

A marble statue of David by Michelangelo, showing the figure from the waist up. David has curly hair and is looking slightly to the right. His right hand is raised towards his chest. The background is a dark, textured wall with some faint inscriptions.

**May 2019**

**David:  
A person  
after God's  
own heart**

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Michelangelo, "David"

## Monday, May 6: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

For the coming few weeks, we'll be looking at the life of King David. We'll also look at several of the songs/poems/prayers/psalms David wrote. These psalms express his deep faith.

People are complicated. David is an outlaw for much of his life. David becomes a great king – perhaps the greatest king in Jewish history. David is also a person who desperately seeks to know God and have a personal relationship with Him. Yet David fails God and himself miserably several times. His family is a mess.

David's story begins in 1 Samuel 16. Saul is the existing king. Although Saul is still very much alive – and very much king (and will be for a while) – God is angry because Saul had twice disobeyed God's direct commands (1 Samuel 13 and 15). God makes it clear to Saul, and the prophet Samuel, that Saul's days are numbered.

God selects David as the next king. What is it about David? Not his size. Not his leadership expertise. Not his tall, dark and handsome rugged looks. Not his military prowess. Not his intelligence. *"The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them,"* God tells Samuel, *"People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"*(16:7). God will go on to say, *"I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do"*(Acts 13:22 [see also 1 Samuel 13:13-14]).

David certainly is no saint. He often fumbles, falters, and outright fails. But despite his disasters, David still keeps coming back to God, time and time again. This continual desire to return to God sets David apart.

David is a tremendous encouragement to me. I know, in my heart of hearts, that I cannot live without God. But I do fail in my devotion and obedience to Him, time and time again, too. But, just as He did with David God continually gives me another chance again. John would later write, *"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness"*(1 John 1:9-10).

As you reflect on your relationship with God ...

- I look into my heart. Do I love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength?
- I look at my life. What is going on? How can David encourage and inspire me today?

*Lord God, you have called your servants  
to ventures of which we cannot see the ending,  
by paths as yet untrodden,  
through perils unknown.  
Give us faith to go out with good courage,  
not knowing where we go,  
but only that your hand is leading us  
and your love supporting us;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Lutheran Book of Worship

## Tuesday, May 7: Psalm 5

David wrote many of the Psalms. Many of them, like Psalm 5, reflect David's commitment to God, in good times and in hard times.

Frequently David expresses his deep love for God. How do we see David as *"a man after God's own heart"*?

Often David also talks about his enemies. David does not have an easy life. In fact, much of his life is spent struggling with enemies either in his own family, in his own country (Israel) or beyond his borders (the Philistines and others).

Ultimately David has confidence that God is more powerful than any of his foes.

Matthew 5 begins: *"One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them. 'God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs'"* (Matthew 5:1-3). Through our study of David we also look at the beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10), using David as an example (or not) of godly attitudes.

If you want to shock an audience, starting with, *"If you're poor, celebrate,"* is a good way to get their attention. The word "poor" which Jesus uses is not a word that simply describes someone who has just enough but no extra. He uses a word which means abject poverty – having nothing at all, being totally destitute.

Jesus is not talking about financial issues, but spiritual realities. He is talking about the world of our spirits, our souls, our inner beings. Our inner, spiritual health is really important in our lives. There are wealthy people who are miserable and there are poor people who are miserable. The old adage, *"You can't buy happiness"* is true. Real happiness, joy, bliss, peace, spiritual satisfaction is a quality in our lives which exists independently of our material circumstances. True inner joy comes from our spiritual health and our relationships: with people we love, friends, family ... and with God. Psalm 5 invites us to reflect on our deepest, spiritual, needs.

True contentment, joy, and peace come when we recognize we need more than money can buy – we need the power and touch of the living, personal God in our lives. We need more than a dream; we need real spiritual life. We need more than someone else's spirituality – we need **OUR OWN** authentic relationship with God. We desperately need to know God, personally and powerfully.

To be poor in spirit is to recognize our spiritual poverty – our spiritual bankruptcy – before God. We need Him. We have nothing to offer, nothing with which to plead, nothing with which to buy the favour of heaven.

How is Psalm 5 an inspiration to you? A challenge to you? Come to Jesus ...

*I am not worthy, Master and Lord,  
that You should come beneath the roof of my soul into my life.  
Yet since in Your love towards all, You wish to dwell in me,  
in boldness I come and welcome You in.  
You command: open the gates of my heart for You alone made them.  
Please, Lord, come in and enlighten my darkened reasoning.  
I believe You will do this –  
for You did not send away the prostitute who came to You with tears,  
nor cast out the repenting tax collector,  
nor reject the thief who acknowledged Your Kingdom.  
But You counted all of these as members of Your band of friends.  
You are blessed forevermore.  
Come, Lord Jesus, into my life.  
Amen.*

John Chrysostom, 347-407

### **Wednesday, May 8: 1 Samuel 17**

We all know the story of David and Goliath. But try to read it again as if you were reading it for the first time ... Put yourself in David's sandals: what is he thinking?

A wise pundit once said, *"True courage is not the absence of fear – but the willingness to proceed in spite of it."* How does David model this?

- He is described as *"a man after God's own heart."* How do we see that in this incident?
- What challenges are "Goliaths" in our lives? Health issues? Family problems? Work challenges?

Martin Luther King, Jr, said, *"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and*

*convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” How is this challenging?*

Paul writes, *"Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ...No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. 39 No power in the sky above or in the earth below – indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:35-39)

How can you have faith in God even when the difficulties seem gigantic and overwhelming? What encouragement for us is there in this story?

*O good, omnipotent Lord.  
You care so much for me as if You cared for me alone;  
yet You care so much for all of us as if we were all, together, Your special one.  
Help me to love You, to love my neighbor in You, and to love my enemy for You;  
for when I love all these I can lose no one who is dear to me,  
and everyone is dear to me and therefore cannot be lost.  
Lord, Your law is truth, and the truth is Yourself.  
You can set me free.  
I see how some things pass away and others replace them,  
but You never depart, O God, my Father,  
supremely good, beauty of all things beautiful.  
To You I will entrust whatever I have received, so shall I lose nothing.  
You made me for Yourself.  
My heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.  
Amen.*

Augustine, 354-430

### **Thursday, May 9: Psalm 7**

In Psalm 7 we see more into David's heart and soul: He faces some horrendous challenges, but he has:

- a deep, deep faith in God's power and provision;
- a passion for truth, justice, and righteousness;
- confidence that God will do the right thing.

Mature people recognize that when it comes to our spiritual lives – and finding real true satisfaction, contentment, and joy – we are spiritually destitute on our own. We cannot solve our own problems. We cannot conjure joy. We need God. We need His gift of grace. Recognizing our need for God is not a sign of weakness, but tremendous strength. Strong people recognize their limitations. Strong people admit they need an authentic experience with the living God. Strong people can acknowledge that they can never earn their way into His favour. Strong people know they need His gifts of mercy and unconditional love.

Truly strong, mature people are committed to coming to God in faith, welcoming His love, and working with Him to grow. They are not satisfied with who or where they are: they want to grow in their lives with God.

William Barclay writes, *"O the bliss of the man who has realized his own utter helplessness and his own utter inadequacy, and who has put his whole trust in God; for then he will humbly accept the will of God, and in so doing he will become a citizen of the kingdom of God. And that is precisely the origin of bliss, for in doing His will is our peace."*

If being *"poor in spirit"* (Matthew 5:3) means recognizing that (1) you desperately need a personal relationship with God, and (2) that you cannot face life's challenges in your own strength, then David is the epitome of *"poor in spirit."* How does David inspire you?

God hasn't changed. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever ...

- Why do we find it so difficult to trust Him?
- Why do we find it so hard to let go of every detail of our lives and allow God to manage them?
- Why are we such "control freaks" of our own lives?

*Lord Jesus, think on me, and purge away my sin;  
from earthborn passions set me free and make me pure within.  
Lord Jesus, think on me, with care and woe oppressed;  
let me your loving servant be and taste Your promised rest.  
Lord Jesus think on me, nor let me go astray;  
through darkness and perplexity point me to Your heavenly way.  
Lord Jesus, think on me, that when the flood is passed,  
I may the eternal brightness see and share Your joy at last.  
Amen.*

Synesius, 375–430

### **Friday, May 10: 1 Samuel 18**

David and Saul have a love-hate relationship. David and his immediate family know Samuel has anointed him to succeed Saul. Saul doesn't know that yet (probably for the better). And Saul is still king.

There is something about David that fascinates Saul. Obviously God is with David in amazing ways: as a soldier, musician, and friend. But Saul can also sense in David his own ultimate demise.

As we think about being "*poor in spirit*" think about David ...

- He knows he has been anointed as king;
- He has defeated Goliath;
- He sees Saul becoming (increasingly) paranoid ...
- He does not take matters into his own hands; he does not retaliate.
- He is patient; he doesn't try to seize control. He waits.

How does David handle Saul's moods so well?

Patience is one of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Joyce Meyer writes, "*I believe that a trusting attitude and a patient attitude go hand in hand. You see, when you let go and learn to trust God, it releases joy in your life. And when you trust God, you're able to be more patient. Patience is not just about waiting for something ... it's about how you wait, or your attitude while waiting.*"

What lesson can I learn from this?

*Jesus, invincible power;  
Jesus, unending mercy;  
Jesus, radiant beauty;  
Jesus, unspeakable love;  
Jesus, Son of the living God;  
Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner.  
Jesus, hear me, for I was conceived in iniquity;  
Jesus, cleanse me, for I was born in sin;  
Jesus, teach me, for I have been a fool;  
Jesus, enlighten me, for I have been in darkness;  
Jesus, purify me, for I am defiled;  
Jesus, restore me, the prodigal;  
Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me.  
Amen.*

Hymn of the Eastern Orthodox Church

## Saturday, May 11: Psalm 16

Who are David's "heroes" (16:3)?

What other "gods" do people chase after? Money? Power? Pleasure? \_\_\_\_\_? What is their fate (16:4)?

What encouragements/blessings does David find from God (16:5-8)? Have you experienced any of these from God? Thank Him.

What is David's hope for the future (16:9-11)? This is our certain hope as well. Praise God.

*"Do not scrutinize so closely whether you are doing much or little, ill or well, so long as what you do is not sinful and that you are heartily seeking to do everything for God,"* counsels Francis de Sales. *"Try, as far as you can, to do everything well, but when it is done, do not think about it. Try, rather, to think of what is to be done next. Go on simply in the Lord's way, and do not torment yourself. We ought to hate our faults, but with a quiet, calm hatred; not pettishly and anxiously."* It's good advice.

*"Heartily seeking to do everything for God"* today ... and see what happens.

Pray God would move deeply in your heart and life ...

*O God, You are the only hope of the world,  
the only refuge for unhappy people,  
the only hope for those without joy or peace –  
grant me Your strong presence in the testing places of life.  
O King, protect us, Your people, from the evil around us,  
lest those of us that are weak in faith surrender to the tyrant.  
Help us to know your abiding presence,  
that we may not face the blows of life alone.  
Remember I am dust, and wind, and shadow,  
and life for me is as fleeting as the flowers of the field.  
But may Your eternal mercy, which has shone from times of old,  
rescue me from the jaws of the lion.  
You came from on high in the cloak of flesh ...  
strike down the dragon with your two-edged sword,  
so that with our Captain – God –  
we may wage war with the winds and beat down strongholds.  
Amen.*

Bede, 675–735

## Mother's Day, Sunday, May 12: 1 Samuel 19

David's life is one of struggle and adversity. If anyone has a right to be "poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3) it's David. He spends much of his early life dodging Saul's tempers and his assassination attempts. David was promised he would be king; he has married Saul's daughter ... but he is running for his life. Where is God during those times when it seems everything you know and love is lost? When the world is falling down around you?

The answer is that God hasn't gone anywhere. As we read David's story objectively – from the distance of time and place – we can see God's hand on David's life continually. God doesn't cause the bad things that happen to David to occur. People, like Saul, make nasty decisions. God does provide David with all the necessary help he needs to get through: friends like Jonathan, his wife Michal, Samuel and his prophets, even the Holy Spirit's miraculous inspiration so Saul's hit squad begin prophesying.

At the time, I'm sure David felt he was all alone and that God had deserted him. But we know – as we see the big picture – that God is providing a way for David through all his tragedies. God doesn't spare David from some very trying circumstances, but He does get David through them. And David's faith is growing.

When we feel like we are all alone and that God has deserted us ... He hasn't. If we could only see the big picture objectively (which in the heat of the moment we never can), we would see that God is bringing people into our lives – friends, family – who help us get through. He is bringing complete strangers (Samuel and his prophets) into our lives, who encourage us and help us get through. God even – once in a while – does a complete miracle to help us get through. Through the tough times our faith can grow.

Where do you see God's hand on your life? Thank Him. Pray.

*O gracious and holy Father,  
give us wisdom to perceive You,  
intelligence to understand You,  
diligence to seek You,  
patience to wait for You,  
eyes to behold You,  
a heart to meditate upon You,  
and a life to proclaim You,  
through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Benedict, 480–550

### **Monday, May 13: Psalm 59**

Does David take justice seriously? Does God take justice seriously? You bet.

We live in an age where leaders seem to get away with lies, untruths, falsehoods, and other despicable behaviour. There seems to be impunity for those who blatantly cheat or lie. In the short term, anyway.

But God is a just God. While He may not mete our judgment as instantaneously as we might like him to, the assurance of His word is that He is just. Ultimately, one day, some day, those who are dishonest and evil will face judgment for their actions. There are long term consequences for evil behaviour.

In the meantime, we are called to live as people of justice, integrity, honesty, godliness, and uprightness.

*"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted"* (Matthew 5:4). Eugene Peterson's translation puts this verse this way: *"You're blessed when you've lost what you feel is most dear to you."* Jesus speaks this beatitude directly on the heels of the first, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*. The first stage in spiritual blessing is to recognize and acknowledge that spiritually we are desperately poor, and we need help – we need God. The second stage is to grieve over being lost without God. It is one thing to recognize you need help (to be poor in spirit). It is another to be so moved emotionally you begin to do something about it.

We know we need God, and we are emotionally moved. Jesus is talking about a grief and sorrow as deep as when we lose a loved one – BUT this sorrow comes as the result of a loss of innocence and self-respect. We grieve our sin. Just as we are "poor in spirit" without God, Jesus is saying that we need to grieve that our lives are a mess. The sorrow of repentance, Jesus is saying, is what motivates us to change our lives ...

An early missionary to North America, David Brainerd, wrote in his journal, *"In my morning devotions my soul was exceedingly melted, and I bitterly mourned over my exceeding sinfulness and vileness."* When was the last time we were emotionally moved by our own sin? When was the last time we recognized we had any sin in our lives? When was the last time we confessed something to God? Maybe it's good to do some self-examination ... not so we are miserable, but so we can deal with it and get on with our lives.

Real personal growth comes not only with a realization of a problem, but also a recognition that the problem is ours: we own it and take responsibility for it. We are moved to grieve over it. We are passionately dissatisfied with who we are and where we are. Then can God work in and through us to change us.

When God works in us, He inevitably moves us outside ourselves into caring for those around us. *"True godliness does not turn people out of the world, but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavors to mend it,"* wrote William Penn. May that be true in our lives.

*Guide me better than I can towards Yourself.  
Guide me to Your will,  
to the need of my soul,  
better than I can myself.  
Make my mind steadfast towards doing Your will.  
Strengthen me against the temptations of the devil;  
put far from me all lust, and every unrighteousness,  
and shield me against my foes, seen and unseen.  
And teach me to do Your will,  
that I may inwardly love You before all things with a pure mind.  
For you are my Maker and my Redeemer,  
my Help, my Comfort, my Trust, my Hope;  
praise and glory be to You now,  
ever and ever, world without end.  
Amen.*

King Alfred the Great, 849–901

## **Tuesday, May 14: 1 Samuel 20**

We can mourn many things:

- Some of us mourn the death of a loved one. Whether just recently – or in the more distant past – our lives have been permanently changed by the loss of a spouse, child, parent, sibling, friend ...
- Some of us mourn the loss of a significant relationship. A marriage has ended. Communication and relationship with a child/grandchild/parent/friend have collapsed ...
- Some of us mourn good health. We struggle to cope with our (or a loved one's) illness ...
- Some of us mourn the loss of a job and financial security. We are facing tough times. The prospects seem few. We always seem to be rejected. And our debts are increasing ...
- Some of us mourn the loss of inner peace and innocence. Those who have been victims of abuse or injustice and live with those scars forever ...
- Some of us mourn lost opportunities. There were things we could have done/should have done/might have done. It seems like we've blown our chances ...
- Some of us do mourn for our sinfulness: we know we have failed God. We know we have disappointed others. We need to be forgiven. We need to move on ...
- What else do you mourn for?

What is David mourning for? He has lost his place at court, his wife, his best friend, his home, his personal security, his dreams ... The list goes on and on.

In the midst of our mourning, where is God?

God is always there. He never leaves us.

William Alexander asks this poignant question: *"If you were doomed to live the same life over and over again for eternity, would you choose the life you are living now? The question is interesting enough, but I've always thought the point of asking it is really the unspoken, potentially devastating follow-up question. That is, if the answer is no, then why are you living the life you are living now?"*

What is God saying to you?

How can God encourage me?

*Come, true light.  
 Come, life eternal.  
 Come, hidden mystery.  
 Come, treasure without name.  
 Come, reality beyond all words.  
 Come, person beyond all understanding.  
 Come, rejoicing without end.  
 Come, light that knows no evening.  
 Come, unfailing expectation of the saved.  
 Come, raising of the fallen.  
 Come, resurrection of the dead.  
 Come, all-powerful, for unceasingly You create,  
 re-fashion and change all things by your will alone.  
 Come, invisible One whom none may touch and handle.  
 Come, for You continue always unmoved,  
 yet at every instant You are wholly in movement;  
 You draw near to us who lie in sin,  
 yet You remain higher than the heavens.  
 Come, for Your name fills our hearts with longing  
 and is ever on our lips;  
 yet who You are and what Your nature is, we cannot say.  
 Come, comforting presence to the lonely.  
 Come, for You are Yourself the desire that is within me.  
 Come, consolation of my humble soul.  
 Come, my joy, my endless delight.  
 Come, Lord Jesus.  
 Amen*

Symeon the Theologian, 949 – 1022

### **Wednesday, May 15: Psalm 23**

*"You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you," Eugene Peterson translates Jesus' words, because "Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you" (Matthew 5:4). What is often most dear to us is our sense of self-confident, self-reliant, self-made pride. We love to feel we are in the driver's seat and masters of our destiny. We love to think that we are alright. Our lives are just fine. Our houses are all in order. But Jesus says, "Blessed are you when you open your eyes and realize that's not the way it is, when you realize that in fact things are a mess; you've botched things; you're not in control. Only then will you allow the really perfect One, the One who really is in control, to come into your life."*

Blessed are you if you are dissatisfied with life as it is. Because it is only when we lose what we always thought was most dear to us – our own self-righteousness and pride – that we really begin to know the One who really is most dear to us ... God Himself. And it is when we realize that God really is most dear to us that we begin to discover true happiness, true joy, true peace, true bliss.

Psalm 23 is written by David. We don't know when he wrote it. It could be appropriate for many times in his life. David experienced some great successes in his life, but tremendous sorrows as well.

How does Psalm 23 express our deepest longings for God? How is it good news for those who are poor in spirit? For those who mourn?

Read Psalm 23 in the context of your own mourning – whatever that might be ( *The Message* translation).

*God, my shepherd. I don't need a thing.  
 You have bedded me down in lush meadows,  
 you find me quiet pools to drink from.  
 True to your word, you let me catch my breath*

*and send me in the right direction.  
Even when the way goes through Death Valley,  
I'm not afraid when you walk at my side.  
Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.  
You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies.  
You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing.  
Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.  
I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.  
Amen.*

How can David's words speak into your life?

*O Lord Jesus Christ, who crossed from this world to the Father,  
and whose love crosses back from heaven to love those who are in the world,  
make my mind cross from earthly to heavenly things;  
make it despise all that is falling away and desire only things that matter  
– You and Your Kingdom –  
and make me long to burn with the fire of Your love.  
And You, O God, who condescended to wash with sacred hands  
the feet of Your apostles,  
purify my heart by pouring upon it the light of the Holy Spirit,  
that in all things and above all things  
I may be able to love You, our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.*

Anglo-Saxon prayer book, 10th century

### **Friday, May 17: 1 Samuel 21**

David is on the run. Emotionally he continues to mourn for his lost position, wife, friends, family ...

How does he handle it?

- He lies to Ahimelech the priest – a choice that will cost Ahimelech and his family their lives (1 Samuel 22:11-23).
- He takes the sword of Goliath (who was from Gath), and then goes **TO** Gath with that sword in hand, expecting to be welcomed with open arms.
- He pretends to be insane in order to escape being killed by the Gath-ites.

David is not thinking clearly. He is not making good choices.

How do I handle stress? I can identify with David. When I'm under stress I can feel like the whole world is caving in on me. I can feel like everyone and everything is against me (in David's case it was true). And when I'm under stress I can make poor decisions, too ...

A common piece of advice for those who mourn is, "*Don't make any major decisions right away. Wait a while.*" The decisions we make under the emotional pressure of stress may not be all that wise ...

Stop. Think. Pray. Ask God for His wisdom.

*Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.  
Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.  
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.  
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.  
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.  
Amen.*

Augustine, 354-430

## Saturday, May 18: Psalm 56 (note the context of the psalm)

This Psalm is written in direct response to the incidents we read yesterday in 1 Samuel 21.

How do I handle stress? Can I find God in the hard times?

Despite his poor choices, David is learning some profound truths through his blunders. We can learn from the mistakes he made and appreciate his wisdom:

- *"When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise – in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"* (Psalm 56:3-4)
- *"In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise - in God I trust and am not afraid. What can man do to me?"* (56:10-11)
- *"I will fulfill my vows to you, O God, and will offer a sacrifice of thanks for your help. For you have rescued me from death; you have kept my feet from slipping."* (56:12-13)
- *"Now I can walk in your presence, O God, in your life-giving light."* (56:13)

Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015) was a Christian author and speaker. Her husband, Jim Elliot, was killed in 1956 while attempting to make missionary contact with the Auca (now known as Huaorani) of eastern Ecuador. She later spent two years as a missionary to the tribe members who killed her husband. She writes, *"Our vision is so limited we can hardly imagine a love that does not show itself in protection from suffering ... The love of God did not protect His own Son ... He will not necessarily protect us – not from anything it takes to make us like His Son. A lot of hammering and chiseling and purifying by fire will have to go into the process."*

Some of us go through a lot of hammering, chiselling, and purifying. What is God saying to you?

*O God, our Leader and our Master and our Friend,  
forgive our imperfections and our little motives,  
take us and make us want to do Your great purpose,  
use us and do not reject us,  
make us all servants of Your Kingdom,  
weave our lives into Your struggle to conquer and to bring peace and union to the world.  
We are small and feeble creatures,  
we are feeble in speech,  
feebler still in action,  
nevertheless, let your light shine upon us,  
and there is not one of us who cannot be lit by Your fire  
and who cannot lose himself in Your kingdom.  
Take us into Your purposes, O God,  
that Your kingdom come into our hearts and into this world.  
Amen.*

H.G. Wells, 1866–1946

## Sunday, May 19: 1 Samuel 22

The choices we make have consequences.

The poor decisions David makes have tragic consequences for Ahimelech and his family. Our personal decisions are often like stones thrown into a pond, whose ripples affect those around us. When people make bad choices, their poor judgment/mistakes/lies often have implications for other people. Hopefully the options we choose don't have the horrible consequences David's did.

Saul does have his "issues" of course. We cannot completely blame David. Saul appears to be becoming increasingly paranoid, unstable, unpredictable, and violent.

How do we handle it when the ripple effects of our actions affect others?

We can confess our mistakes. And, if possible, make amends.

How do we handle it when we are the recipients of the ripple effects of other people's decisions?

Can we be gracious? Can we extend forgiveness?

Lord, give us wisdom.

*O Lord, we let the world overcome us;  
we live too much in continual fear of the chances and changes of mortal life.  
We let things go too much their own way.  
We try too much to get what we can buy through our own selfish wits,  
without considering our neighbour.  
We follow too much the ways and fashions of the day,  
doing and saying and thinking anything that comes uppermost,  
just because there's so much around us.  
Free us from our selfish interests,  
and guide us, good Lord, to see Your way and do Your will.  
Amen.*

Charles Kingsley, 1819–1875

### **Victoria Day, Monday, May 20: Psalm 52 (note the context of the psalm)**

How do I respond to a crisis?

Psalm 52 is an interesting response. David does not take vengeance. The ancient Jewish wisdom is, *"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD"* (Leviticus 19:18), and *"It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them"* (Deuteronomy 32:35). Taking revenge inevitably escalates a conflict. Like the Hatfields and McCoys, the Saul-David feud had the potential to get out of hand. At least David is able to maintain some composure in the midst of his stress and distress.

When we make right choices there are often ripple effects, too. In 1999, the Rev. Dale Lang's son was shot in W. R. Myers High School, Taber. Rather than pushing for revenge, he said, *"As someone who had been a follower of Jesus Christ for 22 years, forgiveness was the only response that I could give. I didn't think about it, my wife and I didn't sit down and talk about it. It was a response out of our faith. We did it because it was the way we understood who Jesus is. And we did that and it had a significant impact on people in the country. I can't explain except to say that people just are not used to forgiveness."*

*"At the end of the day,"* Lang said, *"the whole point that I'm making is that we have to be compassionate people who actually care about others, even the people who are tough for us to like ... Ironically, one of the things that's so sad is that Jason didn't like bullying, and often tried to befriend kids who were picked on."*

People continue to ask him how he has responded so gracefully to the tragedy. *"If it wasn't for the grace of God in my life, I think I would be a very angry man,"* he told the *Ottawa Citizen*. *"When I share my story, I talk about the initial anger – and the pain. But you don't have to live with the anger. We prayed and we forgave the boy. That was very healing for our family."*

The positive ripples from the Langs' ability to forgive have helped others who have experienced significant losses – who mourn. Can we let go of our pain? Can we *"forgive those who sin against us"*? Can we believe that in giving our pain back to God, He can heal us in profound ways? *"I trusted in the generous mercy of God then and now,"* says David. *"I thank you always that you went into action. And I'll stay right here, your good name my hope, in company with your faithful friends"* (Psalm 52:8-9).

In God we really can find healing ...

*Give us grace, Almighty Father,  
to address You with all our hearts as well as with our lips.  
You are everywhere present:  
from You no secrets can be hidden.  
Teach us to fix our thoughts on You, reverently and with love,  
so that our prayers are not in vain,  
but are acceptable to You, now and always;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

Jane Austen, 1775–1817

## **Tuesday, May 21: 1 Samuel 23**

Despite the fact that David and his buddies are on the run and in danger from Saul, they take time to save the town of Keilah from the Philistines. David does make some dreadful decisions on occasion, but overall he is not a bad person. He is good leader (he has several hundred men following him), he cares about his countrymen, and he risks his personal safety to help others. He does genuinely love God and his neighbours.

Saul, however, is more obsessed with capturing David than defending his realm. He isn't here to help Keilah, but to get David. The Philistines, aware of the growing civil war within Israel, take advantage of Saul's obsession to pillage the countryside. Finally, Saul takes action.

As we think about "*Blessed are those who mourn ...*" think about David's emotions. He has lost his status, wife, family, security ... he has been directly responsible for the deaths of Ahimelech and his family ... he is being hunted like a wild animal ... people are betraying him ...

David could just give up. He could try to run very, very far away. He could surrender to Saul – but that would probably mean death. He could just end it all. But David does not take any of those choices. Instead, he chooses to keep the faith and persevere.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor/professor who opposed the Nazis. He was arrested and executed in a concentration camp. He knew about suffering, too. Writing about Jesus' disciples, Bonhoeffer wrote, "*The disciples bear the suffering laid on them only by the power of him who bears all suffering on the Cross. As bearers of suffering, they stand in communion with the crucified. They stand as strangers in the power of him who was so alien to the world that it crucified him. This is their comfort, or rather, he is their comfort, their comforter. ... This alien community is comforted by the Cross.*"

Suffering happens. The challenge David and Jesus give to us is to find strength in God during these times of mourning. We have a Saviour who knows all about suffering as well. And He can give us the comfort we need.

C.S. Lewis writes, "*Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*" What is God saying to you?

*While faith is with me, I am blest;  
it turns my darkest night to day;  
but, while I clasp faith to my breast, I often feel it slide away.  
What do I do if all my love, my hopes, my toil, are cast away?  
And if there be no God above to hear and bless me when I pray?  
Oh, help me, God.  
For you alone can my distracted soul relieve.  
Forsake me not:  
I am Your own, so weak, yet so longing to believe.  
Amen.*

Anne Brontë, 1820-1849

## Wednesday, May 22: Psalm 54 (note the context of the psalm)

Consider this wisdom:

- "A God wise enough to create me and the world I live in is wise enough to watch out for me." Philip Yancey
- "The violent winds of suffering and trouble blow us into the Lord's protective hands." Sadhu Sundar Singh
- "Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home." John Newton

Sometimes we wonder if God is able to get us through the dark times. What is David's encouragement for us?

Paul, writing from a Roman prison, counsels us, *"Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus"*(Philippians 4:4-7).

Pray that God would give you the courage, wisdom, joy, peace, and strength to endure the storms you face.

*Father in heaven,  
You speak to us in so many ways.  
Even when You are silent, You still speak to us,  
in order to examine us, to try us,  
and so that the hour of our understanding may be more profound.  
In times of silence, when I remain alone and abandoned  
because I do not hear Your voice,  
it seems as if the separation must last forever.  
Father in heaven.  
It is only a moment of silence in the intimacy of a conversation.  
Bless then this silence, and let me not forget  
that You are silent through love,  
and that You speak through love.  
In Your silence and in Your word, You are still the same Father.  
You guide and instruct even by Your silence.  
Amen.*

Søren Kierkegaard, 1813–1855

## Thursday, May 23: 1 Samuel 24

Unless we deal with past, we cannot deal with the present or the future as well as we should.

Simon Tugwell writes, *"Blessed are those who mourn" is, paradoxically, a more necessary message than 'Rejoice in the Lord always,' because there can be no true rejoicing until we have stopped running away from mourning.*" Tugwell is right. It is impossible to really experience the fullness of God's joy until we deal with ghosts in our past.

Most of us probably don't need to go through in-depth psychotherapy to deal with people, problems, or issues that haunt us.<sup>1</sup> But we still need to deal with those negative influences that steal our joy. When we do confront the past we invite God to speak into it, to heal it, and to help us move forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of us do need professional help – that's just fine. Those of us who need professional counselling/psychological or psychiatric help sometimes are made to feel like we don't have enough faith: "Just believe." people may say to us – or "You need more faith." But sometimes we really do need good professional help. That's perfectly fine. Never be afraid to get the help you need.

As David confronts Saul, David deals with the source of most of his grief. David can only stop running when he comes to terms with the reason for his mourning – Saul. When he does that, he can begin to rebuild his life.

What are some of the “Sauls” – the challenges/issues/ghosts – of the past you need to deal with?

- Are there dark moments from the past that need God’s light of love?
- Are there secret sins that need confessing?
- Are there hurts that need God’s healing?
- Are there relationships that need rebuilding?
- Are there grudges that need forgiving and moving past?

The good news is we have a loving, compassionate, gracious God who welcomes us as we are – with all our issues – and can deal with all those problems. He does forgive. He does heal. He does give us new beginnings. As He has forgiven us, He commands us to forgive those who have hurt us.

What do you need to deal with, with God’s help?

*Lord, You know what is best;  
let this be done or that be done as You please.  
Give what You will, as much as You will, when You will.  
Do with me as You know best,  
as will most please You,  
and will be for Your greater honor.  
Place me where You will and deal with me freely in all things.  
I am in Your hand; turn me about whichever way You will.  
Behold, I am Your servant, ready to obey in all things.  
Not for myself do I desire to live, but for You –  
would that I could do this worthily and perfectly.  
Amen*

Thomas à Kempis, 1380-1471

### **Friday, May 24: Psalm 57 (again, note the context of the psalm)**

David describes his situation as *a violent storm*” (57:1), *“surrounded by fierce lions who greedily devour human prey”* (57:4), *“my enemies have set a a trap for me ... they have dug a deep pit in my path”* (57:56). You would expect David to be terrified, downcast, and desparate.

For David’s response, read

- 57:1-3
- 57:5
- 57:7-11

How does David deal with the challenges in his life? What can I learn from David?

Paul, in prison, writes, *“Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people ... Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise”* (Philippians 2:14-15, 4:8).

How can this attitude help in tough times? What good things do you need to think about? What are your blessings? What do you have to be thankful for?

Reread some of the key verses in Psalm 57. How they be an encouragement to you today?

*Spirit of God, with Your holy breath  
 You cleanse the hearts and minds of Your people;  
 You comfort me when I am in sorrow;  
 You lead me when I wander from the way,  
 You kindle me when I am cold;  
 You knit us and together when we are at variance;  
 and You enrich Your people with many and various gifts.  
 I pray to You today to increase those gifts  
 which you have entrusted to Your people;  
 that with Your light before us and within us  
 we may pass through this world without stumbling and without straying.  
 And yet may we be bountifully blessing to those around us,  
 for Your name's sake.  
 Amen.*

Erasmus, 1466 – 1536

### Saturday, May 25: 1 Samuel 25

*"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth"* (Matthew 5:5). What does the word "meek" mean? To be honest, I don't like it. Being meek (as I understand the word) is not an attitude to which I wish to aspire.

Sometimes we equate meekness with being spineless: some people are so "meek" we wonder if they have any backbone. Or we think of someone who is meek as syrup-y nice. We equate meekness with weakness. Being meek, we think, means making peace at any price, choosing compromise to confrontation, always passively giving in. A person who is meek, we assume, is one who says, *"I give in. Let's just all get along. Whatever else, let's not fight."* It is not a very attractive "virtue."

This beatitude follows logically on from what has gone before. The first beatitude talks about blessed are the poor in spirit: how happy we are when we realize we need God. The second beatitude talks about how that realization ought to move us to grieve or mourn our sinfulness: we're motivated to really make changes in our lives. And that sense of profound dissatisfaction, in turn, leads to a spirit of meekness.

So what does meekness mean? Meekness in this sense means humbly recognizing that we need **God's** wisdom and guidance in our lives, and we're prepared to live by it. The Hebrew word for "meek" is a favourite word in the psalms, describing a person who accepts the guidance of **God** and lives faithfully under His laws. The one who is meek is certain that **God's** way is always best, even when it seems hard to accept. The meek person has enough confidence in **God** to have faith that, in the long run, the wisdom of every one of **God's** actions will be proven true. The meek person never grows resentful and bitter.

- David is meek. He accepts God's will, guidance, and provision for his life.
- Mary is meek. When the angel told that she would bear a child out of wedlock (a disastrous social stigma), she responded, *"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said"* (Luke 1:38).
- Jesus is meek. As He anticipated His crucifixion, He prayed, *"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will. My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."*

This trust in God is not a symptom of weakness but of tremendous strength. Our natural tendency is to try to manage our lives completely by ourselves. It is easy to make all our own decisions and try to sort things out for ourselves. In contrast, it takes tremendous personal strength to be willing to allow someone else (even when that person is all knowing, all powerful, and all wise God) to make the best decision and then to act upon it. It is completely super-natural to place our lives in God's hands. Only someone who is so dissatisfied with his life as it is and knows they need God (beatitudes 1 & 2) will do it.

Using this definition of meekness – trust in God and a commitment to do the right thing – who is meek in this story? Certainly not Nabal.

- How about Abigail?
- How about David?
- How about Saul (25:44)?

How do you define meekness? How can you be meek in the best, biblical sense?

*Worthy of praise from every mouth,  
of confession from every tongue,  
of worship from every creature,  
is Your glorious name, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:  
for You created the world in Your grace  
and by your compassion You saved the world.  
To Your Majesty, O God, ten thousand times ten thousand bow down and adore,  
singing and praising without ceasing and saying,  
"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts.  
Heaven and earth are full of Your praises.  
Hosanna in the highest."  
Amen*

Nestorian Liturgy, 5<sup>th</sup> century

### **Sunday, May 26: Psalm 61**

We often think meekness is weakness. But think about Jesus. For Jesus, meekness is a by-product of true strength. Jesus knew what He stood for, and from that position of strength He could respond appropriately as necessary. Many of us, when challenged, respond angrily not from a sense of right or wrong, but out of a sense of pride or self-defense (like Nabal). But that is not good enough for a meek person. A meek person will accept criticism if it is valid. They will accept reproof and guidance when needed. They will respond gently when constructively corrected. They will respond out of strength.

However, they also have the discernment to know what is right and true and what is not. And they will not compromise simply to get along. They will be courageous and even righteously angry when appropriate. So, in relationship to others, what this beatitude says is *"Blessed is the man who is always in control of his emotions; he is angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time."*

Meekness is also an attitude which influences our relationships with other people. Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher, talked a lot about "meekness." In Aristotle's experience he observed that people often go to extremes, while the wisest path is often right in the middle. When it comes to anger, for example, Aristotle noticed some people are always angry, blustering about, with bad tempers; while other people always concede defeat, always avoid conflict, always cringe in fear. Between those two extremes, he argues, is meekness.

The person who is meek, Aristotle said, *"feels anger on the right grounds, against the right persons, in the right manner, at the right moment, and for the right length of time."* The person who is meek is *"neither too hasty nor too slow-tempered. He does not become angry with those he ought not to, nor fail to become angry with whom he ought. Those who are meek are able to bear criticism and insults calmly; they do not retaliate quickly; they do not lose their tempers easily; they are not bitter people or people who love to argue; they are calm, peaceful, dependable, even-tempered people."* A meek person has perfect self-control and does what is best.

The promise of this beatitude is that those who learn the lesson of meekness will discover a quality of life here and now that other people cannot know. The meek have a peace and power that comes from self-control and dependence on God. With faith in God, we make the right choices, in the right way, at the right time.

The final meaning of this beatitude might be something like this: *"O the bliss of the person who has so committed himself to God that he is entirely God-controlled: this person will be right with God, right with himself, and right with others. He will enter in to the peace and strength which God alone can give. He will have a quality of life unrivalled on the earth."*

How about you?

- Do you recognize something of Nabal in yourself? Self-centered? Defensive? Angry?
- Do you recognize something of Abigail in yourself? Willing to be proactive for the good of others? Willing to be generous?
- Do you recognize something of David in yourself? Willing to restrain his anger? Willing to forgive?

How can you appreciate meekness more from Psalm 61?

*Grant to us, O Lord, the royalty of inward happiness,  
and the serenity which comes from living close to you.  
Daily renew in us the sense of joy,  
and let the eternal spirit of the Father dwell in our souls and bodies,  
filling every corner of our hearts with light and grace;  
so that, spreading around us the infection of good courage,  
we may be diffusers of life,  
and may meet all ills and accidents  
with gallant and high-hearted happiness,  
giving you thanks always for all things.  
Amen*

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94)

### **Monday, May 27: 1 Samuel 26**

The “war” between Saul and David is a tragic soap opera of violence and compassion, hatred and forgiveness, anger and love. Saul is a difficult person to get along with. He is temperamental, impulsive, jealous, and out of control (definitely un-meek). In fairness, he is threatened by David’s military successes, popularity, and youth. Saul is getting older, his strength is waning, and he is beginning to see the end.

Consider David’s actions. Abishai urges him to assassinate Saul. It would be easy. His problems would be over. David’s life would be so much simpler – maybe.

But David chooses the right way, the hard way, the long way, the patient way, the meek way. He exercises amazing self-control. And in so doing, he accepts a more difficult path – Saul is still preparing for battle – but David’s conscience is clear: he has made the right choice. A clear conscience is priceless.

- *The meek have peace.* The person who has committed himself to God has a peace that the world cannot take away. Nothing can separate them from the love of God. And they have peace knowing who they are and what they stand for.
- *The meek have power.* Meekness means getting control of anger and passion. Self-discipline is the way to strength. And when you think about it, the most content, satisfied people are those who are not at the whim of their emotions, but who are in perfect control of how they respond in all situations.

It is a paradox: when we try to take control of our lives, we often find our circumstances and emotions control us. But when we allow God to take control of our lives (when we are meek before God), we often find that we, in fact, are more in control of our emotions and our lives than ever before. What we discover is we are in fact more self-controlled the more we become God-controlled.

When we allow God to help us make those right decisions, the way might not be easy (as we shall see), but our consciences are clear. We are at peace with God. We are at peace in our own souls. We can live with ourselves.

*"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had,"* writes Paul – an attitude of meekness. *"Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of*

*Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"*(Philippians 2:5-11). What is God saying to you?

*Lord, I pray to you, knowing you watch over me.  
You not only created my soul and made my body,  
You are the Saviour, Ruler and Guide of all people.  
You love us so much that You give us reconciliation and peace.  
Be kind to us, Lord;  
Heal those who are ill, cure their diseases;  
and raise up those who are depressed.  
We glorify Your holy Name through Jesus Christ, Your only Son.  
By Him may power and glory be Yours,  
in the Holy Spirit now and age after age.  
Amen.*

Serapion of Thmuis, 4<sup>th</sup> century

## **Tuesday, May 28: Psalm 25**

David's problems go on and on. Life is hard. *"I am alone and in deep distress"*(25:16), *"My problems go from bad to worse"*(25:17), *"Feel my pain and see my trouble"*(25:18), *"See how many enemies I have and how viciously they hate me"*(25:19). He is not in good space.

Does David totally despair? Or does he see any hope?

David prays that God show him the path where he should walk (25:4), lead him by His truth (25:5), show him the proper path (25:8). David knows, *"He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way. The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all who keep his covenant and obey his demands"*(25:9-10).

David also recognizes that his sin separates him from God. If he is to discern God's path, he needs to pray for forgiveness (25:7, 11).

"Fear of the Lord" – reverence, awe, respect, love and obedience – meekness – is essential (25:14).

How is Psalm 25 a challenge to you? An encouragement to you?

*Enter my heart, O Holy Spirit,  
come in blessed mercy and set me free.  
Throw open, O Lord, the locked doors of my mind;  
cleanse the chambers of my thought for Your dwelling:  
light there the fires of Your own holy brightness in new understandings of truth.  
O Holy Spirit, very God, whose presence is liberty,  
grant me the perfect freedom to be Your servant  
today, tomorrow, ever more.  
Amen.*

Eric Milner-White, 1884-1963

## **Wednesday, May 29: 1 Samuel 27**

What is right? What is wrong? Sometimes when we read Scripture we are left wondering ...

Saul had said he wanted to welcome David home (*"Saul confessed, 'I have sinned. Come back home, my son, and I will no longer try to harm you, for you valued my life today. I have been a fool and very, very wrong"* (26:21)).

Is it right or wrong that *"David kept thinking to himself, 'Someday Saul is going to get me. The best thing I can do is escape to the Philistines. Then Saul will stop hunting for me in Israelite territory, and I will finally be safe'"* (27:1)? What about our challenge to forgive others?

- Is it right or wrong that David goes over to the enemy?
- Is it right or wrong that David destroys entire communities?
- Is it right or wrong that David lies to King Achish?

What do we do with this? David has made some brilliant – tough – choices in his dealings with Abigail and Saul. What about now?

As I read this chapter, I don't get the sense that the author is passing judgment one way or another. The story is just there. And it's ambiguous. Is it right? Or is it wrong?

I'm not sure I agree with all David's choices. He is an imperfect man, sometimes failing God spectacularly.

The final verse of Psalm 25 (yesterday) was, "*May integrity and honesty protect me, for I put my hope in you. O God, ransom Israel from all its troubles.*" I wonder if he wrote this before or after the events of 1 Samuel 27?

Our calling is to live with integrity and honesty at all times and in all things. Our calling is to pray for and work for the best in our communities.

When the Israelites were captives in Babylon, God commanded them, "*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 29:7). Pray for our city. And work for peace and prosperity in our land.

*O most merciful Saviour, I come to offer You the incense of my worshiping heart.  
I speak to You as simply as if I see You, openly seated in front of me,  
with Your hand visibly outstretched towards me.  
I thank you for Your mercies, for the safety and rest of the night,  
for the hopes and duties of today.  
I cannot know what today will bring,  
but I know that it will bring most surely Your love and grace for Your people,  
and continual opportunities for me to do Your will  
and to give myself up to Your use.  
Knowing You, I know all I need to know  
of the unknown future, near or far away.  
May this day, then, be a day of holy peace and happiness  
in my home and in my heart.  
If it pleases You, keep me from all accident and illness and evil tidings.  
But, above all, fill me from within with that holy calm  
which circumstances can neither give nor take away,  
For it is Yourself dwelling and ruling in me.  
May I recollect and realize your presence,  
not at another time only, but today,  
and in the secret power of Your presence  
may I meet in peace the common things of life as they come,  
all calls to act and think, all crossings of my will, all pain and joy.  
Let nothing take me unawares, inasmuch as I am found in You;  
for Your own Name's sake.  
Amen.*

H.G.C. Moule, 1801-1880

#### **Thursday, May 30: Psalm 140**

Why does David do what he does?

Psalm 140 captures some of the emotions that are going on in David's heart and mind at the time. He is feeling incredible stress and fear. He is certain his life is in danger. He also takes on the responsibility to proactively protect his people – by destroying their potential enemies before they attack Israel. Do these reasons justify

what David does in 1 Samuel 27? Does the end – security for Israel – justify the means – killing everyone without provocation? What do you think? Why? (There are NO simple answers to these questions)

Peter counsels us: *"Make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"*(2 Peter 1:5-8).

We all – including David – struggle with such a high calling. Especially in the heat of the moment when we feel threatened. Under stress, we tend to react emotionally rather than rationally. We tend to react with passion rather than seeking God's wisdom.

Benjamin Franklin wrote: *"If passion drives you, let reason hold the reins."* As followers of Jesus, we might qualify that: let God's Spirit control the reins. It is always right to take time to pray and ask from wisdom. To get wise counsel from godly friends. And to ensure that we do is consistent with God's Word.

What is God saying to you?

*We praise You, O God; we acknowledge You to be the Lord.  
All the earth worships You, our Father everlasting.  
To You, all angels and all the powers of the heavens cry aloud,  
To You, cherubim and seraphim proclaim with unceasing voice:  
"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts.  
Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Your glory."  
The glorious chorus of apostles praises You.  
The noble company of prophets praises You.  
The army of martyrs clothed in white praises You.  
The holy Church throughout all the world, praises You –  
Father of infinite majesty,  
Your true and only Son, worthy of our worship,  
And the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Guide.  
You are the King of glory, O Christ.  
You are the everlasting Son of the Father.  
When You became human to set us free,  
You did not abhor the Virgin's womb.  
You overcame the sting of death,  
to open to believers the kingdom of heaven.  
You sit at the right hand of God in the glory of the God the Father.  
We believe that You will come to be our Judge.  
We pray to You, therefore, to help Your servants,  
whom You have redeemed with Your precious blood.  
May we be numbered with Your saints in eternal glory.  
O Lord, save Your people, and bless Your inheritance.  
Rule over us and lift us up forever.  
Day by day we bless You and worship Your Name on earth and in heaven.  
Amen*

Te Deum, 4<sup>th</sup> Century

### **Friday, May 31: 1 Samuel 28**

Saul. Saul. Saul. I feel sorry for him. He can sense his end is coming. And he's desperate. On the other hand, he makes some downright dumb decisions. This is certainly one of them. There are many Old (and New) Testament instructions against the use of witches/mediums/magic etc. Saul knows better. In light of contemporary discussions around Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, I wonder if Saul – given all the battles and bloodshed he had experienced – might be suffering from such a condition. His symptoms are appropriate.

How does Saul respond? Tragically, not with any faith or hope in God.

When people are desperate, some people turn to God (David seems to be this kind of person, most of the time).

Some people turn to everything **but** God – folk remedies, old wives’ tales, a charlatan’s advice, strange spiritual authorities – you name it. Why? People are desperate, and God does not always answer their prayers when, or as, they would like. They give up on God. They look to any and every alternative.

I was talking with a dear saint who lamented, "*she prayed and prayed and prayed, but nothing happened.*" Sometimes we all have moments like that. There is a very real temptation to give up on God.

What do we do when we feel like God is distant or that He doesn’t hear or answer our prayers?

David perseveres in his faith. Throughout the psalms we’ve read, David laments his hardships, complains about his mistreatment, and makes his case for deliverance. But his hard times continue. In spite of that, his deep faith in God shines through. He knows God is helping him scrape by, day by day (if only barely). And he has confidence that one day, some day, he will be vindicated.

Can I keep the faith like David?

*O come, Holy Spirit, inflame my heart, set it on fire with love.  
Burn away my self-centeredness so that I can love unselfishly.  
Breathe Your life-giving breath into my soul  
so that I can live freely and joyously,  
unrestricted by self-consciousness.  
May I be ready to go wherever You may send me.  
Come like a gentle breeze and give me Your still peace  
so that I may be quiet and know the wonder of Your presence.  
Help me to diffuse Your love in the world.  
Never let me shut You out.  
Never let me try to limit You to my capacity.  
Act freely in and through me.  
Never leave me, O Lord and giver of life.  
Amen.*

Michael Hollings and Etta Gullick

### **Saturday, June 1: Psalm 130**

Pilgrims to Jerusalem used to sing this song as they approached the holy city, Jerusalem. Here is it in Eugene Peterson’s *the Message* translation:

*Help, God – the bottom has fallen out of my life!  
Master, hear my cry for help!  
Listen hard! Open your ears! Listen to my cries for mercy.  
If you, God, kept records on wrongdoings, who would stand a chance?  
As it turns out, forgiveness is your habit, and that’s why you’re worshiped.  
I pray to God – my life a prayer – and wait for what he’ll say and do.  
  
My life’s on the line before God, my Lord, waiting and watching till morning,  
waiting and watching till morning.  
O Israel, wait and watch for God – with God’s arrival comes love,  
with God’s arrival comes generous redemption.  
No doubt about it – he’ll redeem Israel, buy back Israel from captivity to sin.*

If only Saul could have prayed such a prayer. Meek people are honest with the Lord, with others – and with

themselves – that they have sinned. We all have. But praise God that He will forgive every kind of sin as we confess it to Him.

- What do you need to deal with before the Lord? We can only discover the joy of His forgiveness as we bring our hearts and lives before Him, with honesty, humility, and meekness.
- What do we need to confess to other people? Strong people – meek people – are able to acknowledge their mistakes and ask for forgiveness from others. Who do you need to speak with?
- Do you need to forgive yourself? If you have confessed to God – He has forgiven you. As you have made things right with other people – they have forgiven you. Now you need to let it go ...

What is God saying to you?

*We beg You, all-merciful Father,  
through Jesus, Your only-begotten Son,  
made man for our sake, crucified and glorified for us,  
to send upon us from Your treasure-house the Spirit,  
who rested upon You in all his fullness:  
the Spirit of wisdom,  
enabling us to relish the fruit of the tree of life, which is indeed Yourself;  
the gift of understanding: to enlighten our perceptions;  
the gift of prudence: enabling us to follow in Your footsteps;  
the gift of strength: to withstand our adversary's onslaught;  
the gift of knowledge: to distinguish good from evil by the light of Your holy teaching;  
the gift of piety: to clothe ourselves with love and mercy;  
the gift of fear: to withdraw from all ill-doing and live quietly in awe of Your eternal majesty.  
These are the things for which we petition.  
Grant them for the honor of Your holy name,  
to which, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory,  
thanksgiving, renown, and lordship for ever and ever.  
Amen.*

Bonaventure, 1221-1274

### **Sunday, June 2: 1 Samuel 29-30**

King Achish is bright, but not too bright ...

- David is an Israelite and Achish is going to take him into battle against the Israelites ... Achish's commanders are very wise – David and his friends might turn on the Philistines.
- Achish thinks David is a great ally because he has supposedly been raiding villages in southern Israel (1 Samuel 27:10). In fact David has been levelling Philistine villages – somehow Achish hasn't figured that out yet. There are some problems in Achish's intelligence network.

What was David's plan? Was he going to fight with the Philistines against Israel? Probably not. Was he going to turn on Achish and the Philistines (Achish wanted him as his personal bodyguard (28:2))? Probably.

David returns home to find that the Amalekites had destroyed their town and stolen their wives, children and all their possessions.

- Notice the men's response: they want to stone David. (30:6).
- Notice David's response: "*But David found strength in the Lord his God ...*" (30:6). This is a wonderful model of what it means to be meek before God. In crises we turn to God for strength. He is the One who can give us wisdom – and strength – to make it through difficult circumstances.
- How do you handle crises? What can you learn from David?

The men pursue the Amalekites and recover their possessions. A great happy ending. But there is a fascinating subplot in the story: 200 men were just too tired to chase after the Amalekites, so they stay behind.

- Notice the men's response: The 400 who had gone, fought the battle, and recovered all their possessions didn't want to give those 200 back their possessions. Why should they? They hadn't made the arduous journey. They hadn't faced the danger. They hadn't fought the fight. They hadn't traveled all the way back – exhausted. This sounds fair, right?
- Notice David's response: *"No, my brothers. Don't be selfish with what the Lord has given us. He has kept us safe and helped us defeat the band of raiders that attacked us. Who will listen when you talk like this? We share and share alike – those who go to battle and those who guard the equipment."* (30:23-24). David goes on to share even further, with towns in southern Israel – strangers – in need (30:27-31). This is a wonderful example of meekness in relationship with other people: you do what is right – you share and you care – even if there is a personal sacrifice involved.

Think about your possessions, bank account, investments ... are they YOURS and YOURS ALONE? Or do you see what you have as gifts from God; blessings He has given you; resources you can share with others? David models sharing his blessings with two groups of people:

- Those who are too tired (30:23-24). In our own community who are the "too tired"? Those who are less fortunate than we are: physically, emotionally, financially, relationally, spiritually? Those who need help with food, finances, health, housing, friendships? Scripture is relentless in its command to care for the poor and needy in our own neighbourhoods.
- Those in need in other communities (30:27-31). For us these might be people in need overseas – those needing clean water, food, leadership development, education, opportunity (Canadian Baptist Ministries – [www.cbmin.org](http://www.cbmin.org) – is a great place to start. Consider giving "Gifts to Change" all year around for birthdays, anniversaries, etc. or supporting a staff worker).

It truly is more blessed to give than to receive. May the Lord help us discover the spirit of generosity.

*Come, Holy Spirit,  
 replace the tension within me with a holy relaxation.  
 Replace the turbulence within me with a sacred calm.  
 Replace the anxiety within me with a quiet confidence.  
 Replace the fear within me with a strong faith.  
 Replace the bitterness within me with the sweetness of grace.  
 Replace the darkness within me with a gentle light.  
 Replace the coldness within me with a loving warmth.  
 Replace the night within me with Your light.  
 Replace the winter within me with Your spring.*

*Straighten my crookedness.  
 Fill my emptiness.  
 Dull the edge of my pride.  
 Quench the flames of my lust.  
 Sharpen the edge of my humility.  
 Light the fires of my love.  
 Let me see myself as You see me.  
 Forgive me for my sins as I forgive those who have sinned against me.  
 May I see You as You have promised,  
 and be blessed according to Your word:  
 "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."  
 Lord I would see you.  
 Lord, I would know you.  
 Lord, I would be more and more like you.  
 Come, Holy Spirit.  
 Amen*

Charles Borromeo (1538-1584)