

July 1 – Vivid Prayers

Today's reading: Psalms 1-5

***“Arise, Lord!
Deliver me, my God!
Strike all my enemies on the jaw;
break the teeth of the wicked” - Psalm 3:6-7.***

David was in trouble, and he was not praying what I call "Now-I-lay-me-down-to-sleep" prayers. He was praying fervently and aggressively because he knew the danger he was in and realized God was the only One who could help and save him. Do you realize that you are in the same kind of danger in which David found himself? You have an enemy that doesn't just want to hurt you; He wants to destroy you and cause your faith to be destroyed. Peter warned about this danger when he wrote,

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Do you see the nature of the spiritual war in which you are engaged when you follow Jesus? Are you praying aggressive prayers that have vivid descriptions of what you need the Lord to do? *Father, I have been reluctant to fight for my spiritual inheritance and blessings. I expected You to give them to me without having to invest any energy or effort in the process. I see now that was wrong, and I commit to fight for what is mine, realizing that battle will only enhance my appreciation and value of what You give me.*

July 2 – Your Purpose

Today's reading: Psalms 6-10

***“What is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet” - Psalm 8:4-6.***

God determined that mankind would rule over the works of His hands and therefore gave man a mandate to do so: "God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28). The Fall of Adam and Eve marred this dominion, but Jesus came to restore all things, including this God-given assignment: "and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:20). Therefore, your purpose

in life is to find that portion of creation over which God has given you dominion and to rule over it in the will of God. Do you know your purpose, or are you just working to make money? Are you extending God's compassion and authority in your purpose, or are you simply paying the bills? Do you want to know your purpose, or are you happy with the way things are in your work life?

July 3 – Dealing with Godless Fools

Today's reading: Psalms 11-15

*“The fool says in his heart,
'There is no God.'
They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;
there is no one who does good” - Psalm 14:1.*

A correct understanding of God is required for any and all righteousness. Without that, God identifies the godless as fools and their ability to do good is minimized. Therefore, the best way to turn around evil and wickedness is to convert the evil doer into a God-fearer. That makes world evangelism the top priority for anyone who wants to make a difference in the world. You can pursue evangelism by going and doing, or by supporting those who are gifted and willing to go, including a local church who preaches the gospel and makes evangelism a priority. Remember, no one is beyond God's reach, and the Apostle Paul is a good example of that:

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 1:13-14).

Are you committed to the work of evangelism? How so? How can you increase your role in reducing the number of godless fools in the world?

July 4 – Your Stuff

Today's reading: Psalms 16-20

*“I say to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing’” - Psalm 16:2.*

In today's verse, David made a clear statement of commitment and devotion to the Lord. Perhaps it's a good thing that David did not live in our materialistic age, where the emphasis is to own cars and more cars, clothes and trendier clothes, games and more complex games, homes and bigger homes. When you invest so much into the things along with their care and maintenance, those things can begin to own you instead of you owning them. Paul wrote about contentment to the Philippians:

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:11-13).

Are you hoarding things? Are you struggling with some of your stuff having a hold on you? Is that interfering with your peace in the Lord? Is it time to divest yourself of some of your possessions, going through your drawers, closet, garage, attic, library or other storage unit to eliminate some of your clutter?

July 5 – Fear No Evil

Today's reading: Psalms 21-25

*“Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me” - Psalm 23:4.*

David faced the temptation to fear, but he avoided it by determining *not* to be afraid no matter how foreboding the situation was. Instead, he chose to focus on the fact that the Lord was with him to comfort him in his troubles. Fear is the great enemy of your faith, and even if the Lord speaks to you (as some have said, “If only I had a word from the Lord”), you will still fear some evil coming upon you unless you decide not to. When the women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus, they found an angel who told them “not to fear.” Yet even with that exhortation, Matthew wrote, “So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy” (Matthew 28:8). Are you afraid? Has God revealed His will to do and told you not to fear, yet you still find fear gripping your heart and restricting your actions? Do you see that you must act in the midst of fear and not wait for the fear to subside or go away?

July 6 – Handling Fear

Today's reading: Psalms 26-30

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?” - Psalm 27:1.*

The Bible in general and the book of Psalms in particular speak about fear a great deal, since it is so common and prevalent among all human emotions. Fear neither be ignored, nor can it be allowed to rule by saying, "I'm only human." Recently I received an email update from Seth Godin that spoke about fear. Here is what he wrote:

If you can say this out loud, when you've been holding back, avoiding your confrontation with the truth, you will free yourself to do something important. Saying it takes away the power of the fear. On the other hand, if you say it 8 times or 11 times or every time, you're using the label to reinforce your fear, creating an easy escape hatch to avoid doing something important. Saying it amplifies the fear. The brave thing is to find the unspeakable fear and speak it. And to stop rehearsing the easy fears that have become habits.

Are you hiding or masquerading your fear, thus denying its existence or hold on you? Are you reinforcing your fear by speaking it often? In today's verse the psalmist acknowledged his potential for fear but by asking himself questions that did not allow the fears to take root or grow.

July 7 – Doctor Jesus

Today's reading: Psalms 31-35

*“Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, ‘I will confess
my transgressions to the Lord.’
And you forgave
the guilt of my sin” - Psalm 32:5.*

God is faithful and ready to forgive sin, if the sinner asks for forgiveness. When sinners hide or deny guilt, they have no need for forgiveness and will continue in their sinful ways. As we have seen throughout this devotional, God requires honesty, not for His benefit since He already knows the truth, but for yours. What's more, those who consider themselves righteous do not need Jesus' help, as indicated by the Pharisees' attitude:

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Mark 2:17).

Do you need Doctor Jesus to heal your sinful heart and ways? Are you aware of your sin? Or are you denying it due to pride or fear? Is it time to confess some sins to God?

July 8 - Your Heart Matters

Today's reading: Psalms 36-40

*“Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart” - Psalm 37:4.*

There is much confusion and distrust about the issue of the heart. Many have been taught and believe that the heart is evil, will always be evil and is *never* to be trusted. That makes their faith a “head” faith – lacking emotion and passion, but strong on doctrine and, if not careful, legalism. What's more, those same people have been taught to distrust their own thought process. Paul wrote these words: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). The problem to this approach is this: Does the Spirit's presence in your life ever make a difference in your heart and mind? If the heart is so evil, then how can today's verse from Psalm 37 be true? Could it be true because there are desires that God put in your heart, and following your heart is not dangerous but absolutely essential to finding and doing God's will? Therefore, the real question today is: What's in your heart, and why are you so afraid of following it?

July 9 – Jesus' Help

Today's reading: Psalms 41-45

*“You are God my stronghold.
Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?” - Psalm 43:2.*

While the psalms accurately described what the writers were experiencing, there is an aspect of Psalms that pertained to Jesus and the suffering and rejection He encountered during His mission to earth. Jesus embodied the message of Psalms, and endured God's judgment to set you free from that judgment. The writer of Hebrews explained the rationale behind Jesus' humanity, so I will let those words explain what I never could:

For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:17-18).

Do you go to Jesus for help, believing He can relate to your situation because He Himself was flesh and blood, just like you? Do you understand that Jesus is your Helper not just because He is God, but also because He is your brother?

July 10 – Wealth Prep

Today's reading: Psalm 46-50

*“People who have wealth but lack understanding
are like the beasts that perish” - Psalm 49:20.*

Many people dream of winning the lottery and therefore play it every day, providing governments, companies and illegal entities a lot of money. Yet few who play are prepared for the pressures that come with money and don't understand how difficult it can be to serve the

Lord and also have and maintain riches. Jesus spoke about this issue on many occasions, saying things like this: “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:23) and “But woe to you who are **rich**, for you have already received your comfort” (Luke 6:24). The understanding that today's verse refers to is that God gives wealth but expects the wealthy to use their money to relieve the plight of the poor as God's and their heart direct. Do you dream of lottery riches? Or are you working hard to amass a fortune from business? If you are doing either, then gird yourself with a proper perspective on wealth and God's desire to place your money under His direction and Lordship before you have it.

July 11 – God’s Business

Today's reading: Psalms 51-55

*“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You” - Psalm 51:12-13.*

Psalm 51 is David's prayer of repentance, probably after his sordid relationship with Bathsheba and the circumstances surrounding their son's birth and death. When David sinned, he did not run *from* God but *to* Him. He did not go into hiding, but instead made a commitment to the Lord to reach out and teach others about the Lord and His ways, but only after God touched and restored David in his inner man. You should note that David was not just interested in himself, but also connected his restoration to God's best interests, which were and are to reach others for Him. In a sense, Paul saw this same dynamic when he admitted his sin, but then saw that God had touched him to go reach others:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

Are you reaching out to other sinners? Do you see that part of your healing and restoration is so you can make God's business your business?

July 12 – Listening for God

Today's reading: Psalms 56-60

*“Save us and help us with your right hand,
that those you love may be delivered.
God has spoken from his sanctuary:
'In triumph I will parcel out Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Sukkoth.
Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine;*

***Ephraim is my helmet,
Judah is my scepter.
Moab is my washbasin,
on Edom I toss my sandal;
over Philistia I shout in triumph” - Psalm 60:5-8.***

David was in deep distress (again) and was crying out to God for help in today's verses. In the midst of his seeking, God spoke to him and let David know that He, God, was in control of everything. While David was praying, God spoke, David heard what He said and wrote it down. Notice that the Lord did not speak about David's situation, but expanded David's vision to see more accurately and completely who God is and what He was doing in the earth. While David's circumstances did not immediately change, his perspective of his circumstances did. Paul was in Corinth and it did not seem to be going well, and then the Lord spoke to him and changed his viewpoint:

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God (Acts 18:9-11).

Are you praying and listening? Do you expect to hear from the Lord? Are you hearing and then resting in the perspective of your life God is giving you as you pray? *Lord, I realize I am talking more than listening when I pray, and I need to adjust that. I want and need to hear Your voice, and from this point, I will spend more time listening as You reveal Your will and heart to me.*

July 13 – Word Ambush

Today's reading: Psalms 61-65

***“Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked,
from the plots of evildoers.
They sharpen their tongues like swords
and aim cruel words like deadly arrows.
They shoot from ambush at the innocent;
they shoot suddenly, without fear” - Psalm 64:2-4.***

David was a mighty warrior, but in this prayer, he prayed that God would hide him from those who spoke evil. He had bravely faced Goliath and embarked on other military engagements, but when it came to gossip, slander and criticism, David asked God to hide him rather than have to face those who uttered vicious and harmful words. This provides two lessons. The first is it shows the power of words and their ability to harm – they are like deadly arrows. Don't underestimate their power to cause you harm, even to depress you. So don't go out of your way to hear things that others have said about you that are negative. The second is the power of *your* words. If you have felt the sting of others' vitriol, then don't be the source of that same pain for others. Speak words that build up and encourage, or don't say anything at all. Do you expose yourself to the harmful words of others toward you? Why do you listen? Why do you seek to

find them out? Are you guilty of launching deadly arrows towards others? Are you ambushing the innocent with your criticism and gossip?

July 14 – Weakness

Today's reading: Psalms 66-70

***“You, God, are awesome in your sanctuary;
the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people” - Psalm 68:35.***

Superhero movies abound and people flock to see them, identifying with these seemingly ordinary people who do extraordinary exploits. Books abound with stories of athletes and business leaders who excelled through exceptional effort and talent, and we refer to them as celebrities. Yet David made a statement as he closed Psalm 68 that it was God who gives His people power and strength. Therefore, it was not their own abilities that caused them to excel, but God's supernatural ability placed in them. Much has been made of Paul's discussion of his weakness and strength, and here is one verse from that discussion: “For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him in our dealing with you” (2 Corinthians 13:4). Paul fulfilled his Empire-wide apostolic tour not in the power of his spiritual gifts, which were quite significant, but in the knowledge of his weakness that he could not do God's will without God's supernatural strength and help. Are you involved in something that shows forth your human weakness while you function in your strengths? What can you say God has helped you do what only He could have done through you?

July 15 – Career Counselor

Today's reading: Psalms 71-75

***“No one from the east or the west
or from the desert can exalt themselves.
It is God who judges:
He brings one down, he exalts another” - Psalm 75:6-7.***

Promotion in your work, association, politics or career is not only a matter of education, experience, talent and preparation. While all those are important, the real issue in career growth is God's will for you and where He desires to place you. God does not promote people with potential, but rather people who have developed that potential. Yet even those who have developed their potential are not guaranteed success (as they deem success), because that is in God's hands. Joseph, Daniel, David, Deborah, Paul, and Joshua, just to name a few, became leaders by God' sovereign choice and not based on interviews, education or talent. Are you toiling hard for the next promotion? Are you offended when you are bypassed for the next pay or responsibility level? Are you disappointed that you were not hired - or that you were fired? Relax and stop fretting. The Lord is your agent and career counselor, and you will move on when He deems it the right time according to His will and plan.

July 16 – God is Able

Today's reading: Psalms 76-80

*“They spoke against God;
they said, ‘Can God really
spread a table in the wilderness?
True, he struck the rock,
and water gushed out,
streams flowed abundantly,
but can he also give us bread?
Can he supply meat for his people?’” - Psalm 78:19-20.*

When the Lord led Israel out of Egypt, He led them into the Sinai desert. They considered their surroundings and chose to panic, lashing out at the Lord, even though they had seen His power to provide when He sent forth water from a rock. They had to trust the Lord daily for their provision and they grumbled, opting not to believe Him able to provide bread and meat in spite of the water miracle. You can easily fall into the same trap, challenging the Lord's goodness today, even though He has acted on your behalf again and again in the yesterdays of your life. Jesus challenged His disciples to also remember God's ability to provide and have faith:

“You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?” (Matthew 16:8-10).

Are you in a panic today because you don't see where tomorrow's provision is coming from? Has unbelief got you in a dither? Are you questioning God's ability to provide for you?

July 17 – Seek His Kingdom

Today's reading: Psalms 81-85

*“For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
the Lord bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless” - Psalm 84:11.*

Today's verse basically tells you that God is everything you need, every day and in every way. If you need light, He is the sun, heating and brightening your way. If you need protection from the sun, He is your shield. He grants honor for work done and favor in the eyes of those who can help you along the way. He does not withhold any good thing you need in your life and walk with him - *if* your walk is blameless (meaning you keep short accounts, asking forgiveness of God and others when you sin). Therefore, if you don't have something it is because God has decided you don't need it. Jesus stated it this way:

So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:31-33).

Can you make peace today with the fact that there some things you don't have only because God has chosen not to give them to you, and He has a good reason for doing so? Are you perhaps the thing standing between God and what you need?

July 18 – Holy Geography

Today's reading: Psalms 86-90

*"Indeed, of Zion it will be said,
'This one and that one were born in her,
and the Most High himself will establish her'" - Psalm 87:5.*

In the Old Testament, Zion was the place where God resided in Israel's mind, for it was in Jerusalem and close to where the Temple stood. Even while they were in Babylonian exile, the Jews talked, sang, wrote, and dreamed about Zion. God's people were “born” there, for that is the place where they communed and met with God. There is still a romantic notion of God living in a place, and some are still captivated by the thought that there is geography special to God. There is not. Today, God doesn't reside in a place or territory, He lives in and with His people:

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:2-3).

Are you fascinated with holy geography or holy living? Are you infatuated with end time fables, or are you fixated on living out a holy life and helping spread the gospel to all nations and people groups?

July 19 – A Refuge from the Storm

Today's reading: Psalm 91-95

*“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty” - Psalm 91:1.*

When I was in a dangerous country on a ministry assignment, our team met every morning at 7 AM, and part of our regimen was reciting Psalm 91 in its entirety as a group. After that, we were more focused on God's promises of protection as we went about our business. God does not have a shelter nor does He cast a shadow. The psalmist was writing poetry and provided images to comfort the mind and soothe the soul of the reader. The psalmist was of course referring to God's

presence with His people that should bring rest and freedom from anxiety. Jesus lived in this truth as evidenced by His calm in the midst of a storm: “One day Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Let us go over to the other side of the lake.’ So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger” (Luke 8:22-24). Are you in a storm right now? Are you in a panic due to the size of the waves or water in the boat? Then it's time to read Psalm 91 daily or hourly to regain your faith focus that God is in control, even when the storm seems to be ready to take you down. *Lord, there is a storm raging in my life right now, and I have been in a panic. Today's encouragement really helps me to see that You are bigger and more powerful than any storm could ever be. I ask that You calm the waves that are terrifying me, and speak to the wind that tries to overpower me. I put my trust in You as together we weather this storm.*

July 20 – Change

Today's reading: Psalms 96-100

***“Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples” - Psalm 96:1-3.***

For you to sing a new song to the Lord means that you must stop singing the old song. No, that is not an endorsement for contemporary music over hymns, but rather an indication that God desires to bring change into your life. As a believer, you should eat change for breakfast, so to speak, for the Spirit who lives in you is always moving and changing you and the things around you. Unfortunately, you may be standing in the way of that change due to your old nemesis: fear. You can fear the new thing so you oppose it for what you believe are spiritual reasons - not wanting to get ahead of or miss the Lord. Jesus Himself said in Revelation 21:5, “He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true!’” What changes are you resisting that, if you embraced them, would allow you to sing a new song? What excuses are you using to resist the change?

July 21 – Choosing Friends

Today's reading: Psalm 101-105

***“My eyes will be on the faithful in the land,
that they may dwell with me;
the one whose walk is blameless
will minister to me” - Psalm 101:6.***

David declared that he was careful about choosing both his friends, associates, and his spiritual leaders. He understood what Paul wrote much later: “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’” (1 Corinthians 15:33). Paul also wrote, “Do not be yoked together with

unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Paul clarified his instruction about contact with unbelievers when he wrote, "But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people" (1 Corinthians 5:11). Are your friends and associates claiming to be believers but behaving badly? Are you in church fellowship with folk who do not evidence Christian behavior and attitudes? Be honest: Is their behavior rubbing off on you and affecting your walk and devotion to the Lord? If it is, what are you prepared to do about it?

July 22 – Friendship Betrayed

Today's reading: Psalms 106-110

*"In return for my friendship they accuse me,
but I am a man of prayer.
They repay me evil for good,
and hatred for my friendship" - Psalm 109:4-5.*

There is an aspect of Psalms that not only describes the experience of the psalmist, but also points ahead to the ministry and suffering of Jesus. Jesus lived the psalms, just like you do when you read them to identify with the human pathos they represent and narrate. In these verses, we learn that Jesus (along with David) was a friend to others, yet His friendship was rejected and was repaid with hatred and accusations. Jesus even chose Judas, whom He knew would betray Him. What did David (and Jesus) do in response to these hurtful acts? They prayed! They took their disappointment and pain and told their heavenly Father about it. What do you do when your goodness is rejected and met with an evil or callous response? Do you lash out at others? Do you become despondent or depressed? Do you become bitter or hold a grudge? Or do you take it to the Lord to ask Him to touch your pain and heal your heart? Do you hold back from any future friend-like investments in others?

July 23 – Water in a Dry Place

Today's reading: Psalms 111-115

*"Tremble, earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
who turned the rock into a pool,
the hard rock into springs of water" - Psalm 114:7-8.*

God led His people in to the wilderness, another word for the Sinai desert. The temperatures were scorching, the nights were bitter cold, there was no food, and of course there was no water. What's more, there were millions of people, plus all their herds of animals, and they wandered there for 40 years before they entered the Promised Land. Did any of them starve or die of thirst? Absolutely not! God was able to provide for them; in fact, He led them there to prove that He

could provide under impossible conditions to build their faith. Instead, they hardened their hearts and did not have faith:

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:1-5).

Are you like the Israelites in the desert, not trusting God even though He has shown Himself strong on your behalf again and again, providing something from nothing for you? Are you in a desert, while God sustains you? Do you resent the desert, or appreciate God's presence while you live there?

July 24 – Leaders and Kings

Today's reading: Psalms 116-120

***“It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in princes” - Psalm 118:9.***

God is a leadership God. He works through leaders, but the tendency of mankind has been to put expectations on their leaders that should only be put on the Lord. This has led time and again to the glorification and deification of leaders, and that always gets people in trouble – for leaders are mortal and will eventually pass from the scene, no matter how effective or evil they are. Israel craved a leader, a king like the rest of the nations had, and it got them into trouble when they put the leader before their allegiance to God. Samuel had this to say to Israel when they demanded a king: “But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your disasters and calamities. And you have said, ‘No, appoint a king over us’” (1 Samuel 10:19). As a follower, are you putting too much trust in leaders, expecting them to do what only the Lord can do for you? As a leader, are you demanding more loyalty and commitment than is appropriate? You should pray for your leaders, submit to your leaders, but reserve your ultimate trust and loyalty for the Lord! *You are my leader, Lord, and I ask Your forgiveness for when I put more trust in my earthly leaders than I have put in You. I also confess that I have hoped my leaders could provide things for me that only You can provide. Today, I take refuge in You, and will continue to do so from this day forward, for You are my only hope and strength. Amen.*

July 25 – Whole Lotta Shakin’ Going On

Today's reading: Psalms 121-125

***“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be shaken but endures forever” - Psalm 125:1.***

It is easy to misinterpret a Bible promise to mean something that it does not mean. In Isaiah, God makes the promise that no weapon formed against you shall prosper (see Isaiah 54:17). The verse doesn't mean the weapons won't be formed or won't try to be effective against you, it simply says they won't be successful. Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church; He didn't say the gates would not *try* to prevail. In today's verse, it states that the people of God are like Mount Zion that won't be shaken and destroyed. It does not mean that shaking won't happen to remove everything in your life not consistent with the stability and purity of Mt. Zion. In Hebrews 12, the writer had this to say about shaking:

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire" (12:26-29).

Is there shaking going on in your life? Is your confidence shaken because there is shaking? Do you see that God is removing what can be shaken so that what cannot be shaken will prevail in your life, which is His will and purpose?

July 26 – A Kingdom Worker

Today's reading: Psalms 126-130

*"In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves" - Psalm 127:2.*

The concept of work is different for a believer than for someone who doesn't know the Lord. For the unbeliever, work is how he or she makes money. For believers, God has promised to provide, so they work to extend God's kingdom rule on the job. What does that mean? A believer works to witness and reveal God to fellow workers, clients and customers. They manifest God's love and righteousness where integrity, honesty, fairness, a work ethic and submission are concerned. Where possible, a Kingdom worker also exercises creativity and authority to bring new ideas and order to his or her sphere of work. Is there a difference between your work and the work of those around you who do not know the Lord? Is your attitude gentle and submissive, or strident and competitive? Do you see your work as your source of provision, or do you see God as the source? Do you understand that He is using your job to provide for you, but He doesn't need your job to provide? What difference should all these truths make in your job, attitude and faith expectations?

July 27 – Vindication

Today's reading: Psalms 131-135

***“For the Lord will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants” - Psalm 135:14.***

One of the most difficult aspects of life to surrender to the Lord is your reputation. When someone makes an accusation or charges you with an offense, everything in you wants to defend yourself and correct what people are thinking about you. Yet the Lord desires that you trust your reputation with Him, allowing Him to be your agent and handle your public image. He promises to vindicate you, but He will do it on His own terms and in His own time. You must keep in mind that He may not clear your name in a way that suits you, but rather causes you to trust Him even more for your career, public image and relationships. The Bible already advised you that God is the one who will avenge wrongs done to you in Hebrews 10:30: “For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay.’” Have you been contemplating taking revenge on someone who has wronged you? Have you been distressed over a wrong done to you or about an accusation or charges made against you? Can you see that the Lord wants you to trust Him and not take matters or your defense into your own hands?

July 28 – Getting Real with God

Today's reading: Psalms 136-140

***“You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar” - Psalm 139:1-2.***

God already knows your thoughts and your words before you speak them. That is in part why the psalms are so brutally honest, for the writers knew it was ridiculous to try and hide their true feelings. Therefore, when someone says, “I would never say that to the Lord,” they are missing the point that, if they think it, it's as good as saying it, for God knows. You need to be honest with God in prayer, not for His sake, but for yours. God is not interested in formula praying or in you using King James' English when you address Him. You don't have to end your prayers “in Jesus' name” to get them heard and answered, but you do have to appear before God as you are and not as someone saying what you think God would want you to say. Are you being real with God in prayer? Do you pray transparent prayers, or are you trying to impress God or others with your prayer words? Do you see that God cannot change you into the person He wants you to be if you are pretending to already be that person?

July 29 – Handling Criticism (and the Critic)

Today's reading: Psalms 141-145

***“Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness;
let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head.
My head will not refuse it,
for my prayer will still be against the deeds of evildoers” - Psalm 141:5.***

Receiving input from others, especially when it isn't requested and falls into the category of "constructive criticism," can be a challenging event. David vowed in today's verse that he would not reject the rebuke from others and would not be angry at the 'rebuker.' Instead, he made a commitment to keep his focus on the real enemies in his life. What's more, David described those confrontations with those who rebuked him as "kindness" and "oil for my head." The wisdom book of Proverbs had much to say about this life experience of receiving criticism: "Whoever remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1) and "A rebuke impresses a discerning person more than a hundred lashes a fool" (Proverbs 17:10). How do you receive a rebuke from someone else? Do you get angry at them? Do you defend yourself, or do you see the process as potentially valuable as you learn about some negative or weak area in your life that can be corrected for God's glory?

July 30 – Your Emotional Health

Today's reading: Psalms 146-150

***"He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds" - Psalm 147:3.***

The Lord is mindful of your emotional condition and can heal your hurts just like He can heal your physical problems. If the Lord is that interested in your emotional health, then you should be as well. That means you should take your feelings seriously, especially if you are depressed, angry, tense or fearful. All those emotional conditions can not only affect your energy levels, they can also impact your physical health. If you had a physical problem, you would hopefully consult a physician. In the same manner, if you have an emotional problem, you should consult a counselor or pastor with whom you can share your condition and get some help. This help is really God's way of healing your broken heart and binding up your emotional wounds. Are you paying attention to your emotional state? Are you trying to "tough it out" even though your heart is hurting? What is stopping you from getting some help? Is it pride? Finances? A bias against counseling or counselors? Do you really believe that emotional health is possible and a priority?

July 31 – Studying God's Word

Today's reading: Psalm 119

***"Open my eyes that I may see
wonderful things in your law" - Psalm 119:18.***

Today's verse contains a good prayer for you to pray when you are studying God's word. You are studying God's word, aren't you? I am not talking about doing a quick reading every now and then, but actually delving into the sometimes intricate but always rewarding concepts and history contained within the text. This process requires something from you to be a rewarding experience: 1) time invested; 2) a teacher, whether in person or through commentaries and books; 3) prayer; 4) consistency; 5) a desire to know the Word; and 6) a study of related concepts like language, history, geography and other helpful subjects. How much time do you devote to the study and not just casual reading of God's word? Why so little? What lifestyle or attitude

changes can you make that will allow you to devote more time to the most important book there is?

August 1 – Only One God

Today's reading: Psalms 1-5

***“Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.
Serve the Lord with fear
and celebrate his rule with trembling” - Psalm 2:10-11.***

Modern theologians declare that there are many ways to God. As long as someone is sincere, their thinking goes, then God will understand, and they can have access to God on their own terms. Yet somehow, that doesn't even make logical sense, for if one says “This is good” and another says, “This is bad,” then both cannot be correct – it must either be good or bad, it cannot be both. If some believe “Jesus is Lord” and others believe “Jesus is not Lord,” then both cannot be correct, no matter how sincere they are. In today's passage, the Lord warned the kings of the earth, not just the kings of Israel, to serve the Lord, as He had told His people in Exodus, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2-3). Therefore, it is important to worship and reverence God for who He is and not for who you want Him to be. Are you fashioning a mental image or interpretation of God that is not consistent with who He is? Do you hold to the belief that there are many ways to God, that accuracy where the path to God is concerned is not important, but only sincere intent? What are you doing to ensure that you are serving God as He is and not as you want Him to be?

August 2 – Suffering

Today's reading: Psalms 6-10

***“My soul is in deep anguish.
How long, Lord, how long?” - Psalm 6:3.***

The psalmists all dealt with a common human experience, and that is suffering. Suffering is pain caused by broken relationships, misunderstandings, violence, persecutions and failures - all the human predicaments that lead to mental and physical turmoil and heartache. In today's verse, David inquired of the Lord as to how long his suffering was going to last. God often answered David's questions, but God seldom if ever answers this question that David and you have asked. If you knew “how long” your agony was going to last, you would do everything you could to end or avoid it, thus missing an important personal development experience. Therefore, you must trust God that it won't last a day longer than it needs to. Peter gave his readers a unique perspective on suffering in his first letter:

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God (1 Peter 4:1-2).

Have you armed yourself with the attitude of Christ, that suffering is beneficial and necessary? Do you see that your suffering sets you free from yourself so you can focus on the needs of others and do God's will? How will this change how you think of your suffering?

August 3 – Helping the Poor

Today's reading" Psalms 11-15

***“You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor,
but the Lord is their refuge” - Psalm 14:6.***

God's heart is for the poor, who are the victims in a fallen world where injustice and oppression are the norm. The Bible is full of directives on how to treat, view, and care for the poor, but today's verse indicates that *evildoers* don't understand God's care or concern. Therefore, the poor have no alternative but to rely on the Lord as their refuge. When they do, those who try to take advantage of the poor will find God the poor's help in time of trouble – and the Enemy of their enemies. What's more, today's verse indicates that the poor don't want or need just a handout, but do need to play in a role and have a say in developing plans to escape their poverty. In Proverbs, the wisdom writer warned, “One who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and one who gives gifts to the rich—both come to poverty” (22:19). Are you on the side of the poor? Do you help them through your church, in politics, in education or in business as they attempt to alleviate their own poverty? What more can you do to empathize and get in touch with their condition, and then act accordingly?

August 4 – Source of Strength

Today's reading: Psalms 16-20

***“Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” - Psalm 20:7.***

David was a warrior king, renowned for his military prowess. Yet he learned not to trust in his own strength, experience, or gifting, but rather to trust in the name of the Lord. On once occasion, the Philistines attacked and David asked the Lord what he should do. The Lord replied, “Go, for I will surely deliver the Philistines into your hands” (2 Samuel 5:19b). The Philistines would not go away even after their defeat, and David could have assumed he was to attack them again in the same way as before. Instead, he trusted the Lord and asked again. This time the Lord advised,

“Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the poplar trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees,

move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army” (2 Samuel 5:23-24).

Are you relying on your own strength or God's? Are you seeking the Lord, even though you “know” how to do that for which you are asking guidance?

August 5 – The Covenant

Today's reading: Psalm 21-25

***“The Lord confides in those who fear him;
he makes his covenant known to them” - Psalm 25:14.***

God wants to share His “secrets” with you, revealing to you who He is and what He is doing in the earth. He especially wants to reveal to you His covenant ways, showing you the riches of the benefits for you a participant in His new covenant. One aspect of the covenant is described in Deuteronomy, and it has to do with wealth and the need to be faithful to the Lord:

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today. If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed (Deuteronomy 8:17-19).

Do you understand that God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God? Do you further understand the terms of the covenant or agreement you have made with Him? Are you taking full advantage of the covenant blessings that are yours as a partaker of the covenant?

August 6 – Jesus in Your Storm

Today's reading: Psalms 26-30

***“The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord thunders over the mighty waters.
The voice of the Lord is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is majestic.
The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;
the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon” - Psalm 29:3-5.***

The Lord is all powerful over nature and, if He is powerful over nature, He can and is also over mankind. These verses cause one to reflect not only on the Flood, over which the Lord presided with complete authority, but also on the incidents on the Sea of Galilee where the Lord demonstrated again and again that He was in control of His own creation:

After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid" (Mark 4:24-27).

Is there a storm in your life, and are you afraid? Then picture Jesus walking in the midst of your tempest, calm and in complete control. Then hear Him saying to you what He said to the disciples, "Fear not!" After that, decide to put your trust in His power that is so beautifully described in today's passage.

August 7 – Guidance

Today's reading: Psalm 31-35

*"Since you are my rock and my fortress,
for the sake of your name lead and guide me" - Psalm 31:3.*

David was in trouble (again) and cried out to the Lord in one long prayer contained in Psalm 31. In the midst of his pain, he prayed that God would lead and guide him. God must make His will clear to you if He expects you to fulfill it, and He is a great communicator who has any number of ways of getting through to you. The problem is that fear or unbelief can cloud your sight and block your ability to hear. The writer of Hebrews warned against this tendency in Hebrews 3:

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion" (3:12-15).

Has there been something on your heart to do for years, but you keep putting it off? Do you have a recurring thought but dismiss it as your own voice instead of God's? Where is fear causing you to misinterpret or block out God's voice that you have prayed would come and guide you?

August 8 – A Surrendered Heart

Today's reading: Psalms 36-40

*"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—
but my ears you have opened—
burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.
Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come—
it is written about me in the scroll.*

***I desire to do your will, my God;
your law is within my heart” - Psalm 40:6-8.***

The sacrifice mentioned in today's passage is not doing something you don't want to do or giving something you don't want to give. It refers to the animal and plant offerings made as part of the worship experience of an Old Testament. You can feel spiritual when you go to church, of when you do make a “sacrifice” – something that you designate as holy that is for God's use or purpose. Yet the psalmist was clear that isn't what God desires. He wants *all* of you and not some part of who you are or what you have. He doesn't require external pious acts, but rather a heart condition of surrender that leads to willing, righteous acts. When that is present, the dynamic explained in Isaiah 50:4 is also present: “The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.” Do you delight in religious acts that are under your control - doing them when you want as you want? Or is your goal a surrendered heart that leads to daily instruction of what to do today based on what you hear from the Lord? *Lord, I like the concept of waking up every morning to hear Your voice. From this time forward, that will be my goal. I will awaken and before I read the paper, check my computer, or exercise, I will listen for Your instructions for the day ahead of me. What’s more, I will journal what I hear so I don’t lose track of it as I engage my day.*

August 9 – Resisting Joy

Today's reading: Psalms 41-45

***“You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions
by anointing you with the oil of joy” - Psalm 45:7.***

This verse was highlighted in the June 18 entry since it is quoted in Hebrews 1:9; here it is in its original context in the Psalms. God anoints you with joy to help you know what you are supposed to do for Him, and then to give you the strength to do it. Yet many of us have been taught not to trust joy because it is an emotion and is subject to sinful and selfish manifestations. Yet, why would God create you with joy to perform some deed, and then not allow you the outlet to express and savor that joy? Joy is not only your strength (see Nehemiah 8:10), it is also the means by which you can pick up your cross and follow Him, as Jesus taught through His own life:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Are you expressing your joy or are you ambivalent about its role in your life? What would you do with your life if you followed your joy?

August 10 – Keeping Track

Today's reading: Psalms 46-50

***“You hate my instruction
and cast my words behind you” - Psalm 50:17.***

The rebuke in today's verse was aimed at people who lived by and studied God's word. Yet God laid the charge against them that they hated His instruction and somehow cast His words aside, or literally “behind them.” This may portray an image of someone taking something tangible, like a book, and tossing it away with disdain. Yet all someone has to do to cast God's word aside is to leave it where it was received and walk away. Each step takes that person farther away, reducing his or her chance of obeying that word. Are you guilty of this? If you don't journal, there is a good chance you are guilty, otherwise you will forget or disregard what God has taught you, “walking away” from it in your pursuit of career, hobbies, family matters or education. Thus, the word is left behind as you walk on. Why don't you keep a journal? What are you recording in your journal? Do you expect God to teach you things? Do you accept those things in faith and seek to act on them? If you do journal, do you read through your entries to ensure you have retained and carried out God's instruction?

August 11 – A Contrite Heart

Today's reading: Psalms 51-55

***“My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise” - Psalm 51:17.***

As we saw earlier this month, God is not interested in religious acts that signify external compliance with His will. He is interested in your heart, for if He has your heart's allegiance, then the external acts will flow from within and be acceptable in His sight. This contrite, broken heart is not just to be present when you do wrong, but you should work to maintain that heart condition at all times, which is called humility, a sense of your own weakness and dependence on the Lord, and contrition. The prophet identified the benefit of a contrite heart in 2 Chronicles 16:9: “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.” Jesus addressed the church at Ephesus about their heart and behavior when He said, “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (Revelation 2:4-5). Would you describe your heart condition as broken and contrite? Do you see yourself as God sees you, or are you evaluating your heart based on your own perspective? How would you approach God today if you had a broken, contrite heart? What would you say?

August 12 – In the World, Not of It

Today's reading: Psalms 56-60

***“I am in the midst of lions;
I am forced to dwell among ravenous beasts—
men whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords” - Psalm 57:4.***

Many of the psalms express the psalmists' struggles to live a righteous life in the midst of evil people. These writers knew they could not withdraw from the world, but had to live for God in the midst of it, while trusting the Lord for protection and vindication of their faith lifestyle. Yet often God's people have taken themselves out of the world, sometimes by being in church often (if not always), and at times by cloistering themselves away so as not to have contact with this rough-and-tumble world. Jesus addressed this tension when He said,

I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth (John 17:14-17).

How are you doing as you live in this world as a pilgrim? Have you withdrawn into your own world? Have you isolated yourself, or do you trust God for protection while you serve as His agent of reconciliation and hope? Can you see that God loves this world and wants you to love it while not being of it?

August 13 – God's Creation

Today's reading: Psalms 61-65

***“You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.
You drench its furrows and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers and bless its crops.
You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance” - Psalm 65:9-11.***

God is in love with His creation, and He tends to it personally and with great care. In today's passage, the psalmist celebrates the abundance of crops that come from God's role as divine farmer. What's more, the psalms contain an ongoing focus on and fascination with God and His creation, referring regularly to mountains, rivers, streams, thunder, lightning, grass, seas and animals. Then Jesus came and continued this focus, using nature and everyday life as the foundation for His teaching. If God is so connected to His creation, then you should be as well.

This would involve taking time to appreciate and acknowledge God's role in creation as He obviously intended mankind to do:

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:8-9).

What can you do to learn more about the Lord as you study His creation? What can you do to incorporate those lessons with others, even if it's just your family? What can you do to better care for God's creation?

August 14 – Body Duty

Today's reading: Psalms 66-70

*“Lord, the Lord Almighty,
may those who hope in you
not be disgraced because of me;
God of Israel,
may those who seek you
not be put to shame because of me” - Psalm 69:6.*

The psalmist was once again in trouble, this time he had water up to his neck and it was rising! While David was praying and crying out for help, he had an interesting request. He was not simply asking that he be delivered. He asked that he be spared for the sake of his fellow believers. You are connected to other people if you put your hope in the Lord. That makes you part of a body and therefore not free to do what you want, for you are joined to them. When one part is in pain, it affects all, and the same is true if one part is doing well. You may not like being a part of a body, you may not like what the body is doing, but you cannot escape the fact that you are part, and when one part is disgraced, it has implications for all. Paul developed the metaphor of the believers being part of a body and explained,

But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it (1 Corinthians 12:24b-26).

Are you cognizant of your place in the body of Christ? Do you see your responsibility to contribute to body health and well-being? How are you fulfilling that duty?

August 15 – One Something

Today's reading: Psalms 71-75

***“We are given no signs from God;
no prophets are left,
and none of us knows how long this will be” - Psalm 74:9.***

One time I was in a tough place financially, and the phone rang for someone to schedule me to consult for them three months later. I was discouraged before the phone rang and was greatly encouraged after the call. Then I thought, “Hey, there won't be any money from that call for three months. Why do I feel so much better?” Then I reasoned, “If I could feel so much better after the call, how can I feel that way before the call?” When you are in a difficult season, the toughest part can be not knowing how long the season will last. Therefore, it is important to encourage yourself today by thinking, “I am just a phone call, unexpected event, chance meeting, sales call, test score, or doctor's visit away from my breakthrough” and then to live and behave like that breakthrough has *already* taken place. David did this before he went into a battle to recover his loved ones: “But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God” (1 Samuel 30:6b KJV). Do you need to encourage yourself today rather than wait for others to do it? Can you encourage yourself with the thought that you are only “one something” away from victory, while not knowing when that one something will occur? *Lord, it's difficult to live in faith at the moment when nothing seems to be happening. Yet You are the God of the turnaround, and You can change my situation overnight with just one act of Your mighty hand. Therefore, I have decided to enjoy today in anticipation of what You will do.*

August 16 – Attitude Toward Leaders

Today's reading: Psalms 76-80

***“You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron” - Psalm 77:20.***

God was the One leading in the wilderness, but He did so through His appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron. God is still a leadership God, working through those whom He gives insight and courage to be out in front of the people. At the same time, Moses and Aaron were not perfect men, and the people often suffered because of them. You must have realistic expectations where leaders are concerned; they cannot be God for you – making your decisions and exerting authority God never intended them to have. Yet God expects you to submit to authority because He has established the authority. Peter wrote these words to servants, and you would do well to extract a lesson from what he was teaching:

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God (1 Peter 2:19-20).

What is your attitude toward your leaders? Do you respect authority, not because it is perfect, but because it is the will of God? Do you expect too much from authority while you submit, requiring their perfection or even their ability to hear God on your behalf?

August 17 – God Speaks

Today's reading: Psalms 81-85

*“I removed the burden from their shoulders;
their hands were set free from the basket.
In your distress you called and I rescued you,
I answered you out of a thundercloud;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah” - Psalm 81:6-7.*

Notice the psalmist was writing in these verses, but he was not speaking. It was the Lord speaking His words through the writer – in the first person. This is another indication that God speaks to His people through His written Word, and you would do well to treat those words not as just another book, but as the special instruments they are. This high view of Scripture was endorsed and taught by Peter himself, who wrote:

We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21).

Are you approaching the Scriptures like God is speaking to you? If you do, how often do you give Him a chance to talk to you through your reading? Do you rush through, or do you linger and savor God's words to you? When you “hear” something, do you act on it? *God, I trust You and Your guidance from the Word. Therefore, I put my faith in Your ability to speak to me in any and all situations. For me to know Your will, however, requires that I read Your word on a regular basis. Forgive me that I have not made Your word the centerpiece of my spiritual growth, and I vow to read and study more in the days ahead.*

August 18 – Procrastination

Today's reading: Psalms 86-90

*“A thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night” - Psalm 90:4.*

This verse should cause you to think of its equivalent in the New Testament: “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2 Peter 3:8). If you do the math, if a day is like 1,000 years, then an hour is like 46 years, and a minute is like nine months with the Lord. Therefore, if the Lord promises to be there in just a minute, you know His concept of time may not be like yours! Yet, the opposite is also true: nine months in the Lord can go by as quickly as a minute. The thing you have been putting off, dare I say procrastinating over because you thought it was going to take too long, can

happen much more quickly than you thought, if you learn how to have faith for time. What is real cause of your procrastination? Is it really lack of time, or are you using that as a cover-up excuse? What project have you been putting off because you assumed you did not have the time? What more could you do, not if you got more organized, but if you began to put off fear that you have so little time and believed you had all the time in the world?

August 19 – Living in Fear

Today's reading: Psalms 91-95

***“A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you” - Psalm 91:7.***

Today's verse is great to recite, but difficult to apply. It's easy to say that no harm will befall you until there is harm all around you. Then you have a chance to live in the promise of this verse or panic. This verse is not a license for recklessness, but it has enabled many believers to combat fear and put themselves in harm's way to serve and help others in need. This promise pertains to cancer, heart disease, poverty, germs, plagues, and other maladies and curses of life, which the Lord Jesus died to abolish. An accompanying promise to today's is found in Isaiah 53:5: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Do you live in fear of calamity? Do you worry about what *may* happen and then structure your life to avoid those remote possibilities? What don't you do because of fear - not travel, avoid crowds, obsess over what you eat? What do you do because of fear - gulp massive quantities of vitamins, store food and weapons, or read fear mongering, end-time novels?

August 20 – Hearing God's Voice

Today's reading: Psalms 96-100

***“Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel was among those who called on his name;
they called on the Lord and he answered them.
He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud;
they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them” - Psalm 99:6-7.***

Moses, Aaron, and Samuel called on the Lord and He answered them. God is always answering, but we are not always listening. When we hear, sometimes we mistake His voice for something or someone else. Take for example the story in John 12 when Jesus said, “Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:29b). In response to Jesus' prayer, this is what happened: “Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.’ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, ‘This voice was for your benefit, not mine’” (John 12:30). The people who heard the voice did not recognize it because they were not really expecting to hear His voice. Therefore, if you say, “If only God would speak to me” about this or that, there is no guarantee you will hear God's answer unless

you really want to hear it! Where are you having trouble hearing God's voice because of your inner turmoil or doubt? Do you really expect to hear? Are you tuning all your attention to hear, or are you holding back?

August 21 – God is Ordering Your Steps

Today's reading: Psalms 101-105

***“He called down famine on the land
and destroyed all their supplies of food;
and he sent a man before them—
Joseph, sold as a slave” - Psalm 105:16-17.***

When it is said that God rules in the affairs of men, the story of Joseph is a classic example of that truth. In these verses, the psalmist gives his view of that historical event and God's role in it. God created and used a famine to get people moving where He wanted them to be – specifically Joseph to Egypt, followed later by his family. God then sent Joseph, his father's favorite, to Egypt. Joseph was not sent as an emissary, however, but as a slave, betrayed and sold by his brothers. Why would God do something that seems so difficult and harsh? Perhaps because there is no way Joseph or his family ever would have gone to Egypt without the “help” of some circumstances that guided their every step, even though they were not conscious of God's guiding hand. Later, Joseph was able to summarize his life experience by saying to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20). Can you trust God that He is ordering your steps to get you where He wants you to be, regardless of whether or not He has explained or you understand right now? Can you trust that God is using the circumstances in your life to prepare you for His purpose?

August 22 – Grumbling

Today's reading: Psalms 106-110

***“Then they despised the pleasant land;
they did not believe his promise.
They grumbled in their tents
and did not obey the Lord” - Psalm 106:24-25.***

The Israelites were a nasty, unruly lot as they left Egypt and made their way to the Promised Land. Even though God had showed Himself strong on their behalf and parted the Red Sea, they were obstinate and gave Moses a hard time, which angered the Lord. One of the behaviors that characterized them during their Wilderness experience was grumbling, which is a form of complaining about their lives, conditions, and provisions. They did this grumbling in their family tents, thus contaminating one another, creating a downward negative spiral that led them to disobedience and rebellion. Paul addressed the practice of grumbling in one of his epistles: “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children

of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky” (Philippians 2:14-15). Have you fallen into the habit of grumbling? Do you complain about your life situation or the particulars therein? Do you gripe at home with loved ones, thus poisoning their perspective and teaching them to do likewise? Do you see the benefit of being positive and not dwelling on or rehearsing the negative?

August 23 – Don’t Grow Weary

Today's reading: Psalms 111-115

*“The Lord remembers us and will bless us:
He will bless his people Israel,
he will bless the house of Aaron,
he will bless those who fear the Lord—
small and great alike” - Psalm 115:12-13.*

The Lord never forgets what you did for Him or for His people. It may seem like He has forgotten, but He has a sharp pencil and a big book, He writes everything down, and in time repays and rewards. Paul wrote it best when he advised the Galatians:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:7-10).

Have you grown tired of sowing? Does it seem like God has forgotten your good deeds? Where do you need to renew your hope in giving or serving, reminding yourself that God is watching and will not forget your cause or your faithfulness?

August 24 – Simple Things

Today's reading: Psalms 116-120

*“Praise the Lord, all you nations;
extol him, all you peoples.
For great is his love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.
Praise the Lord” - Psalm 117:1-2.*

Today's two verses are the only verses in the entire psalm, making it the shortest psalm of all 150. It is not particularly profound, nor does it reveal some truth that cannot be found someplace else. Yet, it has a place in the inspired words of God, indicating God's approval and priority. How often have you not said or done something because it seemed so obvious or simple? You kept your words or idea to yourself because you did not want to come off as simple, shallow, or

even stupid. Today's psalm gives you a model to follow that no matter how something seems to you, it may have value to other people and to God! What's more, these verses summarize a simple yet appropriate behavior that is acceptable in every and any season – and that is the praise of the Lord your God because of His great love. Have you been too quiet because you have been judging either your unspoken words or undone acts of kindness or service? How can you become less critical of your own righteous impulses, no matter how simple they may be? Can you praise the Lord today for who He is and His great love, even if you are in a difficult place?

August 25 – God over Nature

Today's reading: Psalms 121-125

***“Our help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth” - Psalm 124:8.***

The psalmists repeatedly referred back to God's natural acts of creation to describe and frame God's majesty and power. Thus, they regularly mention the Flood, the Genesis story, and the parting of the Red Sea as Israel left Egypt as examples of God's ability to help His people, regardless of how daunting the circumstances seemed to be. Perhaps that is why Jesus on several occasions had encounters with nature that proved His divinity and His authority over the forces of nature that were overwhelming to the disciples, but were well within Jesus' power to control, as told in John 6:16-21:

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But he said to them, “It is I; don't be afraid.” Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

Are you afraid of the forces aligned against you? Do you need a reminder of God's power over your situation that seems to you to be out of control? Do you need to call on the God of the storm to get into your boat today?

August 26 – Restoration

Today's reading: Psalms 126-130

***“When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dreamed.
Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy.
Then it was said among the nations,
‘The Lord has done great things for them’” - Psalm 126:1-2.***

A few of the psalms were written in the sixth century B.C., and all of them were edited and took the shape we know today when Israel was in exile in Babylon. They were pining away in a foreign land for their beloved Jerusalem and all that it represented. Then the Lord began to bring them back and it was almost too good to be true, but it was true. You may have lost something, either through your own misdeeds or an act of God that defies explanation. Today's passage reminds you that when the Lord restores what you lost, it will be a joyous and happy occasion. God is truly a God of restoration, as was also pointed out again in Joel 2:25-26:

“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm—my great army that I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.”

Do you need to be reminded today that your God is a God of restoration? Can you maintain hope that what you have lost can and will be restored? Can you thank God today for your restoration before you see it?

August 27 – Dangers of Idolatry

Today's reading: Psalms 131-135

*“The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
made by human hands.
They have mouths, but cannot speak,
eyes, but cannot see.
They have ears, but cannot hear,
nor is there breath in their mouths.
Those who make them will be like them,
and so will all who trust in them” - Psalm 135:15-18.*

One of the many problems with idolatry is that it dehumanizes the worshiper. According to today's passage, those who worship idols become like those idols. They cannot speak, see, or hear spiritual things apart from those that idolatry imparts to them. Idols can be either external or internal, physical or mental, animate or inanimate. Paul wrote to the Corinthians and advised them how to deal with idolatry:

What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” Therefore, “Come out from them and be separate,” says the Lord. “Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you” (2 Corinthians 6:15-17).

Check your heart to see if anything or anyone has taken a place in your life that is hindering your walk with the Lord and your ability to comprehend your real spirituality in Christ.

August 28 – Crazyiness

Today's reading - Psalms 136-140

***“How can we sing the songs of the Lord
while in a foreign land?” - Psalm 137:4.***

A few of the psalms were composed while the author was in exile in Babylon during the sixth century B.C. In today's verse, the author was asking how he could be creative when the situation in his life and nation were so painfully chaotic. Yet, he was being creative as he wrote Psalm 137, even though the conditions were not ideal. Sometimes you can use the crazyiness in or around your life as a legitimate excuse not to produce or create; at other times, you can actually create the crazyiness as a cover for the fear that you will not be able to create. Rather than face failure, you will create a situation that prevents you from even starting. There was a man who told Jesus that he wanted to follow Him, but first had to go home and wait for his father to die (which could have taken decades). Here is Jesus' response: “Another disciple said to him, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father. But Jesus told him, 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead'” (Matthew 8:21-22). Jesus was saying to stop looking for excuses and follow through. Where are conditions preventing you from being productive or creative? Did you create that situation as an escape from responsibility? Can you still be creative even if you are in a tough spot if you stop making excuses? I have been the master excuse-maker, *Lord, and I see today it is because I am afraid of failure, of success, of what others will say, of what others won't say, and of all kinds of other reasons that have prevented me from following through on my creative ideas that You placed in me. I need your help to identify my fears and, as You do, I trust that seeing the truth of what is holding me back will set me free!*

August 29 – The Kingdom of God

Today's reading: Psalms 141-145

***“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures through all generations” - Psalm 145:13.***

Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God. Another phrase for the Kingdom is God's government, which means Jesus taught that people everywhere must come under God's rule or authority. Every kingdom has a king and a set of rules by which the people are governed. Therefore, God's will for you is not to make you a member of a church but a subject of His kingdom under the rule of King Jesus! When you are under that rule, you will extend God's kingdom wherever He chooses to send you – school, work, church, neighborhood – by obeying His laws and inviting others to come into the Kingdom through faith in Christ: “He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:2). Are you spreading the good news of the Kingdom, or preaching religion and membership in a church or denomination? Do you see that when people come into the Kingdom, they will become part of a church because it is the will of the King? If they become members of a church and don't see themselves as subjects of the Kingdom, then they will settle for a religious experience, and will seek to do the will of man instead of the will of God.

August 30 – Humility

Today's reading: Psalms 146-150

***“The Lord sustains the humble
but casts the wicked to the ground” - Psalm 147:6.***

God loves and cares for the humble, the people who are not proud and who recognize their need for the Lord. The humble do not take matters into their own hands, but rather trust Him to provide for, protect, and defend them. Humility is an attitude, and Mary, Jesus' mother, spoke of its importance. Later, Jesus addressed the implications of those who have or do not have this attitude. First, look at what Mary said: “He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble” (Luke 1:52). Then here is what Jesus had to say: “For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 14:11). The important thing to remember is that you maintain this attitude and determine whether you fit into the proud or humble category. Do you need to adjust your attitude today? Do you need to humble yourself before the Lord, or someone else? Is there an area of your life where arrogance and rudeness prevail? If the answer is "yes," then you need to correct that or else the Lord will.

August 31 – The Word of God

Today's reading: Psalm 119

***“I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you” - Psalm 119:11.***

The Bible is not to be studied as any other book, for it is a living book that will guide your life and inform your decisions. In Jesus' day, there were men called the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, angels, demons, or an afterlife. Yet they revered the books of Moses and were the ruling class of Israel's priesthood. They had probably memorized much of the Old Testament, and had firm theological beliefs and were convinced they were “right.” Therefore, when they came to test Jesus with questions about the resurrection and afterlife, they were confident they could confuse Him and prove the rightness of their interpretations. Jesus started His response to them by saying, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?” (Mark 12:24). Jesus told the Bible experts they did not know the Bible! Why do you study God's word? To gain knowledge or to learn how to live? Do you argue Scripture with others, trying to prove the rightness of your position instead of using it to gain the rightness of heart that God requires? As today's verse advises, do you store verses and concepts in your heart that you may live a righteous life?

September 1 – Silence

Today's reading: Psalms 1-5

***“Tremble and do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent” - Psalm 4:4.***

Today's' verse does not contain the words of David, but rather the words of God. David prayed and God answered with His response, advising not only David but also His people to be silent and search their hearts. Yet in this busy world, it is difficult to take some time to think, reflect, and allow God to speak to you. In fact, you can become addicted to the activity, frantically racing from event to event because you are afraid of what the silence will bring. Will you hear from the Lord? Will you be missing out on something else more important? Will the silence reveal some major deficiency in your life or walk? Jesus understood the importance of silence as Luke reported: “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16). When is the last time you took some time off to be alone and think or pray? Why don't you do more of that? Are you afraid? What are you afraid of? *Lord, I am too busy. My busy-ness keeps me from engaging You on a personal basis. I have substituted church attendance and listening to others talk about You for actually listening to You for myself and that's wrong. Forgive me!*

September 2 – Under Attack

Today's reading: Psalms 6-10

***“My shield is God Most High,
who saves the upright in heart” - Psalm 7:10.***

You don't need a shield unless something is being thrown or launched at you, and you need something to deflect the missile. David was declaring that God was his shield because David was under attack and only God could protect and save him. You are under the same kind of attack, and it's because of your stand for and in the Lord. (If you are not under attack, save this for future reference, because you will be.) Paul went on to describe what you are to do to protect yourself from these attacks:

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:11-12).

Have you accepted the reality that you are in a war not of your own making, but of your own choosing? Do you realize that you have accepted Christ and therefore His enemies are your enemies? Do you comprehend that some of your problems cannot be framed or solved unless you approach them as spiritual and part of the warfare against God's saints?

September 3 – God's Slowness

Today's reading: Psalm 11-15

***“The Lord is in his holy temple;
the Lord is on his heavenly throne.
He observes everyone on earth;
his eyes examine them.
The Lord examines the righteous,
but the wicked, those who love violence,
he hates with a passion” - Psalm 11:4-5.***

Because God is silent at times, it is easy to think that He doesn't care or isn't paying attention – but He does and He is. David wrote in today's passage that He is watching and examining everyone, and has a particular disdain for those who love violence. In fact, David wrote that God “hates” the wicked and violent. That sounds harsh to us because hatred as a human emotion is connected to sin and is to be avoided. Yet God is incapable of sin, so David is indicating that God has no tolerance for those who oppress others, even if it seems like He is being tolerant. Peter described the reason that God is slow to act: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Have you interpreted God's slowness to act to mean He either accepts your behavior or doesn't care? Do you see that God leaves room so that you can repent, for when He judges your behavior, you cannot say He did not allow plenty of time for repentance? Of what attitude or behavior do you need to repent before its too late?

September 4 – Happy with Life

Today's reading: Psalms 16-20

***“Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance” - Psalm 16:5-6.***

David was saying that in the midst of all his success, possessions, positions, and authority, God was His greatest and the most important presence in his life. It was God's presence that led to the success, possessions, position, and work that David was enjoyed, and David was overflowing with gratitude and praise. David's son later wrote about having joy in your life's work and lot when he wrote:

This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20).

Are you happy with your lot in life? Are you thankful for the work you have to do, the relationships you have, and the relationship with God the Father through Christ? Do you survey

the boundary lines of your inheritance that comes from the Lord and delight in your lot? Are you pleased with the body of work you have produced?

September 5 – Faith Victories

Today's reading: Psalms 21-25

*“The king rejoices in your strength, Lord.
How great is his joy in the victories you give!” - Psalm 21:1.*

God gave David strength and it gave David great joy. Yet this strength was for a purpose, and that was to win battles and achieve great things that gave God glory. David then shared in that glory, and it led David to praise and worship. God is not empowering you to make you feel good or to help you out from time to time. God desires that you have victory in every area of life: finances, relationships, purpose, goals, victory over sin, and spreading the gospel. Ultimately, Jesus died to give you victory over the last enemy and that enemy is death. John wrote about victory in his first epistle, when he said:

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:3-5).

Are you living an overcoming life? Are you experiencing victory in important areas of work and ministry? Is your faith making a difference in your day-to-day existence? Can you list the faith victories you have recently experienced?

September 6 – Dark Nights

Today's reading: Psalms 26-30

*“For his anger lasts only a moment,
but his favor lasts a lifetime;
weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning” - Psalm 30:5.*

There are seasons of life when things don't go well. People betray you, businesses fail, sickness attacks, families struggle, or ministries go through hard times. When any of that happens, it can seem like the pain will never end, but the good news is that it does. What's more, those dark nights are often followed by seasons of joy, restoration, and happiness. The challenge is that you don't know how long the dark night will last before the morning of rejoicing comes. You can only encourage yourself with the faith knowledge that the good times will return. Job experienced this turnaround as we read in Job 42:10-12:

After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him

before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought on him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

Are you in a dark night? Can you thank God for the joyful morning long before it comes? Can you remain steady in your faith walk, even when it's so dark that you cannot see your hand in front of your face?

September 7 – A Spacious Place

Today's reading: Psalms 31-35

*“I will be glad and rejoice in your love,
for you saw my affliction
and knew the anguish of my soul.
You have not given me into the hands of the enemy
but have set my feet in a spacious place” - Psalm 31:7-8.*

David was in trouble again, but he took comfort in the fact that God saw and knew about it. David was surrounded by his enemies, but God put him in a spacious place. In other words, David had options that would allow him to escape or defeat his enemies, because the Lord was with him. God knows what you are going through and sees your affliction. Therefore, you can rejoice in the fact that He has your back. When Gehazi, Elisha's servant, saw that they were surrounded, he panicked, but read what happened next:

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?” the servant asked. “Don't be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:15-17).

Do you feel like you are surrounded and overwhelmed? Are you in anguish over your circumstances? Then pray Elisha's prayer that God may open your eyes to see the spacious place in which He has placed you!

September 8- Mind Your Business

Today's reading: Psalm 36-40

*“Be still before the Lord
and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes” - Psalm 37:7.*

Today's verse contains three commands for you to follow. The first is to “be still before the Lord.” Just the other day, you hopefully read an entry in this book named *Silence*, which urged you to spend some quiet time away from the noise of cell phones and computers. The next command is to “wait patiently” for Him. This does not mean you live a passive life, but rather that you recognize things that only God can do, and trust Him to do those while you do what it is that only you can do. Then the final command is “not to fret.” You can waste much emotional energy when you worry, fuss or get agitated over things that are not your business in the first place. Peter tried to meddle in and fret over another person's destiny and this is how Jesus responded: “When Peter saw him [John], he asked, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me’” (John 21:21-22). Are you fretting over the affairs of someone else? Are you allowing that to keep you from being still and staying focused on your business and walk with the Lord? Why do you think you are so driven to get upset over things that are not really yours to fret over?

September 9 – Help the Weak

Today's reading: Psalms 41-45

*“Blessed are those who have regard for the weak;
the Lord delivers them in times of trouble.
The Lord protects and preserves them—
they are counted among the blessed in the land—
he does not give them over to the desire of their foes.
The Lord sustains them on their sickbed
and restores them from their bed of illness” - Psalm 41:1-3.*

David outlined a series of blessings not for those who fast and pray, or who do great exploits for God, or who preach great sermons. David saw how God blessed those who helped the weak among them, who were mindful of other people's situations to be empathetic and helpful. Paying attention to others, even when your needs are greater than theirs, is the heart of Christian behavior, because Jesus commanded His people to “love one another.” Paul went on to describe this love more completely when he wrote:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a).

Are you consumed with your own needs or those of others? What practical things have you done lately to help those who are weak, especially those not part of your family? What steps can you take to be even more aware and sensitive to the needs of the needy? *Father, I want to do all I can for the poor and weak, things that will please You as I am pleasing others. Open my eyes to see the needs all around me, and then help me overcome my hesitancy and fear that keeps me from saying or doing what is in my power to do to assist them.*

September 10 – Fulfill Your Vows

Today's reading: Psalms 46-50

*“Sacrifice thank offerings to God,
fulfill your vows to the Most High,
and call on me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you will honor me” - Psalm 50:14-15.*

It is important that you treat God as you would any business partner. When you make a promise, you should keep it, and not break your word to Him just because you can't see Him or because He is gracious. If you vowed to be more generous, keep your word. If you vowed to pray more, then pray. If you vowed to be a better spouse, parent, student, child, or worker, then work to fulfill what you promised to do or become. If you do that, then the promise in today's passage is that God will answer you when you are in trouble. If you ignore your vows, then He will ignore you. Jesus encountered people who made promises, and then were unable to follow through:

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father” (Luke 9:57-59).

Have you made a vow to God? Are you fulfilling it? If not, what are you going to do about it?

September 11 – Constant Battles

Today's reading: Psalms 51-55

*“He rescues me unharmed
from the battle waged against me,
even though many oppose me” - Psalm 55:18.*

Both Psalms and Revelation inform the believer that warfare is the constant companion of those who put their faith in God. In Psalms, the battle is physical, for David was always under attack from his enemies, which were sometimes from his own family! In Revelation, the battle is spiritual, and the forces that align themselves against God attack God's people with ruthless regularity. The message in both books is clear: God is your source of strength, deliverance, and victory, and is your only help or hope of salvation in the midst of your powerful enemies. How will you be victorious in this battle? John wrote this:

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore, rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short (Revelation 12:10-12).

Are you surprised at the level of warfare you are in? Are you fighting the good fight to overcome with the weapons of your testimony and your faith in Christ? *I confess, Lord, that I am surprised at the level of warfare that is involved in gaining any spiritual victories. I know my victory is secure in Christ, but I must be more aggressive to achieve the overcoming life that You want me to have. Teach me to engage the spiritual battle without being overwhelmed or going overboard on the practice. In other words, Lord, help me to know what only I can do and leave the rest for You.*

September 12 – Your Source of Help

Today's reading: Psalms 56-60

***"Give us aid against the enemy,
for human help is worthless" - Psalm 60:11.***

Ultimately, even if human help is involved in your deliverance, it is God who instigated or empowered the human help to be effective. You should be grateful to those who assist you, but your best and most profuse thanks should be to God. This is especially true of the company who pays you, for while God is using them, God is the one who is providing. Your company doesn't pay your bills, God pays your bills. What's more, He uses your company but He doesn't need your company. In Elijah's case, God used nature to provide for the man of God:

"You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there." So he did what the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook (1 Kings 17:4-6).

Do you understand that God is your source and your career counselor? Do you know that He can provide for you through your job or outside your job? Do you express thanks to God for your provision, even if your company name is on the check?

September 13 – Breaking Down Barriers

Today's reading: Psalms 61-65

***"Surely the lowborn are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie.
If weighed on a balance, they are nothing;
together they are only a breath" - Psalm 62:9.***

Almost all cultures tend to place those who have much above those who have not. The rich receive privileges, special laws and honor, while the poor receive whatever benefits their governments decide to give them. Yet wealth is a meaningless differentiation among human beings, for the wealth seems to be distributed not according to the value of someone's work or humanity, but is based on arbitrary decisions of what cultures deem important and unimportant. If you do a search in Proverbs of the words *rich* and *poor*, eleven verses will come up, one of

which is “Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all” (Proverbs 22:2). Have you created artificial boundaries between yourself and those on the opposite end of your economic spectrum? Do you idolize the rich or despise the poor? If poor, do you have any rich friends? If rich, do you fellowship and have relationships with the poor? Paul wrote that “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). The gospel came not just to break down racial, gender, and national barriers, it also came to demolish class and economic barriers, so get busy crossing from where you are to minister to those who are not like you, regardless of whether live in a mansion or a shack.

September 14 – Your Story

Today's reading: Psalms 66-70

*“He turned the sea into dry land,
they passed through the waters on foot—
come, let us rejoice in him” - Psalm 66:6.*

The psalmists were constantly rehearsing and restating their history, both as individuals and as members of the people of God. They did this to help themselves in their current crisis, reminding themselves that God had been faithful in the past and He would be again. They needed that reassurance because they were in the midst of difficult circumstances. You also need to learn to rely on your story of God's faithful track record with you in times of trouble. It may not even hurt to write down your story, including all the blessings and all the recoveries you have made in the Lord – the latter being difficult times you survived by God's grace. You can also include in this list the benefits God has bestowed on His people, things like forgiveness of sins, salvation, healing, health, His presence, fellowship with other saints, and the like. Do you need to review your story? Do you rejoice in what God has done for you, even if today is not a season with a reason to rejoice for you? Can you rehearse your past story in such a way that it encourages you today?

September 15 – His Story

Today's reading: Psalms 71-75

*“The day is yours, and yours also the night;
you established the sun and moon.
It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth;
you made both summer and winter” - Psalm 74:16-17.*

Yesterday you saw how important it is to recite your story of how God has worked on your behalf. You do that to remind yourself of His power and love when you most need it. Today, you see the psalmist going beyond his story to draw on God's story of creation as a source of teaching and inspiration. God's power is displayed in more ways than His love and acts on your behalf. God did His own thing in creation to establish His glory and give testimony to His faithful acts of creation. Today's passage describes the order that God set in His creation, and the psalmist

went on to warn his foes that this same God is working on the psalmist's behalf. Paul spoke to this issue as well when he wrote to the Romans:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).

Can you add God's creative genius to your list of things that encourage you in times of trouble? Do you acknowledge and appreciate God's creative prowess when you behold nature and its orderly structure? Do you take hope that the same God who created heaven and earth is on your side?

September 16 – Leaders and Followers

Today's reading: Psalms 76-80

*“He chose David his servant
and took him from the sheep pens;
from tending the sheep he brought him
to be the shepherd of his people Jacob,
of Israel his inheritance” - Psalm 77:70-71.*

In today's verse, the psalmist indicated that God was leading His people through His designated leader David. God works through leaders, and since all leaders are imperfect people, you can say that a perfect God uses imperfect people to get His work done. While leaders are flawed, God does hold them to a higher standard of ethics, behavior, and attitude, and also expects His people to recognize His choice of leaders. He further expects the followers to maintain their end of the bargain by maintaining a respectful and submissive attitude toward their leaders. The writer of Hebrews explained the responsibilities of followers in this way: “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you” (Hebrews 13:17). What is your attitude toward the leaders in your life? Is it a joyful experience for them to lead you? If you are a leader, are you leading as God would want you to lead? How can you improve?

September 17 – Times of Testing

Today's reading: Psalms 81-85

*“In your distress you called and I rescued you,
I answered you out of a thundercloud;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah” - Psalm 81:7.*

What is your concept of a test? If you are like most people, you think of a piece of paper being placed in front of you as an examination to determine how much you knew or retained of a school subject. Yet when the Bible mentions a test, it is talking about something totally different. The test that God brings is similar to what they did to metals in ancient times. They would submit the metal to intense heat to see if there were any impurities or what they called dross in the metal. If the heat revealed no dross, then it was considered high quality. Your tests don't come so that God can trick you or found out how much you know (He already knows that). God sends a test to show you how far you have come and how effective His work in you has been, as He explained in Deuteronomy 8:2-3:

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Are you going through a time of testing? Can you see the positive aspect of that process? Do you realize God may be "showing off" His work in you to the people around you as well as to spiritual powers you cannot see?

September 18 – Behind the Scenes

Today's reading: Psalms 86-90

***"Guard my life, for I am faithful to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord,
for I call to you all day long" - Psalm 86:2.***

Sometimes you may think that God did not answer your prayer, but then you must consider the possibility that things would have been much worse or different than they are if you had *not* prayed. There are times when it may appear that God is not acting on your behalf, but you can never say that with absolute certainty. You never know what God has done and is doing that you cannot see or realize. What accidents did He prevent from occurring? What evil assignments against you did He overrule or thwart? What curses did He cancel? What consequences of your sin did He mercifully absolve? In Peter's case, we learn that Satan wanted to destroy him, but Jesus prayed that God would limit Satan's work and use it for God's glory when it was all over: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). Can you thank God in faith for what He is doing behind the scenes that you cannot see or hear? *I am sure, Lord, that You are working behind the scenes to protect and help me. I thank You for all You have done of which I am not aware. I pray for myself now that You would continue to protect from my enemies, and also protect me from myself, from the hidden sins and negative attitudes that undermine Your work in my life. Don't stop helping me, Lord!*

September 19 – Your Fruit

Today's reading: Psalm 91-95

***“They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green,
proclaiming, ‘The Lord is upright;
he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him’” - Psalm 92:15-16.***

Age is not necessarily a factor in your ability to serve the Lord. In today's passage, the psalmist declared that those who love and follow God will *still* bear fruit in old age. This indicates they were bearing fruit while they were younger, so they will *still* bear fruit in their latter years. What is your fruit? How do you define it? What does it look like? Jesus empowered you to bear fruit and expects you to bear it as indicated by this promise:

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it (John 14:12-14).

What works are you doing because Jesus went to the Father? What answers do you see when you pray? Does that promise from Jesus only pertain to acts He did like raising the dead and healing the lame, or does it also pertain to you writing books, learning languages, starting ministries, and helping the poor on a regular basis? Are you using your age – “I'm too old, I'm too young” - as an excuse to not bear fruit?

September 20 – A New Song

Today's reading: Psalms 96-100

***“Sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvelous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.
The Lord has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations” - Psalm 98:1-2.***

The psalmists listed many appropriate responses to God's mercy and salvation, and in today's passage the act of singing was not just mentioned but commanded. Everyone is commanded to sing a new song to the Lord, and that can take place either in a corporate church setting or as a private act of worship. Yet one should not take priority over the other, so you must find a balance of personal worship as well as adding your voice to others in a public worship setting. I have watched people over the years come to church, stare at the hymnal or screen, and not open their lips to sing! Paul taught the Ephesians about this very thing:

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:18-20).

Do you sing and take an active part in public worship? Do you give an exuberant response to your sports team and then withhold the same from God? How often do you sing a new song of praise to God?

September 21 – The Light

Today's reading: Psalms 101-105

*“The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment;
he stretches out the heavens like a tent
and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.
He makes the clouds his chariot
and rides on the wings of the wind.
He makes winds his messengers,
flames of fire his servants” - Psalm 104:2-4.*

First, notice how beautifully these verses are written. They create a vivid picture of a powerful God who uses nature, which of course is His creation, as part of His transportation system. For humans, nature can be an awesome experience, but for God, it is His playground. Second, the psalmist mentions light, and light is a favorite word or theme in John's gospel, starting in the first chapter: “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4-5). Yet, it wasn't just that John wrote about the light to describe Jesus, but Jesus also said it about Himself: “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (John 8:12). Therefore, light for guidance and understanding should never be a problem for you if you follow the Lord and keep your ways in the light. Are you walking in the light? Do you expect to find God's will easily, or do you think God is playing hide-and-seek with you, playing hard-to-get?

September 22 – Acting Out Envy

Today's reading: Psalms 106-110

*“In the camp they grew envious of Moses
and of Aaron, who was consecrated to the Lord” - Psalm 106:16.*

Envy is a sneaky disease, for you can look at someone's success, goods, relationships, reputation, money, job, ministry or looks, and secretly want what they have. In fact, you can get downright angry and agitated that you don't have what they have. That can lead to 1) bitterness; 2) an effort to get things similar to what they have; 3) an effort to actually take what they have; 4) a campaign to minimize what they have through sarcasm or character assassination; or 5) all of the

above. In other words, envy is a dangerous attitude that must be dealt with ruthless abandon. The story of Cain and Abel is rooted in envy and we read the tragic results in Genesis 4:

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him (4:2b-8).

Are you envious of someone else? What is that doing to your thoughts and actions? How do you feel toward the person whom you envy? What are you going to do if you are envious?

September 23 – Leader’s Blessing

Today's reading: Psalms 111-115

*“The Lord remembers us and will bless us:
He will bless his people Israel,
he will bless the house of Aaron,
he will bless those who fear the Lord—
small and great alike” - Psalm 115:12-13.*

You get the idea from these verses that the Lord is in the blessing business, for the psalmist indicated that God’s heart was to bless all of Israel. It is interesting that He singles out the house of Aaron, which is seldom mentioned as a house, since they were the priests of the priests – the nephews of Moses who were the high priests in Israel. It’s almost like God is saying in singling them out, “I see your service and there is a blessing for you as you serve me and the people.” Paul indicated that anyone who desires to lead God's' people desires a good thing: “Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task” (1 Timothy 3:1). Can we deduce from this that there is a special or unique blessing for those who choose to willingly and eagerly serve as leaders?

September 24 – The Cost of Fear

Today's reading: Psalms 116-120

*“The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?” - Psalm 118:5.*

This verse is a bold acclamation of fearlessness that is a worthy goal in life but one that can be difficult to obtain. Why is that? It is because we are Adam and Eve's children, and we were born in fear. It clings to us like lint on a dark wool blanket. What's more, we are so grooved with fear,

and so accustomed to its presence, that we are unable to confront it. There is helpful fear, for you should be afraid of stealing from your company or of putting your hand down a snake hole. Yet, the fear of what others think, of criticism, of losing their approval, of rejection, and of not being part of the group can keep you from saying or doing what God wants. Even the parents of the man born blind whom Jesus healed succumbed to this fear and could not rejoice in their son's healing:

“We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him” (John 9:20-23).

Of whom are you afraid? What is that fear costing you and keeping you from doing? What are you prepared to do about it?

September 25 – Ongoing Salvation

Today's reading: Psalms 121-125

*“We have escaped like a bird
from the fowler’s snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we have escaped” - Psalm 124:7-8.*

I am sure God has saved you, your family, or your organization from something. Perhaps it was financial debt or lack, or a dysfunctional relationship, or a cruel supervisor, or some other dilemma that was inescapable, except by and through God's power and help. The psalmist in these verses likened his escape to a bird that is caught in a trap but somehow managed to escape its doom. That is why you can truly declare that you are saved – saved from eternal separation from God as well as the woe of life. Therefore, salvation is not a one-time experience; it is a way of life. Therefore, when you thank God for your salvation, you should be mindful that your Savior is saving you every day, over and over again. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about being saved: “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Do you see the scope of your salvation? Do you understand that this is an ongoing salvation, for you were saved and are being saved on a daily basis? Are you mindful of God's saving power to protect you on a daily basis? Can you think Him today for His salvation?

September 26 – Be a Blessor

Today's reading: Psalms 126-130

***“May the Lord bless you from Zion;
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.
May you live to see your children’s children—
peace be on Israel” - Psalm 128:5-6.***

Today's verses are a good prayer you can offer for others, and they are also a blessing that the psalmist was bestowing on his fellow believers. You were meant to participate in God's blessing-distribution business, giving those blessings freely and without bias or discrimination. In order to bless someone in a way that they can participate in the blessing, you must utter that blessing within their earshot so that they can, well, be blessed and uplifted as they hear your kind words. The good news is that blessings cost you nothing and you never run out – as long as your heart is to uplift and edify others. Peter spoke about your role as a blesser, even when others don't bless you, when he wrote: “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Peter 3:9). Are you living up to your full potential as a blesser of others? What is holding you back? Why are you so hesitant to utter words of life to others, when they are free and within your total control to do so?

September 27 – Other Gods

Today's reading: Psalm 131-135

***“I know that the Lord is great,
that our Lord is greater than all gods” - Psalm 135:5.***

The Bible is clear that there are no other gods besides Jehovah, but that doesn't mean people don't try to make them up or create them. Those so-called “gods” may seem to have some power, like the sun god or the moon god, but of course the only power they have is the purpose for which God created them. Yet the foolish and sinful heart of man ascribes a divine nature to those created things and identifies them as gods. Idols are not limited to nature, but can be anything to which a person attaches worshipful attention and energy, like careers, family, religious doctrine, money and reputation. The Lord brought Ezekiel in a vision to the Temple where he saw idolatry in the church or the leaders of God's people: “He then brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord, and there at the entrance to the temple, between the portico and the altar, were about twenty-five men. With their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, they were bowing down to the sun in the east” (Ezekiel 8:16). Is your heart divided? Do you worship anything or anyone other than the living God? Don't answer too quickly, but ask God to show you any unholy alliance or attachment you have with any created thing that rightfully belongs to the Creator.

September 28 – Your Personality

Today's reading: Psalms 136-140

***“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well” - Psalm 139:14.***

Most people realize the truth of this verse where their physical makeup is concerned. How the body parts function together is truly amazing and is cause for awe-inspired worship. Yet many would not feel the same about their personality, believing they are seriously flawed and too marred for God to use them until He performed major internal surgery. Your personality, while affected by sin, is as much a creation of God as your internal organs and bodily functions. What aspect of your personality are you convinced is not from the Lord, like your impatience or your lack of mercy? Can you see that God can use your impatience to help fight child abuse or some other dysfunction where patience is *not* a virtue? Can you see that God can use your lack of mercy, which He orchestrated, to deliver a tough-to-say word to someone who needs to hear it? Can you see that God can use your short attention span to get things started that others with more diligence can finish? The point is that what you are considering a shortcoming may not be one at all, which means you can thank God for it rather than unsuccessfully waiting for Him to change what He created for His purposes in the first place.

September 29 – Your Diet

Today's reading: Psalms 141-145

***“Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil
so that I take part in wicked deeds
along with those who are evildoers;
do not let me eat their delicacies” - Psalm 141:4.***

David often prayed for himself throughout the psalms. While you pray for others on your prayer list, it is a good idea to include yourself. If you don't know what to pray, then pray the prayers the psalmists prayed for themselves. Today's verse contains two “do not let me” prayers, both seeking a heart that would stay true to the Lord and avoid evil. The way to do this is to watch what you “eat” – what you allow into your heart through your ears and eyes. This theme of “eating well” is continued in Proverbs, where it says, “Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them” (Proverbs 1:30-32). What diet does your heart have? Does it permit gossip and foolishness through reality television shows to enter? Do you read the Word or dime novels? Do you spend time with those who can encourage your heart or weigh it down? Do you study the lives of great people or fools? Do you listen to great music or trash? What else are you “eating”? Is it junk food or wholesome fare?

September 30 – Do Like Jesus

Today's reading: Psalms 146-150

***“He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free,
the Lord gives sight to the blind,
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked” - Psalm 146:7-9.***

David described some of God's activities and they should sound familiar, for this is a similar list that is outlined in Isaiah and quoted by Jesus in Luke:

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16-21).

Jesus was doing the things that David attributed to God, so that is another indication of Jesus’ divinity. Jesus expects you and I to do the same things He was doing as we represent Him on earth. How many of the list mentioned in today's passage are you doing (giving food, set prisoners free, give sight to the blind)? Which things are part of your strengths or gift package? How can you do more of what Jesus did?