



**June 2019**

**David:  
A person  
after God's  
own heart 2**

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## Monday, June 3: Psalm 145

David's psalm are not all doom and gloom. After all, there are some bright spots in his life (like when he destroys the Amelikitites).

Be encouraged as you read Psalm 145. We love and serve a great God.

What does David highlight about the character of God in this psalm?

- God is kind and merciful.
- God is slow to get angry.
- God is full of unfailing love.
- God is good to everyone.
- God showers compassion on all His creation.
- God is faithful in all He says.
- God is gracious in all He does.
- God lifts up the fallen and those bent under their loads.
- God gives us our daily bread, satisfying our hunger and thirst.
- God is close to all who call on Him.
- God fulfills the desires of those who fear Him.
- God hears cries for help and rescues us.
- God protects those who love Him.
- What else?

David is determined to exalt and praise God for His goodness. What can you praise God for?

David wants people to tell of God's grace from generation to generation. Who can I share my faith with?

This month our prayers are from martyrs who gave their lives for their faith (including, of course, Jesus):

*"My Father, if it is possible,  
let this cup of suffering be taken away from me.  
Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."  
"Dear woman, here is your son."  
"Dear friend, here is your mother."  
"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? – My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"  
"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."  
"I am thirsty."  
"I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."  
"Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands."  
"It is finished."  
"My Father, if this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done."  
Lord, your will be done ...  
Amen*

Jesus, executed by Pilate, c. 30-33 AD

## Tuesday, June 4: 1 Samuel 31 and Galatians 5:16-26

After Saul's encounter with the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28), it is perhaps not too surprising that his end is rather nasty. 1 Samuel 31 is one of the saddest passages in Scripture. Saul is willing to trust in his own strength and in magic, but ultimately is not ready to trust God.

In Galatians 5, Paul casts a much cheerier vision before us. This is who we are called to be as God's holy people. He contrasts

- Saul-like people of the world (people who *"follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these"*(5:19-21)), with
- Godly, meek, people.

Godly, meek people are who God desires us to be. Paul says, *"The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control ...Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives"*(5:22-25).

Like David, we struggle to live up to this high calling consistently. At times we will demonstrate some of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives: we will be inspired to be loving, joyful, patient, self-controlled, etc. At other times we will fail miserably: we will be impatient, unkind, not gentle, and we'll lose our self-control.

When we fail we confess it to God. We confess it to the person we injured. We celebrate God's forgiveness, and we keep on keeping on – trying to be the people God has called us to be. We never give up. Since we are living by the Spirit, we keep on trying to follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives

*I believe God is from the beginning  
the one creator and maker of the whole creation,  
of things seen and things unseen.  
I worship the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.  
I believe Jesus is God, Son of the only, unbegotten, unutterable God.  
He was foretold by the prophets as the future herald of salvation  
for the human race and the teacher of distinguished disciples.  
I choose to worship Him and Him alone.  
As for myself, I am a human being.  
I am insignificant in comparison with this infinite godhead.  
I know I shall enter God's house if I keep my faith, even if I suffer.  
I know that God's favor is stored up until the end of the whole world  
for all who believe in him.  
As for me, I believe.  
I will always believe no matter what fortune or pain comes my way.  
I am and I will be with my Lord, forever  
Amen.*

based on Justin Martyr, martyred, 165 AD

### **Wednesday, June 5: 2 Samuel 1, Matthew 5:6**

Saul, Jonathan, and Saul's other sons are dead. It is a sad season in Israel. Although Saul was a troubled soul, he was still the king, the Lord's anointed ruler. This is why David never killed him when he had the chance. And this is why David is so upset with the man who did. Despite Saul's issues, it was considered an attack on God Himself to touch the Lord's anointed, the king. David has a deep sense of right and wrong: he never tried to take the throne by violence, to deceive Saul, or to kill the king.

David really did want to do what was right. From the very beginning, God said of David: *"The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart"*(1:7). 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 hungered and thirsted for righteousness. He didn't always succeed ... but his passion – his deepest desire – was to the right thing.

Jesus says, *"God blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness/justice, for they will be satisfied."*

Notice the person Jesus calls blessed is not the one who always ACTS perfectly righteously, but the one who desires with all their heart – who hungers and thirsts – to be righteous. We don't have to be "there" yet. But if our passion is pulling us in the right direction, God is pleased.

In his autobiography, H.G. Wells drew a contrast between the secret splendour of our intentions and the relative poverty of our achievements. *"A man may be a bad musician,"* Wells writes, *"and yet be passionately in love with music."* It's the passion that's important. Out of our passionate desire to be better we aim to do better and better (as musicians or as people of God), but we will never totally get there ...

Thomas a Kempis, a reflective Christian writer from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, once wrote, *"Man sees the deed, but God sees the intention."* This insight applies in two directions:

- God sees the mixed and impure motives which may lie behind what looks like a good deed.
- God also sees the longing and love for goodness which lies behind the mistakes and sins of life.

Jesus' beatitude blesses not only the deed, but also the desire that moves us to be more like Jesus.

There is tremendous comfort knowing that God is realistic. He certainly wants us to aspire to perfection. But He also knows that none of us will ever make it. But in God's eyes, that aspiration is important. Paul writes: *"Not that I have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:12-14). It is the determination to *"press on toward the goal,"* not the stumbles along the way, that matters to God. What is God saying to you?

*The Lord grant that we may believe in our hearts,  
declare with our mouths  
and prove by our deeds that his covenant with us has been sealed in our flesh.  
May men see that what we do is good,  
and praise our Father in heaven for it,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom glory will be given throughout eternity.  
May the Lord Jesus touch our eyes, as he did those of the blind.  
Then we shall begin to see in visible things those which are invisible.  
May he open our eyes to gaze, not on present realities,  
but on the blessings to come.  
May he open the eyes of our heart to contemplate God  
in Spirit, through Jesus Christ the Lord,  
to whom belong power and glory through all eternity.  
Amen.*

Origen, executed by Emperor Decius, 254 AD

### **Thursday, June 6: Psalm 63**

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled"* (Matthew 5:6). Have you ever been hungry? No, not just casually hungry, but really, really starving? Have you ever been thirsty? Not just wanting a drink of water, but really, really parched? Jesus is saying these words in a culture where famine – real famine – was a reality and in a desert culture where water was scarce, sometimes even impossible to find. He is speaking to people who have experienced incredible hunger and thirst. And He says, *"Blessed is the man who longs for righteousness/justice as a starving man longs for food, and as a man perishing of thirst longs for water."*

Jesus is asking us a hard question: *"Do you desire righteousness with the sort of intensity with which a starving person desires food, or a person parched with thirst desires water?"* Following Jesus is not for the half-hearted; it is not for the casually interested; it is for that desire righteousness as a matter of life and death.

This begs the question, though, "What is righteousness?" What is it for which we are to hunger and thirst?

Righteousness has three facets:

1. In a legal sense, righteousness means a right relationship with God. Through Jesus' life and death and resurrection – His love – we are forgiven. Our relationship with God, once decimated by sin, is completely restored. God accepts us and loves us and forgives us just as we are, but of course He loves us too much to leave us as we are. He wants us to become holy, pure, and righteous.
2. In a moral sense, righteousness refers to the kind of conduct and character which pleases God. Most of us have a sense of what is appropriate biblical moral behaviour and what is not. Jesus is encouraging us to live our lives by the highest moral standards because then, and only then, will we have peace of mind knowing that our beliefs, values and actions are consistent.
3. In a social sense, righteousness is more than a personal and private affair. Throughout Scripture, pursuing righteousness also means holding to and working for justice in society. It means having integrity in business. It means correcting social injustice. It means having compassion for the less fortunate. It means expecting the best – and insisting on integrity and justice – from our leaders.

Afterwards comes the promise: "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, **for they will be filled.***" It is also quite possible to translate this, "*for they shall be stuffed*" (in the sense of eating a huge, wonderful meal). If we hunger and thirst for the righteousness that comes from God, God does not send us away empty. God fills us. He gives us His complete forgiveness and a profound sense of His peace and presence. He gives us a new desire to pursue the highest moral values consistently. He gives us a passion for justice in society. As the Holy Spirit works those things in our lives, we discover a joy, a peace, a contentment – a sense of blessedness – that fills us to overflowing.

*"O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water ... Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you. I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy"* (Psalm 63:1-5).

*O Lord, give us a mind  
that is humble, quiet, peaceable,  
patient and charitable,  
and a taste of your Holy Spirit  
in all our thoughts, words, and deeds.  
O Lord, give us a lively faith, a firm hope,  
a fervent charity, a love of you.  
Take from us all lukewarm-ness in meditation  
and all dullness in prayer.  
Give us fervor and delight in thinking of you,  
your grace, and your tender compassion toward us.  
Give us, good Lord,  
the grace to work for the things we pray for.  
Amen*

Thomas More, executed by Henry VIII, 1535

## Friday, June 7: 2 Samuel 5

After a nasty civil war, David becomes king over Israel. 2 Samuel 2-4 tell the tragic story of the war of succession between David and Ish-Bosheth (Saul's son) – you are welcome to read the sad events if you wish.

David also captures what is now Jerusalem from the Jebusites and establishes it as his capital. David still has his enemies, however. The Philistines mobilize to capture him.

- How does David handle the situation (5:19)?

- When the Israelites win, who gets the credit (5:20)?
- When the Philistines return, what does David do (5:23)?
- With what result (5:25)?

To hunger and thirst for righteousness means we seek God's wisdom in our circumstances. Sometimes God makes His will clear to us in Scripture. We don't need to consult God about issues like stealing, lying, cheating, etc. – we just know these things are wrong. But when we need specific guidance, we can (1) pray to God – He may give us clear direction, (2) speak with wise, mature Christian friends – they may have wise counsel, or (3) wait for wisdom – David waited years to become king. In the end that patience and willingness to wait was richly rewarded. Sometimes God takes His time to give us His direction.

In Robert Louis Stevenson's darkest novel, *The Master of Ballantrae*, an evil master reflects on his cruel life. His dreadfully abused servant believes that, although the master has been a beast, he still has all the latent potential to be a saint, too. But the nasty lord sadly replies, "*No, not all. Not all (of the potential to be good). It is there you are in error - (I have) the malady of not wanting.*"

The master believed he had the malady – the illness – of just not wanting to be righteous. He had no innate desire to be good. Being righteous had absolutely no attraction for him. So, by default, he became evil. Paul laments many people in his culture: "*Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity*" (Ephesians 4:18-19).

"*But that isn't what you learned about Christ,*" Paul goes on to say. "*Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God – truly righteous and holy. Do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.*" He gives practical advice:

- *Stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.*
- *Don't sin by letting anger control you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.*
- *If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need.*
- *Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*
- *Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.*
- *Instead, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:20-31)*

*Lord God, you have taught us  
that anything we do without love is worth nothing,  
for whoever lives without love  
is counted dead before you.  
Send your Holy Spirit,  
and pour into our hearts  
that most excellent gift of love,  
the true bond of peace and of all virtues.  
Grant this for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who is alive with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God now and for ever.  
Amen.*

Based on a prayer of Thomas Cranmer, executed by Mary I, 1556

## Saturday, June 8: 2 Samuel 6

David – mighty warrior, victorious king, the conqueror after whom the “City of David” is named – *“danced before the Lord with all his might”* (2 Samuel 6:14). When his first wife, Michal, rebuked him, David replied, *“I was dancing before the Lord ... He appointed me as the leader of Israel, the people of the Lord, so I celebrate before the Lord. Yes, and I am willing to look even more foolish than this, even to be humiliated in my own eyes.”* (21-22). Are you willing to be considered a “fool for Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:10)?

Commenting on *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled,”* John Koessler, Professor of Pastoral Studies at Moody Bible Institute, writes, *“In Jesus’ beatitude, we hear an echo of the prophet’s complaint: ‘Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare’ (Isa. 55:2).*

*“Yet our tastes have been captivated by other delicacies. We log onto the internet and feast our eyes on things which sicken the soul. We turn on our televisions and get drunk on the wine of violence. We fill our stomachs with the bread of idleness and cast our leavings to the poor, trying in vain to suppress the gnawing desires that eat at our hearts. So God takes steps to help us get over our taste for food that cannot satisfy. To our discomfort, the main tool he uses is hunger.*

*“During Israel’s years in the wilderness, God let them feel this hunger painfully. ‘He humbled you,’ Moses explains in Deuteronomy 8:3, ‘causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.’*

*“It’s no wonder that Christ quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 when Satan taunted him in the wilderness. Ours is a hunger no earthly bread can satisfy. We don’t want to spoil our appetite.*

*“It’s also no wonder that Christ sacramentalized our need for food and drink in the Lord’s Supper, using hunger and thirst to point us to better fare. ‘Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me,’ Jesus told a hungry crowd early in his ministry, ‘and I in him’ (John 6:56). In our effort to distance ourselves from the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, we Protestants have understood these claims primarily in negative terms. We spend so much energy emphasizing what Jesus does not mean that his words fail to whet our appetite. But the positive symbolism of the Lord’s Supper is powerful: Christ alone can satisfy. Christ alone can sustain. All that we hunger for must be found in him.”*

David knows that God and God alone can satisfy. Other things – like what other people may think of us – really don’t matter. May we be able to take that perspective on life ...

*I am the wheat of God.  
Though I may be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts,  
I will be faithful.  
I will be the pure bread of God.  
I long after the Lord,  
the Son of the true God and Father, Jesus Christ.  
Him I seek, who died for us and rose again.  
I am eager to die for the sake of Christ.  
My love has been crucified,  
and there is no fire in me that loves anything other than my Lord.  
But there is living water springing up in me,  
and it says to me inwardly:  
“Come to the Father.”  
My Father, I come to you today.  
Amen.*

Ignatius of Antioch, martyred, in 97 AD

## Sunday, June 9: 2 Samuel 7

David loves God. He expresses his love in his desire to build a Temple for the Ark. It comes out in his prayer to God. David wants to DO something – to earn God’s favour. But God is not looking for people to impress Him with their good works. We do choose to do right things – in response to God’s love – not to earn God’s love.

Within a few decades David’s son, Solomon, will build an amazing (for the time) Temple in which the Ark will be housed. Thus this prophecy is fulfilled. Sort of. In further decades David’s line of kings will become corrupt and fall apart. Jerusalem will be captured. The Temple will be destroyed. And the Ark will disappear.

Ultimately this prophecy will be fulfilled in Jesus – He will come as God’s true, ever-lasting, un-destroyable Presence among us. And He is the ultimate Ruler of all the universe – not just one small corner of it.

John Koessler continues, *"We cannot labor for Christ's righteousness. Even if we wanted to work for it, we could not expend enough effort to obtain it. If we wanted to buy it, we could not offer enough money. We can't get it by loan. The only way to obtain righteousness is to receive it."*

*"The language of filling in Christ's beatitude, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,' underscores another important aspect of the blessing. Righteousness works from the inside out. We usually go about it the other way around; we try to work on it from the outside in, as if it were a matter of externals. If we worship in the right building, perform the right rituals, wear the right clothes, and are seen with the right people, we are righteous. If we read our Bibles and pray in the morning, give a tithe of our earnings on Sunday, control our tempers and restrain our passions the rest of the week, we are righteous."*

*"But if we listen to Jesus, we begin to understand why he attracted the sort of people who came to listen to his preaching: hookers and thieves, trailer trash and lowlifes, people who dwelled on the outskirts, in places where decent citizens refused to travel. If we dare to hear Jesus rightly, we understand why respectable, law-abiding people such as ourselves wanted to silence him. It is because this word of Jesus has the power to strip us of all we think we've achieved. This beatitude robs us of what we thought we had acquired and leaves us naked, destitute, and empty. If we are to have righteousness as Jesus defines it, we must receive it like beggars, letting it transform us from the inside."*

What is God saying to you?

*Jesus, my Lord and Savior,  
what can I give you in return for all the favors you have first conferred on me?  
I will take from your hand the cup of your sufferings and call on your name.  
I vow before your eternal Father and the Holy Spirit  
– in truth, I vow to you, Jesus my Savior –  
that as far as I have the strength,  
I will never fail to accept suffering along with the blessing.  
If someday, in your infinite mercy,  
you should offer suffering to me, your most unworthy servant,  
my beloved Jesus, here and now I offer my body and blood and life to you.  
Whether I live or die, may I live and die only for you.  
When I die, as someday I will, I will die only for you since you willingly died for me.  
Let me so live that you may grant me the gift of a faithful life and a faithful death.  
In this way, my God and Savior, I will take from your hand  
the cup of your blessings and the cup of your sufferings  
and always call on your name:  
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.  
Amen.*

Jean de Brébeuf, tortured and killed by Iroquois, 1649



## Monday, June 10: Psalm 101

David aspires to be a good king. Good for him.

As you read through Psalm 101, note the lofty goals David sets for himself.

Will he attain all of this? No, he is very human. He will have his successes and his failures. Often he is big enough to admit his mistakes, confess his sins, repent, and receive God's forgiveness. Sometimes he fails.

Becoming "righteous" is a process. Along the way we will make blunders. Are we strong enough to acknowledge them, confess them, repent, and resolve to try better? Or do we fail?

John Koessler continues, *"Above all, Jesus' promise in this beatitude shows us that true righteousness leaves us craving more. We tend to think of righteousness as a standard. Like the little boy whose progress in growth has been marked inch by inch on the kitchen wall and compared to his father's height, we hope that we, too, will measure up someday."*

*"Yet there is no limit to God's righteousness, as if we could accumulate and eventually exhaust it. God has an infinite capacity for righteousness, and so do we. This is the secret to savoring the blessed hunger Jesus describes. Natural hunger is all about emptiness. The hunger Jesus blesses is about never being filled. Such is our lot – and our blessing. As worshipers of an infinite God, we are always longing, always filled."*

Jesus invites us to yearn for an infinite capacity of righteousness ... A group of us were talking about how God relates to us. *"Do you think God deliberately puts speed bumps on our paths?"* one person asked. Another answered, *"God may or may not put speed bumps on our paths, but it's still up to us whether or not we're going to drive like an idiot."*

Our calling is not to drive through life like idiots. But to seek to live for God every moment of every day ...

*Lord, help me to be all here.  
Lord, forgive me for being so ordinary  
while claiming to know so extraordinary a God.  
Help me to live to the hilt every situation, for this, Lord, is your will.  
Help me to know that Your will is always a bigger thing than we bargain for,  
but we must believe that whatever it involves,  
it is good, acceptable and perfect.  
Help me have an appetite for living  
and not be consumed by an appetite for longing.  
Help me to believe You always give Your best  
to those who leave the choice with You.  
Lord, give me firmness without hardness,  
steadfastness without dogmatism,  
and love without weakness.  
I pray that all my misgivings will be melted into thanksgivings.  
I pray to remember that the shadow a thing casts  
often far exceeds the size of the thing itself  
and though some future fear may strut brave darkness as I approach,  
the thing itself will be but a speck when seen from beyond.  
Lord, restore me often with that 'aspect from beyond,'  
to see a thing as You see it,  
to remember that You deal with us as with precious children.  
I pray for the fullness, pleasure, sheer excitement of knowing You, God, on earth.  
Amen*

Jim Elliot, killed in Ecuador, 1956

## **Tuesday, June 11: 2 Samuel 9**

(2 Samuel 8 is about David conquering the Philistine city of Gath and consolidating his power)

Does David do what is right? No one is forcing David to do anything for Saul's family, but David chooses to bless them in order to honour a private promise he made to Jonathan. Honouring this promise costs David significantly – he gives up some of the property and wealth that is rightfully his, in order to do what is right.

*"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy"* (Matthew 5:7). In Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus responds to a question about one of the two greatest commandments ('*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.*' And, '*Love your neighbor as yourself.*') The questioner wanted to know, "*Who is my neighbour?*" Jesus tells the familiar story. In the end, the neighbour is "*the one who had mercy.*" Jesus concludes: "*Go and do likewise.*"

Mercy. It's one of those words that is rather out of fashion of late.

In December 2014, James Moore, Canada's industry minister at the time, commented on rising child poverty rates in Canada: "*We've never been wealthier as a country than we are right now. Never been wealthier. Certainly, we want to make sure that kids go to school full-bellied, but is that always the government's job to be there to serve people their breakfast? Is it my job to feed my neighbour's child? I don't think so.*"

Paula Simons, in the *Edmonton Journal*, responded: "*Hardly the sort of sentiment a canny politician ought to express just before Christmas. When the barrage of Scrooge and Grinch jokes started on social media, Moore sought vainly to defend himself, claiming he'd been lied about or misquoted or quoted out of context, making out that he was the victim of bullying. Unfortunately for Moore, the reporter had the entire exchange recorded. When the raw audio was posted online, Canadians could hear for themselves the minister's ugly and uncharitable words, in their full context, and make their own judgments.*"

*"Finally, late Monday morning, Moore issued an abject apology for his 'insensitive' comment. 'Caring for each other is a Canadian ethic that I strongly believe in – always have and always will,' Moore's statement read. 'Of course poverty is an issue that concerns me, and concerns all Canadians. All levels of government, indeed all members of our society, have a responsibility to be compassionate and care for those in need.'*"

*"Very nice. Moore had his epiphany without benefit of the assistance of Christmas spirits or the pathos of wee Tiny Tim. He didn't need to haul a sleigh to the top of Mount Crumpet. Apparently, all he required for his Christmas redemption was a vigorous round of public shaming on Twitter. So should we just bring out the roast beast and bang our gar-dinkers and rejoice that Moore's heart grew three sizes this day? In real life, not Christmas fairy tales, things aren't quite that simple.*"

*"Am I my brother's keeper?" That was Cain's sneering, snide question for God, when the Lord asked about Abel, Cain's murdered brother. The answer, of course, is that we are all our brothers' keepers. We all, whatever our religious faith, or lack thereof, have an ethical duty to help feed our neighbours' children.*"

*"Sometimes, that's a literal duty – whether we're helping out an actual next-door neighbour during a family emergency, or donating to the snack program at a nearby high-needs elementary school. Sometimes, that duty is more metaphoric – whether we're talking about donating to refugee relief in Lebanon or supporting child welfare programs with our tax dollars."*

Simons goes on to challenge all of us – including all levels of government: "*These aren't problems you can solve with one turkey dinner or holiday hamper. Instead of caring about child poverty once a year in sentimental fashion, we need an honest discussion of the challenges we must confront together, as a nation, province, city and community.*"

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan haunts us: the one who truly loves God and loves his neighbour is the one God affirms. "*Go and do likewise,*" says Jesus. Yes, you are your brother's/neighbour's keeper ...

*Almighty and immortal God, the aid of all in need,  
 the helper of all who flee to you for help,  
 the life of all who believe,  
 and the resurrection of the dead:  
 we call upon you for all who believe  
 that our sins might be forgiven and we might experience new life in you.  
 Welcome us, O Lord, as you have promised through your beloved Son:  
 "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find;  
 knock and it shall be opened to you."  
 So we pray now that you would give your loving grace to we who ask,  
 that we might truly find You who seek You,  
 and that to those of us who knock You will open the door of faith.  
 May we know the blessing of your heavenly cleansing.  
 May we know your peace and your love.  
 And may we come into your eternal kingdom  
 which you have promised us through Christ our Lord.  
 Amen.*

Based on a prayer of Thomas Cranmer, executed by Mary I, 1556

### **Wednesday, June 12: 2 Samuel 11**

(2 Samuel 10 is about a battle with the Ammonites and Arameans)

*"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy"* (Matthew 5:7). What in the world does mercy have to do with this passage?

As we have seen throughout this study, sometimes David succeeds at living up to God's principles wonderfully, other times he fails abysmally. This one of those abysmal failures.

- (1) David is shirking his responsibility ( *"In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight ... However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem."* )
- (2) While David might not have been able to avoid seeing Bathsheba bathing initially, he could have looked away. Temptations happen. But we choose to either resist them or give in to them ...
- (3) David chose to proactively find out who the woman was. David made a poor choice by following up and acting on the temptation.
- (4) He seduced another man's wife (some people blame Bathsheba, but realistically there is a huge power imbalance here – could a common lady dare refuse an absolute monarch like David? No.)
- (5) He tried to lie and cover up his sin by encouraging Uriah to go home (twice).
- (6) He arranged for Uriah's murder.

In a 60 hour period David flagrantly broke 3 of the 10 Commandments. In classic understatement, the author notes that *"the Lord was displeased with what David had done"* (2 Samuel 11:27).

I hope none of us have behaved as despicably as David. But at times we all have ...

- (1) Shirked our responsibility – there were things we ought to have done or said, but we didn't do them
- (2) Faced temptation – often we cannot avoid the tempting situation, but we all still have a choice: it is our own free will that leads us to either resist the temptation ... or give in. Be honest, sometimes we have not chosen the right path.
- (3) Made mistakes – we have done or said things we knew were wrong.

*"Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins,"* writes Paul. *"You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil – the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the*

*passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else."* David can identify.

*"But God is so rich in **mercy**, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. It is only by God's grace that you have been saved. For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.*

*"God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago"* (Ephesians 2:1-10).

The good news we have in Jesus is that the Kingdom of God is about God's mercy and God's grace. He can forgive us. And, through His Spirit, He can give us the power to resist temptation and do the right thing. We, like David, may fail. But we have a loving, merciful Father who, though the blood of Jesus forgives us, and who, through the power of Spirit, empowers us.

Is there anything you need to talk with God about?

*Father, I pray that no circumstance however bitter  
or however long drawn out,  
may cause me to break Your law,  
the Law of Love to You and to my neighbor.  
May I not become resentful, have hurt feelings, hate,  
or become embittered by life's experiences.  
But in and through all, I may see Your guiding hand  
and have a heart full of gratitude for Your daily mercy, daily love,  
daily power, and daily presence.  
Help me in the day when I need it most to remember that:  
1. All things work together for good to them that love the Lord.  
2. I can do all things through Him that strengthened me.  
3. The Lord says, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'  
'Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling,  
and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,  
to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty,  
dominion and power, both now and ever,  
Amen.'*

Eric Liddell, died in Weihsien Internment Camp, China, 1945

#### **Thursday, June 13: 2 Samuel 12:1-25**

It is interesting that David still has a conscience. He can certainly recognize injustice in other people's lives. He is just blind to his own problems.

How quintessentially human. I am very good at seeing other people's problems, too. Whether it's a politician, musician, actor, or neighbour – I am very good at spotting other people's issues. Most of us are. Some of us are so good at finding fault in others, we may feel we have a *spiritual gift* of seeing other people's errors. We see our "calling" to be helping other people see all their mistakes ... Interestingly, when spiritual gifts are listed in the New Testament, there is no spiritual gift of pointing-out-another's-mistakes. There are, however, spiritual gifts of encouragement, help, and serving.

Like David, however, I am not so good at recognizing my own shortcomings. Thankfully, God has a relentless

habit of niggling my conscience until I notice I'm off track. I also have some wonderful – merciful and gracious – friends who kindly and gently help me see some of my problems. These godly people recognize I need to know when I'm messing up, but they can do so in ways that grow out of our relationship. They speak into my life in love, genuinely seeking to help me, serve me, and encourage me. These friends and the Holy Spirit's nudges are tremendous blessings, helping me recognize what I need to deal with. Then, of course, I do need to deal with the problem.

Jesus says, *"God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy"* (Matthew 5:7)

Later on in the Sermon the Mount, Jesus says, *"Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite. First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye"* (Matthew 7:1-5). That is great, practical wisdom.

Despite David's blatant sin, when he genuinely repents, God shows mercy. Solomon, David and Bathsheba's second child, is born. He will go on to rival David as the greatest king in Jewish history.

Paul writes to his mentoree, Timothy, *"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do his work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve him, even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted his people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was. He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus."*

*"This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' – and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life. All honor and glory to God forever and ever. He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen"* (1 Timothy 1:12-17).

That is great news of mercy for all of us.

*O God, early in the morning I cry to you.  
Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you:  
I cannot do this alone.  
In me there is darkness, but with you there is light;  
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;  
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;  
I am restless, but with you there is peace.  
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;  
I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me ...  
Restore me to liberty, and enable me to live now  
that I may answer before you and before me.  
Lord, whatever this day may bring, Your name be praised.  
Amen.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed by the Nazis, 1945

### **Friday, June 14: Psalm 51 (notice the context of this psalm)**

David is genuinely sorry for his sins. As we read Psalm 51 the depth of his repentance comes through. So, too, does his trust in God's mercy.

David is also moved to action by God's mercy. His desire is that others know God and His amazing love.

Read through Psalm 51 again, making it your prayer, today.

- Honestly confess what you need to confess to God. God knows it all anyway.
- Accept God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness. God can deal with it.
- To whom can you show God's mercy? How can you share His loving grace?
- Move on with your life. Forgiven. And forgiving.

*Our Father in heaven (and Jesus our Saviour, and Holy Spirit who fills us)  
May your name be honoured, glorified, and proclaimed as holy.  
May your Kingdom come ...  
May your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth ...  
Give us today the bread we need now ...  
And forgive us for our sins ...  
And we forgive those who have sinned against us ...  
Save us from great trials and help us resist temptations ...  
Rescue us from evil ...  
For YOURS is the Kingdom. YOURS is the power. And YOURS is the glory.  
Before all time, now, and forever.  
Amen.*

Jesus (Matthew 6:9-13) executed by Pilate (c.30 AD)

### **Saturday, June 15: 2 Samuel 13**

David has a dysfunctional family. All of us have our own little quirks and issues, but David's family seems particularly prone to problems. Perhaps – as we saw with David in his relationship with Bathsheba – the men have an “uncontrollable emotion” gene. Then David, Amnon, and Absalom could simply blame their bad behaviour on their DNA. Blaming genetics, they could argue it's not really David's fault that he seduced Bathsheba – it's not Amnon's fault he raped Tamar – it's not Absalom's fault he lied to David and murdered Amnon ... it's their genes. But that's too easy. And it avoids taking responsibility for their choices.

We all have our dysfunctions but we are still responsible for the choices we make. “*The Devil made me do it,*” “*My genes made me do it,*” “*My family background made me do it,*” “*My brain injury made me do it,*” are not legitimate excuses for bad behaviour. Ultimately David, Amnon, and Absalom choose – of their own free will – do despicable things. No one forces them to. No gene pre-determines their bad choices. The devil may have planted seeds of temptation in their minds, but they choose to act on them.

Temptation is one of the realities of life we cannot avoid. On occasion we find ourselves in situations where we're tempted to cut corners, lie, cheat, steal, deceive, lust, shortchange ... The issue is not **if** you will be tempted – you will be. The issue is **how** you will handle the temptation **when** it does, inevitably, come.

When you are tempted by something you know is plain wrong – or something is wrong for you –

1. Immediately get it out of your mind. Do whatever you can to get that temptation thought out.
  - a. Pray about it.
  - b. Distract yourself. Do some physical exercise. Read a challenging book. Watch an engrossing movie. Physically remove the temptation (shut down the computer?)
  - c. Get together with other people. Being alone with your thoughts may not be good for you.
  - d. If you have a trusted friend, confide in them and get them to hold you accountable to NOT act. Create checks and balances.
2. If you don't immediately get it out of your head ...
  - a. You begin to think about it ...
  - b. You fantasize about it ...
  - c. You rationalize it ...

- d. You begin to think up plans to make it happen ...
- e. You act on it ...
- f. You regret it ...
- g. You have to deal with the consequences of it ... usually not pleasant.

Don't give in to temptation: it will lead to complications, trouble, pain, and heartache. So – when you are tempted – be prepared. Recognize what temptation looks like. And instantly – right away – pray for the strength to resist. And then do what it takes to get that thought out of your life.

If you find yourself starting to think about a temptation, toy with the idea, think up schemes ... pray harder. And follow the practical counsel under (1) above. When we are alone we have more time and less distractions – so we get ourselves into more trouble with our thoughts. Get out and do things with others. Keep your door open. Have your computer screen where other people can see what you're looking at ...

Remember the good news: *"Since he (Jesus) himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested ... This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."* (Hebrews 2:18, 4:15).

*Lord, may I have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.  
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, You 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 confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of You, our God the Father.  
Lord, may I work hard to show the results of my salvation,  
obeying You with deep reverence and fear.  
For You are working in me, giving me the desire and the power  
to do what pleases You.  
Lord, may I have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.  
Amen.*

Paul (Philippians 2:5-13) executed by Nero, c. 67 AD

### **Sunday, June 16: 2 Samuel 14**

It is easy to say, *"I believe in being merciful. I believe in forgiving other people."* But when we are confronted with a real, practical situation in which someone has done despicable things to ourselves or those we love (remember the issues in 2 Samuel 13), it can be very difficult to actually put these noble principles into practice.

Consider Absalom. Twice he is faced with situations where he (or someone he loves) is injured ...

1. Tamar had been raped
2. Joab refuses to come to see him (14:28-30)

How does Absalom handle each of those situations? He murders Amnon. He burns Joab's barley field. Absalom does not model self-control, moderation, or mercy. He is vengeful, spiteful, angry, and violent.

Meanwhile David struggles to be a wise parent. Over time he does make progress in his anger with Absalom for murdering Amnon (David never approves of the horrendous thing Amnon did; he also cannot approve of Absalom's taking the law into his hands and executing Amnon). Though it takes a long time, David is able to begin to express mercy to Absalom.

By extending mercy, David is not condoning Absalom's bad behaviour. He is not pretending Absalom did not sin. But David is recognizing that, if we confront our issues and deal with them, we can begin to move on.

God challenges us to show mercy to those who sin against us. In the "Lord's Prayer," Jesus commands us to pray: *"Forgive us our sins, **as we forgive those who sin against us**"* (Matthew 6:12). Right after the prayer, Jesus adds, *"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins"* (6:14-15). This is not easy to do. But the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is to invite us to see the values of the Kingdom of God, and to begin to put those principles into practice now. Since God chooses to show mercy to us and forgive us, we also need to show mercy to one another ...

God does show mercy to us. He never condones our bad behaviour. He does not pretend our sin doesn't exist. But, in love, He chooses to forgive. And He chooses to forget. And He chooses to give us a new beginning. It cost Him dearly to do so – it cost Him the life of His Son, Jesus.

When we extend mercy, we are not condoning bad behaviour. We are not pretending sin does not exist. But, in God's love, we choose to forgive. And we choose to forget. We choose to give people a new beginning. It may cost us dearly – we may have been hurt, we may have suffered, we may have been wronged – but we choose to be merciful. Because that is the model God has set for us.

Paul counsels us: *"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted **mercy**, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

*"Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father"* (Colossians 3:12-17).

This is Eric Liddell's daily prayer check list. Use it as a guideline for your prayer today:

- *Have I surrendered this new day to God, and will I seek and obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout its hours?*
- *What have I especially to thank God for this morning?*
- *Is there any sin in my life for which I should seek Christ's forgiveness and cleansing? Is there any apology or restitution to make?*
- *For whom does God want me to pray this morning?*
- *What bearing does today's Bible passage have on my life, and what does He want me to do about it?*
- *What does God want me to do today and how does He want me to do it?*

Eric Liddell, died in Weihsien Internment Camp (China), 1945

## **Monday, June 17: Psalm 32**

In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis suggests we may fall into one of two equal and opposite errors concerning the devil. Some people become obsessed with the devil; they see him everywhere. Other people completely



forget he exists. Lewis' point is that the devil is alive and well. And, although we don't want to become preoccupied with him and his temptations, we do need to take him seriously.

What the devil is about these days is doing anything he can from keeping people like you and I from relating to God. He is the one who, when we feel like praying, distracts us with all the things we have to do. He is the one who, when we decide to read the Bible, reminds us how tired we are. He is the one who – if he cannot convince to stay home from church – when we get to church, encourages us to think, *"How dare they sit in my seat."* *"Why don't they sing the songs I like?"* or *"I really don't like the sermon today."* He is the one who, when the offering plate comes by, encourages us to think, *"Somebody else will give."*

But the devil is also the one who tempts us in less overtly spiritual ways.

- When the driving force behind most of our decisions is our own personal financial success or our own pleasure ... he has tempted us.
- When we find the surreal world of TV or the internet so titillating we begin to wish we were part of that world, or we get caught up in YouTube or FaceBook, or we become obsessed with games or sports to the point it affects more important parts of our lives ... we have been tempted.
- When we compromise our ethical standards, even just in our thoughts ... we have been tempted.

We will be tempted – that's reality. We are being tempted – that's reality. But we can choose how to respond to those temptations ... Martin Luther, commenting on temptation, said, *"You cannot stop birds flying around your head, but you can stop them from building a nest in your hair."*

And so we come to the sixth beatitude, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"* (Matthew 5:8). Notice, Jesus didn't say, *"Blessed are those who look pure ..."* He is deliberately making a distinction between inward and outward purity. This is an important distinction for two reasons:

1. It means that we ought not to judge someone by appearances. Martin Luther wrote: *"Christ wants to have the heart pure, though outwardly the person may be a drudge in the kitchen, black, sooty, and grimy, doing all sorts of dirty work ... though a common labourer, a shoemaker or a blacksmith may be dirty and sooty or may smell because he is covered with dirt and pitch ... and though he stinks outwardly, inwardly he is pure incense before God if he ponders God's word in his heart and obeys it."*
2. It means we need to be careful not be fooled by a fine exterior, either. Throughout Scripture emphasis is placed on the state of a person's heart. As David prayed in his psalm for forgiveness: *"Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place ... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me"* (Psalm 51 6, 10).

The Bible encourages us to:

1. Flee temptation. The instant a bad idea comes into your mind, turn your back on it immediately. Do not entertain it for a second. Because the instant you do, you're hooked. Today, whenever a thought crosses your mind you know is wrong, don't even stop to think about it. Turn your back on it. Put it out of your mind. Distract yourself. Get out with godly friends.
2. When Jesus was tempted he quoted Scripture back at the devil ... do the same thing. Memorise one verse of Scripture (Matthew 5:8? Psalm 23? John 3:16? Romans 8:28? 1 John 1:9?) and run it over and over in your head – meditating on it – until the temptation is gone. Or sing a chorus or a song. Or think about Jesus. Anything wonderful and good. But do not allow the temptation to get a foothold in your mind, or like a cancer it festers, and grows and spreads.

In Philippians 4, right after dealing with a church spat, Paul writes, *"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. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me – everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you."* (4:8-9). That's great advice.

*In me there is darkness, but with you there is light;  
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;  
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;  
I am restless, but with you there is peace.  
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;  
I do not understand your ways,  
But you know the way for me.  
Lord Jesus Christ,  
You were poor and in distress,  
a captive and forsaken as I am.  
You know all man's troubles;  
You abide with me when all men fail me;  
You remember and seek me;  
It is your will that I should know you and turn to you.  
Lord, I hear your call.  
Help me to follow.  
Lord, have mercy.  
Amen.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed by the Nazis, 1945

## **Tuesday, June 18: 2 Samuel 15**

David had showed Absalom mercy. How did Absalom repay his father's grace?

Reading this 3000 years later, I could say that David should never have forgiven Absalom. If he had properly punished the young man for his crimes, this revolt would never have happened ...

But think of this as a parable. David – the father – blesses his sinful son with grace and mercy. And the child repays him with treachery. God – the Father – blesses us (his sinful children) with grace and mercy. And how do we repay him? In the first century, His chosen people repaid Him with treachery, suffering, humiliation, and death. In the twenty-first century, I want to repay Him with faithful love ... but I stumble and fall, too. I may not be as arrogant and rebellious as Absalom, but I have failed my heavenly Father in far too many ways. And I am SO thankful for my Father's grace and mercy.

Before I am too hard on Absalom, I have to confess the Absalom within me.

Paul, for instance, recognizes the Absalom in himself: *"The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good ... I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway ... I have discovered this principle of life – that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am."* (Romans 7:14-24). I can identify with Paul. Can you?

*"Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?"* Paul desperately asks. *"Thank God. The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 7:25). The great news is that God loves us so much that He chooses to forgive us again and again and again ... despite our failures.

Before I suggest David should never have forgiven Absalom, I have to think about whether God should ever have forgiven me ... And I need to be so thankful that even though I certainly do NOT deserve God's love, mercy, and forgiveness, He blesses me with these precious gifts. Our Father chooses to love us despite our failures, mistakes, blunders, and sins. He chooses to suffer the consequences of our sin ... and give us hope, peace, love, and joy ... and yet another chance to begin again. Thank God for His amazing grace.

*O heavenly Father, the author and fountain of all truth,  
The bottomless sea of all understanding,  
Send, we pray, your Holy Spirit into our hearts,  
And enlighten our understandings with the sunbeams of your heavenly grace.  
We pray for light in our darkness. We pray for faith in times of trial.  
We pray for hope in our distress. We pray for joy in our sorrow.  
We pray for courage in our fear.  
Send, we pray, your Holy Spirit into our hearts  
So we may face the future in your presence, every moment of every day.  
Amen*

Based on a prayer by Nicholas Ridley, executed by Mary I, 1555

### **Wednesday, June 19: Psalm 8**

In the midst of our crises, how do we react?

David has been lurching from crisis to crisis his entire life. Yet he writes a beautiful poem of praise like Psalm 8!

Here are some thoughts on pain, suffering, and tough times:

- *"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."* C.S. Lewis
- *"It is not a question of God allowing or not allowing things to happen. It is part of living. Some things we do to ourselves, other things we do to each other. Our Father knows about every bird which falls to the ground, but He does not always prevent it from falling. What are we to learn from this? That our response to what happens is more important than what happens. Here is a mystery: one man's experience drives him to curse God, while another man's identical experience drives him to bless God. Your response to what happens is more important than what happens."* Chip Brogden
- *"Adversity introduces a man to himself."* Unknown
- *"I say that trials and tests locate a person. They determine where you are spiritually. They reveal the true condition of your heart. How you react under pressure is how the real you reacts."* John Bevere
- *"Life is 10% what happens to you, and 90% how you respond to it."* Unknown

Sometimes we need to get "out of ourselves," reflect on the glory of God's creation, celebrate our salvation through Jesus, and keep our problems in perspective. Can you do that?

*Because of Christ and our faith in him,  
we can now come boldly and confidently into your presence, O God.  
I fall to my knees and pray to You, my Father,  
Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.  
I pray that from your glorious, unlimited resources  
you will empower us with inner strength through your Spirit.  
May Christ make his home in our hearts as we trust in him.  
May our roots grow down into your love and keep us strong.  
May we have the power to understand, as all your people should,  
how wide, how long, how high, and how deep your love truly is.  
May we experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully.  
May we be made complete with all the fullness of life  
and power that comes from you, our God.  
Now all glory to you, O God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us,  
to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.  
Glory to you in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever.  
Amen.*

Paul (Ephesians 3:12-21) executed by Nero, c. 67 AD

## Thursday, June 20: 2 Samuel 16

The way in which David handles Shimei, one of Saul's extended family, shows David at his more pure in heart. Most of us would have reacted like Abishai and David's officers: we would want to kill the one who dared to throw stones at and mock the king. But David sees deeper. And he shows mercy.

Paul advises his friend, Timothy, *"In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use. If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work"* (2 Timothy 2:20-21).

David's challenge – like all of ours – is to keep his heart pure and to do what is right. This is especially difficult when we face stressful, challenging circumstances. It is difficult to maintain a godly perspective and choose to do what is right and true when people throw stones at and insult us.

Paul's advice to Timothy in these circumstances is this: *"Run from anything that stimulates your lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts"* (2 Timothy 2:22). What are the challenges you are facing in your life? Don't compromise, tempting though that may be. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts. Then you will know God's peace ...

Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna (modern day Izmir, Turkey). In a Roman arena he was ordered to burn incense to Caesar as a god. He refused saying, *"For eighty six years have I been his (Jesus') servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"* The Roman Proconsul threatened him with wild beasts. Polycarp would not renounce his faith in Jesus. Finally he was tied to a stake and burned to death. As the torches were being brought, an eyewitness account records this prayer:

*O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ,  
through whom we have received the knowledge of you,  
the God of angels and powers and of all creation  
and of the whole race of the righteous who live in your presence;  
I bless you that you have granted me this day and hour,  
that I might have the opportunity to stand for my faith,  
that I might be counted worthy of suffering,  
in the certain hope of the resurrection of eternal life,  
both of soul and of body, in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.  
You are the faithful and true God.  
For this opportunity to live my faith, and for all things,  
I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you,  
through the eternal and heavenly High-priest, Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son,  
through whom with Him and the Holy Spirit  
be glory both now and ever and for the ages to come.  
Amen.*

Polycarp, killed by the Romans, 155 AD

## Friday, June 21: Psalm 103

What does David say about God's mercy in Psalm 103?

How does God deal with our sin? (103:3, 9-12)

What does David say about God's love in this psalm?

What ought to be our response to all of this (103:19-22)?

How can this prayer teach you more about God's grace and unconditional love?

*It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.  
The kingdom of God is not only beyond our efforts,  
it is even beyond our vision.  
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction  
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.  
Nothing we do is complete,  
which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.  
No statement says all that could be said.  
No prayer fully expresses our faith.  
No confession brings perfection.  
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.  
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.  
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.  
This is what we are about.  
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted,  
knowing that they hold future promise.  
We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.  
We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.  
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.  
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,  
An opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.  
We may never see the end results,  
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.  
We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future not our own.  
Amen.*

Archbishop Óscar Romero, assassinated by Salvadoran soldiers, 1980

### **Saturday, June 22: 2 Samuel 18**

(2 Samuel 17 is about both David and Absalom marshalling their armies)

This chapter gives us the tragic details of the great battle between Absalom's and David's forces. Ultimately Absalom's hair is his demise. If you remember, *"He cut his hair only once a year, and then only because it was so heavy. When he weighed it out, it came to five pounds."*(14:26) – his vanity was his downfall.

What kind of epitaph would you write for Absalom? On the one hand, he loved his sister, Tamar, and was willing to defend her honour – albeit viciously. On the other hand he was arrogant, conceited, and a rebel against his father till the bitter end.

Ultimately, *"The king was overcome with emotion. He went up to the room over the gateway and burst into tears. And as he went, he cried, "O my son Absalom. My son, my son Absalom. If only I had died instead of you. O Absalom, my son, my son."*(18:33)

Think about this story as a parable of human life ... some people may be good people, but they rebel against their Father till the bitter end, too. Ultimately, they would rather run away from their Father's love than come back to Him – merciful and gracious though He is. They build monuments to themselves and their ambition (18:18), but refuse to come back to the Father ... In the end, how will the Father respond? We know how He has already responded – He did die for of us. But we still have to accept His gift of love. And I suspect He cries, grieving over those who steadfastly refuse His mercy and grace time and time again ...

C.S. Lewis muses:

- *"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'THY will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it."*
- *"The choice of every lost soul can be expressed in the words, 'Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.' There is always something they insist on keeping, even at the price of misery. There is always something they prefer to joy – that is, to reality. You see it easily enough in a spoiled child that would sooner miss its play and its supper than say it was sorry and be friends."*
- *"I willingly believe that the damned are successful rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside ..."*

Tragically, those words reflect Absalom's rebellion against his father, David.

Who do you know who needs to come to God? Pray for them. And pray that God would give us the wisdom to know when and how to share His love with those we care about. In the meantime, we are challenged to continue modelling God's love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness in our relationships.

*Eternal God, out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence  
the whole universe has come into being,  
we humbly confess that we have not loved You with our hearts, souls and minds,  
and we have not loved our neighbors as Christ loved us.  
We have all too often lived by our own selfish impulses  
rather than by the life of sacrificial love as revealed by Christ.  
We often give in order to receive.  
We love our friends and hate our enemies.  
We go the first mile but dare not travel the second.  
We forgive but dare not forget.  
And so as we look within ourselves, we are confronted with the appalling fact  
that the history of our lives is the history of an eternal revolt against you.  
But You, O God, have mercy upon us.  
Forgive us for what we could have been but failed to be.  
Give us the intelligence to know your will.  
Give us the courage to do your will.  
Give us the devotion to love your will.  
In the name and spirit of Jesus, we pray.  
Amen.*

Martin Luther King Jr., assassinated in 1968

### **Sunday, June 23: 2 Samuel 19**

David acts wisely. While his advisors want vengeance and blood, David models mercy and grace. The Book of Proverbs, mostly written by David's son, Solomon (I wonder if he learned much of this at David's knee), gives lots of wonderful advice for those who desire to be pure in heart. Consider this wisdom from Proverbs:

- *The path of life leads upward for the wise; they leave the grave behind.*
- *The Lord tears down the house of the proud, but he protects the property of widows.*
- *The Lord detests evil plans, but he delights in pure words.*
- *Greed brings grief to the whole family, but those who hate bribes will live.*
- *The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking; the mouth of the wicked overflows with evil words.*
- *The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayers of the righteous.*
- *A cheerful look brings joy to the heart; good news makes for good health.*
- *If you listen to constructive criticism, you will be at home among the wise.*

- *If you reject discipline, you only harm yourself; but if you listen to correction, you grow in understanding.*
- *Fear of the Lord teaches wisdom; humility precedes honor.*
- *We can make our own plans, but the Lord gives the right answer.*
- *People may be pure in their own eyes, but the Lord examines their motives.*
- *Commit your actions to the Lord, and your plans will succeed.*
- *The Lord has made everything for his own purposes, even the wicked for a day of disaster.*
- *The Lord detests the proud; they will surely be punished.*
- *Unfailing love and faithfulness make atonement for sin. By fearing the Lord, people avoid evil.*
- *When people's lives please the Lord, even their enemies are at peace with them.*
- *Better to have little, with godliness, than to be rich and dishonest.*
- *We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.*

(Proverbs 15:24-19:9)

May the Lord give us wisdom to be as loving, gracious, and merciful as He is. And may our motives be as pure – in all we do – as we think they are.

*I thank you, O Christ, that you suffered for me,  
leaving me an example, that I should follow in your steps.  
You committed no sin, and no deceit was found in your mouth.  
When you were abused,  
you did not return abuse;  
when you suffered,  
you did not threaten;  
but you entrusted yourself to the One who judges with justice.  
You, yourself, bore my sins in your body on the cross,  
so that, free from all sin,  
I might live for righteousness, forever –  
by your wounds I have been healed.  
For I was like a lost sheep,  
but now the Good Shepherd has found me; I am His.  
And He is the guardian of my soul.  
Amen.*

Peter (based on 1 Peter 2:21-25)  
Executed by Nero, 64 AD?

## Monday, June 24: Psalm 122

Psalm 122 is a prayer for peace. But peace doesn't "just happen."

James writes, "*The wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are **peacemakers** will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness*" (3:17-18). Hungering and thirsting for righteousness, showing mercy, being pure in heart ... these all lead to being people who love peace and – more than that – actively **make** peace.

"*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God,*" says Jesus (Matthew 5:9).

Children have a habit of copying the behaviour that they see in their parents – for good or for bad. If parents react to situations with anger and foul language – their kids will do the same. If parents model self-control and grace, kids will often do the same, too ... As children of God, we are challenged to be peace-makers, just as our loving heavenly Father is a peacemaker:

- God gave us the gift of peace with Himself. Through the death of Jesus our sins are forgiven and we are fully restored as God's own children – loved, honoured, and blessed;

- God challenges us to make peace with other people: *"Forgive us our trespasses AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US ..."*

Here are a few though-provoking insights into this beatitude to ponder today:

- *"The followers of Jesus have been called to peace. When he called them they found their peace, for he is their peace. But now they are told that they must not only have peace but make it. And to that end they renounce all violence and tumult."* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)
- *"Now peacemaking is a divine work. For peace means reconciliation, and God is the author of peace and of reconciliation ... It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the particular blessing which attaches to peacemakers is that "they shall be called sons of God." For they are seeking to do what their Father has done, loving people with his love."* (John Stott)
- *"No one has ever been converted by violence."* (Jim Forest)
- *"Many Christians demand the Ten Commandments be posted in public buildings ... I haven't heard one of them demand that the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, be posted anywhere. 'Blessed are the merciful' in a courtroom? 'Blessed are the peacemakers' in the Pentagon?"* (Kurt Vonnegut)
- *"Being a peacemaker is part of being surrendered to God, for God brings peace. We abandon the effort to get our needs met through the destruction of enemies. God comes to us in Christ to make peace with us; and we participate in God's grace as we go to our enemies to make peace."* (Glen Stassen and David Gushee)

*Grant me, O Lord, good digestion,  
and also something to digest.  
Grant me a healthy body,  
and the necessary good humor to maintain it.  
Grant me a simple faith  
that knows to treasure all that is good and that  
doesn't frighten easily at the sight of evil,  
but rather finds the means to put things back in their place.  
Give me a soul that knows not boredom,  
grumblings, sighs and laments,  
nor excess of stress, because of that  
obstructing thing called "I."  
Grant me, O Lord, a sense of good humor.  
Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke  
to discover in life a bit of joy,  
and to be able to share it with others.  
Amen.*

Thomas More, executed by Henry VIII, 1535

## **Tuesday, June 25: 2 Samuel 22**

(2 Samuel 20-21 are about revolts and civil unrest in Israel)

When we think about peacemakers, David is not always the first person who comes to mind. He was a soldier his entire life. However, if you think about the situations he faced, he actually showed remarkable restraint in how he handled most of them. Before we judge David too harshly, we can be thankful that we do not have the responsibility of being the king of an embattled state surrounded by hostile enemies and full of warring factions.

In this psalm, David celebrates the fact that ultimately it is God who provides for us. We do not overcome our obstacles on our own. God is the One who ultimately wins the battles. This is good to remember – we don't need to try to take revenge, to solve all the world's problems, to fight every battle ...

Our task is ...



1. To call on the Lord, who is worthy of praise (22:4)
2. To do what is right (22:21, 24-25)
3. To keep the ways of the Lord and not turn from our God to follow evil (22:22)
4. To follow all his regulations and never abandoned his decrees (22:23)

Why? Because ...

- *"To the faithful you show yourself faithful; to those with integrity you show integrity."* (22:26)
- *"To the pure you show yourself pure, but to the wicked you show yourself hostile."* (22:27)
- *"You rescue the humble, but your eyes watch the proud and humiliate them."* (22:28)
- *"God's way is perfect. All the Lord's promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to him for protection."*(22:31)

As peacemakers, our task is simply to follow God's lead: doing what is right, keeping His principles, asking for His wisdom. This does not mean we are passive. Far from it. It means we actively do what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). It also means we don't do what is untrue, dishonorable, not right, impure, unlovely, not admirable, not excellent, and not worthy of praise.

We do need God's wisdom to help us. Pray that God would direct us to do what is best.

*The drop of rain makes a hole in the stone,  
not by violence, but by oft falling;  
Help us change our nation by oft sharing your love.  
Help us change our community by oft sharing your grace.  
Help us change our homes by oft sharing your mercy.  
Help us change ourselves by oft sharing in prayer.  
Saviour. Teach me, day by day,  
Love's sweet lesson to obey;  
Sweeter lesson cannot be,  
Loving Him who first loved me.  
For self-giving love is the very uniform of Christ.  
May your Kingdom come and your will be done in me, Lord, in me.  
Amen*

Based on a prayer by Hugh Latimer, executed by Mary I, 1555

### **Wednesday, June 26: 2 Samuel 24**

(we'll come back to 2 Samuel 23)

In his better moments, David listens to God and makes wise choices. In his worse moments he makes bad decisions. In this situation his poor decision was to take a census.

His good choices include:

- Saying to the LORD, *"I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. But these people are as innocent as sheep – what have they done? Let your anger fall against me and my family"*(24:17). David is willing to take responsibility for his mistakes. We respect and admire people who are big enough to acknowledge their mistakes.
- Insisting on paying for the threshing floor: *"I will not present burnt offerings to the Lord my God that have cost me nothing"*(24:24). David recognizes that he has to pay a price for his sins.

When we think about peacemaking, we may give lip service to the principle that we should forgive those who sin against us. Intellectually we like the principle of forgiveness ... especially if we have sinned against someone and they offer us forgiveness.

- But admit our own sins? Recognize that we are be part of the problem? Acknowledge that it “takes two to tango” and we have some issues and have made some mistakes? I don’t think so ...
- Pay a price to make things better with another person? Say we’re sorry? Swallow our pride? Buy a gift? Give a sincere compliment? Extend forgiveness? I don’t think so ...

Being a peacemaker may mean ...

- we need to take the first step to recognize our own part in a problem – and not blame others. We need to take responsibility to change the only thing we can change – ourselves.
- we need to do some peacemaking thing. What can you do that rebuilds relationships? How can you extend an olive branch? What can you do to make a difference in the world?

What is God saying to me?

*Gracious God, I pray that you would give me a wise mind  
and a spirit attuned to your will,  
so that I might acquire a thorough understanding of the ways in which you work.  
I pray that I will live well for you, my Master,  
making you proud of me as I work hard in your orchard.  
As I learn more and more how you work,  
I pray that I will learn how to do your work.  
I pray that I'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul –  
not the grim strength of gritting my teeth but the glory-strength you give.  
That is the strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy.  
Thank you, Father, for making me strong enough  
to take part in everything bright and beautiful that you have for us.  
Thank you that you rescue us from dead-end alleys and dark dungeons.  
You have set us up in the kingdom of the Son whom you love so much,  
the Son who got us out of the pit we were in,  
and got rid of the sins we were doomed to keep repeating.  
Amen.*

Paul (Colossians 1:9-14) executed by Nero, c. 67 AD

### **Thursday, June 27: 1 Kings 1**

Have you known a person who just cannot make a decision? Who always dithers?

Sometimes being indecisive is OK. I’m terrible at making my mind up about some things – things that don’t really matter in the bigger picture (like what to have for supper, for instance).

But about some things you have to make a decision – now. David is in that kind of a situation. He’s dying. He has several sons. And there will be civil war and bloodshed if he doesn’t make choice. Give David credit, once again. He listens to God. He wants to make a wise, godly choice. And he chooses: Solomon.

Part of peacemaking is conflict-preventing. As soon as he is aware of the potential crisis, David takes action. And by making a clear decision, David proactively prevents problems.

One of the best ways we can be peacemakers is to be conflict-preventers. Most battles – in our families, workplaces, friendships, church, school – don’t come out of the blue. There are always warning signs.

- Do we notice the warning signs of potential conflict?
- When we notice them do we avoid them? If we choose to avoid them, they will inevitably fester and become BIG issues.

- Or do we proactively deal with them? If we nip them in the bud, they almost always quiet down.

I see this in marriages: when disagreements begin, if couples recognize the issues, communicate well, and work towards resolution, things are good. If couples avoid talking about their problems, the underlying tension usually causes more and more disagreements to the point the marriage is in jeopardy. A little irritation can become a major crisis. A little proactive prevention can go a LONG way.

I see this in families: when a person dies, if their will is explicit, clear, and equitable, things work out well. If there is a lack of clarity, inequity, or confusion, major conflicts can happen. (Please: make sure your estate is properly arranged NOW – and talk about it with the people involved so a little ripple doesn't become a shipwreck). A little proactive prevention can go a LONG way.

Where do you see this principle holding true: if you deal with the first signs of trouble, things work out – if you ignore the little problems, they become HUGE problems?

What little problems/irritations do you see in your life right now? What will you do about them?

*Am I hurting? Lord, help me to pray.  
Am I feeling great? Lord, help me to sing.  
Am I sick? Lord, help me to pray and to ask others to pray for me.  
Have I sinned? Lord, help me to pray.  
Help me to confess my sins to those I have wronged.  
Thank you for your forgiveness, inside and out.  
Help me to pray for others so we can live together whole and healed.  
I pray for those who have wandered off from God's truth  
Help me not to write them off but to go after them.  
The prayer of a person living right with God  
is something powerful to be reckoned with.  
Amen.*

James (based on James 5:13-20), executed in 62 AD

### **Friday, June 28: Psalm 138**

We often say, "*Blessed are those avoid conflict at all costs.*" Jesus says, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for standing up for what is right.*" We say, "*Blessed are those whose religion is a private thing that never offends anyone.*" Jesus says, "*Blessed are you ... when you are persecuted for my sake*" (Matthew 5:10)

When we practice the beatitudes, we find ourselves living by different standards than many of those around us. The consequence of living by Jesus' principles may be that other people are challenged by our ethics and good example. This is NOT saying that we are "in-your-face" and obnoxious about our faith. (In California, a Christmas display featuring Jesus shooting Santa Claus and a run-over Rudolph riled up some neighbours ... the homeowner claimed he was being persecuted for expressing his faith. Really? We are called to live our beliefs, values and ethics in our own lives. We are not called to insult and belittle other people's beliefs and values).

By choosing to live by the highest standards we may find ourselves on the outside of things looking in. We may not get ahead as quickly as we might if we compromised our principles. We may find people annoyed with us because our moral choices show up their lack of values.

However, by living as consistently godly lives as possible, we will be at peace with ourselves and with God. We will know the inner peace that comes when our lives are consistent with our beliefs and our consciences. Ultimately that is far more valuable than living with the stress of knowing what is right but doing what is wrong. There is an inner peace and joy that comes from living consistently ethical lives.

Is the potential cost worth it? Some people don't think so. And so they walk away from Jesus. Other people

try to live as Christians in private, but hide their faith in public. Unfortunately that kind of a double life does not work very well. It's a miserable existence when you have to wear a mask most of the time. It certainly is not a "blessed" life by any stretch of the imagination. Inevitably your faith will come out in public at some point: then you have to face the potential jibes, anyway. And you have to explain why you tried to hide your faith.

We are better off deciding to try to live lives that have integrity. None of us will ever be perfect, but we try to live as authentic Christians at home, with our friends, and at work. That may mean people will think us odd or make snide comments. But we will know the peace of being consistently faithful. We will know the joy of being a blessing to others. We will have a quality of life that really is second to none.

And what we will discover is that over time people will notice that our lives are different. They will begin to respect us. And, in time, they may even begin to enquire about what it is that makes us tick, because it is something they are desperately seeking for ...

David reminds us in Psalm 138 that even though we may be surrounded by troubles, the Lord will work out his plans for his life (138:7-8). Be encouraged, even in your hard times.

*Father, it's time. Display the bright splendor of your Son  
so the Son in turn may show your bright splendor.  
You put him in charge of everything  
so he might give real and eternal life to all in his charge.  
And this is the real and eternal life:  
That we know you, the one and only true God,  
and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.  
Holy Father, guard us as we pursue this life  
that you conferred on us as a gift through Jesus,  
so we can be of one heart and mind as you are of one heart and mind.  
We do not ask to be taken out of the world  
but that you save us from the Evil One.  
May we not be defined by the world  
any more than Jesus was defined by the world.  
Make us holy – consecrated – with the truth;  
your word is consecrating truth.  
In the same way that you gave Jesus a mission in the world,  
give us a mission in the world.  
May we become one in heart and mind –  
just as you, Father, are in Jesus and He is in you,  
So we might be one heart and mind with you, Lord, as well.  
May the world believe that you, Lord, in fact, sent Jesus.  
One day may be with Jesus, right where He is,  
so we can see your glory in all its fullness.  
Amen*

Jesus (based on John 17), crucified c. 30-33 AD

### **Saturday, June 29: 2 Samuel 23:1-7**

Here we have David's final words. David has spent a lifetime protecting his people. He suffered humiliation, banishment, homelessness, hunger, assassination attempts, revolts, betrayal, war, poverty ... all to fulfill his calling to lead God's people. It has certainly not been an easy life. In fact, it has been an incredibly stressful time.

Along the way David has made some brilliant choices. And he has made some stupid decisions. But through it all – his successes and his failures – he has kept his relationship with God strong. He keeps coming back to God – humble, repentant, yearning to do better, longing to be more godly – time and time again.

In the end, we might expect David to either:

- Call down curses on his enemies – the people who made his life a living nightmare; or
- Curse God for giving him such a difficult road to travel ...

What does David do and say?

- He is still listening to God's Spirit, God's wisdom, and God's leading: *"The Spirit of the Lord speaks through me; his words are upon my tongue ..."*
- He still hears God's wisdom: *"The one who rules righteously, who rules in the fear of God, is like the light of morning at sunrise, like a morning without clouds, like the gleaming of the sun on new grass after rain."*

David is too old and weak to put these principles into practice. But his son and heir, Solomon, will credit David for much of his wisdom.

*Lord I know that prosperity is as short-lived as a wildflower,  
so help me not to count on it.  
As soon as the sun rises, pouring down its scorching heat, the flower withers.  
Its petals wilt and, before you know it,  
that beautiful face is a barren stem.  
That's a picture of the "prosperous life."  
At the very moment everyone is looking on in admiration, it fades away to nothing.  
Lord, help me to consider it a sheer gift when tests and challenges come at me from all sides.  
I know that under pressure, my faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors.  
Help me not to try to get out of anything prematurely.  
May it do its work so I become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.  
Help me meet the testing challenges head-on and to stick it out.  
Lord, when I am under pressure,  
may I not give in to evil or say, "God is trying to trip me up."  
You are impervious to evil, and put evil in no one's way.  
The temptation to give in to evil comes from within us and only us.  
We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust.  
Help me not to get thrown off course.  
Lord, every desirable and beneficial gift comes out of heaven.  
These gifts are rivers of light cascading down from you, the Father of Light.  
There is nothing deceitful in You, nothing two-faced, nothing fickle.  
You have brought us to life using the true Word,  
showing us off as the crown of all Your creatures.  
In simple humility, God, be my gardener,  
landscaping me with the Word, making a salvation-garden of my life.  
Amen.*

James (based on James 1:2-21), executed in 62 AD

### **Sunday, June 30: Psalm 139**

As we conclude our study of David, we do well to spend some time with Psalm 139. As you read through the psalm, think of David. What did this psalm mean to him?

Read it through a second time. What is God saying to you?

With all our modern knowledge of how bodies and personalities are formed even before birth, there is still a deep mystery and wonder as we think about the glory of a human being. Each person is a living, breathing miracle, of inestimable worth.

At the same time, we pause in awe and wonder fore the God who creates each person unique, precious, and invaluable. This God knows us so intimately that all our struggles and joys, fears and hopes, and worries and dreams are like an open book before him.

There is no hiding from God. That is not a threat, but a promise. It's a wonderful assurance that God knows our depression and our elation, our neuroses and our health, our grief and our celebrations. He can partner with us in the worst and the best of times.

Are you struggling? Allow God, through this psalm, to be part of your healing ...

Are you in a good place? Thank God. Celebrate His blessing. And pray for those who are hurting.

*I'm a part of the fellowship of the unashamed.  
The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line.  
The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His and I won't look back,  
let up, slow down, back away, or be still.  
My past is redeemed.  
My present makes sense.  
My future is secure.  
I'm done and finished with low living, sight walking, small planning,  
smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions,  
mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.  
I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position,  
promotions, plaudits, or popularity.  
I don't have to be right, or first, or tops,  
or recognized, or praised, or rewarded.*

*I live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience,  
lift by prayer, and labor by Holy Spirit power.  
My face is set. My gait is fast. My goal is heaven.  
My road may be narrow, my way rough,  
my companions few, but my guide is reliable, and my mission is clear.  
I will not be bought, compromised, detoured,  
lured away, turned back,  
deluded, or delayed.  
I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice  
or hesitate in the presence of the adversary.  
I will not negotiate at the table of the enemy,  
ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.*

*I won't give up, shut up,  
or let up until I have stayed up,  
stored up, prayed up,  
paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ.  
I am a disciple of Jesus.  
I must give until I drop, preach until all know,  
and work until He comes.  
And when He does come for His own,  
He'll have no problems recognizing me. My colors will be clear.  
I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ ... (Romans 1:16).  
Amen*

Anonymous, murdered in Rwanda, 1980