this psalm, there is first a remembrance. The psalmist recalls what occurred earlier when the Lord “restored their fortunes.” It was like a dream come true, and there was much laughter and rejoicing. Other nations also recognized their good fortune and realized that God had blessed them. Israel, too, recognized that it was God who had done great things.

Secondly, there is a petition. The psalmist asks God to again restore their fortunes. Comparing it to water in the wilderness, he exhibits faith that sadness will be turned to joy when this happens, and bountiful crops also will result.

(Contributed by Rev. Jared McNabb.)

Pray Psalm 126. Use the key ideas in this psalm to write a prayer.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Day 40: Praise Him

Read Psalm 150

In the beginning, the psalms speak of the Law of the Lord and how it serves as a source of nourishment and life to our souls. In progressing through the psalms, a wide range of human experience is expressed. There is suffering. There is conflict. There is grief and loss. There is great fear and dread. There is anticipation of the promises of the Lord. In this last psalm, there is the culmination of all things – the praise of him who is from, and through, and to, all things. He is center of all life experiences. He is the joy of the journey and he is the end of the journey. The Psalms begin with the picture of a godly person drawing deeply from God through his Word. The Psalms end with the shout: “Hallelujah” (literally, “Praise Yahweh”). This final chorus calls forth praise with every instrument and every part of ourselves.

“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”

As you read and meditate on Psalm 150, answer these questions in your own words:

- Where can we offer praise to God (v. 1)?
- What are our reasons for offering praise to him (v. 2)?
- How can you specifically grow in offering praise to him? List several actions you can do to praise God more in your daily life and in corporate worship with others.

Pray Psalm 150: Write out your own prayer of praise and express your heart to him.

Sing this Psalm

- Sing your own version to the Lord.
- Sing along with one of the versions found at wordmp3.com/psalms

Endnotes

Cover art:

van Gogh, V. (1889). *Wheat Field with Cypresses* [Painting].

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Retrieved from

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