

## **Cultivate - PSALMS**

### **PSALM 126:**

We now come to the seventh of the "*Songs of Ascent*," a lovely group of Psalms that God's people would sing and pray together as they journeyed up to Jerusalem. Here in this Psalm they are praying for the day when the Lord would "*restore the fortunes*" of God's people (vs.1,4).

126 is a prayer for spiritual revival and reawakening. The first half is all happiness and joy, remembering how God answered this prayer once. But now that's just a memory... like a dream. They need to be renewed again. So they call out to God once more: transform, restore, deliver us again.

Don't you think this is a prayer that God's people could stand to sing and pray today? Pray it this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. God is here inviting such prayer; he's even putting the very words in our mouths.

### **PSALM 127:**

This is now the eighth of the "*Songs of Ascent*," which God's people would sing on their procession up to the temple. We've seen that *Zion / Jerusalem / The House of the Lord* are all common themes in these Psalms. But the "*house*" that Psalm 127 refers to (in v.1) is that of a dwelling for a family.

127 speaks plainly and clearly to our anxiety-ridden thirst for success. How can anything be strong or successful or sufficient or secure... if it does not come from the Lord?

Without the blessing of the Lord, our lives will come to nothing. Let this Psalm teach you how to pray that truth more deeply into your life this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. May your heart be full of the gospel, and may your lips be full of God's praise.

### **PSALM 128:**

Another "pilgrim psalm," another "*Song of Ascent*," enjoyed by God's people as they traveled in big groups of friends and family, on their way to Jerusalem for worship and feasting. Last week Psalm 127 had us praying about our families a good bit; here that theme is continued.

128 teaches us to pray for and understand the Lord's gifts of blessing and prosperity and peace—from the center of life, outward.

Do you want to have a well-ordered life? Pray this Psalm up and down, in and out, all week long. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Let's join our praise and prayers with the faithful saints who have "gone up" (Psalm 122.4) before us, trusting in the promise of the Messiah.

### **PSALM 129:**

Ever since Psalm 120 (when Cultivate started), we've been in the midst of these "*Songs of Ascent*," which run from 120-134. This is the tenth one; there are five more to go, and I hope

you've grown to enjoy praying them. God's people have been praying these Psalms together—during their pilgrimage in this world—for a long time.

129 is reminding us of the need for perseverance while following God in the midst of this rebellious, idolatrous, sinful world. For there are times when we will be persecuted.

If this Psalm doesn't seem to fit your experience right now, be assured that there are many Christians around the world for whom it does fit. Pray it for them. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Go to this website: <http://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/> and pray Psalm 129 for your brothers and sisters / mothers and fathers all across the far-flung expanse of Christ's earthly kingdom.

### **PSALM 130:**

We now enter into the 11th of the 15 "*Songs of Ascent*" in the Psalter, which were first used as a traveling hymnbook / prayerbook / worship book, while the Israelites were on their way to the temple together (like Jesus' family did with all "*their relatives and acquaintances*" in Luke 2:41-45).

130 is itself a steep climb (like the climb up to the temple)... or, at least, it feels that way to me. It begins in "*the depths*" (v.1), but it ends with "*hope... steadfast love... plentiful redemption*" (v.7). You might need that kind of encouragement this week!

In addition to being a "pilgrim Psalm," 130 is also a "penitential Psalm," assuring us that the Lord doesn't keep count of our sins, if we repent (v.3). Pray it deeply, as a repenting pilgrim this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember, the Psalter is all about Jesus and the gospel! See Acts 13.32-39!

### **PSALM 131:**

This is the 12th of the 15 "*Songs of Ascent*," which are specifically designed to help God's people keep our focus on our great God and his great promises, even in the midst of the various trials and distresses of being a pilgrim in a land that is no longer the world for which we were made.

131 is a reflection on and celebration of what might be called "the simple life"—a life of childlike (*not childish!*) faith and trust and rest and hope in God. It reminds us of Jesus' words in Matthew 18: "*Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*"

Note that it's a prayer of David, who was a man's man. But he prayed as a child to his Father; pray like that this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Perhaps one day we'll even find ourselves "*addressing one another in psalms*" (Ephesians 5.19).

### **PSALM 132:**

The last three of the "*Songs of Ascent*" in the Psalter (Psalms 132, 133, & 134) can be seen as

celebrating the idea of "arrival"—the pilgrimage is past, the journey is complete, we are now home. Here in this Psalm, the Lord has chosen Zion as his resting place; there he meets with his people.

132 celebrates the climax of the journey that the ark of God traveled, starting at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 37. It was a journey that spanned centuries and many hardships (v.1), but everywhere displayed the faithfulness of the Lord to be with his people.

One thing we can absorb in this Psalm is a deep and holy passion for the Lord's church. Pray for that this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... singing psalms"* (Colossians 3.16).

### **PSALM 133:**

We said last week that these last three *"pilgrim Psalms"* of the *"Songs of Ascent"* have a sense of "arrival" about them. Here in this Psalm, we are enjoying the blessing of being home, with our true family.

133 is a beautiful and poetically rich celebration of the heaven-sent gift of fellowship and unity among God's people.

Do you know this *"good and pleasant... blessing"* (vs.1,3)? Give God thanks for it and pray for a fuller experience of it in your life this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Interesting historical note: *The Bay Psalm Book* was the first book printed in the American colonies (*in 1640, just 20 years after the pilgrims came ashore at Plymouth*). They counted the subject matter of this Psalm as precious indeed.

### **PSALM 134:**

We now come to the last of the 15 *"Songs of Ascent"* in the Psalter. They began with 120, and they end with 134. They began with a sense of distress (120.1); they end with hands uplifted in praise and blessing (134:1-3).

134 has the pilgrim at last standing in the very presence of the Lord himself, in his sanctuary, under the fulness of his blessing.

We may begin our pilgrimage as far away as Meshech and Kedar (120.5), but we end *"in the house of the Lord"* (134.1). Consider God's faithfulness to you in your journey as you pray this Psalm. We'll pray it together on Sunday. And as we hear of Plymouth Rock pilgrims this week, remember what I mentioned here last week: the first thing they created and published on these shores was a Psalter, so that the American church could worship God with these prayers and songs.

### **PSALM 135:**

Okay! The *"Songs of Ascent"* have now ended! What do we pray next?... Well, still in the general theme of the great "pilgrimage" of 120-134, this next Psalm traces the steps of the great pilgrimage God's people made in days of old... from Egypt to the Promised Land.

135 is a wonderful Psalm for times of trouble. It's both a confession of faith and a call to prayer; still very relevant for God's people today.

It's also a call to worship and a celebration of The One True Sovereign King of the Universe; pray it with gusto this week! We'll pray it together on Sunday. "*Sing to him, sing praises to him!*" (Psalm 105.2)

### **PSALM 136:**

There is one abiding reality in the nature of God, from which all of his grace towards us flows. And that reality is that "*his steadfast love endures forever.*" From this point everything originates and to this point everything returns.

136 again retraces the great pilgrimage from Egypt to Canaan (like last week's Psalm did), but this one is designed to do so in the context of responsive worship.

In a worship service, this responsive reading and prayer could be cumbersome and tedious... *or it could be swift and glorious!* Pray it with a heart full of "eventful" praise this week; we'll pray it together on Sunday. Learning to embrace the Psalter is learning to embrace the praises of your God... on his terms.

### **PSALM 137:**

Does your mind ever wander back to a miserable time in your life? Look at the verb tenses of vs.1-3. Here the psalmist is looking back and remembering what it was like when God's people were in exile, in Babylon.

137 is a "*Psalm of exile,*" and—in a way—a prayer for revival. It's full of passion and pain, and it grows into an intense prayer for the enemies of the Lord to meet justice.

This kind of prayer is a stark reminder that we are not the judge of the earth... but that there is, indeed, a Righteous and Holy Judge of the earth. Pray it this week. There is a "me"-centered form of worship, and there is a God-centered form of worship. Sometimes the latter form meets us with a shock. This is one part of the shock and "otherness"... of holiness.

### **PSALM 138:**

Do you ever experience a whole new appreciation for the nature of God? Do you ever wonder (or despair) about where the story of human history is leading? Does your faith ever need to be strengthened, in the face of your worries and anxieties about your own personal sense of security? Then this Psalm is for you... vs.1-3... vs.4-6... & vs.7&8, respectively.

138 is a "*Psalm of Revival,*" assuring us of the Lord's faithfulness to his promises—promises about himself, promises about his world, promises about you and your purpose.

This is a prayer we need to return to often, since we "*walk in the midst of trouble*" (v.7). Pray it

purposefully this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. There are divine glories in the Psalter that God calls his church to read, pray, sing, live, and "embody" together.

**PSALM 139:**

I love this Psalm. It's a favorite of most Christians who bathe themselves in the Psalter. God completely knows you (vs.1-6) and God is with you everywhere you go (vs.7-12). Why is this true? Because he literally made you (vs.13-18). And he also very much wants you to be like him in holiness (vs.19-24).

139 is a "*Wisdom Psalm*," and if we have any foolish, small-minded, petty thoughts about who our God is, we will find great remedy and beautiful correction right here.

This prayer will stretch you to our limits of understanding the heights and depths of God's majesty and transcendence, and yet it is also deeply personal, from the first verse to the last. Revel in praying it repeatedly this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. One of the very best gifts you could give yourself is the time to grow deeper and deeper in your understanding of the Psalter.

**PSALM 140:**

Do you remember when King Saul was insanely slandering and attacking David? There are two parts to this Psalm. First, a prayer for protection from evil men in vs.1-7. And second, a prayer for God to judge the evildoer and his plots, in vs.8-13. Both sections end with beautiful affirmations of faith (vs.6,7 & 12,13).

140 is an "*Imprecatory Psalm*," a plea for God to intervene and set this world to rights.

Do we really believe that God has promised to judge all wickedness? He has. It will either be upon the head of Christ (in place of the penitent sinner) or upon the head of the impenitent sinner. Boldly pray for evil to be destroyed this week. One way God destroys his enemies, by the way, is to turn them into friends. It happened to us, didn't it? We'll pray it together on Sunday. Behold the Psalms. Ponder them. Fall in love with God through them.

**PSALM 141:**

Last week's Psalm was greatly concerned with slanderous accusations. This week's Psalm is greatly concerned with careful, guarded speech (v.3). May we ourselves not fall into the evil described in the previous Psalm. May we cultivate a voice of prayer and a love for pleasant words (v.6).

141 is "*A Psalm For Times Of Trouble*," a Psalm to pray when we need the Lord's protection.

A most important thing we need the Lord's protection against is the formation of an insincere and compromised heart, when we feel ourselves falling into such temptations. Pray this Psalm for your own heart this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. This kind of prayer is a vital part of the beauty and wisdom and glory and genius of our divinely-given prayerbook.

**PSALM 142:**

Christian, have you ever felt like you've been forsaken by man? That may be so at times, but you're never forsaken by God. David's prayer here moves from great personal distress and helplessness and a spirit of fainting and danger and loneliness... to strong prayer for deliverance... to confidence in God's goodness.

142, like last week's Psalm, is another "*Psalm For Times Of Trouble.*" It is a prayer for the afflicted and the lonely.

This is David when he is hated and hunted and his faith is being stretched. But in praying this Psalm, his faith proved undefeated. Pray it yourself this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Praying the Psalter is a powerful way to grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus... the Greater David.

**PSALM 143:**

This is a desperate Psalm. It seems as if the Psalmist is not just at the end of his rope; he's actually run out of rope completely and his hands are empty. The center of the Psalm is v.7. And with v.7 there begins a crescendo of several petitions that he begs of God. Count the petitions and consider each of them.

143 is one of the seven traditional "*Penitential Psalms,*" along with 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, & 130. It's probably included in that list because of v.2's confession of universal guilt. But the sense of this Psalm is perhaps more accurately represented in v.11: "*For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life!*"

This is a prayer for those in dire straits. It begins immersed in troubles, but it ends with a servant's heart to trust and follow the Lord. Pray it with that servant's heart this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. If your heart hasn't been trained and formed well by the Psalter up to this point in your life, make sure this treasure is not neglected in the remainder of your days. You will be richly rewarded.

**PSALM 144:**

There was a shadow of suffering and persecution in Psalms 140-143; we've been praying in that shadow for four solid weeks. But now a new day is dawning! This is a Psalm for a jubilant and triumphant heart. The Lord has come (v.5)! It's time for a new song (v.9)!

144 is a "*Messianic Psalm,*" prophetically looking forward to the coming of the True King, who will set this world to rights. This Psalm is full of energy and heart, of hope and power. It is bursting with praise and flowing with intercession for the people of God.

I especially love how this Psalm directs us to pray for our sons and daughters in v.12: that they may be well-rooted and ready to grow strong and beautiful lives, adding to the security and stability of whatever "*structure*" they inhabit. Let's pray in this way for the children of DPC this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Is there a verse in this Psalm that you may even want to memorize this week?

### **PSALM 145:**

This is an acrostic Psalm, meaning that the first letter of each line goes A-Z through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, speaking the praise of the Lord (see v.21). Except that it isn't fully an acrostic, because the line for the Hebrew letter "nun" (n) is missing. (Later copyists simply added it; see your Bible's footnote for the second half of v.13.) But its absence actually carries a meaning: it reminds us that the human mind can never fully and exhaustibly describe the praise of our eternal God.

145 is a "*Psalm of Wonderment*," pouring out an alphabet of praise to our "*God and King*" (v.1). Nearly a whole alphabet, anyway.

Note how vs.1,2 and v.21 bookend the whole purpose of this Psalm. Let this alphabet of praise lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. God preserved this Psalm for generations so that today, right now, we might know him better by praying it with hearts full of his worship.

### **PSALM 146:**

The final five Psalms in the Psalter all start (and end!) with the exact same words: "*Praise the Lord!*" And these final five Psalms are indeed perfect praise. You won't find references to personal distress. You won't find petitions. You won't find much by way of historical allusions. But what you do find is a very focused celebration of the Living God.

146 is a "*Psalm of Pure Praise*," joyously praying and singing, in unbroken delight, the glories of our God.

The robust hymn "*Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah, O My Soul, Jehovah Praise*" (#57 in the Red Trinity Hymnal) is based on this Psalm, and I recommend it to you strongly. Let the bright praise of our Lord lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. In many ways God intended the Psalter to be the glue that binds the church's worship together, across all times and all lands.

### **PSALM 147:**

*Three times* this Psalm calls us to give voice to the praise of our great God (vs.1, 7, 12). The other 17 verses tell us *why* our God is worthy of such vigorous praise; reflect carefully on those 17 reasons for why "*a song of praise is fitting*" (v.1). You'll find yourself really wishing you had a lyre handy (v.7)!

147 is another "*Psalm of Pure Praise*," drawing our attention to the wonders of creation, to the wisdom of providence, and to the glories of grace.

It's a lovely thing that we are coming to this Psalm as we near the Lord's challenges to Job, for there those challenges will be turned into the stuff of worship. Let the "*good*" and "*pleasant*" (v.1) praise of the Lord lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. What a wonderful intro this will be into a morning of God-centered, gospel-driven, Word-saturated worship!

### **PSALM 148:**

We've said that these last five Psalms in the Psalter are full of the unbroken, pure praise of God. There is, however, a sense of progression. 146 began with strong references to the individual ("*my soul*," "*I ... I ... I ... I*," see 146.1,2). 147 then began to speak of the community of praise ("*our God*," "*O Jerusalem*," "*O Zion*," see 147.1,12). But here in 148, this call to praise now extends to all of heaven (v.1) and all of earth (v.7).

148 is the third "*Psalm of Pure Praise*" of these five. In vs.1-6 the order of this call to worship moves down, from the angelic hosts to sun & moon & stars. In vs.7-14 the order of this call to worship moves up, from the deeps, to the stuff of weather & terrain, to animals, to the kingdoms of humanity. EVERYTHING must praise its Creator. Even the "*stormy wind*" (v.8) can only fulfill his Word.

It is God's praise that truly unites the whole of creation. Let these endless hallelujahs of creation lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. In doing so we actually join with this Psalm, along with all Christians in all ages and all nations, giving glory to God alone.

### **PSALM 149:**

148.13 declared that the Lord alone is worthy of having his name and majesty exalted above earth and heaven. Therefore, Psalm 149 speaks of the Lord's purpose to bring THE WHOLE WORLD (not just Israel) under his influence... and therefore into the song, gladness, joy, dance, salvation, and glory of his people. True, the metaphors used for this are militaristic. However, the Scriptures sometimes use this metaphor to speak of the extension of the kingdom of peace, through the gospel of the Victorious Savior, the Messiah King (see Isaiah 9.4,5,7, for example).

149 is the fourth "*Psalm of Pure Praise*," and there's still one more to go. The praise here rises out of Israel's calling to be a people of mission, a people who have been delivered—and who are now called to declare that deliverance to all the nations.

This very same calling has now been given to the church! This is our Psalm. May we joyfully enter into the battle, taking every thought captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10.5; Ephesians 6.12; Hebrews 4.12). Let this battle-song lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. This Psalm was written down "*for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*" (Romans 15.4).

### **PSALM 150:**

We have now come to the very end of the Psalter. In Psalm 149 we saw that THE WHOLE WORLD has been brought into submission to God... and now, in 150, the singing begins! Every instrument is tuned up and ready to go for this final Psalm—which gives us a small taste of the great joy of Old Testament worship, looking forward to Christ.

150 is the final of these "*Psalms of Pure Praise*." It is brief, but it is festive and stimulating, hearty and rousing. Let it stir your praise! Consider this word on praise from C.S. Lewis: "*I think*



*we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation."*

Verse 1 gives us the "where" of praise; verse 2 gives us the "why" of praise; verses 3-5 give us the "how" of praise, and verse 6 gives us the "who" of praise. Let God's praise lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Greek word for Psalms ("Psalmoi") is a translation of the Hebrew word "Tehillim," which simply means "Praises."

### **PSALM 1:**

We started Cultivate with Psalm 120 and went all the way to the end of the Psalter, Psalm 150. Now we turn to the very beginning of the Psalter: Psalm 1 is the doorway that introduces the whole of our Book of Prayer & Worship to us. If we do not submit to Psalm 1 by faith, the rest of the Psalter will not be truly understood. And this doorway into prayer is full of decisive contrasts. Verses 1 & 2: what kind of life will you live? Verses 3 & 4: what kind of person will you be? Verses 5 & 6: what kind of future will you have?

Psalm 1 is a "Wisdom Psalm," teaching us God's eternal truth. And God's truth, as we see here, is quite confrontational. Choices must be made.

There are "two ways" described in this Psalm. And that's all there is; there is no third way. At the end of the Psalm, these two ways are forever separated: one to eternal love, the other to eternal death. Let the wisdom found here shape your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember, this is the very first of 150 prayers and songs, given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to be offered up in praise to the Living God.

### **PSALM 2:**

In the New Testament, when God's appointed King finally reveals himself, he quickly finds that he is opposed, hated, and rejected. And that is prophetically pictured for us right here in Psalm 2. And yet, the gracious invitation of Christ is also prophetically pictured here. In verses 10-12, the rebels themselves are invited to "*take refuge in him.*"

Psalm 2 is a "Royal Messianic Psalm," pointing forward to the long-promised King of God's people. Because this Psalm is so centered on Jesus, we find that it is often quoted in the New Testament. Ponder this Psalm deeply... its fierce threats, its glorious promises, its exalted claims.

There are four "movements" in this Psalm. Reflect on each of them well: 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12. What is each section teaching? Let all that teaching form your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Psalms were mostly written by King David... but always with an eye to the Greater David To Come, who would reign as the Risen King of All the World. **PSALM**

### **3:**

Do you have a need for a more vibrant certainty and sure confidence in God, so that you might face all the trials of life with a more definite assurance and faith? David did. Note how Psalm 3 works. In vs.1&2, he describes his need. Down in v.8, he rejoices in the answer to that need. Back up in v.3 he confesses his faith in who God is. In v.7 he calls on that God to deliver him. And in vs.4-6—the heart of the Psalm, to which and from which everything else flows—he finds his confidence in the Lord.

Psalm 3 is a "Psalm of Trust," in which the believer is centered again in The One Who Alone Is Worthy Of Our Trust. In one of King David's darkest hours (see the title of the Psalm), this is how he prayed. And believers ever since—in the midst of their own troubles—have prayed it with him.

Turn to Numbers 10.35, and enjoy how, in v.7, David is echoing Moses' prayer. Perhaps you need to echo Moses yourself? Let this Psalm of Trust guide your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. King David, the human author of this Psalm, was "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13.14; Acts 13.22). How do you become such a man or woman or child? By praying prayers like this.

### **PSALM 4:**

The centerpiece of Psalm 3 (last week's Psalm) was David's confidence in the Lord. The

centerpiece of Psalm 4 (this week's call to prayer) is knowing something about God (v.3) and trusting God (vs.4&5). Do you need peace (v.8)? Do you seek relief from some affliction (v.1)? Do you need to be reassured that God is listening (v.1)? Then come to Psalm 4. Know. Trust.

Psalm 4 is another "Psalm of Trust," and we will be in this kind of Psalm for a little while, actually. There's a string of them here, and sometimes we may need to pray right through all of them. This one is particularly useful at night (v.8), when we tend to brood or fret or sulk or worry. On this occasion, it was precisely such an evening when David needed to re-center himself in the faithfulness of the Lord.

This prayer rises out of a great trial in David's life. Look at the words we find here; he feels surrounded by distress, shame, vain words, lies, anger, and the temptations of despair. Let this honesty before the Lord embolden your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. King David was known as "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23.1), but—as we see here—that's not at all the false religious "sweetness" that genuine people despise. It's the sweetness of authenticity, resting in grace.

#### **PSALM 5:**

Last week's Psalm (Psalm 4) seemed to be particularly useful as an evening prayer (see 4.8). This week's Psalm (Psalm 5) seems to be particularly useful as a morning prayer (see v.3). And praying this prayer is indeed a strong way to start the day. The centerpiece (vs.7,8) is all about God's love for us, our worship of God, and a prayer for God to lead us in paths of righteousness. This kind of life is lived in contrast to the lives described in vs.4-6 & vs.9-10. This is a life lived with confidence in the Lord (vs.1-3) and joy in the Lord (vs.11,12). Isn't that the life you want? Indeed. It is the life for which you were made.

Psalm 5 still finds us in this string of "Psalms of Trust," this one seeking to order our whole lives around the trust we are to have in God. David prayed this prayer of trust in the very shadow of his enemies, and we need to do the same. Look at how David refers to God in the middle of v.2. Can you pray that with the same passion? That's what this Psalm teaches us to do.

The sense that you have here is David turning full-face to God, giving him the praise due his name, alternating with strong denunciations of those who have dared to denounce their Creator. Let this fullness of godly passion bring vitality to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. David is described as a prophet in Acts 2.29,30. These Psalms are our invitation to pray with the power and devotion of a prophet.

#### **PSALM 6:**

David is still praying in the dark shadow of foes, workers of evil, and enemies (vs.7,8,10). This is a man who is languishing; he feels like his very bones are sick (v.2). His soul is greatly troubled (v.3), and he is weary with his moaning (v.6) and grief (v.7). Have you ever been at this kind of low ebb? Have you ever suffered this kind of depression? Then pray with David: "Be gracious to me, O Lord" (v.2)!

Psalm 6 is one of the seven classic "Penitential Psalms," alongside 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, & 143. These are Psalms to pray in the midst of deep trouble, weeping, and the desperate need of God's cleansing, healing grace. And note how it ends, in vs.8-10: with a defiant outburst of faith. God has heard. The enemies will be turned back.

Sometimes we are so weary in our sorrows that we can't even find the words to pray. This Psalm gives you the words! Let these words of faith fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me," David once said; "his word is on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23.2). And now, because of the way the Psalms work, his words can be on your tongue as well.

### **PSALM 7:**

We don't know exactly who this man Cush was—referred to in the title words of the Psalm. But he obviously made an accusation against David, and David found the accusation to be slanderously false. He has a clear conscience before God. Have you ever been there? If so, this Psalm is for you. If not, this Psalm still has a lot to offer. Pray through every cluster of verses, refusing to let go, until you have a blessing (like Jacob in Genesis 32.26).

With Psalm 7 we are back to this string of the "Psalms of Trust" in 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, & 10, sometimes referred to as "The Golden Chain of Trust." Here we are learning how to trust God for justice, in the midst of an unjust situation. And the flow of the Psalm is from the pain of betrayal, through the conviction that God is the judge of all the earth, all the way to the certainty that evil is pitifully self-defeating.

For all the anguish of the situation, the Psalm ends with grateful confidence and the clarity of sincere, heart-felt praise. Let that confidence and praise color your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Do you have a "words of Cush" situation in your life (see the title)? Do you need to deal with that before God with confidence and praise? Start right now.

### **PSALM 8:**

The central theme of Psalm 8 seems to be found in these words: "*O Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*"... for these are the words that act as bookends to the whole Psalm (see v.1 & v.9). If *you* were to try to describe the majesty of God's name and character, what would you emphasize? What character traits would you ponder? To what surprising choices of God would you draw attention? What would you highlight, to express the great power of God?

Psalm 8 is yet another "Psalm of Trust," and it's teaching us to trust God in yet another magnificent way. Both God's glory and grace are here celebrated. He is praised here for both who he is and what he has done. God's relation to both humanity and the galaxy are here defined. And all of this is presented with beautiful poetry, humble joy, and reverent awe.

The question "*what is man?*" is explicitly dealt with a handful of times in the Bible, and this is one of those times (see v.4). And the answer is astonishing. Let that astonishment animate your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. God's people throughout all ages

have particularly delighted in this book of the Bible. Are we starting to understand that, more and more?

### **PSALM 9:**

In Psalms 9 and 10, faith is wrestling with the realities of a fallen world. In 9.1-12 faith is confident and calm. Enemies are present, but God is clearly on the throne. But by the time you get to 9.13, the mood has changed. The calm has passed, and faith is now in a fight (and that fight will extend into Psalm 10). Life is chaotic, we're crying to God for his grace (v.13), and pleading with him to DO SOMETHING NOW (v.19). Have you felt that way recently?

Psalms 9 & 10 are the last in this string of the "Psalms of Trust" we find in this part of the Psalter. Yes, God is on his throne. He is the king. But, until the world is made new, wickedness and evil will have some temporary victories. Welcome to the life of faith.

Putting 9 & 10 together, you move from the *calm* of faith to the *fight* of faith to the *prayers* of faith... but we'll get to 10 next week. Let these changing circumstances of the life of faith propel your own prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. In doing so we are joining our voices with the faithful among all nations, throughout all history.

### **PSALM 10:**

We said last week that in Psalms 9 and 10 we see faith wrestling with the realities of a fallen world. And when you put them together—which there is good reason to do, as the two Psalms together form something of an alphabetical acrostic—it moves from the *calm* of faith (9.1-12), to the *fight* of faith (9.13-10.6), to the *prayers* of faith (10.7-18). In 10.7-11, the problem of wickedness in this world is identified and described. In 10.12-16, strong prayer is made to God, that he might deal with wickedness justly. And in the final two verses (17,18), we enter into the triumph and assurance of faith: God has heard; salvation is guaranteed.

Psalm 10 is the end of this "Golden Chain of Trust" that consisted of Psalms 3-5 and 7-10. When your trust in God needs to be refueled, open up your divinely-given prayerbook and just pray straight through all seven.

This is a fallen world, and you're going to need to pray prayers like this from time to time, if you want your faith to grow and not wither. May the trust in God that you find here fill your own prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul" (Psalm 25.1).

### **PSALM 11:**

The title tells us that David was the (human) author of this Psalm (inspired by the divine Holy Spirit). Remind yourself of what David's life was sometimes like: take a moment to read through 1 Samuel 18.8-19.7. It was against such a danger-infested background as you read there that David was moved to pray and write this Psalm. Do you need the Lord's protection and favor? Then this Psalm is for you.

Psalm 11 is one of eight "Fugitive Psalms" that we find in the Psalter. It comes straight out of a crisis. What's your first reaction in a crisis? Is it prayer? "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray" (James 5.13).

Notice the flow of this Psalm, from the trouble that is at hand, to what is true of the Lord, to prayer, to the assurance of his favor—freely given to all who come to him in faith. May the face of the Lord (v.7) be upon you as you pray this prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. God himself has given you this precious gift of a Psalter: worship book, song book, & prayer book. Use it well.

### **PSALM 12:**

Every moment of every day we have to decide which words we'll find most persuasive. There are the words of **man**, which are often characterized by lies, flattery, and doublespeak (v.2). (This includes—by the way—our own words to our own selves.) And there are the words of **God**, which are pure, valuable, and perfect (v.6). That is your choice. Every moment of every day.

Psalm 12 is a "Psalm of Lament." And one of the chief things being lamented here (that is, being "grieved" over here) is the menacing and abusive way that human words are often used. Have words been used that way toward you? Or have *you* used words in that way? If so, we need to spend some time praying through Psalm 12.

Notice the pattern found in this Psalm. It starts with prayer (vs.1-4), then flows into promise (vs.5,6), and then returns to prayer (vs.7,8). And even though the outward circumstances haven't noticeably changed by the end of the Psalm, prayer and promise have done their work upon us and within us. Let that work advance in your heart as you pray this prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. What if we began to "address one another in Psalms" (Eph.5.19)? What kind of people might we become?

### **PSALM 13:**

Do you ever feel like you're surrounded by afflictions? That was David's experience here, but the afflictions are strong enough to be called "my enemy" and "my foes" (v.4). There are three parts to this Psalm: prayerful *questions* that rise from this stress (vs.1,2); prayerful *supplications* that rise from this stress (vs.3,4); and finally the *trust, joy, song, and thanksgiving* that come from prayer in the presence of the Lord (vs.5,6).

Psalm 13 is another "Psalm of Lament." And it's one of the most poignant laments in all of Scripture. "*How long...?*" That question is asked, in different ways, four times. It's asked with reference to God, with reference to self, and with reference to the enemies.

Verse 5 is the high point of the prayer, and David shows us that we can reach it, even in the most depressing of circumstances. Let that high point draw your prayers to God this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Sing these Psalms, with thankfulness in your heart to God (Colossians 3.16).

### **PSALM 14:**

This Psalm has some sort of encounter with atheism in view (v.1). But when you read of this kind of atheism in the ancient world, it's generally more of a "practical atheism" than a "theoretical atheism." That is, it's more a denial of God's *relevance* than a denial of God's existence. (The theoretical atheism which denies God's very existence is a strange thing indeed, by the way: not even demons deny that; see James 2.19.)

Psalm 14 is another "Psalm of Lament." God's law is being scorned and disregarded (vs.1-3); God's people are being oppressed and harassed (vs.4-6). This is the fruit of a world which holds God in contempt.

But take a look at v.7! And if you want to fill out v.7 a bit more, hold it up to the light of Romans 8.19-25. Let that light fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Keep in mind, as you meditate on this Psalm throughout the week: this Word comes to you from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

### **PSALM 15:**

This Psalm begins by asking who will "sojourn" with the Lord? Who will "dwell" with him? A more important question cannot be imagined. Hebrews 12.14 says that without holiness, no one will see the Lord. And that's what this Psalm is teaching as well, extending that holiness into our lives, our conduct, our speech, our relationships, our values, our integrity, our financial stewardship, etc. The house of the Lord is holy. Will you honor him, as his guest?

Psalm 15 is a "Wisdom Psalm." We saw that Psalm 1 was also a Wisdom Psalm, acting as our entryway into the Psalter itself. But now *this* Wisdom Psalm is not just inviting us into the Psalter, but into God's own tent (v.1).

Let this Psalm search your conscience, leading you into deeper repentance and renewed faith

in Christ. Let that sense of sweet renewal fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Make it your joyful ambition to meditate carefully upon the Psalms your whole life long.

### **PSALM 16:**

This Psalm opens with a plea for preservation, security, refuge (v.1). It closes with the declaration of that preservation, security, refuge as a present possession and future certainty, even beyond the grave (vs.9-11). And in between (vs.2-8) we have a strong, beautiful, profound proclamation of what that blessing looks like in a human life. There is rich reward in deeply meditating on this Psalm for a week.

Psalm 16 is a "Psalm of Trust." Its power and passion is found in this: as we pray it sincerely, it centers our loves and affections upon God. If your loves and affections are not centered upon God, they will all be disordered and disjointed. The sorrows of such a life will only multiply (v.4).

There are many voices in this world, calling out for your loyalty. Which will you choose? Let loyalty to God through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit infuse your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Thoughtfully and engagingly praying the Psalms is one of the very best spiritual disciplines you could cultivate.

### **PSALM 17:**

Take a look at 1 Samuel 23.19-29, reminding yourself of that episode in David's life. Perhaps that was the background (or one very much like it) in which David first prayed this prayer. But the Lord himself inspired this prayer within David, including it in holy Scripture, so that *you* might pray it as well. There are three major movements in this Psalm, marked by three appeals: "Hear" in v.1, "incline" in v.6, and "Arise" in v.13.

Psalm 17 is a "Psalm of Lament." It is lamenting the hostility of our enemies, and appealing to God for justice, for protection, and for the overthrow of vicious adversaries.

But when you pray your way all the way down to the final verse, you find that you are now praying in confidence and assurance. The darkness shall not win. Eternal Morning shall come, and we will be satisfied with God's likeness. Let the anticipation of that Morning give heart to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Psalms are full of meaning—for the original author, for worshipping Israel, for Jesus, for the worshipping church... and for you. Personally.

### **PSALM 18:**

This Psalm is full of the kind of dramatic imagery that we associate with stories from Bible books like Joshua or Exodus, where mighty miracles and breathtaking deliverances take place. And yet, when we look at the title, we see that this Psalm is expressing what the Lord did for David. We scratch our heads, not remembering those sorts of signs and wonders in the story of David. And we're right... supernatural sights are not part of the David story. But the Supernatural God stands behind everything in the David story. Just like he stands behind your story.



Psalm 18 is a "Psalm for Times of Trouble." And the next time you find yourself in some trouble, perhaps you should turn to this Psalm and attempt to outline it. What is the structure of the Psalm? Where does it start? Where does it end? How does one part flow into another?

In Romans 15.9, Paul takes verse v.49 of this Psalm and tells us that it's really pointing prophetically to Great David's Greater Son—the Lord Jesus Christ. Let this Psalm point you to Christ in your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Psalms helped David remain steadfast and loyal to his Lord; they will do the same for you.

### **PSALM 19:**

It wasn't too long ago that I preached a sermon on Psalm 19 at DPC, entitled "Three Books." The title made reference to what we called "The World Book" (vs.1-6, celebrating the revelation of God to us through the creation, the universe, the world), "The Word Book" (vs.7-10, celebrating the revelation of God to us through his Scriptures, the Bible, the Word), and "The Prayer Book" (vs.11-14, reminding us that one of the chief reasons the Psalms were given to us was so that we might learn to pray through them).

Psalm 19 is a "Psalm of Revelation." And referring to the outburst of revelation of which this Psalm speaks, Charles Spurgeon once said, "He is wisest who reads both the world-book and the Word-book as two volumes of the same work, and feels concerning them, 'My Father wrote them both.'"

See Romans 10.18 and Romans 1.18-23 for some Biblical application of the theology of Psalm 19. Let that theology form your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. This is a wonderful example of how the Psalter provides us with a worship handbook that tells us what we need to know to understand God truly and relate to him faithfully.

### **PSALM 20:**

This Psalm was originally a liturgical service of prayer and sacrifice on the day before a great battle. There are two voices speaking: one is the voice of the people, describing their prayers for their king (vs.1-4, 5c, 9a). The other is the voice of the king himself, heard in vs. 5a and b, 6-8, and 9b. Tomorrow was going to be a "day of trouble" for them (v.1), and they were encouraging one another's faith and pleading together for the Lord's help and protection.

Psalm 20 is a "Royal Messianic Psalm," as was Psalm 2. And though it may at first seem

somewhat anachronistic and irrelevant to us, because we don't have a king... it's actually both pertinent and stirring to our faith. Because the truth is we do have a king; his name is Jesus, and we should wake up every morning expecting to be in a fight, if we are enrolled in his army.

Issues of life and death are found in this Psalm. Let that sense of urgency spur on your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. This is one of those Psalms that beautifully teach us how to speak both to God and to one another.

### **PSALM 21:**

We saw last week that Psalm 20 was prayed by the king and his people on the eve of a great battle. Well, that battle is now over; the Lord graciously granted his people their prayers. And here in Psalm 21 the king is rejoicing and exulting (v.1) and giving God all the glory (v.5). Note that vs.1-7 are praising God for that particular victory. But vs.8-12 seem to look forward to Another Victory, one yet to come. But when it does come, it will be total, decisive, final, and absolute. Yes, Christian. That day is coming...

Psalm 21 is another "Royal Messianic Psalm," in which King David's victory is something like a sonogram image of King Jesus' future victories. This is a jubilant Psalm, reminding us that salvation belongs to the Lord.

Putting the opening and closing verses of Psalm 21 together, we see that the Lord's strength is the theme of these praises. Let that theme carry your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The entire range of the Christian life is covered in the Psalter; this particular Psalm teaches us that there are times when the Christian needs to rejoice in God's strength.

### **PSALM 22:**

No experienced Christian who has spent time pondering the crucifixion of Jesus for our salvation can possibly read the first verse of Psalm 22 without going there immediately in his or her mind. Indeed, Acts 2:30 explicitly says that King David (the human author of this Psalm) was a prophet! And Psalm 22 is perhaps the crown and summit of his prophetic utterances. In his own mind, David may have been *poetically* describing some great personal suffering of his own, but what he ends up *literally* describing is an execution! The execution of the promised one, who would be born in his family line... who would be sacrificed for our sins.

Psalm 22 is a "Psalm of Lament," one that takes us into the deepest and darkest trial that the universe has ever witnessed. Remember, your High Priest is able to sympathize with your weaknesses; he has been tempted in every respect as you have been, yet without sin (Hebrews 4.15).

There are many verses in Psalm 22 that point to Christ, the Greater King (see Psalm 22.22 & Hebrews 2.12, for example). Can you find more? Let all these references to Christ throughout Psalm 22 enlarge your love for him in prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. *"Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that*

he would set one of his descendants on his throne, [King David] foresaw and spoke about... the Christ" (Acts 2:30,31).

### **PSALM 23:**

This is perhaps the most famous and beloved of all the Psalms, and justly so. There are three "testimonies" borne in this Psalm, all starting with the phrase "I shall" or "I will." Find those testimonies, and meditate deeply upon the gifts of a gracious God, so freely poured out on his children. What assurances does God want you to have here? If you've never memorized Psalm 23, now is a great time to do so.

Psalm 23 is a "Psalm of Trust," reminding us that we have a Good Shepherd (see John 10.1-18), who spares no effort in caring for his sheep. From one perspective, this is a very "simple"-sounding Psalm. But take a deeper look, and you'll see the fearful darkness and the threat of attack. We need this Shepherd. We need this Psalm.

Reflect on the last verse until your heart is ready to burst with joy! The climatic goodness and mercy that is given to us is nothing less than the Lord Himself. Let that joy shape your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Athanasius (296-373 AD) reminds us that the Psalter *"embraces the whole life of man, the affections of his mind, and the motions of his soul."*

### **PSALM 24:**

This Psalm has three parts. The first part (vs.1,2) affirms the majesty and mastery and power of the Lord. The second part (vs.3-6) raises the question: if the Lord is that mighty, who can possibly ascend to his holy place to meet with him? Who dares to stand in his presence? The third part (vs.7-10) reverses part two. It's not about us coming to the Lord; it is rather about this Lord coming to us. Will we lift up our heads and recognize him for who he is?

Psalm 24 is a "Psalm of Revelation," telling us who the Lord is and calling upon us to respond to that revelation faithfully. This Psalm has inspired some great hymns, such as *"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates,"* which is traditionally sung around Palm Sunday, commemorating King Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. But it could also point to Advent... or Ascension Day... or the events in 1 Samuel 5, 6, and 2nd Samuel 6. It is the coming of God.

The questions raised in Part 2 of this Psalm are the most important questions in the world. Let the great significance of those questions lead you into deeper prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Our friend Athanasius (296-373 AD) assures us that one may find *"a Psalm suited to every occasion, and thus he will find they are written for him."*

### **PSALM 25:**

There are 22 verses to this Psalm, and whenever a chapter of the Old Testament has 22 verses, look around in the footnotes & such to see if this is an "acrostic." An acrostic, in this setting, means that each verse begins with the next, successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet—which has 22 letters! This Psalm is indeed an acrostic, but it is a "broken" acrostic—meaning that the A, B, C, D, E pattern isn't exactly perfect. And in Hebrew poetic thought, that in itself has meaning. Here it seems to be a reflection on the way that the troubles of this fallen world

interrupt and break the patterns of our lives.

Psalm 25 is a "Psalm of Petition," calling out to the Lord in the face of enemies and confusion and guilt. Sometimes this kind of Psalm will end with an explosion of joy and relief, but notice how this one does not. It remains somewhat subdued throughout. There is no burst of blissful elation; rather, there is a steadiness of patient hope in the Lord. And sometimes that's the most beautiful prayer of all.

What David has prayed and petitioned for himself in verses 1-21, he prays and petitions for all of Israel in the last verse. Let that kind of transformation of prayer (from yourself to the whole of God's people) mark your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Our friend John Calvin (1509-1564 AD) once called the Psalter *"the anatomy of all the parts of the soul."* What you find here in Psalm 25 is part of the very "bodily structure" and internal workings of your soul. Use it well.

### **PSALM 26:**

Have you ever had to endure a false accusation? David did. Unpacking this psalm a bit, it appears that David was accused of living unfaithfully (v.3b), of being yoked with corrupt men (vs.4,5), and of great insincerity in his faith (vs.6-8). But David here proclaims before the Lord that, as to these matters, his conscience is clear (vs.1,11,12). And as he invites God to inspect and test his life (v.2), he also prays for God to take action on his behalf (v.1a,9,10).

Psalm 26 is another "Psalm of Petition," as was Psalm 25. But note the heart of this petition: it is a fully absorbed love for the presence and the house of God (vs.6-8). Does David's love for God make our love look "faint"? C.S. Lewis: *"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."*

The source of David's great joy is his treasured yet costly allegiance to the Lord. Let that kind of joy give voice to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Lord has given you the Psalter so that you might worship him with all of your heart, in every single circumstance of life.

### **PSALM 27:**

Just look at the vocabulary of this Psalm: evildoers, adversaries, foes, the day of trouble, enemies, enemies again, etc. And yet, at the heart of everything: *"One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple"* (v.4). Is that our heart, in the midst of great trial and tribulation?

Psalm 27 is a "Psalm of Trust," as were 16 and 23. Reading the three of them together is quite fortifying during times of restless anxiety. As verse 1 asks: *"Whom shall I fear?... Of whom shall I be afraid?"*... indeed! Consider the wisdom of C.H. Spurgeon: *"Our anxiety does not*

*empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strengths."*

The protection of the Lord, the joy of being in his presence, the implicit loyalty and trust of his servants... let these themes fashion your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. *"I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise"* (Psalm 138.1).

### **PSALM 28:**

In v.2, David asks the Lord to hear the voice of his pleas for mercy. And in v.6, he blesses the Lord, *"for he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy."* And that's a significant theme of this Psalm. In vs.1 & 2, David is begging the Lord to hear him. In vs.3-5, David is reflecting on the fate of the wicked (those who do not repent of their sins), and asking the Lord to keep him from that fate. In vs.6 & 7, David gives praise to the Lord, for the Lord has heard David's cry. And then the Psalm ends (vs.8 & 9) with David praying for the Lord to do this for *all* of his people.

Psalm 28 is a "Psalm of Lament," bringing before the Lord this fear of being reckoned with the wicked and cast away. Have you ever known that fear? Here the answer from the Lord is clear, and David immediately begins praying this way for all of God's people.

I love the last line of this Psalm: "Be their shepherd and carry them forever." See Isaiah 40.11; 46.3-4; 63.9 to enjoy more of that theme. Let that joy brighten your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. *"I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word"* (Psalm 138.2).

### **PSALM 29:**

I love the way that one author (the very recently deceased J.A. Motyer) revels in this Psalm: *"It is best simply to let the wonder and awesomeness of this psalm sweep and swirl around us until we are so possessed in spirit by the majesty of the Lord that we too cry 'Glory.'"*

Psalm 29 is a "Psalm of Revelation," powerfully declaring to us the *"wonder and awesomeness"* of our God. Do you see his majesty in heaven (vs.1,2)? Do you hear his mighty voice crashing over the sea, through Lebanon and Sirion, and into the wilderness of Kadesh (vs.3-9)? Can we try to comprehend the one who is enthroned over the universe right now, giving strength, blessing, and peace to his people (vs.10,11)?

This is a vigorous Psalm, attempting to more fully express just who the Lord is, using his name (*Yahweh*, "the LORD") no less than 18 times! Let that vigor breathe life into your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. *"On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of soul you increased"* (Psalm 138.3).

**PSALM 30:**

The title says that David wrote this Psalm for the dedication of the Temple. The Temple is the Lord's "house" (see 2 Samuel 7.5; 1 Kings 6.1). This is what was prayed and sung on the day of its dedication. What if we used these same themes in praying over our church today? What if each of us used these same themes in praying over and dedicating our own personal "house" to the Lord and to his praise?

Psalm 30 is a "Psalm for Times of Trouble," and there is much trouble that is referenced therein. But note that the Psalmist has also now seen restoration, salvation, and healing. And

his delight, joy, thanksgiving, and praise shine beautifully through every verse. Mourning has been turned into dancing (v.11).

There's an interesting confession of a foolish, over-confident boast in vs.6-10. That kind of carelessness reminds one of Proverbs 1.32,33: *"the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster."* Perhaps that manner of confession should be brought into your prayers this week? We'll pray it together on Sunday. *"All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth, and they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord"* (Psalm 138.4,5).

### **PSALM 31:**

How do you typically meet a crisis in your life? There are several less-than-helpful ways to meet a crisis. But in prayerfully submitting ourselves to this Psalm this week, let's seek to grow into a faithful response to our crises. Note here how David turns to the Lord in his crisis, with prayer and renewed commitment. And notice how the Lord hears and shows steadfast love (vs.21,22). And notice how David now calls upon *us* to learn this way of meeting crises in our lives (vs.23,24).

Psalm 30 is a "Psalm of God's Faithfulness," reminding us that our times are in God's hand (v.15). And the rest of the Bible shows us how useful this Psalm is to our faith. Jonah drew upon v.6, Jeremiah drew upon v.13, and Jesus Himself drew upon v.5. Everyone has crises from time to time, don't they?

Explore how this Psalm, in some ways, covers the same ground twice: vs.1-8 and then again in vs.9-24. And let that doubled-down emphasis leave its mark on your own prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. *"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me"* (Psalm 138.7).

### **PSALM 32:**

Before jumping into Psalm 32, I encourage you to review the shameful episode in King David's life that is recounted in 2 Samuel 11. And then read 2 Samuel 12, noting especially the astonishing verse 13: *"David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.'" Is that not remarkable? As soon as David acknowledges his sin, stops covering his iniquity, and confesses his transgression, he is forgiven. Now turn to and savor the goodness of Psalm 32, especially v.5.*

Psalm 32 is a "Penitential Psalm," taking us deeper into the confession of our sin. And notice what the first word of this Psalm is—the first word of a Psalm leading us back into restored fellowship with God. It is "Blessed." To be reconciled to God is true and lasting happiness.

That blessed happiness is expressed here both positively and negatively (by recalling the miseries of what it's like to have lost fellowship with God). Let the blessed joy of forgiveness shine through your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. *"The Lord will fulfill his*

*purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands" (Psalm 138.8).*

### **PSALM 33:**

The "steadfast love" of God is the big theme of Psalm 33; you can see that theme in vs.5, 18, and 22. Here's a little experiment to see how closely your understanding of God's steadfast love reflects how the Bible celebrates that beautiful and eternal reality. Take out a pen and paper and list 20 things that reflect and bear witness to God's steadfast love here on earth. And then—*after you've made your own list of 20 things*—go verse by verse in Psalm 33, making a list of how *this Psalm* describes and celebrates the steadfast love of God. How similar are the two lists?

Psalm 33 is simply a Psalm that celebrates God. It is pure praise, both for *who* he is and for *what* he has done. A friend recently told me that he's really good at the confession and thanksgiving part of prayer, because confession and thanksgiving are all about him. But he's not so good at adoration, because that is about God. Want to grow in adoration? Psalm 33 is the place to hang your hat for a while.

Some great themes found here: the honor of God as Creator, Sovereign, Judge, and Savior, and our declaration of trust in him. Let those themes lift up the chin of your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. To see Jesus in this Psalm (*he is in all of them!*), take each verse as a reference to him. And then imagine him praying/singing each verse.

### **PSALM 34:**

The title for this Psalm tells us that the background can be found in 1 Samuel 21.10-14. If you only read the background story, this episode seems like an example of David being very clever and outsmarting his enemies. But when we read Psalm 34, we see the true story: David sought the Lord in the midst of a crisis, and the Lord heard him. And then the Lord delivered him from all of his fears; the Lord saved him out of all of his troubles (see vs.4,6).

Psalm 34 is a "Psalm of Revelation." Taste and see that the Lord is good (v.8)! The first 10 verses can be read as David's testimony from this crisis, and the conclusions that need to be drawn from it. Verses 11-22 contains the teaching and the wisdom that the child of God can learn from King David's experience. May we sit at the feet of Psalm 34 and learn deeply and well!

Read 1 Peter 2 & 3 to see how later generations benefited from this Psalm. Seek to echo that same benefit in your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Old and New Testaments make up one covenant of grace between God and his people, fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christian, this Psalm was written for your use today.

### **PSALM 35:**

As in the previous Psalm, David is in the midst of a crisis here. And it's the particularly distressing crisis of *undeserved* suffering. This Psalm may feel like a bit of a ramble (which prayer sometimes is!), but it can be divided into three sections. Each section ends with



promises of great praise, in response to the Lord's gracious deliverance: vs.9-10, v.18, vs.27-28.

Psalms 34 is an "Imprecatory Psalm," praying for God's judgment to fall on God's enemies. The boldness of this kind of Psalm is a shock to us sometimes. But note that righteous anger is possible (see Mark 3.5; Revelation 6.9-10; Ephesians 4.26), and note also that David is not acting out his own judgement against these enemies... he's leaving it all to the Lord (see Romans 12.19).

Note again (as we said in the first paragraph, above) how each plea ends with words of praise and hope. Let that confidence shape your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember: ultimately it is Jesus who sings and prays the Psalter (Matthew 26.30; Mark 14.26; Hebrews 2.12); these words are His.

### **PSALM 36:**

There is a choice that each of us has to make, and that choice will determine what sort of life we will have in this world and what future awaits us in the next. The choice is how we will respond to the revelation of God. We can reject the revelation of God, in favor of submitting to our own hearts. Or we can embrace the revelation of God. Both of these paths are described in this Psalm.

Psalm 36 is a "Psalm of God's Faithfulness," and its outline shows the fullness of God's faithfulness by way of a powerful contrast: v.1: the philosophy of the wicked... vs.2-4: the wicked are characterized... vs.5-8: the Lord is characterized... vs.9-11: the path of those who know the Lord... vs.12: the fate of the wicked.

One way of life is empty and without value and menacing. The other way of life knows the joy of life, light, provision, and protection. Let that joy guide your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. "All the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus]. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory" (2 Corinthians 1.20).

### **PSALM 37:**

There are four sections to this Psalm. The opening section begins with "Fret not yourself because of evildoers" (v.1). The second section begins with "The wicked plots" (v.12). The third begins with "The wicked borrows" (v.21). And the final section begins with "The wicked watches" (v.32). So. That tells us a lot about what this Psalm's theme may be, doesn't it? God knows that we need to be taught the futility of wickedness... especially when it *seems* to be prospering in this world.

Psalm 37 is a "Wisdom Psalm," as were Psalms 1 & 15 before it. If you want to study other Psalms in this category, see 49, 90, 112, & 139. Together they give us a wonderful opportunity to sit at the feet of wisdom and ask life's most important questions. The heart of this particular wisdom Psalm may be verse 11... from which Jesus seems to draw in Matthew 5.5.

In a world full of wickedness, where is your security? Psalm 37 guides you to a wise

answer. Let that guidance shape your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember the rule of thumb if you want to deepen your understanding of any Psalm: ask yourself, "how is this Psalm teaching me more about Jesus?"

### **PSALM 38:**

To get a feel for the trajectory of this Psalm, read the first verse and then the last. And in between those two bookends, see how this Psalm is faithfully warning us about the menacing hazards of sin. Think of sin as a monster that, in the words of J.A. Moyter, *"offends the Lord and burdens the sinner, replaces wellbeing by wounds, induces lowspiritedness, with pain of body and disquiet of heart (1-8). It saddens and devitalizes, isolates us from friends, and excites enmity (9-12); it leaves us without excuse (13,14). But it does not close the door of prayer, nor exclude us from the place of repentance (15-18)."*

Psalm 38 is one of the seven classic "Penitential Psalms." (The others are 6, 23, 51, 102, 130, 143.)

The next time you feel the yucky burden of guilt, flee to these Psalms for prayer and freedom. Let that freedom lift up your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. No wonder Jesus and his apostles quote the Psalter more than any other Old Testament book in their sermons and writings!

### **PSALM 39:**

This life is precious. Just because eternity is promised to the people of God does not remove grief over death, nor does it nullify sadness at the brevity of life. The Bible bears this testimony everywhere: *"Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow"* (Philippians 2.27). In 2 Samuel 12 David deeply lamented the loss of his little boy, even if he did know that he would see him again in presence of God. And here in Psalm 39, David laments the possible abbreviation of his own life.

Psalm 39 is one of three "Prayers for the Sick," and they all come in a row, for ease of location. Note that this is a prayer of strong faith, even in the midst of trial: *"And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you"*(v.7).

It takes a strong faith to look the reality of v.4 in the face without fear. Pray for that manner of faith to be found in you this week! It's so true, isn't it? The Psalms really do cover all of life. Which is why Jesus turned to the Psalter for words to express what was in his heart, again and again.

**PSALM 40:**

In the previous three Psalms, David was prayerfully waiting. And now, in the first three verses of this Psalm, it seems that the waiting is finally over! David's trust in the Lord has been vindicated (vs.4-5), and the renewed disposition of David's heart towards the Lord is then described in the next few verses. But then, at the end of the Psalm (vs.11-17)... we're back to waiting on the Lord again. This is how life is, isn't it? The next trouble is never very far away.

Psalm 40 is the second of three "Prayers for the Sick" in a row. But take note of the joy that lies underneath these verses. Even in difficult circumstances David can be encouraged, for his eyes are not focused on himself.

Also take note of the declaration David makes in verses 7 & 8. Ultimately, of course, it's the Greater David, the Messiah, Jesus, who brings these words to their fullest expression. But nonetheless, like David before us, express something of it in *your* prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. To increase your love for the Psalter, take note of these other Psalms that Jesus quoted at key moments of his ministry: 8.2; 22.1; 31.5; 37.11.

### **PSALM 41:**

Before getting into Psalm 41, take a quick look at the big title in your Bible before Psalm 42. It says "BOOK TWO." There are actually five books of the Psalter, and each book ends with a beautiful doxology. Psalm 41 is the final Psalm in BOOK ONE, and the doxology comes in v.13: *"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen."*

Psalm 41 is final installment of the three "Prayers for the Sick" that come in a row. And by the end of these three Psalms, it seems that the ordeal is finally over. Take a look at all the thankfulness at the end of 41.

But take a look at the opening & the middle of the Psalm as well. Perhaps even try to develop an outline of it... maybe that will be of assistance to us the next time we find ourselves in need of a Psalm like this. Let the themes of this Psalm deepen your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. There are all kinds of important truths taught in the Psalms, truths that we need to internalize well if we want to live well. What truths do you find here?

### **PSALM 42:**

The church family we were a part of in St. Louis would sing the Psalms, and 42 was a congregational favorite. And it's a powerful Psalm / song to have committed to memory. The opening metaphor of a drought (vs.1,2) expresses a deep longing for God. The storm metaphor (v.7) pictures the distresses and afflictions in life, but faith learns to see God in the storm: "your waterfalls... your breakers... your waves." His love remains (v.8). God is still "my rock" (v.9).

Let's call Psalm 42 a "Hope in God" Psalm (see vs.5,11). In the midst of the storm, the world says, "Where is your God?" (v.3). My feelings may be tempted to say, "Why have you forgotten me?" (v.9). But faith says, "my rock" (v.9). *To which voice will I listen?* "Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God" (vs.5,11).

42 has been called one of the most "sadly beautiful" poems in the Psalter. Invest some time and effort in knowing it well. Let that sad beauty enrich your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember: this is the book of the Bible Jesus turned to most... even when he wanted to teach things like his divinity, his physical lineage from King David, his transcendence over David, his identity as the Son of Man, the judgment of God upon those who would reject the Messiah, the unbreakable nature of the Scripture (even with reference to his

own betrayal)... and also his hope and trust in his Father, in the midst of the storm—even when that storm was his own harrowing death by crucifixion.

### **PSALM 43:**

This Psalm is closely connected with last week's Psalm (42). See the refrain found in 42.6, 42.11, and 43.5: *"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."* Think of v.3 in terms of a Divine Search Party, and pray that you will be found by it each and every day this week.

Since 43 is the completed thought of 42, we'll stick with calling both of these "Hope in God" Psalms (see the end of v.5). Certainly there are expressions of a downcast soul in a "Hope in God" Psalm (see vs.2b & 5a), but overall the prayer becomes increasingly bright, assured, confident, and hopeful. This is often the result of praying the Search Party Prayer in v.3: God sends out his light and truth, and they lead you home.

Perhaps we should all memorize v.3? For surely that is the best way through the wildernesses and valleys of life: to live in God's light and to cherish his truth. Let God's light and truth illumine your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Keep in mind as you learn how to pray the Psalms: Jesus taught us to understand the whole of the Old Testament, including the Psalms, to be about him.

### **PSALM 44:**

Do you ever feel that life is unfair? 44 is for you. Do you wonder sometimes if God is asleep? 44 is for you. Do you love hearing responsive prayer among God's people, called out strongly in worship, back and forth? 44 is for you. Do you need to stop praying weak prayers and learn how to pray bold prayers? 44 is for you. Do you want to see what a "national day of prayer" could *really* look like? 44 is for you. Do the afflictions of this life sometimes overwhelm you, so that you just want to fly to God? 44 is for you.

Psalm 44 is a "Psalm for a People in Decline." The church of the Lord Jesus Christ lives its entire life (in this world) against the backdrop of spiritual warfare. There will be times when it needs to bring this Psalm out and pray it with uplifted hearts and strong voices. And if we do not, we are defrauding and cheating ourselves. God gave us this Psalm, and he gave it to us for a reason.

Take a look at how Psalm 44.22 is used in the context of Romans 8.31-39. This Psalm foreshadows the persecuted church, and yet the promised future is victory, not defeat. Let that confidence fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember the mystery of Jesus and the Psalms: *"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.... Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled"* (Luke 24.27,44).

### **PSALM 45:**

*"My heart overflows with a pleasing theme; I address my verses to the king"...* what a grand and

graceful beginning! And indeed, the theme of this song is both pleasing and noble: it was composed for a royal wedding. The king is taking a bride, and that is an event worthy of song and celebration! But—like all the "royal" Psalms—this Psalm is actually bigger than itself. It transcends what any earthly king can be... it takes wings and flies directly to the hoped-for Messiah, in whom all these glories ring true. And who is the beautiful bride of the Messiah, the Christ? The church (see 2 Corinthians 11.2; Ephesians 5.27; Revelation 14.4; 19.7; 21.9).

Psalm 45 is a "Royal Messianic Psalm." Every line speaks to the splendor of this occasion and what it means for the Groom, for the bride, and for the future of the kingdom.

Remember Paul's words in Ephesians 5? *"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."* Let that mystery enhance your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. This Messiah is first introduced in the Psalter back in Psalm 2: he is the Lord's "Anointed," established as king on God's holy hill... and all are invited to "kiss" him, to take refuge in him.

#### **PSALM 46:**

Consider the Lord's crushing victory over Egypt in the book of Exodus. Contemplate God's triumph over Sennacherib in Isaiah 36 & 37. Reflect on the Messiah's kingship over all the earth, and how all who oppose him will be utterly defeated on the final and climactic Day of the Lord. Now imagine this Psalm as invitation to survey and study those conquests: *"Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth..."* (v.8).

Psalm 46 is part of a collection of strong and robust Psalms called "The Songs of Zion." Martin Luther's hymn *"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"* takes its starting point from this Psalm. That song was called "The Battle Hymn of the Reformation," and for good reason.

There is a certain indomitable spirit and defiant tone to this Psalm, and today's church needs to recapture that way of singing and praying, for God's promises are certain and absolute. Let that certainty color the spirit and tone of your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Do you hear the voice of Jesus, leading your praise, in every line of this Psalm?

#### **PSALM 47:**

Last week's Psalm (46) spoke of the Lord's final victory over the earth: *"Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire"* (46.8,9). And that, of course, will be the decisive blow of light and truth to those who have chosen to live in darkness and lies. That will not be a good day for them, because it will finally be clear that the One they have ignored and denied is, in fact, the King of this World. But what will be the response for the rest of the world? **JOY!** Hence... Psalm 47.

Psalm 47 is one of seven "Enthronement Psalms," all of which will affirm and respond to the KINGDOM of God. He's not just a nice, kindly grandfather figure; he's *"a great king over all the earth"* (v.2). In fact, he's ***the King of all the earth***" (v.7). He is surely to be feared, he subdues

people and nations, he chooses your heritage, he reigns, he sits on his holy throne, the shields of the earth belong to him, he is highly exalted... just revel in each and every line of this Psalm if you want to understand his kingly glory more fully.

47 is more than mere poetry. It is prophecy. And one day this prophecy will be irrefutably, unassailably fulfilled. Let that certain hope give new heart to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Are we starting to see Christ in the Psalter more clearly?

#### **PSALM 48:**

There's been a building theme and story in the last couple of Psalms. In 46, the evil was removed from this world. In 47, we tasted the Lord's purposes of grace for his people in this great overthrow. And here, in 48, the high jubilation continues! Note, in vs.12 and 13, that the city of our God seems to be unscathed after this war. In the moment of warfare, it seemed to be in great danger; but ultimately, it was not so.

Psalm 48 is another "Song of Zion," as was 46. The great city of our God, Zion, has been delivered! Here we enter into the proper response to so great a salvation.

In the fullness of the Bible, though, Zion points to more than just the local capitol of God's people in much of Old Testament. The struggle of Zion eventually concerns the whole of the earth and all of time. Let that fuller vision of Zion give direction to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. In Acts 2.25-31 the Apostle Peter said that King David was a "prophet," speaking about the resurrection of the Christ (commenting on Psalm 16.8-11). This is the way we should read all the Psalms.

#### **PSALM 49:**

The last words of last week's Psalm (48) were: "this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever." But, will he guide us even on the other side of death? Can he truly guide us through the way of death and out the other side? See the answer in v.15: "But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me." Psalm 49 shows us both sides of death. There is a death without hope (vs.13,14), a death like the beasts (v.12). But there is also a death full of hope (v.15), a death with understanding (v.20).

Psalm 49 is a "Wisdom Psalm," seeking the solution to one of life's great riddles (see vs.1-4). One of the great purposes of the Wisdom Psalms is to instruct God's people. Let's sit at its feet together and learn the wisdom that is offered to us here.

In the New Testament the words "But God" often turn the whole discussion around (see, for example, in Ephesians 2.1-10). Well, we see the same thing in Psalm 49.15. Let that dramatic turn to hope and promise and faith give light to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Lord Christ is the Father's only begotten Son (Psalm 2.7); he is the one sent out to conquer death itself, on your behalf.

**PSALM 50:**

The Scriptures call us to examine ourselves in many different places. And Psalm 50 is a wonderful curriculum for doing so! This is a preview of Judgment Day: "The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting (v.1). And it's the covenant people of God who are especially called unto judgment (vs.4-6). Some love religious rites, but they neglect thankfulness, obedience, and prayer (vs.8,14,15). Others recite the law, but do not keep it (vs.16-21). The Psalm ends (vs.22-23) by calling all to repentance



and faith.

Psalm 50 is a "Psalm For A People In Decline." It draws all eyes to the Lord God, and it assures all that His eyes are on us. Take note, as mentioned above, that this Psalm is not for "the world." It's for the covenant people of God, specifically. 1 Peter 4.17: "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

The intention of this Psalm seems to be to give us a sharp breath of ultimate reality: the one with whom we are dealing is the Living God. Let that breath bring new life to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Lord's throne is forever and ever; his scepter is a scepter of uprightness; he loves righteousness; he hates wickedness. Therefore, he's given you a Savior (Psalm 45:6,7).

### **PSALM 51:**

Make sure you read the title to today's Psalm! If you need to review the context, go read 1 Samuel 11 and 12. Those events and this Psalm must always be bound together. Especially at this point right here: "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die'" (2 Samuel 12.13).

Psalm 51 is one of the seven classic "Penitential Psalms," and it is often considered the greatest of the seven. Why? Perhaps because with this one we know the story behind David's dark moment of self-revelation. But 51 doesn't just delve into the depths of guilt; it also explores the high reaches of forgiveness and salvation.

The last two verses show us that this Psalm wasn't just for David's personal use; it was also intended for use by all of God's people, corporately. Let this Psalm teach you deeper truths about God, sin, and salvation this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. May this Psalm remind us of our need for the cross of Jesus Christ, which was foreshadowed with some detail, in Psalm 22.

### **PSALM 52:**

Once again, we need to take note of the title. This background story may be slightly less well known than last week's; you can find it in 1 Samuel 21 & 22. Remember King Saul? At this point in his apostasy, he declares holy war on the priests of God. And Doeg the Edomite has an opportunity to get himself in good with the king...

Psalm 52 is one of the "Fugitive Psalms," which teaches us how to pray in desperate times like the ones that David experienced. One aspect of this Psalm is David's reflections on the kind of man that Doeg is, who would carve out a place for himself in this world by slander, evil, and violence. This kind of "success" will be very brief.

Another aspect of this Psalm is David renewing his trust in the steadfast love of God. Let this Psalm move you to such renewal this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. How might this

Psalm prepare the Old Testament reader for the coming of Christ? How does it help you to trust in Christ?

### **PSALM 53:**

Take a quick look at Psalm 14, comparing it to Psalm 53, line by line. Do you see the big difference? In Psalm 14, vs.5-6 says, *"There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. You would shame the plans of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge."* That is, the enemies of God's people are in great terror when they realize that God Himself is with His people. But in Psalm 53, verse 5 says, *"There they are, in great terror, where there is no terror! For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you; you put them to shame, for God has rejected them."* God's people have no need to fear, for God will scatter their adversaries. The enemies have everything to fear; God's people have nothing to fear.

Psalm 53 (like Psalm 52) is another "Fugitive Psalm," teaching us (again) how to pray in desperate times.

The word "fool" in v.1 is the Hebrew word "nabal." You can read about David's fugitive-days interaction with a "Nabal" in 1 Samuel 25. Let this richer context encourage your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. How might this Psalm relate to the promises of the gospel?

### **PSALM 54:**

Once again we have a title that tells us of a certain context. You can find the story in 1 Samuel 23.15-29. This is yet another desperate situation in which David finds himself. How does he respond? He responds by prayer (vs.1,2). By recounting the truths about his enemies and his God (vs.3-5). And finally, by responding to God's goodness in faithfulness and commitment (vs.6,7).

Psalm 54 is another "Fugitive Psalm," taking us again to the response of faith in difficult, dangerous, and disillusioning times. Disillusionment? Yes. Earlier in 1 Samuel 23 David had rescued one of the Israelite towns from the Philistines. But in spite of this kindness he is rejected once more, by the very people who should be grateful to him.

There is no such thing as untested faith. The question is: what will you do when your faith is tested? In this story, David turned to God. Let that mighty truth encourage your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. This too is another divinely-inspired, Christ-centered song and prayer of faith and praise. It is most worthy of taking on our own lips with joyful confidence.

### **PSALM 55:**

If David had wings like a dove, he would be gone! *"And I say, 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; I would hurry to find a shelter from the raging wind and tempest'"* (vs.6-9). He's in dire straits *"day and night"* (v.10), and would gladly flee. But instead he prays: *"Evening and*

*morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice" (v.17). And he trusts: "But I will trust in you" (v.23).*

Psalm 55 is yet another "Fugitive Psalm," rising out of the era of David's great distress when Saul wanted to take his life. Those who suffer will find in the Psalms a fellow-sufferer, and a guide for dealing with suffering faithfully.

Or, if you're not in the midst of suffering right now, you here find a guide for how to pray for those who do suffer (see Hebrews 13.3). Let that guidance organize some of your prayer life this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. There are some heartbreaking descriptions of betrayal here (see vs.12-14 and 20,21). Do you remember Judas? Can you see your Jesus praying this Psalm?

### **PSALM 56:**

In v.3, David says *"When I am afraid..."*. In the next verse he says, *"I shall not be afraid."* And, again, the title provides the all-important context. You can read the background in 1 Samuel 21.10-15. And you can even read David's later reflections on this episode in Psalm 34. Whom can we trust when we find ourselves under the hostility of the enemy?

Psalm 56 has us again in the "Fugitive Psalms" of David. Think over the desperation of David's situation. While fleeing from King Saul, he discovers that he can't even trust his own people to protect him. So where does he go? To Gath. You remember Gath? It's the hometown of Goliath, the Philistine.

So, now David finds himself in a double circle of danger. What can one do? Verse 4: *"In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?"* Let that striking statement lead you into prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Lord particularly gifted and called David to lead us in worship. The Psalter itself was largely composed out of that gift and calling. Enjoy.

### **PSALM 57:**

Once again, note the title. To review the story, read 1 Samuel 21. David is again fleeing from Saul, and now he must take refuge in a cave. That might be kind of discouraging if we had to do that, but David sees the cave as the outstretched wings of his God: *"in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by" (v.1).*

Psalm 57 is another of the "Fugitive Psalms." Note what David is most concerned about in this Psalm. Not that he be delivered. Not that his enemy be defeated. Rather, David's heart desire in this Psalm is that God should be exalted in his glory! See the repeated refrain in verses 5 and 11.

To get a feel for the flow of the Psalm, read the first verse and then the final two verses. Let that flow from opening cry to concluding praise shape your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Give thanks to God for the Psalter-composing labors of Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman, under the direction of King David (see 1 Chronicles 25.6).

### **PSALM 58:**

Wicked rulers are failing to administer justice and maintain order (vs.1,2). David cries out to God to intervene strongly (v.6). And, by the end of the Psalm, there is joy for the righteous (v.10) and God's holy and just character is being publicly acknowledged (v.11). And in the in-between sections, vs.3-5 deals with the character of the wicked, and vs.7-9 deals with the doom of the wicked.

While still having a lot in common with the Fugitive Psalms, this Psalm is usually categorized as an "Imprecatory Psalm." And these Psalms are sometimes troubling to Christians. If you'd like to study that out, let me encourage you to read this:

<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2011/10/19/how-to-think-about-curses-in-the-psalms/>

One benefit of praying the Psalter is that the Spirit builds within us a passion for justice. In the midst of a world where people just get used to the scandals of evil, this is a gift from God. Let that gift give direction to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Praise the Lord this week for an entire book of the Bible that is an inspired collection of songs and prayers. What a gift.

### **PSALM 59:**

We have another title that points us to the backstory; it's found in 1 Samuel 19.10-12. Psalm 59 has two parts: 1-10 and 11-17. The first half begins with a prayer for deliverance (vs.1,2), develops into a prayer for judgment (v.5), and ends with a reflection that begins with "*But you, O Lord...*" (v.8). The second half begins with a prayer for God to address the wrongs committed (vs.11-13a), develops into a prayer for revelation (v.13b), and ends with a reflection that begins with "*But I*" (v.16). And in the midst of each section we have this reference to howling, prowling dogs (vs.6-7 and 14-15).

Psalm 59 is the last of the "Fugitive Psalms." Reading the backstory, one can easily enter into this Psalm's sense of urgency, outrage ("*for no fault of mine,*" v.4), anger at those seeking innocent life (the howling, prowling dogs of vs.6-7; 14-15), and the strong joy in God's deliverance that leads to such fierce prayer.

But, again, the Psalms are bigger than their immediate contexts. Note the prayers for "*all the nations*" in vs.5 and 8. Let that world-wide vision of salvation from the enemy drive your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Compare this Psalm to Psalm 2, if you want to connect David the outlaw with David the king and with Jesus the final King.

**PSALM 60:**

Have you ever been in big trouble, but realized that the terrible situation was completely of your own making? That's the situation in this Psalm; see v.1: "*O God, you have rejected us, broken our defenses; you have been angry; oh, restore us.*" The real danger that David finds himself in is not Edom (see the title). The real danger is God's anger at David, which is being expressed through Edom. Therefore, the only answer will be found in prayer. "*Oh, restore us*" (v.1).

Psalm 60 is a "Psalm of Revival," teaching us how to petition God, as we read in v.5, *"that your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer us!"* See vs.6-8 for a strong reminder of God's faithfulness to his people, even when we are unfaithful (see 2 Timothy 2.13).

This Psalm teaches us to pray, *"Oh, grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man! With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes"* (vs.11,12). Let's pray that this week! Revisit Psalm 1, the doorway into the Psalter, and see what connections your heart may find between what we find here and the wisdom and power of God that is celebrated there.

### **PSALM 61:**

As you learn to pray the Psalms, there are certain patterns of prayer that will start to form you. One such pattern is this: a prayer that starts with strong (or perhaps desperate) *petitions* will often end in strong (even fearless) *praise*. Psalm 61 is an example of this kind of progression, as prayer begets a confidence in God that stirs the soul.

Psalm 61 is a "Psalm of Petition," in which we are taught to implore God with words like these: *"lead me to the rock that is higher than I"* (v.2). Have you ever been in great need of assurance? Security? Protection? Strength? Fellowship? Then 61 is for you.

Note the prayer for the king in vs.6 and 7. Of course, Israel used this to pray for their kings back in the days of the Davidic dynasty. But consider the abundant answer to this prayer that our God has forever granted his people in Christ, the Greatest Son of David, the Eternal and Final King of the Universe. His reign is endless, and if he is your hope, that's all the assurance, security, protection, strength, and fellowship you need. Welcome the king who ever reigns, in prayer, this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Drop in on Psalm 2 again this week, as you rejoice in your king.

### **PSALM 62:**

Why do you think the most frequently-given command in the Bible is "do not fear?" (Not, "be good," "do this," "don't do that"... but "do not fear.") *Why is that?* Because there is MUCH in this world to fear! But God is constantly tell us not to fear, *because we can trust in him*. This is stated in vs.1&2, restated in vs.5&6, given to others for their encouragement in vs.7&8, contrasted against false trusts in vs.9&10, and founded in the sure Word of God in vs.11&12.

Psalm 62 is a "Psalm of God's Faithfulness," and it was born in the context of intense pressure. See v.3. This is not a Hallmark-inspired moment of sentimentality. This is real life. And real faith.

As the prayer continues, the confidence deepens and clarity grows. Let 62 have this effect on your faith this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. To see how this is also true of the whole of the Psalter—*that confidence deepens and clarity grows as it continues*—go read the last five Psalms (146-150) really quick. See how each one begins, and how each one ends.

### **PSALM 63:**

David knew what it was like to be in *"in a dry and weary land where there is no water"* (v.1)—just look at the title of this Psalm! But what his soul is thirsting for, what his flesh is fainting for, what he is earnestly seeking (v.1) is God. It is God's power, glory, and steadfast love (see vs.2,3) that have gripped David. To be honest, reading this Psalm makes me think that I don't love God as much as David did. But then, that's why this Psalm is given to us: that we might learn to love God more deeply.

Psalm 63 is a "Psalm of Trust," and it reminds us that when we are thrown into difficult circumstances—in which we are forced to turn to God in desperate faith—that's actually when we are at our best.

There is a strong outpouring of devotion in this Psalm. Let that devotion lift up your prayer life this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. *"I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands"* (v.4).

### **PSALM 64:**

The "problem" or "question" of evil often gets raised when people are discussing the existence of a God who is both good and powerful. *"If a good God is really ruling the world, how can [fill in the blank] happen?"* Psalm 64 provides one of the Bible's answers to this question by asserting and affirming divine retribution. Yes, there is a just God. Therefore, there will be a day of reckoning. There will be a day of vengeance, of redress, of never-ending punishment for all who partner themselves with evil, without repentance. So. *"Let the righteous one rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him! Let all the upright in heart exult"* (v.10)!

Psalm 64 is a "Psalm of Petition," asking the Lord for protection.

Note the elaborate scheming of the wicked in vs.2-6. And then note the decisive brevity of God's judgment in vs.7-8a. It's all over in a verse and a half. Let that sense of strong assurance inhabit your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. (Also note that the wicked are destroyed by their own weapons. Scary. And fitting.)

### **PSALM 65:**

Here's the apparent background to 65: there has been a notable answer to prayer (vs.2,5); sin had recently seemed overpowering, but God was faithful (v.3); God had shown himself capable of *"awesome deeds"* (vs.5,7); and now God's fame and power are known throughout the world (vs.2,5,8)! Also, the harvest has been particularly blessed with abundance (vs.9-13). Bible scholars suggest Isaiah 36-37 as an illustration of this kind of situation, but offer 2 Samuel 21.1-14 as a possible background within the life of David (see the title).

Psalm 65 is one of four "Temple Songs," and they all come in a row: 65-68. See all the temple imagery in vs.1-4? God is being praised in corporate worship! And when you read the rich and vivid climax of this Psalm, where all the harvest joys are celebrated, you can't help but want to join in!

But again, it's not just in his temple courts (vs.1-4), but in his vast dominion (vs.5-8), and out among the hills and valleys (vs.9-13) that God's praise is known. Let that praise fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. With God's vast dominion in mind, visit the shortest Psalm in the Psalter: Psalm 117. It's only two verses long, but it's an international doxology, blessing God for his covenant faithfulness. See how Paul used that Psalm in Romans 15.9. If you're a "Gentile," you'll find yourself there. Give glory to God.

### **PSALM 66:**

In verses 1-7 the whole of the earth is invited to consider what the Lord did for his people at the Red Sea, and then to join his people in rejoicing before him. Let us no longer exalt *ourselves* with rebellious hearts (see the end of v.7); let us give to *God* the glorious praise that is his due (see v.2).

Psalm 66 has us in the second of four "Temple Songs," that all come together, one after another. Here the temple imagery is especially found in vs.13-15, but note how the language of the Psalm goes back and forth from the corporate worship of all of God's people to the voice of the one individual.

This is quite appropriate because God is the God of all the earth (see for example, v.1, etc.), but he's also the God of the many (see the us / our language of vs.8-12, for example); but, very importantly, he is also the God of the one (see, for example, the I / me language of vs.13-20). This Psalm has so much to offer our prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Interestingly, the two "middle verses" of the Bible are Psalm 118.8 & 9. Read them and remember again how central the Psalter is to the message of the Bible.

### **PSALM 67:**

Imagine living in the ancient agrarian culture of Israel, at harvest time. The harvest this year has been abundantly blessed by the Lord (v.6), so we gather to worship on the Sabbath, our hearts full of thanksgiving! The pastor calls out verses 1 and 2. The congregation responds vigorously with verse 3. Now everyone, all together, calls out verse 4. The pastor calls out verses 5 and 6; the congregation responds again with verse 7. Notice that verse 4 is the heart of everything—this prayer that the whole world would delight in the gracious rule of Israel's God.

Psalm 67 is the third in a series of four "Temple Songs," calling us into worship and expressing the missionary hope that the blessing we know will come to all.

Remember God's covenant promise to Abraham, that he himself would both be blessed by the Lord AND made into a channel of God's blessing for others. That is the heart and spirit of this Psalm. May that heart and spirit guide our prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. If you are starting to get a taste for the joy and pleasure of the Psalms, take a brief trip to Psalm 119 and try to get a sense of what it's all about, in just a quick minute or two. More about that in this space next week.



### **PSALM 68:**

Before jumping into Psalm 68, first go read Numbers 10:35,36. That's what Moses would say as the ark of God led the people of God on their march from Mt. Sinai to Canaan. Now, read v.1 of Psalm 68. Keeping that background in mind, enjoy the whole of Psalm 68... as former prisoners (v.6) are lead out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. As God carries his people through the desert (v.4), promising to be their Father and Protector (v.5). And continue to reflect on each line of the Psalm that way, seeking to find all the connections between these two parts of the Bible that you can... while prayerfully exploring its application to you today.

Psalm 68 is the final of the four "Temple Songs," seeing us all through our journeys in life, that we might arrive in the sanctuary of God, through his power and care (v.35).

This celebration of God's victory march, taking his people from Egypt to Mt. Zion, is an early picture of the later "ascension," when Christ leads his people to the very throne of God (see v.18; Ephesians 4.7-16; Acts 2.33). Let that gift give wings to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Last week I invited you to take a small taste of Psalm 119, one of the most magnificent gifts of the Psalter. It's an acrostic, where the 8 verses of each section begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet, moving successively from A-Z. And the theme of all 176 verses is a celebration of the beautiful excellencies of the Scriptures.

### **PSALM 69:**

David is in a crisis. Enemies hate him without cause and want to see him destroyed (vs.1-4). All those who trust in the Lord with him are being dishonored (v.6). Even his own family is falling apart because of the strain (v.8). The practice of his faith is itself the focus of mockery (vs.10-12). He is worried that the Lord Himself has turned away (v.17). He is broken-hearted and friendless (v.20). And you know what? Jesus, the Greater David, lived out the experience of much of this: see v.4 in John 15.25; v.9 in John 2.17; v.21 in John 19.28.

Psalm 69 is a "Psalm of Lament," and the next time you find yourself in need of healthy, prayerful lamentation before God, perhaps you can work through your grief right here.

David here reminds us that we are not men or women of steel. We *feel* the pain of slander and betrayal and even self-accusation (v.5). Let that vulnerability of our humanity urge us into a greater dependence on prayer like this in the coming week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember the Psalter is made up of five "books." The first two books (Psalms 1-72) center on the golden age of the united monarchy under David & Solomon. Laments in these books (like 69) always conclude with praise.

### **PSALM 70:**

Remember this song, by The Beatles? *"Help! I need somebody. Help! Not just anybody. Help! You know I need someone. Help!"* That's the sense here. Psalm 70 is much like Psalm 69, only much briefer. As one commentator put it: "It's good to have such a written prayer available for times of pressure when our thoughts cannot focus and our extremity confuses our powers of

expression."

Psalms 70 is a "Psalm of Petition," and the fact that it is nearly identical with Psalm 40:13-17 shows us that there are times, in this fallen world, when we will desperately need to pray these petitions.

In some situations we'll need to cry out to God with great urgency and great power. Let those situations push us to Psalms like this one. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Last week we briefly commented on Book One of the Psalter (1-72), mostly written during the time of David. Note that Psalms 2 & 72—at the beginning & at the end of Book One—teach us to pray for a king who will extend the rule of God to the ends of the earth. Jesus, the Son of David, is that king.

### **PSALM 71:**

David is an old man in this Psalm (vs.9,18), but he has known the Lord since the earliest days of his youth (vs.5,6,17). He still has enemies (vs.4,13), and he still responds to this reality with prayer (vs.1-9; 12,13) and praise (vs.8,14,22-24) and faith in God (vs.19-21). And he is certainly still mightily concerned to send a faithful witness into the next generations (vs.17,18). As we age, what will be our hopes? A life of luxury, indulgence, and ease? No. May that never be our greatest hope. *"Let us love the Lord who bought us."*

Psalms 71 is a "Psalm of Revival," and it is a wonderful Psalm to read, perhaps even memorize, but surely pray through frequently as we are aging.

Over against the failing strength of advanced age, this Psalm teaches us to set a life-long memory of God's faithfulness. And a still-maturing hope in his *unfailing* strength. Let that hope give shape to our prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. We are nearly to the end of Book Two of the Psalms. Book Three will begin with Psalm 73. One trait of Book Three is that it is darker than the other Books. It begins with a reflection of the suffering of the righteous (73). It ends with a lament that the Davidic Covenant seems to have failed (89). And in Psalm 88, you have the one and only Psalm in the whole of the Psalter which has no praise at all.

### **PSALM 72:**

Only this Psalm and Psalm 127 have titles referring to King Solomon, David's son. And indeed, much of this Psalm brings the reign of that "royal son" (v.1) to mind. Verse 10 can be seen in 1 Kings 10:1-13. Verse 15 can be seen in 1 Kings 10:22. But. This Psalm also reaches far beyond anything that could be attributed to *any* merely earthly king. Read it and see if you agree. Ultimately this Psalm points us toward the endless reign and limitless realm and boundless blessing of another King... another Son of David... a Perfect King.

Psalms 72 is a "Royal Messianic Psalm," and if you want to see how the church has understood and interpreted it, visit these two mighty hymns of old: *"Hail to the Lord's Anointed"* and *"Jesus Shall Reign."* Meditate on those lyrics. This is the righteous and compassionate king we worship.

Take this Psalm and set it next to Isaiah 11.1-5. Then set it next to Isaiah 60-62. Let that messianic hope drive you to King Jesus in prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Make it a goal in life to enter more deeply into the breadth of the Psalter. Praise, lament, thanksgiving, confidence, remembrance, wisdom, kingship... our God teaches us so much here, and he does it so beautifully.

### **PSALM 73:**

The Psalms do not hide from the hard questions of life. Rather, they often crash head-on into them, running full speed and with every intention of follow through. Such is the case here. Note that this is the beginning of Book 3 of the Psalter. Book 1 opened by confessing that the godly one will prosper (Psalm 1.3). But Book 2 opened by admitting that the experience of the godly in this world won't always be perfectly comfortable (Psalm 42.3,5,9-10). And now Book 3 opens by working through a clearly disheartened cry, *"All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence"* (v.3).

Psalm 73 is a "Psalm of Trust," which is an excellent reminder that our trust in God is not tested nor strengthened during our happy times of cheerfulness and contentment. Our trust in God is tested and strengthened during our seasons of bitterness and our temptations to despair.

But—like with Job and Jeremiah and Jesus and Paul and so many others in the Bible that we could name—the time of testing ends in great reward for the faithful. The hard questions of life are not unanswerable. If you meditate upon this Psalm carefully, you'll find one of the hardest of life's questions answered perfectly. Let that discovery fuel your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Give thanks to your God for Psalms like this.

### **PSALM 74:**

If you want a fuller background to this amazing Psalm, go read 2 Kings 24 & 25. What the Psalmist is remembering here—as if reliving a nightmare—happened in 587 BC. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (v.3) by the Babylonians. Where once God's Word was heard, all one could hear now was the roaring of the enemy (v.4). Can you see them swinging their axes and hatchets and hammers (vs.5,6)? This is a terrible thing. And the counsel here is not *"well, it's going to be okay, don't worry about it."* Rather it's *"Call on God to enter this terrible thing with you"* (v.3)! Which God? The God robustly described in vs.12-17.

Psalm 74 is a "Psalm for a People in Decline." When disaster strikes and your life feels completely disoriented, this is how God invites you to pray to him.

Reflect for a moment on the breaking in of vs.12-17 in such a prayer. Does praise make a prayer like this less urgent? No. But it does make it more confident. Let that confidence shape your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Psalms exhort us to praise our God at all times, and give us thousands of reasons to do so.

### **PSALM 75:**

Take a moment to reflect simply but deeply on v.1. This is the one of the great beauties with which God has graced his world, fallen into the unhappy miseries of sin and ingratitude: a world-

wide community of people who gather with one another to give sincere thanks to God. For, as this verse says, his deeds are wondrous, and his name is near.

Psalm 75 is a "Psalm of God's Faithfulness." The previous Psalm ended (74.22,23) with this plea: *"Arise, O God, defend your cause; remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day! Do not forget the clamor of your foes, the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up continually!"* Read 75 as an answer to that prayer.

Here the God of unexpected reversals says, in v.7, that he puts down one and lifts up another. See similar descriptions of God's work in the songs of Mary (Luke 1.46-55) and Hannah (1 Samuel 2.1-10). Let these songs guide your praise of God this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Let the church adore God for who he is and what he has done.

### **PSALM 76:**

You may have heard or read the phrase *"The Spirit of 76"* used to refer to a *"patriotic sentiment typified by the zeitgeist surrounding the American Revolution. It refers to the attitude of self-determination and individual liberty made manifest in the Declaration of Independence"* (definition provided by Wikipedia). But the Christian finds a far more meaningful and eternal *"Spirit of 76"* right here, in the 76th Psalm.

Psalm 76 is a "Song of Zion" Psalm, reminding us of where our true loyalty and most profound identity lie. Verses 1-6 speak of a great deliverance. Verses 7-12 speak of a great judgment.

In these great themes, deliverance and judgment, we find something of a picture of the story told in the Scriptures. Jesus was sent to deliver his people from all of their enemies. And one day all the world will stand before him, on the day of judgment. Let these themes cultivate more of *"The Spirit of 76"* in your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember, we are citizens of Zion before we are citizens of America.

### **PSALM 77:**

This Psalm begins in a time of suffering and tears and trouble and prayer-less, sleepless exhaustion (v.4). The Psalmist finds himself assailed by some very specific doubts (vs.7-9). But then there's verse 10. Followed by memories of God's holiness (vs.11-13), God's might (v.14), and God's love for his people (v.15), as seen in the story of the Exodus (vs.16-20). And then the prayer ends, very abruptly. The true God has been remembered, even in the midst of trouble.

Psalm 77 is a "Psalm for a People in Decline." And the next time you are attacked by dark moods and stinging doubts and tormenting despair, perhaps you will find comfort in this fellow-sufferer's honesty, courage, and faith.

Look for the turning point in the Psalm when the "I" (which seems to be everywhere at first) turns into the "You." Let that turning point find your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Give thanks to God that in the Psalms, he gives us a language for suffering and for asking God hard questions. In fact, there are more Psalms of Lament than any other kind. And

this is what we should expect, if life is full of trouble and sorrow at times, and if God loves us. It is. And he does.

### **PSALM 78:**

This Psalm is a bit lengthy. And it is entirely wonderful. The first eight verses set the agenda: each generation has a holy calling to pass on the faith to *"the coming generation"* (v.4) / *"the next generation"* (v.6), so that they might then do the same, and on and on, from one generation to the next. *This is how God intends that our children and their children "should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (v.7).*

Psalm 78, like last week's Psalm, is a "Psalm for a People in Decline." It is a searching, honest review of the history of God's people, from the days of their slavery in Egypt, until the reign of King David. And the stories of this history—*children love hearing stories well told!*—are explored so truthfully so that the next generation might learn from those stories, avoiding the foolish errors of the past.

But the stories here told don't merely search the heart. They also encourage, instruct, and warm the heart. It's not just man's sin on display; it's also God's glorious grace. May both themes be found in your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. If we would be trained by them, the Psalms will teach us both how to adore our God and how to call out to him for deliverance.

### **PSALM 79:**

We have said many times that the Psalter offers you a way to pray through every conceivable circumstance in life. Well... what if the world turned against the church and tried to completely wipe it out? Would we have help praying in that kind of situation as well? Welcome to Psalm 79.

Psalm 79 is an "Imprecatory Psalm." Notice the strong "they" sections of the Psalm (vs.1-3, 5-7, 10-12), alternating with the "we" sections of the Psalm (vs.4, 8-9, 13).

Take note, as you pray this Psalm, that this is a cry of faith, in the midst of great distress. It is not a cry of doubt. Let that faith fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Imprecatory Psalms are prayers for God's judgment to fall upon the enemies who are destroying God's people. Remember, there is a godly anger—known by both God and his people—that can be directed toward anything that is belligerently hateful toward the Kingdom of God. But we don't pour out this anger towards other people. We turn it into godly prayer to the Lord, waiting for the Great Day he has promised, when absolutely everything in the world will be set to rights.

**PSALM 80:**

If God shines his face upon us, we shall be saved (v.3). Conversely, the full rebuke of his face means that we will perish (v.16). Therefore, you have the petitions that fill this Psalm: *"give ear... stir up your might and come to save us... Restore us, O God: let your face shine, that we may be saved (a refrain found 3 times)... Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven,*

*and see; have regard for this vine."*

Psalm 80 is a "Psalm of Revival." And the vine metaphor of vs.8-18 makes it especially rich and memorable and striking. Reflect on what all that extended metaphor is teaching; consider each phrase carefully. And then meditate on what it means when Jesus says that he is "*the true vine*" (John 15.1ff).

Also take note of the title and attributes of God revealed here. Let those aspects of God's character and work enrich your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Praying a Psalm like this trains us to cry out to God for strong help, and doing that builds confidence and hope and trust in the very midst of weakness.

### **PSALM 81:**

Redemption and Response. Those are the great themes of this great Psalm. In vs.1-5, God is calling his people to a great feast day, according to his law. In vs.6 & 7, God is recalling how he delivered his people from Egypt. Next (in vs.8-10) God recalls how he revealed himself to his people by his Word. In response, the free people of God are called to faithful lives of love and obedience. There are terrible consequences attached to disobedience (vs.11-13), and there are beautiful blessings attached to obedience (vs.14-16). Welcome to the covenant.

Psalm 81 is a "Psalm of God's Faithfulness." The "*feast day*" (v.3) in view here is most likely the Feast of Booths (also sometimes called the Feast of Tabernacles). See Deuteronomy 31.10-13 for a quick introduction. This feast commemorated the wilderness journey of God's people (after the Exodus) and included a public reading of God's law, every seventh year.

In spirit this Psalm is very similar to Psalm 95. Both begin with festive joy; both go on to remind us that God is looking for true listeners... not just happy feasters. May the lessons of the wilderness journey not be lost on God's people. Take those lessons with you as you pray this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Let us faithfully believe and confess and teach the next generation the meaning of the history between God and his people, while we praise the Lord for his mighty works of salvation.

### **PSALM 82:**

In John 10.35 the Lord Jesus refers to earthly, human rulers who hold offices of great dignity and judgement and power—with corresponding responsibility and accountability before the Lord—as "gods." The Bible does that occasionally. It does so here. You see the duties of these "gods" specified in vs.2-4. These are Israel's judges (see those same duties spelled out in such passages as Exodus 22.22-4; 23.6-7; Deuteronomy 1.16-17; 10.17-18; 16.18-20). Their calling is to reflect the judgment of God (Deuteronomy 1.17). But what happens when these "gods" fail us? What happens when "*they have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness; [and] all the foundations of the earth are shaken*" (v.5)? Is there still a True God, to whom they are answerable? Yes. See vs.1,6-7. Therefore, we must pray to Him (v.8).

Psalm 82 is an "Imprecatory Psalm." The "gods" of earth have been brought to trial before the

True God.

This is a bold Psalm, and it is a dramatic Psalm. And it brings great and terrible clarity to what is often a very confusing, chaotic human situation. Let that clarity encourage your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Once you starting living faithfully in the fierce beauty of the Psalms, are these not some of the most rich and powerful encounters of your entire Christian life?

### **PSALM 83:**

Want to read an illustration of Psalm 83? Take in 2 Chronicles 20. But keep in mind that the evil coalition described in Psalm 83.5-8 by far exceeds any coalition against Israel of which we have any historical record. But even if all the world does turn "*with one accord*" (v.5) against the people of God, what we have here is this: the people of God coming to him in prayer (v.1), in the very face of the world's roaring hostility (vs.2-8), forming their prayer in light of God's revealed Word (vs.9-15), and longing for the day when the "*Most High over all the earth*" is acknowledged by all nations (vs.16-18).

Psalm 83 is another "Imprecatory Psalm." And it helps us have a clear-eyed view of where the church truly stands, even if all the world hates us because we do not belong to it (see John 15.18-25). So... just pray. God has actually already overcome the world (see Psalm 83.9-12; John 16.33).

But make sure you note what the final desire of this Psalm is. It's not just our comfort or our victory; it is the true conversion of those who stand opposed to God (see v.16,18). We want to see them convinced of God, seeking God, and humbly bowing before him. Let that vision fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. May our prayers be a means of God bringing his blessing to the world.

### **PSALM 84:**

Does your faith need to be strengthened and fortified this week? Then reflect deeply on the longing and hunger for God found in v.2. Contemplate how *all* creation can rest in the sacrifice ("*altar*," pointing to the work of Christ on the cross) that God has provided, pictured for us in v.3. Ponder the earnestness of faith celebrated in vs.5-7. Chew on that sweet contentment with God that is expressed in vs.10&11. Meditate and pray on these things until they begin to swell up in your heart, more and more.

Psalm 84 is a "Song of Zion," and a deep yearning for the presence of the Lord is written all over it. It's a rebuke to a puny, skimpy appetite for God, and it's an encouragement to those who desire to come and feast on the Lord.

Consider the three times the word "*blessed*" is used in this Psalm (see vs.4,5,12), as you seek to "enter into" this Psalm this week. Let that blessedness stir up a greater craving for the glory of God in your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember the wisdom of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, question #1: your chief purpose in all of life is to glorify this God. And to enjoy him. Forever.



### **PSALM 85:**

When we are in the midst of some painful affliction of life, that does not always and necessarily mean that we are in great sin and that God is displaying his disapproval. Remember Job, the one who suffered righteously. However, the wise *will* always receive the painful afflictions of life as invitations for self-examination. Perhaps there is some sin to be confessed. Perhaps there is some wrong to be righted. Such is Psalm 85.

Psalm 85 is a "Psalm of Revival." Out of the bleakness of a time when God's favor is only a memory (vs.1-3) and a sense of his anger fills the present (vs.4-7), this Psalm teaches us to pray, "*Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?*" (v.6).

And yet, look upon the land of God's goodness that comes into view at the conclusion (vs.10-13). This is the result of resolving to truly, sincerely listen to God (vs.8,9). May the joy of that promised country fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember: the Psalter is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3.16).

### **PSALM 86:**

Are your prayers more occupied with telling God about you? Or telling God about himself? There's certainly nothing wrong with telling God about yourself; it happens everywhere, even here in 86. But notice the emphasis. We don't even fully get to David's specific need until v.14. First David spends time in communion with God and renewing his commitment to God (see vs.11,12). Count how many times the phrase "O Lord" is used, and what it is teaching us about the Lord at each instance.

Psalm 86 is a "Psalm of Petition," but it's striking how differently it is framed than the Psalms/Prayers of Petition that you and I usually pray. To see more examples of how people pray this way in the Bible, visit Nehemiah 9.5-31, 32-37; Acts 4.24-28, 29-30.

This is the only prayer of David (see the title) in Book III of the Psalter. It's a "lonely" prayer in that way. It's a lonely prayer in other ways as well. And yet, it's filled with praise. May praise, even in lonely moment, gladden your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Psalms remind us, in a thousand ways, that *all* of life is oriented around God. All of it. Every single moment.

### **PSALM 87:**

The City. The Birth. The Book. Three important themes of the Bible, all woven together here in Psalm 87. The City of Man (see Genesis 11.1-9) is an attempt to live in this world without reference to God, but the consummation of God's redeeming work will be a world-wide Garden City (Revelation 21.1-2, 15-27)! For other important "city" passages, see Isaiah 2, 26, 60, and Hebrews 12. But there's also the theme of Birth. Are we citizens of the City of God? That is, have we indeed been "born" there (see John 1.12-13; 3.3-8)? And finally, the theme of Book. Will our name be found in God's Book? See Exodus 32.32; Psalm 56.8; 69.28; Ezekiel 13.9; Daniel 12.1; Luke 10.20; Philippians 4.3; Hebrews 12.23; Revelation 3.5. And right here, Psalm 87.6 (see Isaiah 4.3).

Psalm 87 is a "Song of Zion." For a fuller commentary on it, see and sing and study John Newton's wonderful hymn, "*Glorious Things Of Thee Are Spoken*" (which title it taken from v.3).

As Paul says of the City of God in Galatians 4.26, "*the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.*" Let that remarkable origin and destiny saturate your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Consider well this week all the delights of being a child of God, a citizen of that better city.

### **PSALM 88:**

Have you ever felt like you were stumbling through a darkened path, with no sunshine in sight, where even the good news of gospel and the assurance of God's love and the promise of heaven all seem like it must be referring to someone else? That's the experience of this Psalm, over and over and over again. Even though the Lord is confessed as "*the God of my salvation*" (v.1) and even though the Psalmist is still praying, still trusting, still leaning... the feeling of darkness only deepens. Welcome to Psalm 88.

Psalm 88 is a "Psalm for a People in Decline." It is the incarnated prayer of Isaiah 50.10: "*Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.*"

This is the saddest, most depressed, most outcast-feeling Psalm in the Psalter. And when you need to pray honestly to God from that point of view, here it is for you. Take it in hand, get down on your knees, and pray. "*Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.*" May this kind of freedom and honesty in prayer be yours this week, regardless of what kind of prayer you need to express. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember, God will never abandon his children, even in the most confusing and absurd-feeling moments of life. He teaches us how to pray honestly in those moments as well.

### **PSALM 89:**

This one is a bit lengthy, so some outlining helps. There are three sections to this Psalm: 1-14, 15-37, and 38-51. (Verse 52 is an editorial conclusion to Book III of the Psalter.) The first section is centered on the idea that God's promises are guaranteed by God's nature. The second section is the core and heart of the Psalm, focusing in on significant points of God's promises to his Old Testament people: the favored people, the favored king, the favored dynasty. The third section is seeking God's face in the midst of what seems like broken promises. To get a quick taste of this section, just look at the verbs attributed to God's actions in vs.38-45.

Psalm 89 is one of the great "*How long?*" Psalms of the Bible (see that question twice in v.46). "*Remember how short my time is!*" (v.47).

There is pain and tension in this Psalm, but the heart of it is humility, not bitterness. It doesn't rant and scold. And it doesn't explain away. It looks to God to explain and fulfill. And, in doing so, it points us on to the New Testament, where all of God's promises of an eternal king from the line of David are fulfilled well beyond all of our wildest imaginations. Let those Christ-

centered promises occupy your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember, Book III of the Psalter (which just ended with Psalm 89) was darker than the first two books. Book IV will turn to the praise and reign of God on earth, with new hope.

**PSALM 90:**

The top of this Psalm offers us my favorite title found in the whole of the Psalter: "*A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.*" Can any setting possibly better suit the subject matter of this Psalm than the devastating news Moses heard from God in Numbers 14.34: "*According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure*"? What was Moses doing for those wearying 40 years? What was he thinking? What was he praying? Psalm 90. It's beautiful, it's

moving, it's utterly realistic... and it's pointing us to our only hope.

Psalm 90 is a "Wisdom Psalm." You and I do not live in a culture that welcomes reflection on judgment, reflection on mortality, reflection on death. But the Bible again and again teaches that we must reflect on these things deeply, if we would be wise.

Isaac Watts once wrote a hymn, based upon this Psalm. It's called, "*O God, Our Help In Ages Past,*" and I heartily recommend the knowledge of it and the singing of it. Let this Psalm's presentation of God's eternity over against our frailty give wisdom to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Wisdom Psalms are very practical. What practical guidance do you find here, for your own life and for your own growth in the fear of the Lord?

### **PSALM 91:**

Earlier this morning I woke up from one of those threatening nightmares that make you immediately turn to God and mutter something like, "Thank you, Lord, that that was just a dream. It wasn't real." However, as Psalm 91 quite vividly reminds us, threats can be very real in this world. But that's not the only thing in this world that is real. Our Father's pledge of strong love, defending love, personal, warm and caring love is also very real. Even a host of unseen heavenly guardians is real (v.11).

Psalm 91 is a "Psalm of Trust." And the next time you feel that you are being encircled by danger or exposed to threat... come and dwell in the shelter of the Most High.

Notice the "I" who prays in vs.1 & 2—this is you. Notice the "you" who is being addressed in vs.3-13—this is also you. And finally, notice the "I" who confirms his promises in vs.14-16—this is the Lord. May each of those changes of voice, in its own way, bring confidence to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Give God thanks and praise for his delivering love.

### **PSALM 92:**

Just as all of human history pivots on Christmas Day—the *birth of this world's Redeemer*—so this Psalm pivots on v.8, a simple but commanding statement of the exaltation of the Lord. The title tells us that this is "*A Song for the Sabbath.*" Read through this Psalm with that in mind! What does this Psalm / Song teach us about the Sabbath? Note that it's obviously a day for praise; a day to recognize God's holiness; a day to be reaffirmed in the eternal distinction between what is stupid/foolish/wicked/evil and what is exalted; a day to recall what God has done for his people.

Psalm 92 is a "Psalm for Times of Trouble." And indeed, once a week in the midst of this troubled world, God is calling *you* to Sabbath. To a day "*of solemn rest, a holy convocation*" (Leviticus 23.3), for corporate worship.

Notice the big contrast in this Psalm between the transience of the wicked (vs.7,9,11) and the ever-renewed strength of the righteous (vs.10, 12-15). Let that contrast move you to deeper

prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever.

### **PSALM 93:**

Psalms 93-100 have a consistent theme of the Lord's kingship, his sovereignty, his rule, his reign, his strength, his role as the mighty judge of the universe. God is the Great King over all the earth and all that is in it! See here, in 93.4&5, the image of his effortless sovereignty over the thunderous pounding of the mighty waves of the sea. Prepare to be encouraged in the royal calm of how God exercises his kingly majesty, and with Psalm 93, let us faithfully acclaim his kingship to this world.

Psalm 93 is an "Enthronement Psalm," and it begins this series of Psalms described above with an announcement that declares truth over and above all the tumult of this life: "*The Lord reigns!*"

In the midst of your tumult this week, simply pick up this Psalm and announce that declared truth with the Psalmist. Announce verse 1. Then announce verse 2. Then announce verse 3. Then announce verse 4. And finally, announce verse 5. Declare it calmly, but declare it loudly. The Lord is speaking to you yourself very directly in this Psalm. Let that calm directness be celebrated in your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember, one role of the Psalms in your life is to help you rightly express your faith, even in the midst of suffering.

### **PSALM 94:**

We said in last week's intro that Psalms 93-100 have a consistent theme of the Lord's kingship. In Psalm 94 this developing picture of the king begins to also acquire the related picture of the "*judge of the earth*" (v.2). Last week we celebrated God's sovereignty over the pounding waves (93.3,4); this week we trust in his sovereignty over the pounding that "*evildoers*" would like to inflict upon his people.

Psalm 94 is a "Psalm of Petition," urgently calling out to the Lord, begging him to "*rise up*" (v.2) and avenge the innocent blood of his people, as he has promised (see Deuteronomy 32.35; Romans 12.19-20). If vs.1 and 2 strike us as controversial, spend some time reflecting on vs.3-7. The God of the Bible is never uncaring, inactive, non-interventionist nor irrelevant when his beloved people are being crushed. And we rightly praise him for this.

But 94 is not merely a cry for vengeance. It is also a very reflective Psalm—almost like the Proverbs, at times—full of the confident spirit and passionate faith of one who has known and experienced God's faithfulness very personally. Let that spirit and faith forge bold prayers in your life this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Learning to love the Psalms rightly may take some effort. But it's one of the wisest efforts you could make for your Christian maturity.

### **PSALM 95:**

In this Psalm the people of God are singing and worshipping the one who is in their very midst as the Lord, the Rock of their salvation, the great God, the great King, the Creator, the Maker, the Shepherd, the One to whom—*when you hear his voice*—full faith and full trust and full

obedience is owed. No wonder this Psalm is frequently encountered as a call and guide to worship. In fact, the ancient church use to call 95 "*the Venite*"—which is Latin for "*Oh, Come*"—the first two words of the Psalm.

Psalm 95 is an "Enthronement Psalm." And, with that in mind, take note of how the conclusion of the Psalm has a very different feel than the opening. This is a real and true King whose enthronement we are here celebrating. "*Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.*"—Mr. Beaver, *The Chronicles of Narnia*

The message of this Psalm is expanded upon in Hebrews 3.7-4.13. The "*today*" is actually today. The "*you*" is actually you. And the "*rest*" is salvation in Jesus Christ. Let this call to worship give shape to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Note the great variety of directions in which the Psalter seeks to take your praise. Let's indwell all of those directions faithfully.

### **PSALM 96:**

Last week's Psalm (95) seemed to be centered within the fellowship of the covenant people, where the Lord is known by all the wonderful titles used to describe him in that song. This week (Psalm 96) we seem to be moving outward, in mission, bearing the testimony of who God is to "*all the earth*" (v.1). His glory and his marvelous works are worthy of all praise out among the nations, among all the peoples (v.3). All the earth is called to tremble before him (v.9) and rejoice before him (v.11), for he is indeed the righteous judge of all the earth (vs.10,13).

Psalm 96 is the second in a series of five "Enthronement Psalms." This Psalm has a lot in common with the song of David in 1 Chronicles 16, when the ark of God triumphantly enters into Jerusalem. Stand in awe at that moment when the *True King Of This World* planted his throne right there, in the enemy's former citadel. He's still doing that today.

Romans 8.19 says, "*the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.*" Do you get that same sense of eager longing here? "*Oh sing... ascribe... worship... for he comes!*" Let that vigor of that "*eager longing*" fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. May the Psalter fill your heart with the life and power of salvation this week, alongside a holy love for the Lord.

### **PSALM 97:**

In these Psalms that so strongly and so beautifully celebrate the Lord's kingship (Psalms 93-100), a strong link has been established between his kingship and his holiness or righteousness (see, for example, 93.5; 94.15, 21, 23; 96.9,13). Now that link is heightened and magnified when we catch a glimpse of a throne which has as its very foundation righteousness and justice (v.2), and the heavens that are always proclaiming his righteousness (v.6). And finally this Psalm's climax comes to us as a resolute call to righteousness (vs.10-12).

Psalm 97 is the third in a series of five "Enthronement Psalms." These Psalms make very clear that God is coming, as the universal king.

But his coming as the King of the Universe will meet with different reactions. In Psalms 96 & 98 we see the sheer delight of his people. Here, in 97, we see the doom of the rebels, as they behold the coming Conqueror. Let the awe of that approaching moment move you to vigorous prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Let us join with the whole of the church—throughout all time and in every place—in praising the Lord, with united heart and voice.

### **PSALM 98:**

We saw in last week's Psalm (97) that the king's "*righteousness*" continued to be developed as a big theme in this series of "The Psalms of the King" (93-100). In this week's Psalm we consider the king's righteousness again, both in the past (v.2) and in the future (v.9). Very important! Does God's kingly righteousness make you glad and joyful of heart? It should! For assistance (from God!), see verses 1 and 4 and 7.

Psalm 98 is another "Enthronement Psalm." The ancient church knew this Psalm as the "*Cantate Domino*," meaning "*Oh Sing To The Lord*" (the first words of v.1). And the Book of Common Prayer would often use it as the bridge between Old Testament promise and New Testament fulfillment.

Note that this Psalm is a lot like 96, but here we find no didactic instructions and comparisons, as we find there. Rather, 98 is wholly and completely given over to the joyful exhilaration of praise! Let that praise infuse your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Remember there are 4 "uses" of the Psalms to keep in mind, that you might explore and enjoy it fully: the prayer of the original human author, the corporate prayer of Israel in worship, the prayer of Jesus, and finally OUR prayer—both individually and corporately.

### **PSALM 99:**

"*Holy is he!*" (v.3) "*Holy is he!*" (again, v.5) "*The Lord our God is holy!*" (v.9). Psalm 99 is a strong call to praise and worship the Lord! And these three refrains of his holiness divide the Psalm up into three parts. Verses 1-3 emphasize the grace of the Holy One; though peoples tremble and the earth quakes before him, he sits enthroned, dwelling among his people in Zion. Verses 4-5 stress the law of the Holy One; he loves justice and equity and righteousness with all of his might. And verses 6-9 assert the fellowship of the Holy One; hearing and answering the prayers of his people, forgiving them, and disciplining them.

Psalm 99 is the last of this series of "Enthronement Psalms" (93, 95-99). As we've been praying through them, how have they affected you? At times, perhaps these Enthronement Psalms have stirred you deeply, calling you into the feast of worship! At other times, perhaps they have humbled you, revealing again the depravity of sin, before the face of his profound holiness. As a wise believer once wrote, "God is all that stirs us and all that shames us." Let both moods carry you to a self-forgetful joy and delight in Christ, through whom the exalted Holy One is "*a forgiving God*" (v.8). Pray Psalm 99 to your Holy Lord of Grace! We'll pray it together on Sunday. Believer, you have a particular circumstance in life right now, to which Psalm 99 speaks powerfully. Believe it and live it, thoughtfully.

**PSALM 100:**

Just take a moment, first of all, to reflect on all the commands here: *"Make a joyful noise, serve, come, know, enter, give thanks, bless."* And then take a moment to reflect on all the affirmations: *"He is God, he made us, we are his, we are his people, the Lord is good, his steadfast love endures forever, his faithfulness to all generations."* Obviously, we can learn a lot about God and about what it means to be his people, right here, in Psalm 100.



This Psalm richly and vigorously and beautifully celebrates the Lord God! And if you want to more fully enter into this celebration, look up the hymn *"All People That On Earth Do Dwell."* Notice that the name of the tune to which it is sung is "Old Hundredth." Why? Because it's based off of... Psalm 100.

Another wonderful hymn that is based upon this Psalm is *"Before Jehovah's Awesome Throne."* Reflection upon that hymn would also be very worthwhile for any Christian. Let this Psalm illuminate your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Consider how the nation of Israel had her understanding of the Lord God formed by this Psalm. And then consider how the Christian church today has our understanding of the Lord God formed by this Psalm. *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"* (Hebrews 13.8).

### **PSALM 101:**

There are going to be verses in this Psalm that strike you as inappropriate for you to pray and sing and affirm, with reference to yourself. And that is a good instinct. So... what does that mean for praying the Psalter? It means we're about to learn something important. Look at the title. "A Psalm of David." This Psalm speaks of the high office of the king. And it is the king's duty to remove wickedness from the land (v.8, Romans 13.1-4). And, of course, remember that King David is merely a picture of the Greater King To Come, the Final and Forever King of the Universe, the Lord Jesus.

Psalm 101 is a "Psalm for Times of Trouble," and it shows us three parts of a godly king's agenda. We see the personal standards of holiness to which he commits himself in vs.1-4. Then, in vs.5-7, we see the standards to which he will keep his court officials; it is the king's duty to have a clean and honest administration, from the top down. Finally, in v.8, the king affirms the public duties of his office, dispensing justice throughout the land *"morning by morning."*

Of course, King David failed to meet all of these standards. Just read 2 Samuel. For the perfect king, we are forced to look beyond David... to Jesus, Great David's Greater Son. Let that longing for Christ and his purity characterize your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. How might this Psalm be applied today by those who are responsible for running *any* enterprise and choosing its officials?

### **PSALM 102:**

Take a look at the title of this Psalm: *"A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord."* Could the original Psalmist have written this after the Babylonians reduced the stones of Jerusalem to dust (v.14)? Maybe. But regardless of original context, the people of God have this prayer to use in any circumstance of affliction, when one's heart is faint and when one needs to pour out one's complaints before the Lord. Welcome to 102.

Psalm 102 is one of the seven classic "Penitential Psalms," and when you are near the end of your rope and think you can endure no longer... take it in hand, fall to your knees, and let your heart rise to prayer. Have confidence that your Father in heaven *"regards the prayer of the*

*destitute and does not despise their prayer" (v.17).*

Take note how the conclusion of the prayer begins to contrast our experience of time and the Lord's eternity. The opening chapter of Hebrews will quote from this conclusion, in praise of Christ. And that reminds us to look for ways in which this Psalm is "Messianic"—pointing to the sufferings and afflictions of the Lord Jesus, and his own eager anticipation to see the kingdom of God come in its fullness to planet earth. Let that "Messianic" character of 102 fill your own prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Psalms and the many quotations of the Psalms in the New Testament never fail to show us how Christ truly is the fulfillment of *everything* for God's people.

### **PSALM 103:**

This Psalm opens on a very personal note (vs.1-5), reminding one's self of what God's grace has accomplished in one's own life. And there is a matching conclusion (vs.20-22), but it's no longer strictly personal: now *all* of reality is called to join in and bless (worship, praise) the Lord! And in the middle verses (vs.6-19), we have an overflow of God's attributes: righteousness, justice, blessed self-revelation, kind-hearted acts, mercy, grace, compassion, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, perfect fatherhood, love, eternity, faithfulness, sovereignty, etc.

Psalm 103 is a "Psalm of Wonderment," and it's the first of six such Psalms in a row. Every single line shines with the beauty of praise and thanksgiving to the God of every grace.

This Psalm inspired one of the most beautiful hymns to ever grace the English language: "*Praise, My Soul, The King of Heaven.*" And matching each line of that hymn (google it!) with its corresponding line in the Psalm ushers one's soul to throne of grace, where we may bask in the glory of our God. Let that exercise soak your prayers in God's praise this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Seek to apply each and every Psalm to your heart (as a believer in Jesus) and to your life (as a follower of Jesus).

### **PSALM 104:**

Here we find a delightful and exuberant poetic celebration of God's work of creation, recorded in Genesis 1. There are some great hymns that sing over the truth of God's creation (*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation; All Creatures of our God and King; O Worship The King*, etc.), but Psalm 104—bursting with wonder and praise—is by far the greatest. **Day 1 of Creation** (Genesis 1.3-5): Psalm 104.2... **Day 2** (Genesis 1.6-8): Psalm 104.3-4... **Day 3, Part I**(Genesis 1.9-10): Psalm 104.5-13... **Day 3, Part 2** (Genesis 1.11-13): Psalm 104.14-18... **Day 4** (Genesis 1.14-19): Psalm 104.19-24... **Day 5 and part of Day 6** (Genesis 1.20-28): Psalm 104.25-26... **The Rest of Day 6** (Genesis 1.29-31): Psalm 104.27-30.

Psalm 104 is another "Psalm of Wonderment," and it fits well as a followup to Psalm 103. One praises God as Savior, the other as Creator. One as Father, the other as Sustainer. In the hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy*, the Lord God Almighty is praised as "*merciful and mighty.*" That's Psalm 103 & 104, put together.

The Apostle Paul says that God's *"invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made"* (Romans 1.20). Let these attributes of God conduct you to praise and prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Pursue the praying and singing of the Psalter in your own private life with God, as well as in your family, and also within the church. That is the intention of our Lord.

### **PSALM 105:**

**Special Personal Note:** I love Psalms 105 & 106! In fact, they were the first two sermons I preached after my ordination as a pastor. "Covenant FaithFULness" (105) and "Covenant FaithLESSness" (106). They go together, in just that way: the faithfulness of God and the faithlessness of the people.

Psalm 105 dramatically sweeps through some of the foundational stages of the history of God's dealings with his people... **First**, the patriarchal period of Genesis 12-50 is summed up: the inauguration of the Abrahamic covenant (vs.7-11), the wandering in Canaan (vs.12-15), and the story of Joseph in Egypt (vs.16-22). **Secondly**, the period of Exodus 1-12 is summed up: Israel entering Egypt (vs.23-25), Moses and the plagues (vs.26-36), and Israel's exodus from Egypt (vs.37-38). **Thirdly**, we see wilderness journey of Exodus 13-19 summed up in vs.39-43 and then the entrance into Canaan (told in the book of Joshua) summed up in v.44. All of it told with an eye to the faithful, promise-making, promise-keeping character of our God. His ways may be mysterious at times, but he is always loving his people. He is mindful of their true needs and he is faithfully planning ahead for their good.

Psalm 105 is another "Psalm of Wonderment." So. Stand in wonder at the unfailing love of God for his people, from Abraham to the Promised Land.

This Psalm opens with *"Oh give thanks to the Lord,"* and it closes with *"Praise the Lord!"* May those bookends define the posture of your heart in prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. One of the most practical things you can do as a Christian is to fill your heart with the Psalms.

### **PSALM 106:**

**Special Personal Note:** I love Psalms 105 & 106! In fact, they were the first two sermons I preached after my ordination as a pastor. "Covenant FaithFULness" (105) and "Covenant FaithLESSness" (106). They go together, in just that way: the faithfulness of God and the faithlessness of the people.

Psalm 106, like 105 before it, reviews much of Israel's history: **vs.6-12** speak of the Exodus (see Exodus 14); **vs.13-18** speak of the wilderness (see Numbers 11.4-34; 16); **vs.19-23** speak of Sinai (see Exodus 32.1-6, 9-14); **vs.24-27** take us to the borders of Canaan (see Numbers 14); **vs.28-33** reviews the stories of Baal-Peor and Meribah (see Numbers 25.1-15; 20.2-13); and **vs.34-38** carry us to the entry into the Promised Land (see Judges 1.21,27-36; 3.3, 5). Last week we saw how 105 reviewed the covenant history between God and his people with an eye

to the faithful, promise-making, promise-keeping character of our God. But this week the history is reviewed with an eye to our sin (v.6), our forgetfulness (vs.7,21), our short-lived reforms (vs.12,13), our self-focus (v.14), our petty jealousies (v.16), our tendency toward idolatry (v.19), our stubborn disobedience (vs.24,25), our consequent failure to live in the promises of God (v.26), our fickle hearts (v.28), our propensity to provocation (v.32), our willingness to compromise (vs.34,35), and our spiritual corruptions (vs.37-39). And yet, God's saving grace still breaks through (vs.8-11, 23, 30, 40-43, 44, and 45).

Psalm 106 is another "Psalm of Wonderment." It's the darker side of the Psalm 105/106 partnership, but the light cannot be fully appreciated until one is mindful of the darkness.

And yet, for all of its exposure of our sullen hearts, this is actually a Psalm of praise! The deeper theme here is the long-suffering grace of God. That's the basis of the final two verses. Let those verses give heart to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Seek to truly inhabit this Psalm in your personal communion with the Lord this week.

### **PSALM 107:**

Psalm 107 begins Book V, the final book of the Psalter. And one of organizing features of this Psalm is repetition. Note the repeated depictions of threatening and frightening situations (vs.4-5,10,17-18,23-26). Also the repeated resort to prayer (vs.6,13,19,28). And then the repeated responses of God (vs.6-7,13-14,19-20,28-29). Finally, take note of the repeated calls to thanksgiving (vs.8,15,21,31).

Psalm 107 is the fifth of six "Psalms of Wonderment" in a row. There are four word-pictures in 107, all of which describe—in different ways—the plight from which God's people have been delivered. The wanderers have been retrieved (vs.4-9), the prisoners have been released (vs.10-16), the sick have been restored (vs.17-22), and the storm-tossed have been rescued (vs.23-32).

The final section poetically elaborates on the reversal of fortune which God delights to give in his saving grace. And then the final verse (v.43) tries to make sure we don't miss the lesson! Let that lesson give shape and form to your prayers this week. Maybe there's a verse or two here that you would really benefit from memorizing this week?

### **PSALM 108:**

Psalm 108 has three stanzas. In each stanza a truth is declared and a petition is prayed. **In Stanza One** (vs.1-5), the truth is centered on God's steadfast love and faithfulness (v.4) These attributes of God are above the very highest things we know! The prayer for Stanza One comes in v.5: that God would be glorified. **In Stanza Two** (vs.6-9), the truth is that God has committed himself by his promises (vs.7-9), and there's nothing in this current crisis that his promises haven't covered. The prayer of Stanza Two comes in v.6: that God's people would be delivered. **In Stanza Three** (vs.10-13), the truth is that God's power is sufficient (vs.10,13), and the prayer is that this current crisis would be met with God's help and favor (v.12).

Psalm 108 is the last in this series of six "Psalms of Wonderment." And what David has done

here is this: he's taken two parts of previous Psalms he had written (Psalm 57.7-11 and Psalm 60.5-12) and fashioned them together, to describe and pray through this new crisis he was now facing. That's the life of faith, isn't it? If we're walking with Christ thoughtfully, we'll often find that the lessons God taught us years ago now need to be dusted off and applied yet again, to this similar (but new) circumstance.

These truths and these petitions (noted in the first paragraph, above) still need to be believed and prayed today! Let these truths and petitions give life to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Ponder these things in your own hearts, in your own beds, and be silent and at peace before the Lord (Psalm 4.4).

### **PSALM 109:**

If we are unfamiliar with the imprecatory Psalms, our first response to reading this might be, "What is going on with Psalm 109?" That's a good question. Here are a few things that are going on... **1.** David is affirming his duty to love his enemies (vs.4,5), even when they hate him. **2.** David is taking absolutely no vengeance upon his enemies himself. Rather, he gives himself to prayer for them; v.4 literally says "*I am prayer.*" When attacked and hurt, he does not retaliate; he brings it all to God in prayer, and leaves it there. See Romans 12.19. **3.** In asking God to deal with his enemies, David is indeed quite specific. But it's a specificity that comes from knowing Scripture. The things David prays are what the Bible says will happen to those who live in this manner, without repentance. We might pray for God to deal with our enemies in a general way. David was praying the same, but in a more specific way, shaped by the realism of the Scriptures. **4.** Also note that according to Acts 1.16-20, there's one more thing going on here: a picture of Jesus loving Judas, v.8 being quoted in Acts 1.20.

As stated above, Psalm 109 is an "Imprecatory Psalm." If the command of Romans 12.19 is to be confidently obeyed, no matter what the enemies of God's people may do, we're going to need to pray some strong prayers. Strong prayers have been provided.

The link below will take you to a memorable example of using such prayers for me: the day my wife and I prayed this sort of prayer with our children, on behalf of God's persecuted people. Let the imprecations in the Psalter remind you of an often-politely-ignored side of the Holy One to whom we pray. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Turn to Psalms 3 and 5 if you want to see what kind of mood David often woke up to, early in the morning. Even during those times when his enemies were hunting him down. How could he be so confident? Because he prayed these Psalms.

**PSALM 110:**

Psalm 110 points to one of the great mysteries of the Bible: "*You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek*" (v.4). But, like all the Bible's mysteries, the riddle is worked out through Christ. Take a deep breath...

Melchizedek appears suddenly in the Scriptures, unexpected and unheralded, in Genesis 14.18-20. Abram (later, Abraham) has just shattered a coalition of evil kings, and "*Melchizedek king of Salem*" (later, Jerusalem) brings him bread and wine, blessing him in the name of God Most High. At which point Abram presents his tithe (!), since Melchizedek is also the priest of

God Most High. In v.22 of Genesis 14 Abram affirms (again) that Melchizedek's "*God Most High*" is indeed Yahweh, the Lord. David (the author of Psalm 110) later takes Jerusalem, sitting on Melchizedek's former throne, and becomes something of the fulfillment of Melchizedek's priestly-kingship before Yahweh. Hence we have every single verse in Psalm 110. But David is only \*something\* of the fulfillment of Melchizedek's priestly kingship. The Final and Forever Priest-King (before whom David was merely a shadow mysteriously cast beforehand) was still to come. Remember: Jesus, the Final, Forever, and True Priest of this world, did not descend from the priestly tribe of Levi. So, how is he even a priest? In this way... Jesus is the True Melchizedek! Please read Hebrews 6.20-7.28. Jesus is the fulfillment of a mystery that reaches back through David to Abraham himself. Abraham met and paid tithes to a prototype, a shadow, a picture, a prophecy of a Coming Reality—a reality that by far supersedes the privileges of the tribe of Levi. Jesus is that Reality.

Psalm 110 is, of course, a "Royal Messianic Psalm."

To see something of the weight the New Testament lays on this Psalm, read Mark 12.35-37 and then Acts 2.33-35. Let that weight give power to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. And may we offer ourselves freely (v.3), in the service of our mighty Priest-King, Jesus the Christ.

#### **PSALM 111:**

Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 go together, and they go together in two different ways. First of all, they are both acrostics, meaning that they both have 22 lines in the Hebrew, each line starting with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which has 22 letters. They are both perfect A-Z poems! And secondly they go together in theme. Psalm 111 describes the Lord, as he has revealed himself in both deed and word. Psalm 112 describes the Lord's people, viewed as a representative "man," who in deed and word has grown to resemble his Lord.

Psalm 111 is a "Psalm of Revelation," inviting us to study our God, with deep delight and open praise. In fact, it begins with a summons to "*Praise the Lord!*," as does Psalm 112, as does Psalm 113.

There are also a number of matching ideas in both Psalms, as we would expect, if the people of God are truly learning godliness. See if you can line up the two Psalms and pick out the similar phrases and related themes. Let the "like Father, like son (people)" nature of these matching Psalms give direction to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. And if your heart hungers to give further praise to the Lord, turn to Psalm 3 or Psalm 5, and sing and pray. Particularly turn to those two Psalms early in the morning! They were written for mornings.

#### **PSALM 112:**

As we noted last week, Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 go together. Not only are they both acrostics, perfect A-Z poems (in Hebrew), but they are also paired together in themes. 111 is all about the Lord. 112 is all about the people of the Lord, considered as a representative "man." And note the resemblance. The "man" (people) has (have) grown, in character and

conduct, into the likeness of his (their) Lord.

Psalm 112 is a "Wisdom Psalm," inviting us to study the blessed man. Think of it as a development of the last verse of the previous Psalm: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!"*

The Scriptures everywhere promise great blessing to those who fear the Lord. Pore over that blessing here. Let that blessing make your prayers mighty this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. To keep in view the eternal blessing promised to God's people, take in Psalm 23 sometime this week as well.

### **PSALM 113:**

Psalms 113-118 is a collection of Psalms / songs / prayers that the Hebrews used every year at Passover. Please read Alec Motyer's introduction to this run of six Psalms...

*"Anything that relates to the Lord Jesus Christ is of supreme value and attractiveness for the Christian. Consequently, the strong likelihood that this group of Psalms formed part of his Passover celebrations enhances their interest and importance. At the last Passover, the first Supper, he and his company would have sung Psalms 113-114 before the meal and 115-118 would be the 'hymn' they sang at the end (Mt.26:30). No doubt each psalm in the group had its own literary history but together they are well called 'the Egyptian Hallel / Act of Praise', a commentary in song on Exodus 6:6-7."*

Psalm 113, as the opening note of "The Egyptian Hallel," grounds the whole run of six Psalms in the Lord. He is exalted, as the transcendent God of the universe! And yet, he himself exalts the poor and the needy and the broken-hearted. He is sovereign over all, yet good to each individual child. He is indeed both "Heavenly" and "Father." Nothing is too great for him; no one is too small for him.

These Psalm have great relevance for the original Exodus (from Egypt, through Moses), of course. But they have even deeper relevance for the Greater Exodus (from sin and death, through Jesus). Let that Christ-centered relevance transform your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. If this is more a week of sorrow than joy for you, start with Psalm 42. Let it lead you in lament, but also stir you toward the hope and expectation of 113.

### **PSALM 114:**

Last week we introduced the "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113-118)—the Psalms that were traditionally sung by the Hebrews every year at Passover. They would sing 113-114 before the meal and 115-118 after (see Matthew 26.30). Psalm 114 celebrates God's glory in the Exodus out of Egypt. There the Lord showed himself to be the true king of all nations (v.1), compassionate to the downtrodden (v.2), sovereign over all creation (vs.3-7), and more than ready and able to provide for the needs of his people (v.8).

Psalm 114, part two of "The Egyptian Hallel," demonstrates that everything said of God in Psalm 113 is true. Our faith is not based on wishful thinking; it is grounded solidly on historical



revelation.

I love how Derek Kidner describes this Psalm: *"A fierce delight and pride in the great march of God gleams through every line of this little poem—a masterpiece whose flights of verbal fancy would have excluded it from any hymn book but this. Here is the Exodus not as a familiar item in Israel's creed but as an astounding event: as startling as a clap of thunder, as shattering as an earthquake."* Let that thunder and that earthquake strengthen your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Are you encircled by fear and upheaval, difficult circumstances and contentious trials? God is your true and only security, your refuge, and your strength. Follow up 114 with a good dose of 46.

### **PSALM 115:**

We are in the midst of a group of Psalms known as the "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalm 113-118), and we've said that 113-114 would traditionally be sung by faithful Hebrews right *before* partaking of the Passover meal, every year. Once the meal was over, they would then sing 115-118. This is the post-Passover "*hymn*" you see mentioned in Matthew 26.30 & Mark 14.26. So, the first part of this "*hymn*" was Psalm 115. What is it about? Verses 1-3 and 16-18 are all about praise given to God. Verses 4-8 are about idols and those who trust them. Verses 9-15 are about the Lord and those who trust him.

Psalm 115, part three of "The Egyptian Hallel," sings of God's invincible glory and the blessings he gives to the faithful.

Notice the three groups referenced in vs.9-11. *"O Israel... O house of Aaron... O you who fear the Lord."* That phrase "*you who fear the Lord*" (or, later, "God-fearers") becomes the name given to non-Israelite converts, those Gentile believers who worshiped the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This has always been a gracious reality, from the very beginning of God's people (see Genesis 15.2; Exodus 12.48f; Ruth 1.16; 2 Samuel 11.3; etc). Let God's gracious world-wide gospel intentions encourage your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. On that note of God's concern for all the peoples of the earth, take in Psalm 47 this week as well.

### **PSALM 116:**

We have now come to the fourth song of the "Egyptian Hallel," which was also sung by faithful Hebrews after the Passover meal was celebrated. I hope we'll all soak in this Psalm for a while. There's a great threat to life here (vs.3,8,15), and it seems to be have surfaced due to human deceitfulness (v.11) and personal foolishness or lack of discernment (v.6). But prayer is made (vs.1-4), and a gracious and righteous and merciful God has heard (v.5). All the other verses are basically taken up with descriptions or consequences of God's mighty deliverance.

Psalm 116, part four of "The Egyptian Hallel," is bursting with the delight and gratitude of one who realizes that the Lord answered his prayer with overwhelming grace.

Do you, like me, sometimes feel that you need help sufficiently expressing your thanksgiving to God? Well, welcome to 116. Here you will find strong help. Let that help give form and shape

to your prayers this week. Sin and its consequences are very real. But so is the great power of our God in heaven! Along those lines, perhaps throw in a dash of Psalm 71 as you exercise your soul in prayer this week.

**PSALM 117:**

Welcome to the shortest Psalm in the Psalter! (*Enjoy how its brevity allows you to comprehend the theme fairly quickly. Though it is an enormous theme! But enjoy this brevity while it lasts, because we're two Psalms away from the tour de force of the Psalter...*) Psalm 117 takes the Exodus truths—remember, we're still in the "Egyptian Hallel" Psalms, closely associated with Passover—and extends their promise to the gigantic whole of the world. What God has done for Israel is not limited to Israel!

And to that point, the Apostle Paul quotes this Psalm in Romans 15.11, in support of his insistence that Jesus is the Messiah for the whole world, all the Gentile nations included! We see the world-wide aim of 117 fulfilled in Revelation 7.9, by the way. This part of the "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113-118) reveals something essential to understanding the heart of God. It's just as God promised Abraham way back in Genesis 22.18: *"in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."* God's grace intends to reach into the remotest regions of the earth. King Solomon prayed in this way (see 1 Kings 8.41-43). Indeed, once you find this theme in the Bible, you see it everywhere! Psalm 47.9, Psalm 96-98, Romans 4.11-12, Galatians 6.16—the whole of the world can become *"the Israel of God."*

There truly is one Lord, one world, and one joy. And that joy is Christ! Let that joy fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. This is a very small Psalm, to be sure. But the faith it expresses is great. And its reach is vast.