



August 2017

Prayers for Real Life

**Readings,
Reflections,
Prayers from Psalms**

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Monday, August 7: Psalm 115

When the British Parliament passed a bill to abolish the slave trade in 1807, William Wilberforce celebrated with Psalm 115:1: *"Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name goes all the glory for your unfailing love and faithfulness."*

When things go well in our lives, we are often quick to take the credit. When things go poorly, we are quick to blame God. What if we turned things around? When things go well, we would give God all the glory. And when things go badly we look at ourselves, our own poor choices, and recognize our own culpability.

- Read the various phrases of Psalm 115 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, personally, offer your life – with all of the changes that need to happen – to God. "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. The last phrase of this psalm is the familiar *"Praise the Lord."* – in Hebrew, *"Hallelujah."*

*O LORD, the God of our ancestor Israel,
may you be praised forever and ever.
Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty.
Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O LORD, and this is your kingdom.
We adore you as the one who is over all things.
Wealth and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything.
Power and might are in your hand,
and at your discretion people are made great and given strength.
O our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name.
But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you?
Everything we have has come from you,
and we give you only what you first gave us.
We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us.
Our days on earth are like a passing shadow,
gone so soon without a trace.
O LORD our God, everything we have we give to honor your holy name; it comes from you.
It all belongs to you.
I know, my God, that you examine our hearts and rejoice when you find integrity there.
May all I do be done with good motives.
May I offer my gifts willingly and joyously.
O LORD, the God of our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,
may your people always want to obey you.
See to it that their love for you never changes.
Give me the wholehearted desire to obey all your commands, laws, and decrees,
and to do everything necessary to build your Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.
Amen.*

Based on 1 Chronicles 29:10-19

Tuesday, August 8: Psalm 121

One of the beauties of poetry is that two people can read the same poem and identify with the writer's sentiments very differently. When some people read Psalm 121:1, they see the mountains as a source of danger. So when they lift up their eyes to the hills – and perhaps contemplate a journey through them –

they wonder who will protect them from thieves, violent weather, rockslides, wild animals, etc. When others of us read this poem, we see it differently. For me, when I think of lifting up my eyes to the hills, I think of looking for strength and assurance. For me, mountains are symbols of rock-solid constancy and security. As I look at mountains, I see things that are solid, immovable, and a safe refuge (as in Psalm 11:1).

Living in southern Alberta, I still identify with the positive side of mountains. When I look west and see the Rockies rising dramatically from the plains, I find comfort in the hills. More and more I appreciate the beauty of the Prairies, but I still find the sight of the mountains to be awe-inspiring and reassuring that despite the winters and the winds, politics and economics, some things are immovable and rock solid.

From my perspective, then, when I read, "*I lift my eyes to the hills ...*" I find that phrase, in itself, a profound statement. I can get so wrapped up in my own circumstances, so focused on my own problems, so embedded in my own issues that I cannot see beyond the dust right at my feet. When we face challenges in life, one of the things we need to do is lift up our eyes. I find this psalm saying to me that I need to lift up my eyes, from the sharp stones right in front of me, to look at hope in the mountains ...

When I do look up, my perspective inevitably changes. The world is bigger than my problems. I find that when I spend my time looking down – at my own feet – I get a limited view of reality. I see the potholes. I see the roots I can trip over. I move forward step by step along the path, with no idea of where the trail is leading. But I lack a broader sense of vision. It is good to lift up my eyes, take a look around, and see where I'm going. This helps me keep things in perspective.

Lifting up my eyes also encourages me to look around. On the one hand, this means "*taking time to smell the roses.*" It is good to look beyond the potholes to see the beauty around me ... to enjoy a child's soccer game, a walk along the river, a cup of really good coffee. On the other hand, looking around also helps us see there are others who need our help. We can make a difference in the world.

But the mountains are not enough. Despite their apparent strength, I know that they are not as solid as they seem to be. As a geographer, I know processes of weathering and erosion are slowly, but relentlessly, wearing down the mountains. Occasionally cataclysmic events, from floods to earthquakes, can radically reshape the physical landscape. I need something more than the mountains. Simply having a broader perspective – and simply seeing the needs of others around me – is not enough.

Ultimately, "*My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.*" Beyond the mountains is the One who created the mountains. The eternal One. God. He is the source of life. He is the one who is truly rock-solid, immovable, and a safe refuge.

The psalmist has seen the faithfulness of God, year-in year-out. He knows, from the diverse experiences and challenges of life, that faith does work. He knows, as one who has walked through difficult times, that God will not let His child's foot slip (note, this does not mean that God protects us from those tough situations ... the testimony of experience is that problems come, but God gets us through them). He knows, as one who has faced 7-day a week, 24-hour stress (perhaps a chronic health problem) that God's watch-care for us is constant ... He does not slumber nor sleep. For those of us who struggle to sleep, isn't it encouraging that when we're awake at 3 a.m., the Lord is there with us? (Note again: this does not mean that we will not face stress, but that we can know God is always there).

Are you asking, "*Where does my help come from?*" Answer: from God. Read Scripture. And talk with people who have been there. God will speak to you. It may not be "dramatic;" it will be real. It will be powerful. It will provide the encouragement and comfort you need.

If life is going well – keep your eyes up. Look to the Lord. And see those around you who are struggling. Can you come alongside? Can you say, from your own experience, "*The Lord will watch over you ...*" People need to hear ***your*** story. You will make a difference in the life of someone else.

*Thank you, Lord, for being there for me
and allowing me to cry out to you in my times of need.
It is amazing to me that the Lord of the Universe
would take time to listen to me and to care about what I say.
God, there are things happening around me right now that I do not understand.
Some of these things make me feel weak, helpless and afraid.
Even in the midst of this, I know that you are the Lord.
I know that the situation is in Your hand, and I trust You.
I beg you for strength and for wisdom that I would be able to endure this situation
and be able to handle it in a way that would bring glory to Your name.
In Jesus name.
Amen.*

Unknown

Wednesday, August 9: Psalm 46

"Mrs. Fidget, as she so often said, would 'work her fingers to the bone for her family.' They couldn't stop her. Nor could they - being decent people - sit still and watch her do it. They had to help. Indeed they were always having to help. That is, they did things for her to help her to do things for them which they didn't want done. The Vicar says Mrs. Fidget is now at rest. Let us hope she is. What's quite certain is that her family are." (C.S. Lewis).

Can you identify with Mrs. Fidget? Or her family? If we are not officially working at our occupations, we are always doing something – we never slow down. When we do find ourselves with "nothing to do" we get restless, edgy, desperately trying to find something to do ...

It is easy to get caught up in doing things – very good things – but lose any sense of purpose, or enjoyment that might come with it. One of the reasons I keep busy is because I worry too much. I worry what people will think of me if I'm not busy all the time. I worry I will not get everything done unless I'm going every moment. I worry that if I don't do it, it won't be done right. Or everything will fall apart. And busy-ness keeps me from thinking about things: if I'm not busy I worry ... The sons of Korah (Psalm 46's authors) are worriers, too. What is God saying to them? What is He saying to me? *"Stop. God is your refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble ... Be still, and know that I am God. The Lord Almighty is you."*

God gives the sons of Korah – and us – a direct command: *"Be still and know that I am God."* That's not polite advice. It's God grabbing us by the scruff of the neck. For our own good.

In the Bible the principle of rest is very important ... *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour ..."* The "Sabbath principle" goes right back to Genesis 1 and 2 – if God chose to create Sabbath it's probably good for us, too. Jesus said, *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath ..."* (Mark 2:27). It was instituted by God for our spiritual, physical, social, and mental health. He knows we don't function well when we to drive ourselves 24 hours/day, 7 days/week, 365 days/year.

The first warning signs that most of us notice when we've been pushing too hard or worrying too much are physical – we lose energy, we ache, our digestion acts up. We get emotional symptoms – depression, irritability, frustration and anxiety. Socially we turn in on ourselves. Our spiritual life dries up – we don't have time to pray, study, come to church. It all becomes drudgery. In our twisted culture, we sometimes actually pin those symptoms like medals on our chests: *"I'm so busy I have a hiatus hernia, heart murmurs, AND panic attacks."* Crazy. I had one friend who used to brag about how many heart attacks he'd had.

"Be still and know that I am God ..." Let God speak to you today. Jesus says, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden light."* Spend some time turning all your worries and cares over to Him. And rest.

Martin Luther used Psalm 46 as the inspiration for this famous hymn:

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe (Satan) doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth (Lord of Hosts), His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him (the name of Jesus – Philippians 2:10).*

*That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.
Amen*

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Thursday, August 10: Psalm 6

How do you feel when you are scared (6:1), sick (6:2), or under pressure from forces beyond yourself (6:8)? We don't know all the specifics of David's problems: they seem to be a combination of fear, illness, stress, and spiritual desperation. 6:1 implies that David has sinned, too (Bathsheba?); he knows he has done wrong. Whatever the problems are, David knows that no person can solve them. Certainly he can't on his own. He can't sleep. His health is failing. He's desperate. The only thing he can do is turn to God ...

"Sin," Penny Boshoff writes, "weighs us down in this life ... Quite possibly David's enemy was his own son, Absalom. The family's troubles were rooted in David's lack of sexual morality (see 2 Samuel 11–18). The repercussions of David's adultery lasted decades. Sin affects everyone on the planet. We see it in ourselves (v 1), we see it in others (vs 7,8,10), and it takes its toll. The trauma of sin (whether we are the victim or the perpetrator) can cause physical (vs 2,7), mental, emotional (v 6) and spiritual suffering (v 3) ...

"Our modern world may have ways to alleviate suffering, but only God can deal with the root cause. We need to be honest about our sin and humble in asking God to deal with it (vs 1–4). David knew God's character. He knew, without doubt, that God responds to repentant people with forgiveness and love (v 9)."

Prayer works. We do not know how. Of course, it is for God to say yes, no, wait, or even 'don't ask.' But what loving father does not want to bless his children? What caring mother does not want to provide for her children's needs? What teacher does not want to see their students excel? What doctor does not want to see their patient in full health? (but sometimes the patient doesn't like the prescription).

In Christ, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have the assurance that our prayers are heard by our loving heavenly Father, and will be answered in his perfect way and time.

Bring your prayers to God today ...

Martin Luther's Morning Prayer:

*My Heavenly Father, I thank You, through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son,
that You kept me safe from all evil and danger last night.
Save me, I pray, today as well, from every evil and sin,
so that all I do and the way that I live will please you.
I put myself in your care, body and soul and all that I have.
Let Your holy Angels be with me, so that the evil enemy will not gain power over me.
Amen*

Martin Luther's Evening Prayer:

*My Heavenly Father, I thank You, through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son,
that You have protected me, by Your grace.
Forgive, I pray, all my sins and the evil I have done.
Protect me, by Your grace, tonight.
I put myself in your care, body and soul and all that I have.
Let Your holy angels be with me, so that the evil enemy will not gain power over me.
Amen.*

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Friday, August 11: Psalm 45

At face value, Psalm 45 is about a royal wedding. Like the Song of Songs, it celebrates the union of a man and woman, as husband and wife, in the Lord.

But there is a much deeper meaning, too. The New Testament writers use the wedding image to describe Jesus (the groom) and the church (the bride).¹ Paul, John and the others use phrases from Psalm 45 as they described the coming of Jesus. The description of the King (45:2-9) is reminiscent of some of Isaiah's descriptions of the coming Messiah.

Speaking about the bride, Derek Kidner writes, "*A royal wedding emphasizes with special clarity the parting and new beginning which are fundamental to all marriages. Here the brunt of it falls on the bride, as a king's daughter, whose old loyalties must not compete with the new.*"

It's interesting to think about this in terms of us – the church. To follow Jesus, we put away our old loyalties and make a complete new start in Christ. Jesus refers to this as being "born again" ([John 3:1-18](#)). Paul describes it as dying to my old self and rising to a new, resurrected life with Jesus. What does it mean for us when we think about Christian discipleship – living as a Christian – in terms of being as faithful to Jesus in all things as we would expect a great spouse to be faithful to their spouse in all things? Have you thought of your loyalty to Jesus in those terms?

As we work our way through summer, how can we remain faithful to Jesus? It is so easy to divide our loyalties – we can get caught up in doing fun things in the moment, the weather is good, church seems so dull, Jesus seems so distant, the lake/mountains are calling ... And we forget about what life is really about.

At Christmas, we remind ourselves that we need to keep Jesus at the centre of our celebrations. That's great. How can we keep Jesus at the centre of our summer? As you have some time for recreation, see it as "re-creation" – how can the Spirit re-create, renew, restore, and re-inspire you?

- As you enjoy the beauty of God's creation, be thankful and celebrate the Creator.
- As you enjoy friends, family, and relaxation, give thanks for those precious gifts.
- Spend some time praying through your priorities (I find the less frantic pace of summer a better time to make significant changes than New Years with its resolutions).
- Ask God how He might want to re-create you.

¹ See, for example, Ephesians 5:23-33, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:1-8, Revelation 21, and Revelation 22:17.

*Oh Lord, I am so tired.
 It seems like the lists of to-do's get longer each day,
 the frenzy in my home each night gets wilder.
 It seems like the summer has barely started but it's August.
 I'm so far behind.
 Help me, dear Jesus.
 Let me feel your loving arms wrap me tightly in the warm embrace of your endless love.
 Teach me to make choices about my time,
 to remember what is important this season
 and to say "NO" whenever my "Yes" would take me away from your peace.
 Fill me with patience,
 Love,
 and a sense of humor.
 Remind me of your deep love for me
 and let the fire of that love be something I can share with everyone around me.
 Amen.*

Creighton University Online Ministries

Saturday, August 12: Psalm 2

Like Psalm 45, this psalm looks forward to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. At one level, the psalm was probably written for the coronation of either King David or Solomon, his son. But both David and Solomon, while great kings, were limited by their human weaknesses and failures. So the psalm anticipates an even greater King who will ultimately triumph – the Messiah, Jesus.

In Acts, Peter and John were arrested for preaching about Jesus. The Sanhedrin (Jewish Council) forbade them speaking about Him. They replied: *"Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard."* The council threatened them, but finally let them go. Peter and John returned to the other believers; they prayed: *"O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them – you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying, **'Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the LORD and against his Messiah'** (Psalm 2:1-2). In fact, this has happened here in this very city. For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed" ([4:19-28](#)). They understood Psalm 2 as referring to Jesus.*

Speaking in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul also quotes Psalm 2: *"It is one of King David's descendants, Jesus, who is God's promised Savior of Israel. ... The people in Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize Jesus as the one the prophets had spoken about. Instead, they condemned him, and in doing this they fulfilled the prophets' words that are read every Sabbath. They found no legal reason to execute him, but they asked Pilate to have him killed anyway. When they had done all that the prophecies said about him, they took him down from the cross and placed him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead. And over a period of many days he appeared to those who had gone with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to the people of Israel. And now we are here to bring you this Good News. The promise was made to our ancestors, and God has now fulfilled it for us, their descendants, by raising Jesus. This is what the second psalm says about Jesus: **'You are my Son. Today I have become your Father'** (Psalm 2:7). For God had promised to raise him from the dead, not leaving him to rot in the grave" ([Acts 13:23-34](#)).*

At Jesus' baptism and transfiguration, God the Father proclaims Jesus both Son and Servant in words drawn from Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1 – [Matthew 3:17](#), [17:5](#), [2 Peter 1:17](#).

How does Psalm 2 help you think about Jesus in new ways?

How can you keep Jesus – the Saviour – at the centre of your life?

*My God and my Chief
I give myself to You in the morning.
My God and my Chief,
I give myself to You this night.
I am giving You my mind.
I am giving You my will.
I am giving You my wishes and desires,
My soul, and my body.*

*May You be the chieftain of my life.
May You be the master of my heart.
May You be the shepherd of my soul.
May You be the guardian of my mind.
May You be the herdsman of my thoughts.
May You be the guide of my paths.
May You be always with me,
O High Chief of chiefs –
O Father who created me,
O Saviour who died for me,
O Spirit who cleanses me.
Amen.*

Scottish Prayer

Sunday, August 13: Psalm 110

Psalm 110 is another psalm looking forward to Jesus' coming. In [Mark 12:35-40](#), Jesus quotes this psalm to emphasize that He is God Himself, not just a human being (see also [Acts 2:33-35](#)).² The picture we have, as in Psalm 2, is of the Messiah, as King of All, leading his faithful people to victory in battle. This is an image we are unfamiliar with, but it is a common one in the psalms. The truth is that ultimately, when it comes to the great cosmic battle between good and evil, God wins. No contest. Sometimes we feel like the forces of evil are so strong – corruption is so widespread – systems are so broken – there is so much violence ... but the good news is, God wins.

And in our lives, when we wonder if we can make it through, the message is this – "Immanuel" – literally "God with us" – and He wins ([Matthew 1:23](#)). Always. No ifs. No maybes. No buts. God wins. Period.

As we live in uncertain times with so many unknowns, it is good to remember the important things in life ... it doesn't get much bigger than the fact that the King of Creation, the Lord of the Universe, the Saviour of the Cosmos is with you, today and everyday.

Lord, help us to keep the BIG PICTURE in mind ... "Nothing can ever separate us from God's love ... despite all these things (suffering, pain, struggles, trials, trouble, danger, threats, injustice – these things happen.), overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us" ([Romans 8:37-38](#)).

*It is a wonderful truth
that you have already walked the path that we now follow,
known hardship, temptation and suffering.
And with that knowledge deep in our hearts we can follow you in confidence,
and when difficulties arise, listen for your footfall.
When our faith is weak, grant us wisdom.
When our body is weak, grant us strength.
When our journey is long, grant us perseverance.
Amen*

² There are a host of other New Testament references to this psalm: Hebrews 1:13 and 10:13, Acts 5:30-31, Romans 8:34 and 12:1, Philippians 2:17, Revelation 17:14. Also Hebrews 5:5-10 and 6:19-7:28

Monday, August 14: Psalm 131

Scripture encourages us to see ourselves as

- created in the image of God. That's good.
- those whom God loves so much He gave His one and only Son Jesus, who died a horrible death on the cross for us, that, if we believe in Him, we might have eternal life with God. That's really good.
- people who are blessed with God's Holy Spirit within us. That's great.
- a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession, called out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Fantastic.

Sometimes we can get down on ourselves. We wonder if we have any value to God or anyone else. Yes. You do. You are all the above and so much more.

Occasionally we can think a bit too much of ourselves. We can think we know better than anyone else. We know better than the pastor(s) or the Council on how things should happen. We don't need church, or a group, or other Christians because we know more than they do. We may not even read the Bible anymore because we know it all. We become proud, haughty, even arrogant.

Psalm 131 is introduced as "*A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.*" It reminds us that God loves us: we are invited to come to Him and to know Him (for the Jews, Jerusalem was where they believed God literally was present on Earth). Their pilgrimages were times to celebrate God's love:

- Passover – celebrating God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, into the Promised Land;
- Weeks – marking God's provision of the wheat harvest and giving of God's wisdom in the Torah;
- Booths or Tabernacles – the end of harvest (like our Thanksgiving) and remembering how God provided for the people in the wilderness during the Exodus

There is a healthy humility that comes when we remember who we are and what we have is a gift from God. Ultimately He is the One who "*gives us this day our daily bread*" – and everything else. A key part of a healthy self-image is humbly giving thanks for and recognizing God's blessings.

Note this is also "*A psalm of David.*" King David – the hero who slew Goliath, the wealthy King of a great nation, the commander of elite soldiers – had every reason to be sure he knew best, he could solve the world's problems, and he had the power to do it all. He could be proud and haughty. But David is humble before God. He recognizes that He – and His nation – need to hope in the Lord, and only in the Lord.

Give thanks today for your blessings. Allow that humility to make you a stronger person.

Pray that we (individually, as a church, and as a nation) might put our hope in the Lord ...

*O God, listen to my prayer, bend your ear to my voice.
Let my supplications and my prayers ascend upwards to your throne.
Come, King of Glory, to protect me from all evil.
You are the King of life and mercy – You are the Saviour of all who trust you –
You are the Spirit of truth and grace – more than able to protect me with power.
Since I came into the world, I have deserved your wrath.
Grant me forgiveness, merciful God of all, God of all grace.
Anything that is evil in me or may witness against me when I come before you:
Show it to me; banish it from me; root it out of my heart.
God, be with me on this your day, Amen.
To me and with me, on this your day, Amen.*

Gaelic prayer based on 'Achanaich Choitcheann' and 'Dhe bi Maille Ruinn,' *Carmina Gadelica*

Tuesday, August 15: Psalm 119:97-112

The best known verse among the 176 verses in Psalm 119 may be 119:105, "*Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.*" Read through the other verses in today's reading. What other phrases strike you? What is God saying to you?

Come back to you verse 105:

- How is God's word a lamp to guide your feet?
- How is God's word a light for your path?

In what areas of your life do you need guidance? How can God and His word help you?
In what areas of your life do you need light? How can God and His word lead you?

Pray for wisdom as you seek God's leading in your life ... And commit to following His word ...

*Your light is the only light I need,
as I travel through life's mystery.
Your word is the only voice I hear,
that still small voice that leads me
to the place where I should be.
Your presence is the only company I need,
as I walk this narrow road.
Your fellowship is the warmth I crave,
to help me on my way.
Amen*

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Wednesday, August 16: Psalm 108

Life is a confusing, exciting, annoying, invigorating, wonderful, worrying, joyful, fearful roller coaster of emotions. Psalm 108 captures some of this ambiguity.

There are great times when we sing, "*My heart is confident in you, O God; no wonder I can sing your praises with all my heart. ... Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens. May your glory shine over all the earth*" (108:1-5). It is good to give thanks for the good times. Being thankful helps us give God credit for His blessings. And gratitude and appreciation for God's grace also give us encouragement when we go through rougher stretches. When life is hard, we can be encouraged as we recall God's mercies.

There are challenging times when we pray, "*Now rescue your beloved people. Answer and save us by your power. ... Oh, please help us against our enemies, for all human help is useless*" (108:6-12). It is good to come to God in the tough times, too, prayerfully asking for God's mercy, strength, wisdom, and help. God is faithful. As we reflect on His blessings we celebrate that. As we go through hard times, as we experience God's presence and power, we have more opportunities to be thankful.

At the end of the day, we know that, "*With God's help we will do mighty things ...*" (108:13).

*The true adventurer is willing to walk through sunshine or rain,
when the going is good, or ground slips away from beneath their feet.
The true adventurer delights in the glory of each mountain peak,
yet does not fear the danger of forest or swift flowing stream.
The true adventurer listens to the words of one who knows the way,
intimately, having already walked the path they travel on.
Lord, I come you as my Guide, my Companion, and my Wisdom for the way.
Lead me and strengthen me for the great adventure that is life.
Amen.*

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Thursday, August 17: Psalm 95

When the children of Israel were wandering in the desert before coming into the Promised Land, they grumbled at Moses. They grumbled at the Lord. They actually asked to return to slavery in Egypt. In Exodus 17, their grumbling became unbearable: "*Moses named the place Massah (which means "test") and Meribah (which means "arguing") because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord here with us or not?"*"([Exodus 17:17](#)). Was the Lord with them? Absolutely.

Jewish people reading Psalm 95 knew that history very, very well. So when the psalmist cryptically refers to Meribah and Massah (95:8-11), Jewish readers knew exactly what he was referring to. They knew the psalmist was encouraging them to put their trust in God, not to doubt His presence, power, mercy, or love.

Psalm 95:1-7 describes just how much God does love us, care for us, and provide for us. We do not need to be afraid: even if it feels like we are wandering in an arid wasteland for forty years or more. God never abandons us. Even though we may feel like we are gasping for breathe in the desert, God is always there. He is the great God. He is the great King. He is the Creator. He is our Maker. He is the great Shepherd. He cares for us, his sheep.

How is the psalm encouraging to you, today?

*Creator God,
from the moment your spirit
hovered over the waters of this earth,
we were part of a vision held lovingly within your heart.
From the moment you spoke
and separated darkness from light,
you created space where we might one day walk.
From the moment your joy spilled out into green and living things,
your beauty was revealed for us to taste and see.
Creator God,
for this world,
beauty and majesty,
passion and artistry,
a green and pleasant place,
we praise your mighty name.
You are the God who formed us,
The God who knows us,
The God who loves us,
The God who leads us,
The God who feeds us,
The God who blesses us,
The beginning and end
of all that we are,
and hope to be.
Worthy of our praise.
Amen.*

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Friday, August 18: Psalm 86

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian. In 1939 he was a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York. As he saw things going from bad to worse in his native Germany, he returned home on the last scheduled steamer from the United States to Germany. He wrote his friend and fellow theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr: "*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." Staunchly opposed to the Nazi dictatorship, including vocal opposition to Hitler's persecution and genocide of Jews, he was arrested in 1943. In 1945 he was transferred to Flossenburg Concentration Camp where he was tried as a conspirator to assassinate Adolf Hitler. He was hanged just three weeks before Germany's surrender.

In his theological writings, Bonhoeffer wrestled with Christianity's role in the secular world. In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, he argues that we often settle for "cheap grace" rather than recognizing God calls us to a deeper commitment, "costly grace":

"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

"Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

"Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God."

A psalm like Psalm 86 reminds us that following God can be tough. Jesus went into some hard places; walking with Jesus can lead us into hard places, too. In the midst and in the messiness of difficult times, God is with us. He hears our prayers. He gives us strength. He forgives us. He teaches us. He loves us. He is compassionate and gracious. He is faithful. He is good. He helps us ...

*How often when weary do we sigh
'The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.'
How often when in prayer are thoughts distracted
By sounds or circumstance,
or prayers diverted by trivial concerns.
Baggage carried with us rather than left at your feet.
How often do we find ourselves apologising to you
for our abbreviated prayer life.
And yet you draw us still to be in your presence,
as you did the disciples at Gethsemene.
You want us to share in your life,
to play our part.
You told your disciples to watch and pray,
so that they might not fall into temptation.
Do you ask the same of us?
And do we also fail you, each time we whisper
'The spirit is willing, but the body is weak'?
Grant us the strength, Lord,
of body and of spirit,
to offer you the sacrifice of our lives
Amen.*

Saturday, August 19: Psalm 100

Archbishop William Temple wrote: "*Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness, the nourishment of the mind with His truth, the purifying of the imagination of His beauty, the opening of the heart to His love, the surrender of the will to His purpose.*"

As you read through Psalm 100, reflect on each phrase of Temple's definition. Try reading through Psalm 100 six times, thinking about each of these ideas, in turn:

- *Worship is the submission of all our nature to God.*
- *Worship is It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness,*
- *Worship is the nourishment of the mind with His truth,*
- *Worship is the purifying of the imagination of His beauty,*
- *Worship is the opening of the heart to His love,*
- *Worship is the surrender of the will to His purpose.*

What is God teaching you today?

Worship God – in these six ways and more – today.

*Into the daily cycle of our lives,
When all seems well with us and with the world,
When our yoke is easy and the burden light,
You break in,
And scatter our complacency.*

*Into the daily cycle of our lives,
When we are comfortable and at our ease,
When the fire is lit, but eyes are closed,
You break in,
And challenge our dependency.*

*You break into our daily prayers:
Humble our hearts,
Lay bare our souls.
You break in, You break in.*

*You break in
When defences are down, with an Angel's shout,
Or the quietest sound,
You break in, You break in.*

*And we change,
And all things change,
When you break in.
Break in, Lord Jesus.
Amen*

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Sunday, August 20: Psalm 147

"*Praise the Lord.*" – remember in Hebrew this is "*Hallelujah.*"

This morning as many of us gather to worship, we come to praise the Lord, to shout and sing, "*Hallelujah.*"

As a geographer and a person who loves God's creation, I love the way in which the author of Psalm 147 sees God's creativity, power, and care in His creation. Yes, God cares for His people (He gathers the exiles;

He cares for their city; He protects them). But God's creation is more than just people. He cares for more than just people. God loves more than just people. If God loves and cares for all His creation and we, His stewards, are called to "tend and watch over" His creation, how ought we to live in relationship with His world ([Genesis 2:15](#))? Followers of Jesus ought to be at the forefront of those caring for God's world ...

Notice there is a certain ambiguity within God's creation. On the one hand, rain waters the grass so it grows. On the other hand, snow, frost, hail, and wind, are part of His creation, too. God's world is more complex and mysterious than we always imagine.

Spend some time simply worshiping God today. What can you thank Him for? What can you praise Him for? What are the needs in your life you can bring to Him? What issues do you need to confess? What do you need to change?

*Glorious Trinity,
make your presence known in this place,
through our worship,
our prayer,
the reading of your Word.
Father, Son, Holy Spirit,
within whose unity lies all that is you,
perfect love,
justice,
peace,
and power,
As we gather here today,
your body, your church throughout this world,
fill our outstretched hearts with your Spirit,
encircle us with your love,
make yourself known to us
in new ways,
exciting ways,
challenging ways.
Empower us,
Inspire us,
Glorious Trinity,
Father, Son, Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

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Monday, August 21: Psalm 119:33-48

We have read other sections from Psalm 119. It is a wonderful celebration of how God teaches us through His word. As you read through these verses, make them your own pray for understanding, insight, wisdom, and so much more.

Our prayer today is a prayer for wisdom, composed by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), an American theologian, ethicist, commentator, and professor at Union Theological Seminary. Niebuhr was one of the United States' leading intellectuals for several decades, frequently writing and speaking about the intersection of religion, politics, and public policy. His influential books include *Moral Man and Immoral Society* and *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (ranked one of the top 20 nonfiction books of the 20th century). *Time* magazine called Niebuhr "the greatest Protestant theologian in America since Jonathan Edwards."

As you pray today, reflect on Psalm 119:33-48.

*God, give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.
Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.
Amen*

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

Tuesday, August 22: Psalm 73

Life isn't always fair. Job experienced that. Solomon wrestled with this awkward reality in his book, Ecclesiastes: *"The fastest runner doesn't always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn't always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry, and the skillful are not necessarily wealthy. And those who are educated don't always lead successful lives. It is all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time. People can never predict when hard times might come. Like fish in a net or birds in a trap, people are caught by sudden tragedy"* (Ecclesiastes 9:11-12).

Asaph struggles with that same observation. In our hearts, we feel like those who love God and do good should be reward with healthy, wealthy, happy lives. Those who reject God should, at worst, not succeed and, at best, be punished with all sorts of hardships and suffering. It often doesn't work that way.

How does Asaph come to terms with this? (Read Psalm 73:23-28)

In the long run – in the big picture of eternity – God is just, and we will receive our reward (or not). In the short term, God is always with us. In the toughest of times, He guides us. In the hardest situations, He holds us. He is our strength. He is our refuge. We anticipate a glorious destiny with Him, forever.

How can we keep this perspective? How can we put our trust in God, even when life is not fair? Prayerfully read through 73:23-28 a few times, asking God to help you know Him more deeply through these words ...

*In your time, Saving God, You walked upon this earth,
and in your time, you became one of us,
to show what we could become.
Remind us always,
as we look at our lives in comparison with yours,
that at the centre of all things is the saving Grace of God.
In your time, Mighty God, You will come in glory,
and in your time, you will gather the harvest,
from one end of this earth to the other.
Remind us always,
in times of plenty and in times of famine,
that at the centre of all things is the saving Grace of God
and the mercy and justice of God.
Amen*

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Wednesday, August 23: Psalm 107

Wisdom, as we have noted before, comes from hearing God's word AND putting it into practice. Wisdom can also come when we learn from the past AND live more wisely as a result. To be blunt: we learn from our mistakes. Or, even better, we learn from the mistakes of others so we don't make them ourselves.

Notice where this psalm ends: "*The godly will see these things and be glad, while the wicked are struck silent. Those who are wise will take all this to heart; they will see in our history the faithful love of the LORD.*" The psalmist wants us to learn from the (sometimes) wise choices and (sometimes) mistakes of those who have come before us.

1. Look at 107:4-9. Who were these people? What did they discover about God? How can you learn from them?
2. Look at 107:10-16. Who were these people? What did they discover about God? How can you learn from them?
3. Look at 107:17-22. Who were these people? What did they discover about God? How can you learn from them?
4. Look at 107:23-32. Who were these people? What did they discover about God? How can you learn from them?
5. Look at 107:4-9. Who were these people? What did they discover about God? How can you learn from them?

What are the general principles in 107:33-42? In general, when we do love God with all our heart mind, soul, and strength, and do love our neighbour as ourselves, things go well for us. In general, the opposite is also true. Of course, as we read yesterday in Psalm 73, this is not always true in the short term. In the longer term, in the light of eternity, those who love God are blessed with His presence eternally; those who reject God are not.

As you look back over your life, who are some of your "heroes of faith" – people who have inspired you? What can you learn from them? How can you put something you admired about them into practice in your own life, today?

*Grant us the confidence, Lord
to step out in faith,
and become the people we are meant to be,
unapologetic in our love for you,
wanting to be change-makers,
bringers of hope, love and grace
into an unbelieving world
that has no faith but in itself,
is almost blind
and cannot see that all it seeks is found in you.
Grant us the confidence, Lord
to step out in faith and become
the people we are meant to be.
Grant us the confidence, Lord,
to follow Jesus.
Amen*

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Thursday, August 24: Psalm 62

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) was a French-German theologian, organist, philosopher, and physician. He received the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize for his philosophy of "Reverence for Life", expressed most famously in his founding and sustaining of the Albert Schweitzer Hospital in Lambaréné, Gabon, west Africa.

Schweitzer believed Christian faith must be lived out in ethical action: *"When Christianity becomes conscious of its innermost nature, it realizes that it is godliness rising out of inward constraint ... It is intended to be solely determined by our allowing ourselves to be gripped by the ethical God, who reveals Himself in us, and by our yielding our will to His."* In this very present experience of the Spirit, Schweitzer argued we need to live for and serve God this moment, this day. We need to care for God's creation, including other people.

"A man believes in eternal life because it is already his," he adds. *"It is a present experience, and he already benefits from its peace and joy. He cannot describe this experience in words. He may not be able to conform his view with the traditional picture of it. But one thing he knows for certain: Something within us does not pass away, something goes on living and working wherever the kingdom of the spirit is present."*

Schweitzer encourages us to keep an eternal perspective in mind. When we remember that we look forward to being with Jesus, we can live more fully in the present: *"The man who dares to live his life with death before his eyes,"* writes Schweitzer, *"the man who receives life back bit by bit and lives as though it did not belong to him by right but has been bestowed on him as a gift of God, the man who has such freedom and peace of mind that he has overcome death in his thoughts — such man believes in eternal life because it is already his, it is a present experience, and he already benefits from its peace and joy. He cannot describe this experience in words ... But one thing he knows for certain: Something within us does not pass away, something goes on living and working wherever the kingdom of the spirit is present. It is already working and living within us, because in our hearts we have been able to reach life by overcoming death."*

In Psalm 62, David recognizes God is present in his life, in his present experience as well. Through his many psalms, David tries to express this sense of God's reality in words, but he struggles to do so, using images like a rock, a fortress, a refuge ... but the words fall short of totally capturing his experience of God. And through his life David tries to live an ethical life in response to God's love and care (he does fail though ☺).

As you read through Psalm 62, what phrases speak to you? How do you experience God? How do you try to live ethically in response? If you do fail, the good news is we can confess it and start again ... How can you truly live – fully live – in the Spirit, today?

*Today and all days
embrace us in a love that knows no end.
Today and all days
fill us with a power that overcomes.
Today and all days
encourage us with a word that nourishes.
Today and all days
inspire us with a hope that sustains.
Today and all days
comfort us with a peace that endures.
Today and all days
bring wholeness of body, mind and spirit.
Today and all days
help us to live your love with grace and mercy.
Today and all days
Empower us to be peacemakers and justice-bringers.
Amen*

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Friday, August 25: Psalm 57

Have you ever felt like you were surrounded by fierce lions (57:4)? Have you ever felt like your enemies were out to get you (57:6)?

David writes this psalm as Saul is out to kill him. Through the book of 1 Samuel (chapters 19-31), Saul tries to kill him on numerous occasions: he sends men to kill David, he hurls a spear at David, he has his armies hunt David ... David ends up fleeing to Gath, the hometown of Goliath (whom David had killed in battle). David must have been desperate to flee to the town where his mortal enemy, Goliath, was from. David had Goliath's sword at this side when he showed up in Gath, too ... not exactly a good life choice.

In Psalm 57, David is hiding in a cave in the desert. Saul and 3000 of his elite troops are searching for him, intent on murdering him (the story is told in [1 Samuel 24](#)). He is surrounded by ravaging "lions" with actual spears, arrows, and swords. They are trying to trap him. Hiding in caves in the wilderness, David is tired, scared, and stressed.

What is the tone of David's prayer (the overall mood in Psalm 57)? Is it despair? Hopelessness? Fear? Resignation? Anger?

It is a prayer for mercy (57:1). It is a prayer for protection (57:1). But most of all, Psalm 57 is a celebration of God's faithfulness and love. It is a prayer of confidence in God's power and grace. The refrain David comes back to you again and again is "*Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens. May your glory shine over all the earth.*" David has hope, peace, and joy because he knows God.

How can we find encouragement and hope in God, even when life seems difficult?

*We have heard your glorious whisper,
almost silent, yet insistent,
breaking through the chatter of many voices,
the clatter of background noises:
wind and rain,
storm and hurricane.
Through all of this,
Your voice remains unchangeable,
cuts through to heart and soul, unmissable:
"Come follow me ...
"Pick up your Cross ...
"My burden is no burden at all,
it is simply love poured out
for you, and through you,
sustaining, empowering ...
Come follow me."
The world has ears, yet fails to hear.
But we have heard your glorious whisper ...
As for me, I will follow you, Jesus.
Amen*

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Saturday, August 26: Psalm 97

If you were to try to picture God, the Father, in your mind, what image do you have?

- A stern judge? Does He keep track of all your slip-ups? Is He out to get you? When you pray, it is with dread because you know you are not worthy ... and what sin are you forgetting to confess?.
- A kindly, almost Santa-Claus-y figure? He is OK with pretty much everything because after all, "God

is love, just love ...” When you pray, God smiles, pats you on the back, but never challenges you, corrects you ... or does much to guide or help you.

- Do you have no mental image of God? He may have created the universe but He is now distant, withdrawn, and uninvolved? When you pray, do your prayers just go into oblivion?

We cannot begin to imagine what God is like. In the book of Revelation, John sees God but he struggles to express Him in words. God is so far beyond language and words. We do look forward to being with the Lord in eternity ... It will be quite an adventure. And quite a surprise.

Psalm 97 does give us a couple of different metaphors/images/glimpses into who God is:

1. In 97:1-9, God is the great King, creator, sustainer, and supreme ruler of time and space. He is the awesome God. This reminds us of “the fear of Lord” we read about a few days ago. Because God is the Creator and King, we ought to revere and worship Him with a sense of awe. Theologians refer to this as God’s **transcendence** – Almighty God transcends all our experience and reality.
2. In 97:10-12, God is our good God who hates evil, our protector, rescuer, source of light, and giver of joy. God is our intimate Saviour. Theologians talk about God’s **immanence** – He loves us intimately, saves us intimately, and relates to us intimately.

We live in this profound mystery. On the one hand, our God is an awesome almighty King – on the other hand He is our intimate, loving Saviour. We need to hold all this truth about God (and more) in creative tension. We do need a loving, gracious, merciful, forgiving rescuer and Saviour who saves us and changes us. But we also need the almighty creator, sustainer, holy One who can save and change the world.

How can Psalm 97 help you worship God in new ways?

*Creator God, we glimpse your beauty
in setting sun, mountain top, eagle's wing.
We sense your power in thunder crash,
lightning flash and ocean's roar.
Creator God we praise you.*

*Precious Jesus, we see your love
stretched out upon a cruel cross.
We stand in awe at your sacrifice,
pure love poured out for humankind.
Precious Jesus we praise you.*

*Holy Spirit, we see your power
in lives transformed, hearts on fire.
We listen for your still, small voice,
comforting, guiding, calling.
Holy Spirit we praise you.*

*You are the God who formed us,
The God who knows us,
The God who loves us,
The God who leads us,
The God who feeds us,
The God who blesses us,
The beginning and end of all that we are and hope to be.
Worthy of our praise.
Amen*

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Sunday, August 27: Psalm 145

Albert Schweitzer commented, "Those who thank God much are the truly wealthy. So our inner happiness depends not on what we experience but on the degree of our gratitude to God, whatever the experience."

It's interesting that mental health researchers continue to emphasize the benefits of gratitude. Amy Morin, a psychotherapist and author, identifies 7 scientifically proven benefits of gratitude:³

1. Gratitude opens the door to more relationships. Showing appreciation can help you win new friends.
2. Gratitude improves physical health. Grateful people experience fewer aches and pains.
3. Gratitude improves psychological health. Gratitude reduces a multitude of toxic emotions, from envy and resentment to frustration and regret.
4. Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression. Grateful people are "nicer" people.
5. Grateful people sleep better. Jotting down a few grateful sentiments before bed, helps you sleep better and longer.
6. Gratitude improves self-esteem by reducing the tendency to compare and compete.
7. Gratitude increases mental strength. Gratitude not only reduces stress, but it may also play a major role in overcoming trauma.

Many psalms, like Psalm 145, invite us to be thankful. Psalm 145 is one of David's "thanksgiving lists" – a long litany of ways in which he has seen God at work in his life. Read through it a couple of times. What phrases resonate with you?

What are you thankful for? Take some time, today, to jot down some things that you are thankful for ...

Write down how you have seen God at work in your life ... Give thanks with a grateful heart ...

*You have gifted the Church
through the goodness of your Grace
to be your hands and do your work,
to be your voice and share your words,
to bring healing to a fallen world
and broken lives make whole.
Thank you, Jesus.*

*You have gifted your people
with the blessings of your Spirit,
the power to transform lives
and make all things new.
Thank you, Jesus.*

*Now may our hearts receive,
our mouths proclaim,
our hands prepare for service,
that the love that we have known
might overflow the lives we live
and pour into the hearts of others,
that all might receive your Grace,
your renewing Spirit and your love.
Thank you, Jesus.
Amen*

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³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/amymorin/2014/11/23/7-scientifically-proven-benefits-of-gratitude-that-will-motivate-you-to-give-thanks-year-round/#9f4e493183c0>

Monday, August 28: Psalm 125

I first started going to church in the late 1970's. The first "choruses" were starting to be used in churches. One of them was based on Psalm 125:1: *"Those who trust, those who trust, those who trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion which shall not be moved but remains established forever ..."* Musically, it was such a poor chorus that when I tried to google it, it doesn't even exist online. Hmmm.

Think a little bit about Mount Zion/Jerusalem. The name "Jerusalem" literally means "City" (Hebrew "Ir") of "Peace" (Hebrew "Shalom"). But its history is anything but peaceful. Over the centuries it has been conquered by Babylon, Persia, Greeks, Romans, Persians (again.), Byzantines, Turks, Ottomans ... The wicked have ruled the land of the godly. Those who do good are not always rewarded.

This psalm, like many of the prophetic passages in Scripture, operates at two levels:

1. It is a prayer for the physical city of Jerusalem, sung by pilgrims going up for the various feasts. It is a hopeful prayer. Unfortunately, due to the disobedience of the people and global power politics, it is one of those prayers that is not always answered, "Yes". We do well to pray for God's protection for our city and country, too. But that does not guarantee that it will be so ...
2. It is prophetic prayer, anticipating the future. Ultimately we look forward to being with the Lord in what Scripture describes as a "new Jerusalem" (Revelation 21-22). This is one image among many of what it means to be with the Lord eternally. Only when Jesus returns and finally establishes His Kingdom in all its fullness will this vision of perfect "shalom" – peace, justice, righteousness, and security – be realized.

We live very much in our homes, our city, our country, and our world right now. Pray for them. They need it. We live as Jeremiah urged the people of God living in Babylon to live, fully and completely for God in the moment: *"Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply. Do not dwindle away. And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare"* (Jeremiah 29:5-7).

"You are a chosen people," writes Peter. *"You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."*

"Dear friends, I warn you as temporary residents and foreigners to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world."

"For the Lord's sake, submit to all human authority, whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right."

"It is God's will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. For you are free, yet you are God's slaves, so don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king."

"For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps."

"He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his

wounds you are healed. Once you were like sheep who wandered away. but now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls" (1 Peter 2:9-25)

We look forward to being with Jesus, safe and secure, at peace and with justice, in holy and joyful fellowship. In the meantime, we live for Jesus, we live for what is right, even if it is hard ... *"Anyone who proposes to do good must not expect people to roll stones out of his way, but must accept his lot calmly if they even roll a few more upon it"* (Albert Schweitzer). Let's pray for strength ...

*We are a chosen people,
A family people,
Chosen for love and to share love,
Chosen for joy and to spread joy,
Chosen for friendship and for befriending,
Chosen for blessing and to bless,
Chosen for fruitfulness,
Chosen for harvest.
We are a chosen people,
A family people,
Your family,
Our family.*

*As we adventure with you today
be the compass that guides us,
the light that shines on our paths,
the only one I follow.
As we adventure with you today
be the word that encourages,
the hand that reaches out,
each time we stumble.
As we adventure with you today
let us glimpse our destination,
and appreciate the places
through which you lead us.
As we adventure with you today,
be the strength we need to follow,
and as the day draws to a close
let us rest in your embrace.
Amen*

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Tuesday, August 29: Psalm 119:121-136

Justice. We yearn for justice. We do want the innocent, the vulnerable, the victims, and those who have been mistreated to receive justice. We do want the oppressors, the liars, the cheats, the abusers, the power-hungry, the money-hungry, and those who take advantage of others to face justice.

Ultimately, in the long run, God's promise is that there will be perfect justice.

But in the meantime, things are not always as we'd like. Or as we think they should be. Unfortunately, in a world where God allows people freedom of choice, many people choose to put themselves first, to put down others, to take advantage of the vulnerable, to lie, to do what is wrong. Injustice happens ... a lot.

We cannot "fix" the world. But we can choose to live justly ourselves. Throughout the Old and New Testaments there is a consistent call to live ethically:

- *"The Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God"* (Micah 6:8).
- *"Hate evil and love what is good; turn your courts into true halls of justice ... I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living"* (Amos 5:15, 24).
- *"God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied"* (Matthew 5:6).

We can pray for global justice. We can also do our bit, right where we live. How can we do what is right, love mercy, and walk humbly with God today? How can we live justly and righteously, today?

*We pray for families
torn apart by explosion of missile or artillery round,
and those living in fear of rocket launch or terrorist fire -
wherever they might be,
whoever they might be -
for they are united in their adversity and distress.
Bring comfort, peace, and refreshment
for those whose hearts are dry.*

*We pray for leaders
who have no regard for the sanctity of human life,
in pursuit of ideologies or political ambition -
wherever they might be,
whoever they might be -
for they are united in their arrogance and wilfulness.
Bring wisdom, love, and repentance
for those whose hearts are cold.
For your love is far greater than the hatred of this world,
far greater than the sorrows of this world.
Infuse this world with your love.*

*Let there be peace and justice on Earth, Lord,
and let it begin with us, we pray.*

Amen

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Wednesday, August 30: Psalm 84

Do you enjoy spending time with God? When you think of God do you feel gratitude? Do you appreciate singing or listening to music that praise God? Is worshipping God a positive thing in your life? Do you know God loves you and do you love Him?

Or is your relationship with God more of a duty or obligation? You worship out of guilt or fear? God, Himself, seems distant, remote, and unknowable? Does the concept of "relationship" not really describe your connection (or lack thereof) with God?

Psalm 84 invites us to bring ourselves into God's presence ...

And to realize we are always already in God's presence and to enjoy knowing Him ...

*Rejoice in the Lord always.
Shout out his name.
For God is with us,
Our God is with us,
The God of our salvation,
In whom alone we trust.*

(continued on next page)

*Rejoice in the Lord always.
Shout out his name.
For God is our Father,
He draws us home,
By streams of living water,
Where we shall thirst no more.*

*Rejoice in the Lord always.
Shout out his name.
He knows our thoughts,
Understands our hearts,
And enables us to become
The people we were meant to be.
Amen*

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Thursday, August 31: Psalm 67

The good news is that the Good News (the good news about God's love, salvation and forgiveness through Jesus, and new life in His Spirit) is for **ALL** people, everywhere. The Bible makes it clear from the very beginning, through the call of Abraham (Genesis 12), the prophets, the words of Jesus, the writings of Paul and the other apostles, that God's good news is for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, ability, or status. That's great. Otherwise, if Jesus only came for the Jewish people, as non-Jews we'd be left out.

I get the impression that some white North Americans think Jesus only came to bring good news to white North Americans. They might, begrudgingly, acknowledge that some white Europeans and maybe some African American people might know Jesus. But they don't want to acknowledge that the Spirit could be at work in the lives of Asian people from other religious traditions. They are positive the Spirit is NOT at work in Middle Eastern people from Moslem backgrounds.

The prayer in Psalm 67 is that God's ways be known throughout **ALL** the earth and His saving power among **ALL** people everywhere. It's a prayer that **ALL** nations praise Him. Is that possible? Through our own power, no. Through the power of God's Spirit? A resounding **YES**.

No one ever would have imagined the Christian church would have survived one year after Jesus' death. There were other well-established hostile religions. The government authorities wanted to stamp them out. Within a few generations it was the official religion of the entire Roman Empire. Within a couple of hundred years there were churches stretching from southern India through north Africa and throughout Europe. People of hundreds of tribal and ethnic backgrounds worshipped Jesus.

In Revelation John records this glorious vision of God's Kingdom: *"I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, 'Look, God's home is now among his people. He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.'*

"And the one sitting on the throne said, 'Look, I am making everything new.' ...

"I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city ...

"Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God

and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations ..."(Revelation 21:1-22:2)

This is vision of Psalm 67. While we will never know this perfect harmony among the nations and all peoples this side of eternity, pray for it. God can do amazing things (He has throughout all of history). God can bring people from other religions to faith in Jesus. Don't limit the wonders God can accomplish.

Do your part. If you have the opportunity to connect with people from another nation, background, or life experience, take advantage of it. You will be blessed. And you will be a blessing to the other person. After all, we could be spending eternity together, so we might as well begin the friendship now ... ☺

*This world I live in,
this town I live in,
this street I live in,
this house I live in,
may each be the focus of my prayer.*

*Those I live with,
those I rub shoulders with,
those I work with,
those I don't get on with,
may each be the focus of my prayer.*

*Those who laugh,
those who cry,
those who hurt,
those who hide,
may each be the focus of my prayer.*

*Prayers centred less on self
and more on others,
less on my circumstances,
more on the needs of others.*

*May my life be likewise centred
less on self and more on You,
and through You to the world
in which I live and move.*

Amen

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Friday, September 1: Psalm 96

Like Psalm 67 (yesterday), Psalm 96 is a call for **ALL** nations to praise God.

John's glimpse into the Kingdom of God describes this reality, *"I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, 'Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb.'"* (Revelation 11:9-10).

The Kingdom of God is totally inclusive of people from **ALL** ethnic backgrounds.

When I was in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at UBC, a group of us worked specifically with international students. Very few were Christian. Many had background in Asian religions or Islam. We discovered that the Spirit was working in their lives. Many were interested in reading the Bible, learning about Jesus, and talking about spiritual things. It would have been impossible for us to have gone to their home countries

and shared our faith in Jesus. But when they came to Canada, the door to share our faith was wide open.

Today, many people are coming to Canada. We continue to welcome international students. We are also welcome refugees and immigrants. Some of us perceive this as a threat. But maybe it's an opportunity ... Maybe God is bringing people, from countries where no Christian missionary could ever go, to us, to hear the good news about Jesus. Maybe the Spirit is bringing the nations to us so we can help them know Jesus.

The good news is NOT a treasure we are given to hoard for ourselves or that we need to protect from other people. The good news about Jesus is a gift we receive and then freely share, far and wide ...

Pray for those who have come from the nations to our community ... Pray that the Spirit would be working in their lives. And pray that we would be courageous enough, sensitive enough, and loving enough to share the amazing gift of grace we have received ...

*It's all in the touch,
the touch of love,
the touch of healing,
the touch of compassion,
the touch of reassurance,
the touch that says,
'You are special, wanted,
held in high regard'.
It's all in that touch,
that very special touch,
the touch you give through us
who reach out to those in need,
to those who need to know.
Help us to be channels of your touch
in this dark world,
to bring your love,
healing,
compassion,
and reassurance,
to a world that knows
none of these.
Amen*

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Saturday, September 2: Psalm 99

There are a few old-fashioned words we just don't use anymore in popular culture. In the latest Star Wars movie, Marvel movie, Billboard music charts, and *New York Times*' bestseller list, we don't hear the word "holy" any more. It's not part of a modern vocabulary. Does the concept of "holiness" still exist, just with another label? I honestly cannot think of a synonym for "holy" or "holiness" that is used today.

In popular culture, "holiness" is a relic of the past. But throughout the Bible, including in Psalm 99, God is described as "holy." The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "holy" as "*exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness.*"⁴ Goodness and righteousness are other words that you never hear in the latest blockbuster or read in the newest bestseller.

Closely associated with God's holiness is His justice, also a theme in Psalm 99. "Justice" is "*the maintenance or administration of what is morally upright or good especially by the impartial and fair adjustment of*

⁴ Merriam-Webster note that "holy" is often used as an intensive (the example they give, "*he was a holy terror when he drank*") or as a mild oath as in "*holy smoke.*" These less-than-holy uses of the word "holy" are far more common than the proper use of the word!

conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments" (Merriam-Webster). Again, "morally upright" and "good" are not terms that are popular in mainstream culture.

God is counter-cultural. (Surprise. 😊)

The implication is that we, as God's people, will be counter-cultural, too. (Surprise. 😊)

- We are called to be God's "holy" people, as perfect in goodness and righteousness as possible (and when we fail, to confess it, repent, and aim to do better the next time, and the next time, and the next time ...). God takes holiness seriously. But He also forgives when we mess up and confess it ...
- We are called to be God's "just" people, to uphold what is morally upright or good and to be impartial and fair in our relationships. God takes justice seriously. He calls us to be "just" people who live justly and who seek justice for those who are being abused ...

Pray about "holiness." What does it mean for us to be God's holy people (1 Peter 2:9)? How can we live that concept out in our lives?

Pray about "justice." What does God's justice look like (Isaiah 1:17)? How can we live justly? How can we be those who *"help the oppressed, defend the cause of orphans, and fight for the rights of widows"* among other "good" things?

*There is more to peace
than a temporary cessation of hostility,
political solutions cannot undo such wilful disregard for human life.
First must come
repentance,
forgiveness,
and finally, shalom.
God of grace,
work in hearts torn apart by hate,
pour upon them your healing balm of love;
bring wholeness,
restoration,
and hands that reach out to embrace,
rather than cause more pain.
Bring your peace,
your shalom.
Amen.*

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Sunday, September 3: Psalm 48

The "kings of the earth" (48:4) have all sort of plans. The news websites are full of them. The newspapers are full of them. It all seems so serious, so important, so world-shatteringly important ...

Throughout history powerful men (let's be honest, they were mostly men), have plotted, killed, planned, warred, schemed, and attacked. They have built great empires. And every single one of their empires has fallen. Change the names and the faces and instead of Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Kim Jon-Un, or Xi Jinping, you could substitute

- David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson, or Wilhelm II (World War I),
- George III, Arthur Wellesley, Napoleon Bonaparte, George Washington (Napoleonic Era),
- The Black Prince, Joan of Arc, Charles V (the Hundred Years War)
- Guangwu, Ming, Zhang, Ban Chao (Imperial China)
- Theodosius, Magnus Maximus, Stilicho, Alaric (the Fall of Rome)

- Julius Caesar, Mark Anthony, and Octavian/Augustus (Roman Civil War)

Imperial China and Rome are ancient history. The Napoleonic and British empires have faded. We can predict that the future for the global influence of the United States, Russia, and China is not good ...

Through all this – over all of this – God is still God. His church remains. We are His church, the people of God. After Peter’s confession faith that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus says, *"Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it"*(Matthew 18:13-18).⁵ He will build His church. There is no doubt about it.

Later in life, Peter writes, *"You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God’s temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What’s more, you are his holy priests."*

"As the Scriptures say, 'I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced' (quoting Isa 28:16). Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him, 'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone' (Psalm 118:22). And, 'He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall' (Isaiah 8:14). They stumble because they do not obey God’s word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them"(1 Peter 2:4-8). Jesus is the solid rock, the only immovable cornerstone of history.

This new Temple – the church – built of living stones (us) is indestructible. God’s Spirit in His people, His Church, has outlived opposition and persecution from the Romans, Huns, Goths, the Communist Party in China, the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, dictators in all parts of the world, internal corruption, even dry rot from being the “state church” or (supposedly) “moral majority” in many countries.

"You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession," Peter goes on. *"As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light"*(1 Peter 2:9). Pray that we can show others the goodness of God through our actions and through our words ...

*The door through which we enter
into the world can be for some
more than a handle to be turned,
more than a barrier to be crossed.
There is comfort and security in isolation,
a kind of peace behind locked doors.
And the alternative?
Fear in venturing beyond the known.
Fear in the interaction with others.
Fear of intimidation or worse.
For those whose hearts are troubled
or spirits crushed by sin or circumstance,
Good Lord, deliver them,
bring healing and wholeness
of mind, body and spirit,
and freedom to be the person
they were always meant to be.
Help us, O lord, to be your church,
your royal priests,
being your light in the darkness,
bringing your hope, healing, and love.
Amen*

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⁵ This “rock” refers to Peter’s confession of faith: Jesus **IS** the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Monday, September 4: Psalm 119:73-80 (Labour Day)

Sometimes in premarital counselling sessions, I hear something like, "After we are married, he (or she) will change this about themselves ..." One spouse has an agenda for how they will change (fix) their partner. I cringe. The only person you can change is yourself. You cannot change your spouse. You cannot change your child. You cannot change your parent. You cannot change your co-worker.

So, if your relationship isn't working, guess who may need to change? Hint: the only one you CAN change!

Psalm 119:73-80 is all about asking God to change **me** (not someone else.). I pray that God helps **me** change to be the person God created me to be. **I** want to change to be more like Jesus ...

As you read through this passage, what things in your life need to change?

What will you do about it?

*You are the everything we desire,
the everything we do not deserve.
You are the love we have yet to find,
the peace beyond imagining.
You are the breath of life,
enlivening the hardest heart.
You are the vibrant colour,
illuminating the darkest dawn.
You are the truth that calls,
in quiet whisper and through storm.
You are the precious moment,
we reach out and touch the divine.
For those days when we forget,
forgive us.
When life distracts and focus shifts,
forgive us.
When self imposes its own will
forgive us.
When our praise and worship fail to please,
forgive us.
Embrace us once again, we pray,
in sweet and loving fellowship with you.
Amen.*

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Tuesday, September 5: Psalm 56

I make dumb decisions. I make mistakes. And I get myself into some tough spots. I cannot blame God. I got into the pickle all on my own ...

As you read the subtitle to this psalm, it sounds like David is the innocent victim here. But it's not so straightforward. David is fleeing from King Saul (so he is a bit of an innocent victim). He has chosen to get Goliath's sword from the priest at Nob (not a bad choice). Remember Goliath – the giant Philistine from the town of Gath, whom David had killed? "That day (when David got Goliath's sword from Nob), David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath ..." (1 Samuel 21:10). Carrying Goliath's sword in Goliath's hometown, David wonders why the king of Gath seizes him and doesn't welcome him with open arms? Really? Could he not have made a better life choice? Any other choice would have seemed wiser to me.

To get away from Gath, David pretends to be insane, scratching the doors with his fingernails and drooling

like a madman (you can read all about it in [1 Samuel 21:10-15](#)).

Even when David's problems are of his own making, he knows God's presence, comfort, peace, and help.

This does not imply we can do stupid things and expect God to be our "Get-out-of-jail-free" card. Often we do have to face some very real consequences from our mistakes.

However, even then God is with us. Even then, He can give us His peace. Even then we can grow in our faith. We may have a lot of work to do to make things right, but God is always with us.

In whatever you are going through, know that God is with you. He can teach you, encourage you, and empower you in all circumstances ...

*You have given us a world of beauty,
and we have spoilt it.
A world to feed us,
and so many go hungry.
A world of riches,
and we are unwilling to share.
A world to care for,
and we think only of ourselves.
Forgive us, gracious God,
for those times your heart is saddened
by our selfishness.
For those times we have no thought
for others, no cares but ours.
Enable us to see this world anew
as a gift from you,
to be shared and nurtured,
and those who live upon it
to be loved and cared for.
We ask this that your name
may be glorified,
through the beauty of this world,
and the service of our lives
Amen*

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Wednesday, September 6: Psalm 13

Eugene Peterson translates Psalm 13:1-2 like this, "*Long enough, God – you've ignored me long enough. I've looked at the back of your head long enough. Long enough I've carried this ton of trouble, lived with a stomach full of pain. Long enough my arrogant enemies have looked down their noses at me ...*"

Have you ever felt like that?

Psalm 13 is fairly short. In only a handful of sentences, David goes from despair to celebration, remembering God's answers to prayer throughout his life. David's life was not so simple. As you read through 1 Samuel and 1 Kings, David spent long periods of time in despair, even depression.

When we go through hard times, it is good to be thankful. It is good to remember. We can be encouraged as we reflect on God's faithfulness. But it may take time to "feel" better. And that's OK.

Lord, please "restore the sparkle to my eyes" (13:3).

*God of the journey,
may you be both traveling companion and mountain guide
on this, our daily walk;
lest unprepared or ill-equipped
our feet should stumble
on uneven ground,
or clouds obscure the destination
that we so long to see.
God of the journey,
in this busy world that we inhabit
grant us space to rest awhile -
by the still waters of your peace,
to hear the whisper of your voice
and feel the warmth of your breeze
within our souls.
God of the journey,
grant us space to rest awhile.
Amen*

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Thursday, September 7: Psalm 41

Yesterday I mentioned that David experienced time of depression. You can read that in the lines of this psalm. Even David's desire for revenge is a symptom of his mental (dis)stress and emotional pain.

It's good to know that we can bring all our emotions to God. We can bring our joy. We can bring our sorrow. We can bring our anger. We can bring our celebration. We can bring our disappointment. We can bring our mourning. We can bring our gratitude. We can even bring our desire for revenge.

Revenge? Really? Remember this is a psalm **of David**. David is expressing how **he** feels to God. His desire for vengeance (41:10) is what **he** feels. That doesn't mean it is the right thing to feel (or act on).

David does shows it is quite OK to bring our rawest emotions to God. He can handle our anger, frustration, and lust for revenge. He can handle your (dis)stress. He can handle your depression. What are the challenges in your life? You can be totally honest with God about how you feel ...

We need to reflect on the bigger of Scripture when it comes to the repay/revenge issue:

- *"I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord ("Vengeance is mine" saith the Lord") (Deuteronomy 32:35)*
- *"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say, do not resist an evil person. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also ... You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:38-44)*
- *"Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ... Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the Lord. Instead, 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.' Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good." (Romans 12:14-21)*

Who do you find it difficult to deal with? Who drives you crazy? Pray for them.

*For each step that I might take,
Be my guide, O Lord of life.
For each load that I might bear,
Be my strength, O Lord of life.
For each mountain I might face,
Be my power, O Lord of life.
For each river that might impede,
Be my safety, O Lord of life.
For each place where I might rest,
Be my peace, O Lord of life.
For each sunrise and sunset,
Be my joy, O Lord of life.
Amen*

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Friday, September 8: Psalm 25

We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Some of us have sinned less than others, perhaps, but we have still all made mistakes, said the wrong things, or failed to do the right things.

In God's holiness there are not fifty shades of grey. There are not even five shades of grey. Anything other than pure holiness – perfection – creates a problem. We are separated from God, who is totally holy.

The good news is that, through the love of God shown to us in Jesus, our sins can be completely forgiven. That is what the cross is about. That is what Jesus' resurrection is about. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has destroyed the power of sin and death, and restored our relationship with God.

Psalm 25 is a prayer for forgiveness. What do you need to pray about? Bring it to God (He knows all about it anyway.). Confess it. His promise is that He forgives you completely (1 John 1:9).

*Loving Father
all the fancy words in the world,
expressed in eloquent prose,
decorated with emotion,
spoken with conviction,
cannot compete with a heartfelt 'sorry.'
There are times
when we are all too aware of our limitations,
conscious of sin
and the distance it creates between us.
Sometimes 'sorry'
is all the heart can bear to say aloud.
It is only you who can read and understand
the language of our hearts.
Only you who can translate our 'sorry'
into the prayer we would have prayed
if we had the words within us.
Then you forgive,
and having forgiven,
surround us in an embrace of love,
drawing us close to your heart as it was always meant to be.
Thank you, Loving Father,
that you listen to hearts as well as voices.
Thank you.
Amen*

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Saturday, September 9: Psalm 47

Last year the newest Star Wars epic, *Rogue One*, came out. It's a prequel to the original *Star Wars* movie (made in 1976). In other words, the 2016 movie *Rogue One*, tells the story of what happened *a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away* before the events in the 1976 movie.

Without giving away too much of the plot, *Rogue One* ends on a pretty bleak note. If the only *Star Wars* movie you were to ever see was that one, you would probably not go to another. However, there is one tiny glimmer of hope in *Rogue One*. That tiny spark of hope is what is fanned into a flame in the 1976 movie, appropriately subtitled, *A New Hope*.

If all you knew about human history was what you read on your news feed today, you might feel a bit like the other rebels in *Rogue One*: this is going to end badly. However, what we see in the news is not all that is going on. God is still God. He does allow human beings a lot of freedom to make good – and terrible – decisions. God allows people to act ... and we all live with their actions. He does not micromanage His world (otherwise "free will" would be a farce). But ultimately things are not out of His control.

One day, some day God will put all things right. There will be justice. God's holiness will prevail. We look forward to that time. This is what Psalm 47 anticipates.

In the meantime, we get about the mucky business of trying to be the people of God. No where is Scripture are we told to sit back and watch the world go to hell. Instead, we are called to roll up our sleeves, live our own lives as "holy-ly" as possible, and care for those around us. We pray, "*Your Kingdom come ...*" and we live as Kingdom people, acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). We pray, "*Your will be done ...*" and then we get about the business of actually doing His will in our lives. We are the voices – and hands – of hope to our broken, hurting, crying world.

Pray, "*Lord, Your Kingdom come, your will be done ...*" Then pray about how you can be part of that happening, today.

Pray for the wisdom to live for God, today.

Pray for the opportunity to encourage someone, today. Call. Write. Smile. Pray. Help. Email. Text.

*In our anxiety, fear and uncertainty,
when hearts are heavy with the load we bear,
and there is no one to turn toward but you;
yours is the peace that calms,
the peace that comforts,
the peace that gives us strength to carry on.
Yours is the voice we long to hear,
the persistent whisper in our ear,
'Be still, and know that I am God'.
Yours is the presence in the dark
that banishes our fears.
Yours is the hand that guides,
the footprints in which I walk.
In our anxiety,
fear and uncertainty,
in confidence we turn to you.
Amen.*

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Sunday, September 10: Psalm 150

We began our reflections on the psalms back in July with Psalm 1, a wisdom psalm, acknowledging that we need God's wisdom to live wisely and well:

*Oh, the joys of those who do not
follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners,
or join in with mockers.
But they delight in the law of the Lord,
meditating on it day and night.
They are like trees planted along the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season.
Their leaves never wither,
and they prosper in all they do.
But not the wicked.
They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.
They will be condemned at the time of judgment.
Sinners will have no place among the godly.
For the Lord watches over the path of the godly,
but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.*

Over the past two months we have read a lot of psalms (less than half, believe it or not.). Some have been more instructional (like Psalm 1). Some have prayers of confession (Psalms 25, 52). Some have been prayers for our broken world. Some have been laments. And some, like Psalm 150, are simply songs of praise. It is good to simply praise the Lord. Praise the Lord today – Hallelujah! (“Hallelujah” is the Hebrew word for “Praise the Lord”).

*You are the God who made this world,
You are the truth that all may find,
You are the touch which heals our wounds,
The source of life for humankind.

You are the hope that we proclaim,
You are the path we choose to tread,
And if we hunger on the way,
You are the food by which we're fed.

You are the love that knows no end,
You are the perfect sacrifice,
For broken lives weighed down by sin,
You are the One who paid the price.

You are the joy that fills our heart,
You are the comfort in our pain,
And as we lay all else aside.
For all we lose, you are our gain.
Amen*

John Birch