A photograph of a dirt path leading through a wooded area. The path is flanked by trees and a wooden fence on the left. A person is walking away from the camera in the distance. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

**July 2017**

# **Prayers for Real Life**

**Readings,  
Reflections,  
Prayers from Psalms**

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## Monday, July 10: Psalm 1

Through the summer we will be reading some of the Psalms. The Psalms are not a unified, organized "book" like one of Paul's letters, the gospels, or the Old Testament history books. They are in no logical order. This can make reading the entire "book" challenging. The Psalms are a collection of poems, written by different authors, in different places, at different times, for different situations. The psalms are poems/songs/prayers written by many people: several were written by David, a few by Solomon, and others by a variety of others. The psalms have been the song book/prayer book of the Jewish people and Christian church through the ages. This summer we'll read a variety of psalms with a variety of themes.

The psalms can be a rich source of inspiration for our prayer lives. We may find our own emotions, situations, questions, doubts, fear, joys, and hopes reflected in the words of the authors. We are invited to pray with these people who knew God, struggled with God, worshipped God, questioned God, celebrated God, wrestled with God, and discovered a deep relationship with God.

Psalm 1 is a good place to start. Psalm 1 is a "wisdom" psalm. Like some of the other "wisdom literature" in the Bible (like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes), Psalm 1 teaches us how to be and live as the people of God. One of the common themes in biblical wisdom is a dichotomy between:

- wise people, who choose to listen to God AND obey God, and
- fools or wicked people, who choose to ignore God and/or not put His words into practice.

Psalm 1 highlights a choice we all must make:

1. We can choose to listen to God: "*do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands*" and be "*like a tree planted by streams of water.*" Is that a good or bad thing? What does that look like in real life? OR
2. We can choose to "*not be fully devoted to God,*" to compromise, go it on our own, and be "*like chaff that the wind blows away.*" Is that a good or bad thing? What does that look like in real life?

In principle, the decision seems straightforward. Of course, we should choose #1.

We all know it can be very difficult to live for God in practice. Often we do well. Other times we fail. The issue is not whether we fail or not (we will fail), but how we handle our failures. David often failed. But he confessed, repented, and kept trying to do better. He had enough character to admit his weaknesses and humble himself before God. He was committed to doing better the next time. Strong people do that.

How do you handle your failures? Can you admit your sins before God? Can you be humble before Him? Are you working on doing better the next time? What do you need to deal with before the Lord?

*Christ has no body now but mine,  
No hands, no feet on earth but mine,  
Mine are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world,  
Mine are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Mine are the hands with which he blesses all the world.  
Mine are the hands, mine are the feet,  
Mine are the eyes – I am his body.  
Let nothing disturb me,  
Let nothing frighten me,  
All things are passing away:  
God never changes.  
Patience obtains all things.  
Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.  
Amen*

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

## Tuesday, July 11: Psalm 8

Have you ever been overwhelmed by the beauty of God's creation? Do you ever simply feel an awe-inspiring sense of wonder at the glorious creation God has fashioned?

Some psalms, like Psalm 8, are hymns praising God. It is good for us to take time to celebrate who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing in our lives and in the world around us. It is so easy to focus on our problems (which, frankly, are sometimes trivial) and forget to recognize God's blessings, His presence, and His answers to prayer. It is good to take time for awe, for wonder, for worship, and for celebration ...

This psalm has a very practical application, too, however: *"You made us only a little lower than God and crowned us with glory and honor. You gave us charge of everything you made, putting all things under our authority – the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents."*

The Hebrew refers to "man" – in the generic sense – and the "son of man" – in the specific sense (probably referring to the Messiah, Jesus, as in Daniel 7). Sometimes we read it in terms of Jesus, and Jesus only. However, we need to remember that Jesus is the new "Adam" ("Adam" is the Hebrew word for "man"). He is the one who shows us how we were intended to live, perfectly, in harmony with God, one another, and creation. We are invited to follow His example, to be all we were created and meant to be (Ephesians 5:1).

In Genesis 1:17 and 2:15, **WE** – God's people, created in His image – are to tend, care for, and keep His creation as wise stewards, as His people, His royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). We have this mandate, as God's image-bearers, to care for His creation wisely and well. How are we doing at that?

Personally, are there ways that I can care for His creation better? Recycling? Reusing? Driving less and walking more? Generating less garbage? Consuming less water? Contributing less pollution?

Ultimately, we want future generations to enjoy God's glorious creation, too ... how can we do that best?

*Every creature, every plant,  
every rock and grain of sand  
proclaims the glory of its Creator,  
worships through colour, shape,  
scent and form.  
A multi-sensory song of praise.  
Creator God, may we join  
with the whole of your creation,  
in praising you, our Creator,  
through the fragrance  
and melody of our lives.  
May we worship you  
Along with every other part of your creation.*

*This world,  
Your creation,  
Rolled into a sphere,  
Packaged in sunshine,  
Gift-wrapped in love,  
Given to us,  
Thank you, Lord.  
Help us to care and tend for it as your stewards.  
Amen*

Church of Scotland

## Wednesday, July 12: Psalm 12

Many psalms are laments or complaints. The writers of these psalms felt comfortable coming to God with their pain, struggles, fears, disappointments, stress, anger, doubts, and hard questions. We can be honest with God. Isn't it wonderful we don't have to pretend to be joyful when we are going through hard times? We don't have to "put on a happy face" for God. We can come honestly and authentically to Him.

David is wrestling with moral and social collapse in his culture. It sounds eerily familiar to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, doesn't it? It is interesting that nothing is new under the sun – the problems we face today were the same ones they faced 3000 years ago.

In culture-at-large, lies, flattery, boasting, dishonesty, greed, and deceit are common. What were once commonly assumed ethical boundaries are now ignored by people from presidents on down. Some leaders have lost any moral convictions. And they are setting a dreadful example for younger generations.

David would love to see all such people destroyed (12:3). But notice God's response ... He sees it all – nothing is hidden. He is pure, holy, and just. He promises – and provides – protection, but not destruction.

How do we live in the amoral world around us? We keep the faith and we persevere. We keep living by the high standards to which God has called us, even if it means we feel very alone as we live with high moral values and ethics (I appreciate this folk wisdom: "*Just because 5 million flies hang around the inside of the outhouse doesn't mean the inside of an outhouse is a good place to hang around*").

And we hold to the promise that, as we honour God with our choices, with our integrity, and with our love, He will be more than faithful to us ...

*You are holy, Lord, the only God, and Your deeds are wonderful.  
You are strong. You are great.  
You are the Most High. You are Almighty.  
You, Holy Father are King of heaven and earth.  
You are Three and One, Lord God, all Good.  
You are Good, all Good, supreme Good, Lord God, living and true.  
You are love. You are wisdom.  
You are humility. You are endurance.  
You are rest. You are peace.  
You are joy and gladness.  
You are justice and moderation.  
You are all our riches, and You suffice for us.  
You are beauty. You are gentleness.  
You are our protector. You are our guardian and defender.  
You are our courage. You are our haven and our hope.  
You are our faith, our great consolation.  
You are our eternal life,  
Great and Wonderful Lord, God Almighty, Merciful Saviour.  
Amen.*

Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

## Thursday, July 13: Psalm 51

Some psalms are very personal prayers. They can give us language that may help us as we pray. Psalm 51 is a prayer that comes out of a specific situation: it is "*A psalm of David, regarding the time Nathan the prophet came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.*" The story is told in 1 Kings 11 and 12: King David (a married man) spied on the beautiful (married) Bathsheba, seduced her, and had her husband killed. It is a sordid tale of lust, abuse of power, treachery, and murder. Nathan, a prophet, confronted David. David was convicted about his sin. Psalm 51 is David's prayer of confession to God.

We all sin – hopefully not nearly as dreadfully as David did. But to God, sin is sin. Anything less than perfection is a problem; God doesn't deal in fifty (or a million) shades of grey. Therefore, we all need to spend time in self-examination, in confession, and in repentance.

Thankfully, Jesus has paid the price for all our sin. As we confess our shortcomings, God forgives us completely. "If we claim we have no sin," writes John, "we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness" (1 John 1:8-9). That is amazing, good news.

Use Psalm 51 as your prayer today:

*Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love.  
Because of your great compassion,  
blot out the stain of my sins.  
Wash me clean from my guilt.  
Purify me from my sin.  
For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night.  
Against you, and you alone, have I sinned;  
I have done what is evil in your sight.  
You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.  
I was born a sinner – yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.  
But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there.  
  
Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.  
Oh, give me back my joy again;  
you have broken me – now let me rejoice.  
Don't keep looking at my sins.  
Remove the stain of my guilt.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God.  
Renew a loyal spirit within me.  
Do not banish me from your presence,  
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.  
  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and make me willing to obey you.  
Then I will teach your ways to rebels, and they will return to you.  
Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves;  
then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.  
Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you.  
You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.  
You do not want a burnt offering.  
The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.  
You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.  
Amen.*

#### **Friday, July 14: Psalm 24**

God is the King of Creation. He is the Creator of everything. We tend to limit our thinking simply to God as creator of the Earth – this little planet. People in the Old Testament era didn't even have the concept of the Earth as a planet. In their cosmology, described in Genesis 1, the Earth was a flat surface and the sky was a metallic dome above, with little holes in it through which rain fell and stars shone. The entire "universe" was only as big as their limited experience. They described the world as they experienced it from their pre-scientific viewpoint. They later developed a concept of heaven beyond the metallic dome of the sky and an

underworld beneath the Earth.<sup>1</sup>

These days we know a bit more about cosmology. The Earth is spherical. The sky is not a metal dome. Heaven and hell are not physical “layers” above the sky or beneath the surface of the Earth. The universe is incredibly vast, composed of millions of galaxies (the Hubble Space Telescope has revealed an estimated 100 billion galaxies in the universe, but this number is likely to increase to about 200 billion as telescope technology improves. Check out <http://hubblesite.org/> for amazing images and videos). There may even be multiple universes (a [multiverse](#)). God is the God of all of this – and so much more. Wow.

The amazing truth of Scripture is that this awesome God of ALL of creation wants to know us. We are invited to welcome Him into the gates of our lives. He wants to walk with, talk with, and share with us.

Yes, we are challenged to have “clean hands” and a “pure heart.” God is pure, holy, righteous, and glorious. But through Jesus, our sin has been forgiven. As we read yesterday, John writes, *“If we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.”* John is honest: we all fall short – *“If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.”* However, John also reassures us, *“if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness”* (1 John 1:7-9).

- Pray about anything in your life you need to confess ... Thank God for His promise of forgiveness.
- Welcome God into your heart, mind, body, and soul. Praise Him today.

*By faith  
I gaze up to the heavens and know  
within its vastness  
that this is your creation,  
planned and effected within eternity.*

*By faith  
I pluck an ear of corn, and know  
within its symmetry  
lies the chemistry of life,  
the potential of creation within my hand.*

*By faith  
I listen for your voice, and know  
the whisper that I hear  
breathed a world into existence,  
yet listens to the prayer within my soul.*

*By faith  
I strive to do your will, and know  
the door that I approach  
may lead me to shadows,  
where my role is to become your light.*

*By faith  
I cling to your word, and know  
the strength that I receive  
has its source within the Love of my great God,  
who is at the centre of all things.*

*Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture is **NOT** a scientific textbook about the scientific nature of the Earth/universe. It describes reality as people observed it (a flat Earth, domed sky, sun moving around a stationary Earth). This made more sense to ancient people than a description of a spherical Earth, the Earth revolving around sun and rotating on its axis, and a vast universe. Is the Bible wrong? Not at all! It describes things as they appear to be. God is communicating profound spiritual truths (only He can reveal), not scientific observations (we can figure out on our own). He could still write a far better physics/geography text than we could if He wanted to; that’s not His purpose in Scripture. The Bible is about a higher type of truth (spiritual truth) than scientific truth. “Science,” as we know it, was not considered of great importance until the 17<sup>th</sup> century; this was also when the word “science” was coined.

## Saturday, July 15: Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is probably the best known of all the psalms. It is a “thanksgiving psalm” – a psalm celebrating God’s love and faithfulness.

Read each phrase separately. Spend time reflecting on what that phrase means in your life. Take time to ask God to speak to you ...

- *The Lord is my shepherd ...* what is God saying to you?
- *I have all that I need ...* what is God saying to you?
- *He lets me rest in green meadows ...* what is God saying to you?
- *He leads me beside peaceful streams ...* what is God saying to you?
- *He renews my strength ...* what is God saying to you?
- *He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name ...* what is God saying to you?
- *Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me ...* what is God saying to you?
- *Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me ...* what is God saying to you?
- *You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies ...* what is God saying to you?
- *You honor me by anointing my head with oil ...* what is God saying to you?
- *My cup overflows with blessings ...* what is God saying to you?
- *Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life ...* what is God saying?
- *I will live in the house of the Lord forever ...* what is God saying to you?

*Lord of reality, make me real,  
not plastic, synthetic, pretend, phony, an actor playing out his part – a hypocrite.  
I don't want to keep a prayer list – but to pray.  
I don't want to agonize to find Your will – but to obey what I already know.  
I don't want to argue theories of inspiration – but to submit to Your Word.  
I don't want to explain the difference between 'eros' and 'philos' and 'agape'<sup>2</sup> – but to love.  
I don't want to sing as if I mean it – I want to mean it.  
I don't want to tell it like it is – but to be like You want me to be.  
I don't want to think another needs me – but I need him, else I'm not complete.  
I don't want to tell others how to do it – but to do it.  
I don't want to have to be always right – but to admit it when I'm wrong.  
I don't want to be a census taker – but an obstetrician.  
I don't want to be an involved person, a professional – but a friend.  
I don't want to be insensitive – but to hurt where other people hurt.  
I don't want to say "I know how you feel" – but to say, "God knows,"  
and "I'll try, if you'll be patient with me,"  
and meanwhile I'll be quiet.  
I don't want to scorn the clichés of others – but to mean everything I say.  
Including this. Amen*

Joe Bayly<sup>3</sup> (1920-1986)

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<sup>2</sup> These are three different Greek words typically translated into English as “love” – “eros” is passionate and emotional (including sexual) love; “philos” is brotherly or family-type love; “agape” is unconditional, self-sacrificing love.

<sup>3</sup> Among other challenges, Bayly endured the deaths of three of sons. He wrote several books including *Heaven* and *Psalms of My Life*. “Christians won’t escape the pain and hardship of being human,” he wrote. “The difference comes in the way they appropriate God’s strength and live His will even in times of tears and loneliness.” (*How Long Lord?* p.4).

## Sunday, July 16: Psalm 34

Wisdom. In the Bible, wisdom is not just a matter of “knowing the right stuff.” In Scripture, knowing about God, ethics, and truth is referred to as “knowledge.” People can be very knowledgeable about God, the Bible, theology, and ethics, but if they don’t act on it, they are not wise. If you think about it, the devil is incredibly knowledgeable about God, the Bible, theology, and ethics (he knows more than I do), but he doesn’t choose to act on it ... The Bible calls people who know the truth, but don’t live it out, “fools.”

In Scripture, wisdom is knowing the truth AND living it out in appropriate ways. One key to biblical wisdom is the “fear of the Lord.” In Proverbs, for instance, Solomon writes, “*Fear of the Lord teaches wisdom ...*” (Proverbs 15:33). This phrase bothers some people. After all, God is love and He loves us, why should we fear Him? Is He a terrifying monster?

“Fear of the Lord” in Scripture is an English translation of a Hebrew phrase that means something like “awe,” “reverence,” “deep respect,” or “profound wonder” more than terror or dread. When we come into God’s presence, we are with the Creator of billions of stars in billions of galaxies. That should instill awe, wonder, and reverence – not terror. This God is the One who loves His creation so much He did humble Himself, become human, and die on the cross to bring us back into relationship with Himself (Philippians 2:1-11). Reverence, awe, wonder – and love and worship – are all caught up in that phrase “fear of the Lord.”

Because God is God, we take His instruction and guidance seriously. We choose to obey it. Out of awe, respect, reverence – and love – for God, we acknowledge He knows best (after all He created us, this world, and everything in it). Therefore, out of a healthy, humble, reverent “fear of the Lord” we choose to live wisely, following His way. In general, things go well for us when we choose to live with godly wisdom.

As you read through Psalm 34, what phrases speak to you? What is God saying to you, today?

### **Morning Prayer:**

*O God, our Father, you make the light to shine out of the darkness.  
We thank you for waking us to see the light of this new day.  
Help us to waste none of its hours; to soil none of its moments;  
To neglect none of its opportunities; to fail none of its duties.  
Bring us to the evening undefeated by any temptation, at peace with ourselves,  
At peace with our fellow-travellers, and at peace with you. Amen*

### **Evening Prayer:**

*O God, our Father, we thank you for this day that is passing from us now ...  
For any glimpse of beauty we have seen;  
For any echo of your truth we have heard;  
For any kindness we have received;  
For any good we have been enabled to do;  
And for any temptation which you gave us grace to overcome ...  
We thank you, Lord.  
We ask forgiveness for anything which has spoiled or marred this day –  
For any word which now we wish had never been spoken;  
For any deed which now we wish had never been done;  
For everything which makes us ashamed when we remember it ...  
Forgive us, Lord.  
Eternal God, who gives us the day for work and the night for rest,  
grant us a good night’s sleep,  
and wake us tomorrow,  
refreshed and better able to serve you and the people around us.  
We ask this, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

## Monday, July 17: Psalm 19

Psalm 19 contains three different themes:

- 19:1-6 are a celebration of God as the Creator. Like Psalm 8, it is good for us to simply pause in wonder and awe, and worship our amazing Creator. How do passages like this help you appreciate who God is in new ways? How do you appreciate His creation in new ways?
- 19:7-11 are a wisdom passage (like Psalm 1). David is giving us some good advice for godly living. What is God saying to you through these verses? How can you put this into practice?
- 19:12-14 are a personal response to God's wisdom, and to God as Creator. What does David pray? Can you pray David's prayer?

William Penn (1644-1718) wrote, *"In the rush and noise of life, as you have intervals, step within yourself and be still. Wait upon God. Feel his good presence. This will carry you through your day's business."*

Find time today to worship God, in awe and wonder. To learn from God, wisdom for your life. And to be open an honest with God, allowing Him to renew you from within ...

*How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?  
Cleanse me from these hidden faults.  
Keep your servant from deliberate sins.  
Don't let them control me.  
Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin.  
May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you,  
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.  
Lord, help me pay attention and gain understanding.  
Help me lay hold of my words with all my heart;  
keep your commands I may become fully alive.  
Lord, may I get wisdom and understanding  
by not forgetting your words or swerving from them.  
May I never forsake your wisdom.  
Amen*

Psalm 19:12-14

## Tuesday, July 18: Psalm 102

There may be times in your life when, like the subtitle in this psalm, you feel overwhelmed with trouble and need to pour out your problems before the Lord. God can handle that just fine. Psalm 102 reminds us that we cannot shock God, we cannot offend Him, and we needn't hide our raw emotions from Him. In fact, it encourages us to be brutally honest with God about how we feel. That's good news.

102:1-11 are a lament. The writer lays out his troubles before the Lord. Your problems will be different than this writer's. That's ok. You can still bring them all before God.

102:12-22 moves us from lament to praise, recalling God's promises and assurances for the future.

There is no nice, happy ending to this psalm. The writer can find comfort and strength knowing God is eternal, knowing He is compassionate, and knowing He holds everything in His hands. But that doesn't necessarily mean that this writer, individually, is going to be saved from his physical ailments. Life still hurts.

*"Love anything,"* wrote C.S. Lewis, *"and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal."*

Part of the human experience is that we do go through hard times ... often because we love. And yet, during that, we are called to remain faithful. We remain faithful because we trust God; we know that He is

good and all things are in His hands. We remain faithful because we do love others – and we can support one another through our faith and trust in God. And we remain faithful because we know that this life is not all there is. We look forward to eternity with God.

We don't know why sometimes God does miraculously intervene in some circumstances, and not in others. We don't know why some people suffer or die young. We don't know why accidents happen to some and not others. We don't know why some people and not others die in natural disasters. There are many things that remain mysteries to us. Life – real life – is lived in these mysteries.

C.S. Lewis also wrote, "*God is not hurried along in the time-stream of this universe any more than an author is hurried along in the imaginary time of his own novel. He has infinite attention for each of us ...*" He has infinite time for you ... Will you spend some time with Him?

*All glory to you, Holy Father of Glory,  
ever-kind, ever-loving, ever-powerful,  
Because of all the abundance, favour, and deliverance that you have given us in our need.  
Whatever blessings befall us as your children  
– in our portion, in our lot, in our path –  
We thank you for the rich gifts of your hand and the joyous blessings of your mouth.  
We are guilty and polluted, O God, in spirit, in heart, and in flesh,  
in thought, in word, and in act.  
We pray for the power of your love to cleanse us.  
Leap over the mountains of our transgressions,  
and wash us in the true blood of your forgiveness,  
that we may be like the fresh snow on the mountain, like the lily of the lake.  
In the steep path of our calling – be it easy or uneasy to walk,  
be it bright or dark for us to follow – guide us with your strong hand.  
Be our shield against the wiles of the deceiver;  
protect us from his arrows of temptation.  
Be our helmet and our buckler so that every secret thought of our minds is holy,  
every word of our mouths is pure,  
and every step we take honours your name.  
Be the valiant Shepherd of glory near us:  
though dogs and thieves would try to take us from your fold, protect us.  
Whatever matter, or cause, or propensity would bring to us grief, or pains, or wounds,  
or would bear witness against us at the last  
on the other side of the great river of dark shadows,  
hide it from our eyes, and drive it forever from our hearts.  
Now to the Father, who created each creature,  
Now to the Son, who paid ransom for His people,  
Now to the Holy Spirit, Comforter of might –  
shield and save us from all harm.  
Be at the beginning and end of our race.  
Be giving us songs to sing in glory, in peace, in rest, in reconciliation,  
Be bringing us safely where no tear shall be shed,  
where death comes no more.  
Amen*

Gaelic prayer based on 'Athair Naomha na Gloir,' *Carmina Gadelica*

### **Wednesday, July 19: Psalm 146**

"Praise the Lord" is actually the familiar Hebrew phrase "Hallelujah" (every time your translation says "praise the Lord" you are really reading the Hebrew word "Hallelujah" – make the substitution back to Hebrew if you wish). Psalm 146 is a beautiful celebration of praise and thanksgiving for all of God's blessings. Hallelujah.

In whom do we trust? Presidents? Premiers? Business people? Authors? Pastors ☺? Media personalities? Friends? Family members? Like it or not, human beings will always fail us.

Or do we put our trust in God, the Maker of heaven and earth? He will never fail us ...

What is God like (compared to human powers)?

- What can you thank God for?
- What are some of the blessings you enjoy?
- What do you have you can celebrate, today?

One of the best therapies for depression, disappointment, disillusionment, disgruntlement, discouragement, and other “dis”-es is gratitude/thankfulness. When we pause, and give thanks, it changes our attitude. Neuroscientists believe being thankful even changes the physical structure and chemistry in our brains.

It takes no effort to complain; that’s easy. Being a good complainer is not a gift: it’s fallen human nature. It does take work to be thankful. Gratitude is a gift from God. What are you thankful for? It will change you!

*Thank you, Lord, for making all things beautiful in their time,  
and for putting eternity into our hearts.  
O most high, almighty, good Lord God, creator of the universe,  
watch over us and keep us in the light of your presence.  
May our praised continually blend with that of all creation,  
until we come together to the eternal joys which you promise in your love,  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
O God, our Father, we would thank you for all the bright things of life.  
Help us to see them, and to count them, and to remember them,  
that our lives may flow in ceaseless praise,  
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.*

J.H. Jowett (1841-1923)

### **Thursday, July 20: Psalm 37**

Psalm 37 is another wisdom psalm. It “reads” a lot like a chapter of the Book of Proverbs. It is a collection of wise sayings that reflect on the challenges of life: wicked, violent, ruthless and greedy people often flourish while godly, good, and generous people often suffer. It’s just not fair. It shouldn’t be.

David is brutally honest. He doesn’t try to provide alternate (fake) news, blame other people, or explain evil away with trite theological platitudes. He admits that, yes, the world is broken. People have free will – for good or bad. Bad people can do bad things. Bad people often do thrive – financially, politically, and in terms of power. There is (lots of) evil in the world. That’s life.

Life is not a slot machine: you cannot put in a good deed and expect an automatic blessing. There is ambiguity: a righteous person is promised that his feet won’t slip (37:31) but he may stumble (37:24). We are promised the desires of our heart (37:4) but may also possess little (37:16) – perhaps a comment on what the desires of our heart should/shouldn’t be, too. The reality of lived experience is that good people experience disaster (37:19) and trouble (37:39). Welcome to a world of human free will, marred by sin.

David is pointing out, however, that when we take the big picture view, the best option is still to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. In general, life goes well for those who follow God’s ways. In general, things do work better for those who follow God. He is not talking about financial wealth; he is talking about rich relationships, peace of heart and mind, a sense of purpose and mission, and a holistic worldview that brings God’s truth and our lives together in harmony.

As you read (and re-read) Psalm 37, how is God speaking to you? What can you learn from this wisdom? How can it apply to your life, today?

*O God,  
In my deeds, in my words,  
In my wishes, in my reason,  
And in the fulfilling of my desires,  
In my sleep, in my dreams, in my repose,  
In my thoughts, in my heart and soul always,  
May your Holy Spirit,  
The promised Lord of Glory, dwell.*

*God with me lying down,  
God with me rising up,  
God with me in each ray of light,  
There is no ray of joy without You, not one ray of joy without You.  
Christ with me sleeping,  
Christ with me waking,  
Christ with me watching,  
Every day and night, each day and night.  
God with me protecting,  
The Lord with me directing,  
The Spirit with me strengthening,  
For ever and for evermore, ever and evermore, Amen.  
Chief of chiefs,  
Amen.*

Gaelic prayer based on 'Uirnich' and 'Dia liom a laighe,' *Carmina Gadelica*

### **Friday, July 21: Psalm 135**

Psalm 135 is a hymn celebrating that our God is greater than all other "gods." In the ancient world, each country had its own "gods" – the Egyptians had Atum, Ra, Amun, Ptah, etc.; the Canaanites had Baal, Molech, etc.; the Assyrians had Marduk, Assur, Ishtar, etc. Ultimately our God, who called Abraham to bless all the nations and rescued the Israelites from Egypt, is the only true god. The others are all pretenders.

Many religions today claim to be ways to God. Some people suggest all religions are equally valid. Unfortunately, that's too easy. The three Abrahamic faiths – Christianity, Judaism, and Islam – each exclusively claims it is the only way (eastern religions, in general, are more amorphous). Jesus is clear: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6).

Every religion (Judaism, Islam, Eastern religions, Mormonism, Jehovah's witnesses to name a few) – EXCEPT Christianity – insists *you have to earn your way* to heaven/into God's favour. In these faiths, you have to get to heaven on your own, by your religious activities and good works. It's like snakes and ladders – good deeds move you up; mistakes slide you down: you hope you have been "good enough" ... or else.

Only Christianity is honest: you cannot possibly be good enough. Being "good enough" for a perfectly holy, almighty God demands complete perfection. None of us measures up. The remarkable uniqueness of our faith is summarized by Paul in Romans 3:23-26: *"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. **Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous.** He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins."* Paul continues: *"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners ..."* (Romans 5:6-8).

Jesus, God Himself, comes to us. He meets us where we are. By His grace He saves us. We are called to live godly lives, do good things, be generous, be compassionate, seek justice, care for those in need, etc. We do these **IN RESPONSE to** God's love, **NOT TO EARN** God's favour. That's a huge difference.

There are, of course, other 'gods' people can worship, too. Whatever is most important in our lives and whatever determines our values and major decisions are our gods: money, power, popularity, enjoyment, the new car, retirement plans, the new shoes, the vacation, the new game ... Any created thing, that controls your decision-making and moves God to the back-burner, functions as your god.

What is most important in your life? How can your life reflect what is most valuable to you?

*Glory to you, O God, Creator and Father,  
for the universe in which we live,  
and for men and women, girls and boys, all made in your image.  
Glory to you, O Christ,  
who took a human body and redeemed our fallen nature.  
Glory to you, O Holy Spirit,  
who made our bodies, the temple of your presence.  
Glory to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
whose will it is that we should be made whole in body, mind, and spirit.  
Glory to God, to all eternity.  
Amen.*

George Appleton (1902-1993)

### **Saturday, July 22: Psalm 20**

In a violent world, it is good to reflect on the tragedy of war, to think about the sacrifice of those who died, and the suffering of those in war-torn parts of the world today. It is good to remember we are in God's hands: *"Some nations boast of their chariots and horses, but we boast in the name of the LORD our God. Those nations will fall down and collapse, but we will rise up and stand firm."*

War, violence, suffering, pain, and evil are persistent problems in the Bible. In the Old Testament, God's people wipe out entire civilizations. David is a warrior, fighting for and protecting his kingdom. Throughout history many Christians have taken part in "just wars" – wars that are justified because they ultimately protect innocent people from horrific suffering (like stopping Hitler in World War 2).<sup>4</sup>

Other Christians, citing that all people are created in God's image, God seems to detest humans killing one another (Cain and Abel), one of the ten commandments prohibits killing, and Jesus espoused "loving your enemies" rather than violence, argue that war is never justified.

There is no easy resolution to this theological conundrum. At the end of the day, each of us must work these things through for ourselves and come to a position that, before the Lord, we feel comfortable with.

It is good for us to remember the past. It is good to remember the horrific violence of war. It is good to remember those who died. We want to be thankful for those who protected the freedoms we enjoy. We can learn from the past.

It is good for us to pray for parts of the world today where there is horrific violence. And it is good to pray protection, wisdom, and success for those who seek to bring peace into the conflict.

It is good for us to think about how we can be peacemakers: *"God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God"* (Matthew 5:9). How can we actively work for peace ... In our

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<sup>4</sup> In 1805, Napoleon threatened to conquer Europe. British Admiral Horatio Nelson prayed this prayer before the decisive defeat of Napoleon's fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar: *"May the Great God, whom I worship, grant to my Country, and for the benefit of Europe in general, a great and glorious Victory; and may no misconduct in any one tarnish it; and may humanity after Victory be the predominant feature in the British Fleet. For myself, individually, I commit my life to Him who made me, and may his blessing light upon my endeavours for serving my Country faithfully. To Him I resign myself and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend. Amen."* Note his concern that his cause was just, and that – even in the chaos of war – Christian principles would prevail.

homes? In our community? In our world?

General Robert E. Lee led his soldiers in prayer on August 13, 1863. It is a profound prayer ...

*We have sinned against Almighty God.  
We have forgotten his signal mercies,  
and have cultivated a revengeful, haughty, and boastful spirit.  
We have not remembered that the defenders of a just cause should be pure in His eyes;  
that "our times are in His Hands,"  
and we have relied too much on our own arms  
for the achievement of our independence.  
God is our only refuge and our strength.  
Let us humble ourselves before Him.  
Let us confess our many sins,  
and beseech Him to give us a higher courage,  
a purer patriotism,  
and more determined will;  
that He will convert the hearts of our enemies;  
that He will hasten the time when war, with its sorrows and sufferings, shall cease,  
and that He will give us a name and a place among the nations of the earth.  
Amen*

*Pray for peace and for peace-makers in specific parts of the world today, too: Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan, Yemen, Libya, Nigeria, Congo, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, and many, many more*

### **Sunday, July 23: Psalm 18**

I appreciate the brutal honesty of the psalms. While many are joyous celebrations of God's goodness, others are raw expressions of pain, struggle, and sorrow.

Note the context of Psalm 18: "*David sang this song to the LORD on the day the LORD rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul.*" Throughout David's life, he was hounded and hunted by enemies – initially Saul (who tried to kill him), then foreign powers, then his own son, Absalom. However, as David looks back on his life, in Psalm 18, notice how he comes to terms with all his difficulties ...

Paul sees this psalm as a prophetic look forward to the life of Jesus, too. Paul quotes Psalm 18:49 to show the good news of Jesus is for ALL people: "*Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote: 'For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to your name'*" (Romans 15:8-9).

This great news of God's love, power, and protection that David – and Jesus – experienced is God's gift to ALL of us. As you read this psalm, ask God to help you understand how it applies to your life ...

Is God trying to speak to you through this psalm? What word or phrase resonates in your heart?

Today's prayer was written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor. Bonhoeffer was teaching comfortably in the United States in the 1930s. In 1939 he chose to return to his native Germany: "*I have come to the conclusion,*" he wrote, "*that I made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people ... Christians in Germany will have to face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose but I cannot make that choice from security.*"

In 1943, Bonhoeffer was arrested for helping Jews escape Germany. He was executed at Flossenbürg Concentration Camp on April 9, 1945, just 23 days before Germany surrendered.

*O God, early in the morning I cry to you.  
Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you;  
I cannot do this alone.  
In me there is darkness, but with you there is light;  
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;  
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;  
I am restless, but with you there is peace.  
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;  
I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me.  
O heavenly Father, I praise and thank you for the peace of the night;  
I praise and thank you for this new day;  
I praise and thank you for all the goodness and faithfulness throughout my life.  
You have granted me many blessings;  
Now let me also accept what is hard from your hand.  
You will lay on me no more than I can bear.  
You make all things work together for good for your children.  
Lord Jesus Christ, You were poor and in distress, a captive and forsaken as I am.  
You know all man's troubles;  
You abide with me when all men fail me;  
It is your will that I should know you and turn to you.  
Lord, I hear your call and follow; help me.  
I remember in your presence all my loved ones,  
my fellow-prisoners, and all who in this house perform their hard service;  
Lord have mercy.  
Restore me to liberty.  
Lord, whatever this day may bring, Your name be praised.  
Amen.*

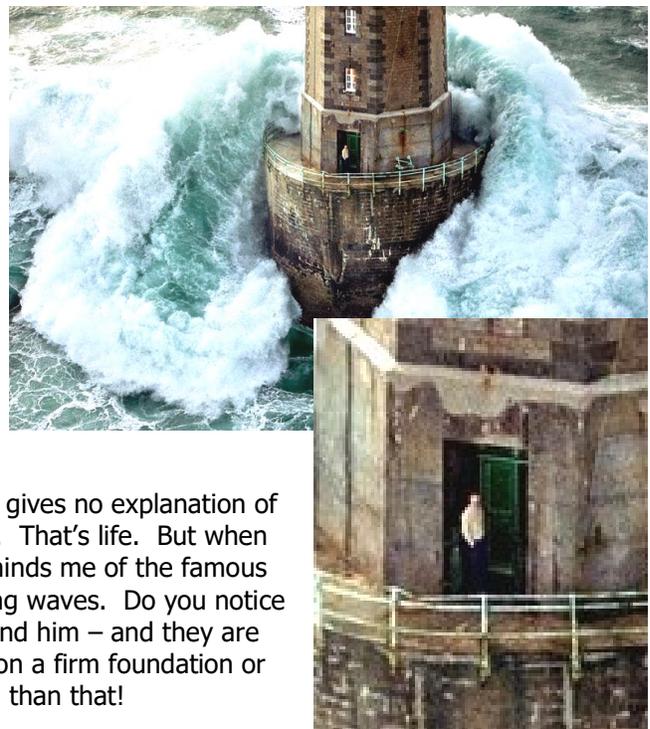
Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

### **Monday, July 24: Psalm 93, Matthew 7:24-27**

When the world seems to be in chaos, read Psalm 93. It is simple, clear, and profound. When your life seems to be in chaos, read Psalm 93, too.

This psalm is not about a specific flood or storm. To ancient Jews the sea/ocean/flood was a symbol of disorder and everything that was not of God. For example, swirling water is the initial state of things in Genesis 1 before God puts them in order; in Daniel 7, the beast comes out of the sea. In Jewish thought, floods/waves/seas represent anything evil, nasty, bad, and not of God.

The psalm is honest: bad things happen. The author gives no explanation of why bad things happen to good people. They just do. That's life. But when tough times do come, God can get us through. It reminds me of the famous picture (right) of the lighthouse surrounded by crashing waves. Do you notice the man in the doorway? While the waves crash around him – and they are crashing – he is safe ... even relaxed! He is standing on a firm foundation or stone. Our foundation is Jesus. Nothing is more solid than that!



Jesus tells a story about solid (and not so solid) foundations in Matthew 7:24-27. How is life different if Jesus is the foundation of your life? How can you invite God to be the rock solid base of your life?

Today's prayer – a familiar old hymn – was written by Philip Spafford (1828-1888). He and his wife, Anna, suffered several traumatic events. Their only son died in 1871 at the age of four. The same year, the Great Chicago Fire ruined him financially. In 1873, he planned to travel to Europe with his family: he sent his family ahead while he finished up some fire-related business. While crossing the Atlantic, their ship collided with another vessel – all four daughters died. Anna, alone, survived. As Spafford traveled to meet his grieving wife, he wrote these words as his ship passed near where his daughters had drowned:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought.  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.*

*For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:  
If Jordan above me shall roll,  
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,  
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.*

*But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,  
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;  
Oh, trump of the angel. Oh, voice of the Lord.  
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.*

*And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

## **Tuesday, July 25: Psalm 139**

Psalm 139 is a wonderful exploration of what it means to be human, to be created in the image of God. It doesn't require much commentary. It is far better to simply spend some time asking God to speak to you through its words.

- These words are for you, about you. How is God helping you understand yourself better?
- These words are also about every other person you meet. How is God helping you understand other people better?
- **Read** the various phrases of Psalm 139 several times "with the ear of your heart" – listen deeply to what God is saying to you. Listen for God's still small voice speaking to you. What phrase speaks to you the most? What words jump out at you? What themes resonate with your soul? Read slowly, attentively, listening to God ...
- **Ponder** this in your heart. Reflect on God's Word. Turn it over in your mind. Ruminates on it. Mull it over. What does it mean to you, today?

- **Pray.** As God has spoken to you through Psalm 139, personally offer your life to God – with all of the changes that need to happen. “Lord, make this part of my life ...”
- **Rest.** Take a moment or two to thank God for transforming you through His word. If a special phrase or thought continues to resonate in your soul, celebrate it before God. Praise Him.

*God was all-complete, all-blessed in Himself,  
 but it was His will to create a world for His glory.  
 He is Almighty, and might have done all things Himself,  
 but it has been His will to bring about His purposes by the beings He has created.  
 We are all created to His glory – we are created to do His will.  
 I am created to do something or to be something for which no one else is created;  
 I have a place in God's counsels,  
 in God's world, which no one else has;  
 whether I be rich or poor, despised or esteemed by man,  
 God knows me and calls me by my name.*

*God has created me to do Him some definite service;  
 He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.  
 I have my mission –  
 I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.  
 Somehow I am necessary for His purposes, as necessary in my place as an Archangel in his –  
 if indeed, I fail, He can raise another, as He could make the stones children of Abraham.  
 Yet I have a part in this great work:  
 I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.  
 He has not created me for nothing.  
 I shall do good, I shall do His work;  
 if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling,  
 I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it.  
 Therefore I will trust Him.*

*Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away.  
 If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him.  
 If I am in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him.  
 If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.  
 My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow  
 may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us.  
 He does nothing in vain;  
 He may prolong my life, He may shorten it;  
 He knows what He is about.  
 He may take my friends,  
 He may throw me among strangers,  
 He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink,  
 hide the future from me – still He knows what He is about.*

*O my God, I give myself to You.  
 I trust You wholly.  
 You are wiser than I –  
 more loving to me than I, myself.  
 Fulfill Your high purposes in me whatever they be;  
 work in and through me.  
 I am born to serve You, to be Yours, to be Your instrument.  
 Let me be Your blind instrument.  
 I ask not to see, I ask not to know – I ask simply to be used.  
 Amen.*

John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

### Wednesday, July 26: Psalm 111

This is another wonderful psalm in praise of God. It begins with the Hebrew word "Hallelujah" – or as it is commonly translated in English, "Praise the Lord." (Whenever you see the English phrase, "Praise the Lord." in the psalms, the Hebrew is "Hallelujah").

Psalm 111 praises God for what He has done. And He has done incredible things. Psalm 111:2, "*The works of the LORD are great,*" is engraved in the entrance to the Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge University. In this lab, pioneering research in nuclear physics occurred and the structure of DNA was discovered (28 Nobel prize winners have worked in the Cavendish Laboratory, including Ernest Rutherford, Francis Crick, and James Watson). As we learn more about our world, science continues to reveal to us how incredible our creative God is. The more we learn about His works, the more in awe we are of how amazing He is. Scientific research is not a threat to faith. It is a wonderful affirmation of the creative genius of God.

Among the great works of the Lord are:

- The things He has made – the heavens, the earth, and all of creation (111:2);
- The things He continues to do – sustaining and caring for His creation (111:3);
- The "wonders" – specific miraculous things He has done (111:4) ... saving His people from Egypt, and, of course, complete salvation through Jesus.

Verses 5-8 remind us that God has not just done great things in the past, but He continues to provide for us every day ("*Give us this day, our daily bread ...*").

Verse 9 is a prophetic look ahead to the coming of Jesus. Ultimately, the greatest act God will do is to come among us, die on the cross for us, and rise triumphantly from dead ... "*He has paid a full ransom for his people. He has guaranteed his covenant with them forever. What a holy, awe-inspiring name he has.*"

*Lord, take me from myself and give me to yourself.  
In your nature, my God – Father, Son, and Spirit – I shall come to know my nature.  
And what is my nature, O God of boundless love?  
It is fire, because you are a fire of love.  
And you have given humankind a share in this nature,  
for by the fire of your love you created us.  
And so with all other people and every created thing;  
you made them out of your love.  
O eternal Trinity, my sweet love,  
Light of our lives, give me light.  
Wisdom of all ages, give me wisdom.  
Supreme Strength of all strength, strengthen me.  
Today, eternal God, let the clouds covering my heart melt away  
so that I may perfectly know and follow your Truth in truth, with a free and simple heart.  
God, come to my assistance.  
Lord, make haste to help me.  
Lord, take me from myself and give me to yourself.  
Amen.*

Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

### Thursday, July 27: Psalm 112

Like Psalm 111, Psalm 112 begins with the Hebrew word "Hallelujah" – "Praise the Lord." This Psalm is parallel to Psalm 111. While Psalm 111 celebrates what **God** does, Psalm 112 looks at what a **wise, godly person** does. The wisdom of Psalm 112 is reminiscent of Proverbs 22:6: "*Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.*" The clear implication is that, if we "fear the Lord" (i.e. honour, love, worship, reverence, desire to serve the Lord), we will be blessed. It's simple cause

and effect, right? We do our part, and God will do His part and bless us ...

Does it always work that way? Does every child whose path has been directed wisely choose to follow the right road? Are the children of everyone who fears the Lord successful (112:1-2)? Is everyone who fears the Lord wealthy (112:3)? No ...

The Psalms – like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon – are “wisdom literature.” They give us wisdom for life which, in general, rings true. They help us understand the basic ways in which things work well, but they are not absolute guarantees. But in a world tainted by sin, sometimes the evil flourish and the good suffer. The sayings in the Psalm, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are not the same kind of absolute promise as Jesus’ words, “*I am with you always to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20).

So, as we read Psalm 112, we can learn much. In general, if we do fear the Lord – if we are generous, compassionate, righteous, confident, and fearless – life will go well for us. But, as we have also seen repeatedly in the psalms, bad things can – and will – still happen to us. People have free will. There is sin in the world. Reality is ambiguous. In those hard times the certain promise is that God will get us through.

We are challenged to live godly lives: if we do, life will likely go better than if we don’t. But there still will be difficult times. That’s reality. What is certain is that, for those of us who love God, His Spirit will help us make it through. And He will help us handle even the most trying of times wisely and well.

C.S. Lewis muses: “*Now even if all the things that people prayed for happened, which they do not, this would not prove what Christians mean by the efficacy of prayer. For prayer is a request. The essence of request, as distinct from compulsion, is that it may or may not be granted.*” This is the tension we live in ...

**Morning Prayer:**

*O God, our Father, bless us and keep us through today.  
At our work, make us diligent, showing ourselves workmen with no need to be ashamed.  
In our pleasure, help us find delight only in such things as bring no regrets to follow.  
In our homes, make us kind and considerate,  
trying to make the work of others easier, not harder.  
In our dealings with other people, make us courteous and kind.  
In our dealings with ourselves, make us honest to face the truth.  
And in every moment of this day, make us always remember that you, God, see us,  
and that in you we live and move and have our being.  
May we do nothing that brings shame to ourselves,  
grief to those who love us, or sorrow to you.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Evening Prayer**

*O God, our Father, you have asked us to pray for others:  
we remember tonight those who specially need our prayers.  
Bless those who are lonely,  
and who feel their loneliness worst of all at night time.  
Bless those who are sad,  
and who at night feel most the absence of someone whom they loved and lost.  
Bless those who are ill and who will not sleep this night,  
and those who will wake to care for those who suffer.  
Bless those who have no home, and no family circle to call their own.  
O God, who is present everywhere, bless this, our home.  
Help us to remember that Jesus is always our unseen guest.  
Help us never to do or say anything which would bring Him sadness.  
Keep us this night in the dark hours, and grant us kindly sleep.  
Make us feel around us and about us the clasp of your everlasting arms that will never let us go.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

William Barclay (1907-1978), *A Book of Everyday Prayers*, 26-27

## Friday, July 28: Psalm 148

Have you ever thought of the skies, creatures of the ocean depths, fire and hail, snow and clouds, wind and weather, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all livestock, small scurrying animals and birds all praising God? Of course, they don't praise God like **we** do. We cannot begin to imagine how some of the things and creatures God created do praise Him. But they do.

Of course, all people – kings of the earth and rulers and judges of the earth, young men and young women, old men and children – are called to praise God, too.

All of creation praises God. When we see a beautiful sunset, enjoy a gorgeous view, feel the warmth of the sun, God's glory shines forth. God's creation reflects the wonder of the Creator. Hopefully today is a beautiful day (I'm writing this on a sunny, warm day in April). As you enjoy the wonders of God's creation, praise Him. Even if it's a dull day, praise God for the glory of His creation.

I enjoy this poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins:

*Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings:  
Landscapes plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;  
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.  
All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him.*

Take time, today, to praise and worship Him.

*God of the moon, God of the sun,  
God of the globe, God of the stars,  
God of the waters, the land, and the skies,  
You are the King of promise, whom I praise.  
The star of guidance went up early,  
covering Mary fair, who came upon her knee before you.  
It was the King of Life who lay upon her lap,  
who destroyed darkness and tears,  
and illumed the land, illumed the world,  
illumed doldrum and current.  
In Christ, grief was laid to rest and joy was raised –  
music was set up with harp and pedal-harp.  
I come this day to the Father,  
I come this day to the Son,  
I come to the Holy Spirit powerful;  
I come this day with God,  
I come this day with Christ,  
I come with the Spirit of kindly care ...  
God, and Spirit, and Jesus,  
From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet;  
I come with my reputation and I come with my whole being  
To praise you, Jesus. To praise you, Jesus.  
Amen*

Gaelic prayer based on 'Dia na gile' and 'Thigheam an diugh,' *Carmina Gadelica*

## Saturday, July 29: Psalm 80

Psalm 80 is a "national psalm." It is a prayer on behalf of the entire country. The nation (Israel) had fallen away from God. The psalmist comes as an intercessor, praying on behalf of the whole country ...

Have you ever prayed for our country? Do you pray for our leaders?

It is a good thing to pray for nation and for our leaders. Writing to Timothy, Paul says, "*I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.*"(2:1-4). There are some good, practical suggestions here.

What can you pray for Canada? Psalm 80:18-19 are a good place to start: "*Revive us so we can call on your name once more. Turn us again to yourself, O LORD God of Heaven's Armies. Make your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved.*"

The National House of Prayer in Ottawa has these suggestions (christianity.ca):

### What to pray for, for the nation

- Pray that Canada will be a country that honours and serves God.
- Pray that Canada will be a nation which demonstrates righteousness, justice, compassion and generosity.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will bring a spirit of individual and national repentance across our land.
- Pray that individuals and leaders will seek and demonstrate forgiveness.
- Pray that Canada will be a nation of diverse people accepting, forgiving, sharing and working together for a better Canada.
- Pray that Christians would have both grace and the courage to be bold.
- Pray for the Spiritual Strength of the nation.

### Who to pray for, in the nation

- Pray for the Governor General, Prime Minister, cabinet, senate, party leaders, and caucus of each party.
- Pray for premiers, mayors, and provincial/municipal governments.
- Pray for the Supreme Court, judges and the judicial system.
- Pray that God will protect our land and pray for military, police, fire and emergency services.
- Pray for the healthcare system and healthcare workers.
- Pray for educators, teachers, students.
- Pray for the media and the arts.
- Pray for Canada's leadership in international relations and policy.

*O God, give your love of justice to those who rule our land.  
Help them to rule with wisdom and compassion,  
so that the poor and powerless may be treated fairly and with justice.  
Open their ears – and our ears –  
to the cries for help from those caught in cycles of hunger, poverty, or violence.  
Give them – and us –  
wisdom to know how best to respond,  
and courage to do the right thing, even when it may not be popular.  
Under their rule may all people flourish,  
and may there lasting peace and plenty for all.  
Amen.*

Based on Christine Longhurst, re:Worship blog

## Sunday, July 30: Psalm 127-128

Psalms 127 and 128 are wisdom poems – good advice that generally holds true ... but they are not ironclad guarantees that if we build our homes on the Lord we will be blessed with children, health, wealth, and only good things. In general, however, when we do base our lives on God, things go better than if we don't.

Psalm 127 is written by Solomon, also the author of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes begins with Solomon's famous line: "*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, Vanity of vanities. All is vanity.*" In Psalm 127:1-2 Solomon makes clear what is "vain" – trying to build a life without dependence on God.

In 127:3-5, Solomon emphasizes that "*God's gifts are as unpretentious as they are miraculous ... man builds for glory and security, to achieve only a fiasco, whereas God quietly gives blessings that proliferate ever since ... Nothing is said of monetary wealth or position: an upstanding family is wealth enough and honour enough*" (Derek Kidner). That is great wisdom.

Kidner also notes: "*It is not untypical of God's gifts that first they are liabilities, or at least responsibilities, before they become obvious assets. The greater their promise, the more likely that these children will be a handful before they are a quiverful.*" That is a wise and helpful insight, too.

Psalm 128 reflects on the keys to a peaceful and ordered life. 128:1-2 summarize that the keys to true contentment or happiness (the first word of the psalm is "blessed" or "happy") in life are:

- reverence for God (loving the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength), and
- walking in His ways (obeying Him by loving our neighbour as ourselves / being in right relationship with other people).
- "*Hard work,*" Kidner adds, "*is taken for granted but this psalm makes it as clear as Psalm 127 that enjoyment of its fruits is a gift from God.*" We are not passive. We live our faith and work hard.

Following God is not necessarily complicated – love God and love your neighbour – but it is not easy.

Our prayer is an old Irish prayer of commitment to God, *Rop tú mo Baile*, attributed to Dallán Forgaill (530–598 AD). There are several English translations, the most popular being this one, by Eleanor Hull:

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
Be all else naught to me, save that thou art;  
Thou my best thought in the day and the night,  
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.*

*Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,  
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee Lord;  
Be thou my great Father, and I thy true son;  
Be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.*

*Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;  
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;  
Be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:  
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.*

*Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise:  
Be thou mine inheritance now and always;  
Be thou and thou only the first in my heart;  
O Sovereign of Heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*High King of Heaven, thou Heaven's bright sun,  
O grant me its joys after victory is won.  
Great heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all. Amen.*

## Monday, July 31: Psalm 66

"Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he did for me ..." (66:16). It is good to reflect on all the blessings God has given us and to give Him thanks. It's also good to tell others.

Some wise pundit once quipped: "Some complain that roses have thorns – others rejoice that thorns have roses." It is so easy to focus on all our problems and be negative. The psalmist admits that he and his people have had more than their fair share of hard times, but he still chooses an attitude of gratitude.

Frank Doyle writes, "As we grow older and have fewer tasks ahead of us, we have leisure to indulge our memories. We should choose with care the memories we indulge. Even in old age they shape our moods. If we are seduced into what you might call sore memories, resentments and grievances, then people will avoid us. The world is hard enough without doses of other people's gloom to darken it. But we can lift our own and others' moods if we linger on the joyful mysteries of our life, on the people we loved and the experiences that we felt as blessings. We don't want to bore our friends with complacency or boastfulness. Gratitude for God's gifts is different. It is one of the basic themes of any mature spirituality, and it makes us easy to live with."

Gratitude is a great attitude. Being thankful can motivate us to action, too. John F. Kennedy said, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them." How can you live your thankfulness?

What are you thankful for? How can you live your thankfulness?

*Almighty God, Father of all mercies,  
we your unworthy servants give you most humble and hearty thanks  
for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all people;  
We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;  
but above all for your inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,  
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.  
And we beseech you, give us that due sense of all your mercies,  
that our hearts may be genuinely thankful,  
and that we show forth your praise,  
not only with our lips, but in our lives;  
by giving up ourselves to your service,  
and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory,  
world without end. Amen.*

Anglican Prayer of Thanksgiving

## Tuesday, August 1: Psalm 130

"From the depths of despair, O Lord, I call for your help ..." "Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD; Lord, hear my voice ..." All of us can pray that prayer at one time or another.

In some of the "penitential psalms" (as these are called), the issues are illness, homesickness, or persecution (see Psalms 6, 42, and 69). But in this case the issue is guilt (130:3).

Do you struggle with feelings of guilt? Are there things you've done or said that nag at you? Are there things you ought to have done or ought to have said, but didn't, that eat away at you? Do you replay videos in your mind of things you said, or did (or didn't say, or didn't do but should have)?

The good news of our faith is that with God there is forgiveness (130:4). He does forgive us. One of the great purposes of Jesus – God Himself – coming among us was to pay the price we ought to have to pay

and to take the punishment we deserve to take for our sins, mistakes, and failures. Jesus satisfied all the requirements necessary to cleanse us from our sins. Through His death on the cross and resurrection He destroyed the power of sin and death. Completely. Unequivocally. Irrevocably. Forever. For all.

In the psalmist's case, Jesus hadn't come yet, but he still believed in God's love and forgiveness. He knew God would forgive him as certainly as he knew morning would come after the night. That's God's character.

God can and does forgive you, as you confess your sin to Him (1 John 1:8-9). Sometimes it's harder to

- confess our sin to a person we have hurt and ask for their forgiveness;
- forgive ourselves.

Both are critically important. Forgiveness from God restores our relationship with Him. But asking forgiveness from other people, tough though it may be, is essential to restoring our relationship with one another.

And then forgiving ourselves – letting go of the past, refusing to replay the videos, not second-guessing every action/conversation – is essential for our own mental and spiritual health. God forgives you. Now forgive yourself.

*"Put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem you from all your sins."*

#### **Morning Prayer**

*O God, our Father, who asks us to live in harmony with one another,  
keep us today from everything which would make us difficult to live with.  
Help us never to speak thoughtlessly or deliberately in such a way  
that we would hurt another's feelings or wound another's heart.  
Keep us from all impatience, from all irritability, and from a temper which is too quick.  
Keep us from eyes which are focussed to find fault  
and from a tongue which is tuned to criticize.  
Keep us from being touchy and quick to take offence, and slow to forget it.  
Help us not to be stubborn or obstinate.  
Keep us from the selfishness which can see nothing but its own point of view,  
and which wants nothing but its own way.  
We pray that you would grant us this day  
something of the grace and beauty which shone upon our blessed Lord.  
Hear this prayer, for the sake of Your love and glory,  
Amen.*

#### **Evening Prayer**

*Eternal God, forgive us for those things we did not do today ...  
Forgive us any word of comfort, praise, or thanks that we might have spoken  
and did not speak.  
Forgive us for any help we might have given someone in need, and did not give.  
Forgive us if we made things more difficult for anyone today.  
Forgive us if we have set a bad example, by word or deed,  
and made it easier for someone to go wrong.  
Forgive us if we have been disloyal to any friend  
or have hurt the hearts of those whom we ought to cherish.  
Grant us the gift of sleep tonight.  
And grant us grace that we may walk closer to you tomorrow.  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
Amen.*

William Barclay (1907-1978), *A Book of Everyday Prayers*, 28-29

### Wednesday, August 2: Psalm 40

God doesn't always answer our prayers as quickly as **WE'd** like. Sometimes we pray, and wait ... and wait ... and wait ...

God doesn't always answer our prayers as **WE** think He should:

- Sometimes He says "No";
- Sometimes He says "Yes";
- And sometimes we do wait.

Our challenge is to trust God, knowing who He is – the Almighty One, the Holy One, the One who knows us inside out, the One who will never leave us, the One who will do what is best for us ...

There is wisdom in Garth Brooks' song, "Unanswered Prayers":

*"Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers -  
Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs  
That just because he doesn't answer doesn't mean he don't care -  
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers."*

- What phrases from Psalm 40 speak to you? Why?
- What can you learn from Psalm 40? How can you apply those lessons to your life?

*Teach me, my Lord, to be sweet and gentle in all the events of my life,  
in disappointments,  
in the thoughtlessness of others,  
in the insincerity of those I trusted,  
in the unfaithfulness of those on whom I relied.  
Let me forget myself so that I may enjoy the happiness of others.  
Take away my little pains and heartaches so that I may not burden others with them.  
Teach me to profit by the suffering that comes across my path.  
Let me so use it that it may mellow me, not harden or embitter me;  
that it may make me patient, not irritable;  
that it may make me broad in my forgiveness, not narrow or proud or overbearing.  
May no one be less good for having come within my influence;  
no one less pure, less true, less kind, less noble,  
for having been a fellow traveler with me on our journey towards eternal life.  
As I meet with one cross after another,  
let me whisper a word of love to You.  
May my life be lived in your Spirit,  
full of power for good, and strong in its purpose of living for You.  
Amen*

Anonymous

### Thursday, August 3: Psalm 103

Psalm 103 and 104 (tomorrow) are companion psalms, celebrating with thanksgiving God's love and provision. Together the two psalms praise God as our Creator and Saviour, our Father and Sustainer, merciful and mighty. Both psalms end with the familiar phrase, "Hallelujah" – "Praise the Lord."

- 103:1-5 celebrate God's love and mercy.
- 103:6-18 celebrate God is faithful even though people fail. He always cares for us. These verses also remind us to keep things in perspective – we are not eternal, but God is.
- 103:19-22 remind us to praise God.

This Psalm refers to when the people of Israel, having left Egypt, on their way to the Promised Land, wandered in the wilderness. While Moses was on a mountain being instructed by God, the people chose to make and worship an image of a golden calf. Furious, Moses broke the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. Going back up the mountain, he received two more: *"Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation'"* (Exodus 34:5-7). Psalm 103:8 is quoted directly from this passage.

The truth is, God does take sin, disobedience, and rebellion very seriously. The great news is that, as we read in Psalm 103, He delights to forgive us. However, we do need to confess and repent ...

We celebrate that, through Jesus, God completely, absolutely, finally and forever has paid the price of all our sin. There is nothing in our lives He cannot deal with.

As we celebrate God's love and forgiveness and the salvation we have in Jesus, it is good to remember that we are called to be just as loving and just as forgiving to one another. In the famous words of Alexander Pope: *"To err is human; to forgive, divine."* We blow it. God forgives. That's good news.

We can pass that blessing on. That's good news, too.

- *"Never forget the three powerful resources you always have available to you: love, prayer, and forgiveness."* (H. Jackson Brown)
- *"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you."* (Unknown)
- *"'I can forgive, but I cannot forget,' is only another way of saying, 'I will not forgive.' Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note – torn in two, and burned up, so that it never can be shown against one."* (Henry Ward Beecher)

We are called to love – and forgive – as God does. It takes no strength of character to remember wrongs committed against us; it takes real strength to forgive. God has forgiven you. Now pass on that blessing to the people around you ...

*Lord, you are a forgiving God.  
So I come today asking for your forgiveness.  
Father, my desire is to do your will, to be more like you, and to please you in every way.  
Father I know that you hate sin,  
but I thank you that you love me unconditionally despite the wrong I may do.  
I know that it is your desire that I be holy as you are holy.  
So Father I ask that you would wash me and cleanse me of all unrighteousness.  
Forgive me for using my words as weapons instead of for encouragement.  
Forgive me for any thoughts that caused you shame.  
Forgive me if I repaid evil for evil instead of doing good.  
Search my heart, O God, and reveal to me anything that is not pleasing to you.  
(Take a moment right here and listen to what God reveals to you.  
If God brings any sin to your mind include it in your prayer)  
Thank you Father for forgiving me, for washing and cleansing me.  
Thank you for loving me even when I fall short of your glory.  
Thank you Lord that you keep no record of my wrong.  
Thank you that I am a new creature through Christ Jesus.  
I love you Father and I know that you love me.  
I will bless your name forever more,  
Amen.*

Anonymous

## Friday, August 4: Psalm 104

A great companion to Psalm 103, Psalm 104 celebrates God and His creation.

God is the Creator – separate and distinct from the universe. Yet He is very much involved, intimately, in sustaining and caring for His creation. God created His universe in the beginning. God continues to create by providing for His creation day by day. All His creation – the land and animals, the water and people, the air and trees are incredibly valuable, created by His hand. He continues to provide for all His creation. We live in God's art gallery. We should treat it, then, with great respect ...

*"Few things are more controversial today," writes Ron Sider, "than the status of persons in relationship to the non-human world. Some, including some Christians, suppose that the only purpose of the non-human world is to serve humanity. Therefore, they conclude, we can ravage and destroy species and ecological systems at will ... At the other extreme are those who reject any distinction between monkeys, moles and people, denouncing any claim to superior status for people as speciesism. If that is correct, then human civilization becomes impossible. What right have we to use plants and animals for our food and shelter if we are of no more importance than they?"*

*"Biblical faith offers another perspective. The Bible teaches both that the non-human creation has worth and significance, quite apart from its usefulness to humanity, and also that persons alone are created in God's image and called to be stewards of God's good garden.*

*"Anyone who thinks God created the non-human world merely for the benefit of persons has not read the Bible carefully. God feeds the birds and clothes the lilies (Matt. 6:26-30). God watches over the deer hind in the mountains, counting the months of her pregnancy and watching over her when she gives birth, though she never encounters a human being (Job 19:1-2). In the story of the flood, God makes a covenant, not just with Noah and his family, but also with the non-human creation: 'I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth' (Gen 9:9-10). Knowing that they all give joy to their Creator, Christians will treasure every species ...*

*"Genesis 2:15 says God put people in the garden 'to work it and take care of it'. The word 'abad', translated as 'work', means 'to serve'. The related noun actually means 'slave' or 'servant'. The word 'samar', translated as 'take care of, suggests watchful care and preservation of the earth ...*

*"Created in the divine image, we alone have been placed in the charge of the Earth. At the same time, our dominion must be the gentle care of a loving gardener, not the callous exploitation of a self-centred lordling. So we should not wipe out species or waste the non-human creation. Only a careful, stewardly use of plants, animals and resources by human beings is legitimate.*

*"Biblical faith also provides a framework for dealing with the destructive rat race of unbridled consumption ... The Creator who made us, both body and soul, wants us to enjoy the gorgeous beauty of the material world. At the same time, we are created in such a way that human wholeness and fulfilment come not only from material things, but also from right relationships with neighbour and God. Both the call to care for our neighbour and the summons to sabbatical worship of God place limits on human acquisition and consumption. Material things are good, but less important than spending time and enjoying right relationships with neighbour and God ...*

*"We can measure an ever-increasing GNP and an expanding stock portfolio. We cannot easily measure the goodness of community in the extended family, or the value of caring for the neighbour, not to mention the value of a personal relationship with God. Frantically, each individual seeks fulfilment in more and more material things, even though our very nature makes it impossible for such things to satisfy our deepest needs." ("Biblical Foundations for Creation Care" in R.J. Berry, ed., *The Care of Creation*, pp. 47-8).*

Psalms 104 calls us to celebrate God's creation. And to think about our priorities.

Real joy, real contentment, and real peace comes from right relationships with God, with people ... and with God's glorious creation.

Like 103, Psalm 104 ends with the familiar phrase, "Hallelujah" – "Praise the Lord."

- How can you improve your relationship with God?
- How can you improve your relationship with people?
- How can you improve your relationship with God's glorious creation?

*The God who set the stars in space and gave the planets birth  
created for our dwelling place a green and fruitful earth;  
a world with wealth and beauty crowned, of sky and sea and land,  
where life should flourish and abound beneath its Maker's hand.*

*A world of order and delight, God gave for us to tend,  
to hold as precious in his sight, to nurture and defend;  
but yet on ocean, earth and air, the marks of sin are seen,  
with all that God created fair, polluted and unclean.*

*O God, by whose redeeming grace the lost may be restored,  
who stooped to save our fallen race in Christ, creation's Lord,  
through him whose cross is life and peace to cleanse a heart defiled  
may human greed and conflict cease and all be reconciled.*

*Renew the wastes of earth again, redeem, restore, repair;  
with us, your children, still maintain your covenant of care.  
May we, who move from dust to dust and on your grace depend,  
no longer, Lord, betray our trust but prove creation's friend.*

*Our God, who set the stars in space and gave the planets birth,  
look down from heaven, your dwelling place, and heal the wounds of earth;  
till pain, decay and bondage done, when death itself has died,  
creation's songs shall rise as one and God be glorified.*

*Amen.*

Timothy Dudley-Smith (1926 - )

### **Saturday, August 5: Psalm 119:1-16**

The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters. Several psalms are 22 lines long, each verse beginning with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet (called "acrostic psalms" – e.g. Psalms 37, 111 and 112).

Psalm 119 has 22 sections, each 8 phrases long: 176 altogether. Each of the 22 sections in Psalm 119 begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet (thus, in many Bibles, each section has a Hebrew letter as the "title" for the appropriate section – you can learn your entire Hebrew alphabet from Psalm 119).

Overall, Psalm 119 is a celebration and reflection on God's Word, Scripture. Specifically, it's a wakeup call to wisdom: to read God's Word and to put it into practice.

The psalm uses 8 words to describe God's Word:

1. **Law** – God's Word is something to be obeyed. This is God's wisdom; we do well to live it.
2. **Testimony/witness** – it teaches us about God, who He is, what He has done, what He is doing.
3. **Precepts** – essential principles of wisdom for how to live wisely and well.
4. **Statutes** – God's Word was, is, and is to come unchanging, like God. It's true. It's dependable.
5. **Commandments** – God's Word is not a suggestion you maybe, possibly, perhaps might want to consider as one possible option. This is God's wisdom. They are commands, not suggestions.

6. **Ordinances** – God has given us basic principles of right and wrong; they are not negotiable.
7. **Word** – God’s truth comes to us in many forms: spoken, stated, promised, or commanded.
8. **Promise** – God’s Word is about bringing us into right relationship with God and one another.

You are, of course, welcome to read the entire Psalm. We will read a few sections in coming weeks. What phrases/ideas/principles resonate with you from these verses, today?

As you read this passage, ask God to speak to you ...

*Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you raise me up from last night,  
to the gladsome light of this day,  
To win everlasting life for my soul, through the blood You shed for me.  
Praise be to Thee, O God, forever,  
for the blessings You give me:  
My food, my speech, my work, my health ...*

*I pray, today, that you would  
shield me from sin,  
and guard me from ill.  
God guide me with Your wisdom.  
God chastise me with Your justice.  
God help me with Your mercy.  
God protect me with Your strength.  
God fill me with Your fullness,  
God shield me with Your shade,  
God fill me with Your grace,  
Give me wisdom along with your grace.  
Protect me on sea and on land.*

*Lead me on, step by step,  
to the peace of the Everlasting City,  
for the sake of Your Anointed Son,  
Jesus Christ, of the seed of David,  
Visiting One of the Temple,  
Sacrificial Lamb of the Garden,  
who died for me.  
Amen.*

Gaelic prayer based on 'Urnuigh Maduinn' and 'Dhe stuir mi,' *Carmina Gadelica*

### **Sunday, August 6: Psalm 42**

Many of us know Psalm 42:1 ... and that’s it. Read through the entire psalm.

What are the children of Korah (who wrote it) feeling? Have you ever felt like that?

They are experiencing a drought, perhaps a physical drought due to a lack of water. They are certainly enduring a spiritual drought. They yearn for a refreshing experience of God’s Spirit.

Publicly, they have taken a stand for their faith in God, but God does not seem to be doing what God ought to do ... in their minds. They struggle with disillusionment and disappointment with God. Can you identify with their emotions?

How do you deal with life when things are not going well?

Notice the refrain in the psalm (42:5, 11): *"Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God. I will praise him again – my Savior and my God."*

Nothing in their physical situation changes. But these people find strength in God to face their adversity. As they put their hope in God, they are moved from despair to hope. When we take time to thank God for His blessings and worship Him, we find that we can find hope, too. Being thankful, counting our blessings, and living with gratitude changes our hearts, minds, souls – and lives.

How does the Psalm end?

What can you learn from Psalm 42? How can you integrate that into your life?

Our prayer today is composed of two selections from Joe Bayly's *Psalms of my Life*.<sup>5</sup>

*I cry tears to you, Lord.  
Tears because I cannot speak.  
Words are lost among my fears, pain, sorrows, losses, hurts – but tears.  
You understand my wordless prayer.  
You hear.  
Lord, wipe away my tears.  
All tears.  
Not in distant day, but now.  
Here.*

*Lord, my heart fears.  
I know you have said, "Fear not," but my heart fears.  
Thoughts flash across the track of my mind:  
thoughts of evil not good,  
loss not gain,  
suffering not joy.  
My thoughts are out of control.  
They exhume the past, bury the future,  
make the present a heavy burden.  
Lord, I cannot control these fears, these thoughts.  
I cannot look at the future with peace.  
But I trust you.  
These fears run wild,  
careening thoughts of evil may make it seem that I don't,  
but I do.*

*Lord, I do trust you.  
Amen.*

Joe Bayly (1920-1986)

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<sup>5</sup> We introduced Joe Bayly on July 15: Among other challenges, he endured the deaths of three of sons. He wrote several books including *Heaven* and *Psalms of My Life*. "Christians won't escape the pain and hardship of being human," he wrote. "The difference comes in the way they appropriate God's strength and live His will even in times of tears and loneliness." (*How Long Lord?* p.4).