

45 Days
of
Summer

DEVOTIONAL



PSALMS // an introduction

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 poems that express a wide variety of emotions, including: Love and adoration toward God, sorrow over sin, dependence on God in desperate circumstances, the battle of fear and trust, walking with God even when the way seems dark, thankfulness for God's care, devotion to the word of God, and confidence in the eventual triumph of God's purposes for the world.

The English title comes from the Greek word *psalmos*, which translates Hebrew *mizmor*, "Song," found in many of the Psalm titles and simply translated as "psalm"

The Hebrew label for the psalms, "Praises," may have originally reflected the idea, readily found today, that adoration and thanks to God are the primary acts of worship; but it would be better to learn from the title of the entire Psalter that the whole range of the psalms – from adoration and thanks to the needy cry for help (even the desolate moan of Psalm 88) – praises God when offered to Him in the gathered worship of His people.

When was it written?

The Psalms come from diverse periods of Israel's history. From the time of Moses in the 15th or 13th century B.C. to that of David and Solomon in the 10th century.

Who wrote it?

It is widely accepted that David the young shepherd boy who killed a giant and eventually became king is the author of most of the Psalms. However, it is possible that a few of the Psalms (Ps. 127 & possibly Ps 72) could have been written by his son Solomon, as well as some being authored by Moses.

How to get started

This devotional is set up to be as simple as possible for you to engage in God's Word. All you need to do is start at the beginning and do one devotional a day Monday through Friday. It will take between 10-20 minutes to complete each one. Use Saturday and Sunday to reflect and journal about what God is teaching you. Ideally, it's good to have a set time and place to spend with God each day. The quieter the location, the better. It can be done early in the morning before anyone else is awake to interrupt, it can be done during your lunch break at work, or while you sit in your favorite coffee shop. But the most important part of your time with God isn't the location but rather the application of what you've learned! So don't end your time without reflecting and praying about how you can work out the day's message in your life.

How It Works

EACH DEVOTIONAL IS DIVIDED UP INTO FOUR PARTS

Part 1: Read God's Word

Take some time to read and really meditate on what the passage is saying; you can't expect to fly through a passage and take in all the wisdom it contains.

Part 2: Reflecting upon God's Word

This is a short paragraph written to help readers reflect upon the deeper truth of the passage and its application. Your journey with Christ will be strengthened as you gain a deeper understanding of the background and theme of the chapter.

Part 3: Respond to God's Word

As readers answer the questions that are provided, they will be challenged to work out the theme of the passage in their daily life. The goal here is for the reader to take time to carefully consider what lessons the Lord wants them to apply as they go about their day.

Part 4: The Bottom Line

This is an easy phrase to remember that sums up the main theme of each day's study. Make it a point to stop away this phrase in your memory. You never know how God might use it to encourage you or someone else.

How to benefit from the Bible

Seven questions to ask and answer when feeding on God's Word

1. What portion of my reading stands out to me? Underline
2. Why does it have my attention?
3. Is there an example for me to follow?
4. Is there any error for me to avoid?
5. Is there any duty for me to perform?
6. Is there any promise for me to claim?
7. Is there a sin for me to confess?

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Day 1 : PSALM 1:1-2

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

The Hebrew word for “happy” is 'asrey,' meaning blessed. Happiness, a profound joy, only comes from walking closely with God. In verse 2, we learned that staying on the course of true happiness (blessings) comes from meditating, or having a continual awareness on God's teachings, day and night.

I remember during high school homecoming, I followed a bunch of peers to have lunch at the rival school. Yes, we got caught. Upon arriving home, my dad asked me to stand on a bench and try to pull him up. Rather than me pulling him up, I had to jump down because I couldn't keep my balance. He stated, “You need to realize that it's almost impossible to raise someone else up to your standards. If you choose to be with people who have lower morals or values, nine times out of ten, they'll pull you down to their level.” The consequence was cleaning the football field after the game which lasted up until the dance, resulting in missing some of the evening activities. The lesson I learned that day was if I choose to hang around with people that would drag me down rather than build me up, it would be a sure way to lose my joy.

Being lured off course by what others proclaim is acceptable or may lead to happiness, will ultimately lead to discomfort and separations from the only One who loves you unconditionally. They have become “joy” thieves, giving you a false sense of being happy.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Who are the top five people I am most likely to listen to when I need advice? Do I typically walk away happy after listening to their counsel? Why or why not?
- What situation have I metaphorically been “pulled off the bench” as a result of listening or hanging around ungodly individuals?
- How does this passage help me reflect on my interaction with others?

BOTTOM LINE:

Who or what I spend time with will determine the person I'm becoming.

Day 2 : PSALM 1:3-4

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Finding big trees in Israel is unlikely unless it was transplanted, which is the translation of the word “planted” in verse 3. As a matter of fact, quality lumber was such a scarcity that King Solomon had to arrange for cedar beams to be floated in from Lebanon when they were building the temple in Jerusalem. Only God could make a tree grow strong and tall in the sweltering heat and sandy soil of Israel. Only He could cultivate vegetation so perfectly that its leaves wouldn't wither in a drought.

What this means for us is that by grace, we have been transplanted into God's garden. This is the message of salvation. God plucks us from darkness, and lovingly replants us in a perfect spot where we are guaranteed to flourish. We will get bigger and more beautiful, to the point of bearing fruit as we absorb the living water our Creator provides. When our roots are anchored in Him, even figurative droughts like a financial crisis, cancer diagnoses, or critically ill family members will not destroy us. Those loved by God are nourished and protected as His own.

So how do we flourish & thrive? “Everything they do” is defined by spiritual obedience, and walking closely with God. Just as we are reminded in Romans 8:28, everything will work out for our good and His glory because we are His people and He loves us.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What drought has God transplanted me from?
- What action do I need to take to “succeed/thrive/prosper”? (Read Roman 8:28 and write your next action step.)

BOTTOM LINE:

Being in a real, redemptive relationship with the Creator of the universe is the true measure of success.

Day 3 : PSALM 1:5-6

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

My mom received a notification that she got a ticket for not making a complete stop at a stop light. When she went online to view the footage from the camera, she noticed that she had her grandson with her and that he was picking his nose. We were giggling over this situation and commenting on what the individuals that review the tickets were thinking when they saw this one.

Verse 6 is all about God's observation of us. God knows His people. He has an intimate awareness of all our ways. Which makes me wonder: if we could actually see the "red light of God's camera" activated by every thought that runs through our heads, every word that crosses our lips, and everything we do in public and private, how would we behave?

Just as the traffic-cam is bad news for someone who violates the traffic-law, God's complete knowledge of human character is bad news for the wicked at the end of verse 6. Rather than being happy and content in communion with our Creator, those who have not placed their faith and trust in Jesus as Lord of their life, are heading straight toward destruction. This truth reminds me of Jesus' sermon in Matthew 25:31-46; a relationship with the Shepherd is the reason 'sheep' are spared, and 'goats' are on the path of destruction. God's perfect grace blazes a trail of hope and happiness for messy people like us.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What would the God-cam of your life display? How would this cause you to change?
- Examine your walk with the Shepherd; are you mirroring some of His mannerisms? (Read Matthew 25:31-46).
- What actions do you need to take to be able to "walk right"?

BOTTOM LINE:

God's love frees us from the path of destruction to find life with Him.

Day 4 : PSALM 2:1-12

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

War, bombings, chaos.

Genocide, terror, and fear.

Why do the nations rage (vs. 1)? If you have lived on this planet for any length of time, you know that this is kind of just how things are. Welcome to life. But in this Psalm, we are taken past the evening news and into a just reality with a just King. Plots and plans are made; elections and popular opinions are swayed. But, "*He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision*" (vs. 4). This is equal parts thrilling and terrifying. The Lord of Heaven laughs at all of the schemes of the political operatives and power brokers of this world. He laughs because he has set a real King on the throne. In the days when the Psalms were written, the King here referenced, would have been King David and his royal line. The reality referenced in this Psalm, though, extends beyond the temporary life of King David and his children. Here the lines are blurred between the human referent and the divine. This King is none other than Jesus, the King of the universe, the Son of God. The nations rage and seek power above all else, yet there is a just King who laughs at it all. Jesus is in power seeking justice and peace for all people. "*Blessed are all who take refuge in him*" (vs. 12)!

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What comfort is there in having a truly great King over all of life? How does this jive for more democratically minded people?
- How does Jesus provide justice in our world?
- How does Jesus' authority over every political entity, give you hope? What are the implications for these various political groups?

BOTTOM LINE:

Jesus brings true justice and authority to all the raging wrongs of this world!

Day 5 : PSALM 3:3-6

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Bad dreams are common among young children. But when I was in high school they became a regular part of my life as well. Over a period of several weeks I would wake up in a cold sweat from a recurring dream feeling like what I can only describe as a panic attack. My heart was racing, by mind was confused and I was overcome by fear & anxiety. I don't know what caused this but I do know how it stopped. I had confided in a friend about recurring dreams and my anxiety, and my friend shared this verse with me. I began to read these verses before bed each night, praying this truth over my rest, and I began to experience the incredible truth of verse 3. "You, O LORD are a shield about me..." My God is my shield, my protector and defender. I had no idea what started these dreams & fears I was facing, but I believed that God was able to defend me against the attacks and fears I was facing.

My favorite part of this passage became verse 5 & 6. "I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me..."

My guess is that as you read this passage you skimmed right over this truth. But stop. Read it again, and again. This simple and easy to miss truth is packed with an amazing reality of God's power and our weakness.

Every night we go to sleep and the only reason we wake up is because the LORD sustains me. He gives life to this shell of a body. He puts breath in my lungs. He strengthens my bones, and protects me from all attacks whether I can see them or not.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What stands out to you in this passage? Why?
- What causes you to fear and become anxious? Share your struggles with a friend/spouse and commit to praying for one another.
- Spend time reading Psalm 3. Ask the Lord to deliver you from any fear or anxiety you are facing. Thank God for His protection over you and the safety of His sustaining power.
- Place your trust in the sustaining power of the God Who saves & sustains life.

BOTTOM LINE:

I live and breath because the LORD sustains me.

Day 6 : PSALM 9:1-2

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Almost on a daily basis I get to remind my kids that they must choose a heart of joy. Whenever they don't get what they want and they throw a temper tantrum, I remind them that they get to choose their attitude. I remind them that they can stay upset or they can choose a heart of joy.

We all have choices to make, and in verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 9 we see David's choice to worship the Lord. Countless times throughout the Psalms we see David choose to celebrate and worship the LORD regardless of His circumstances. In just 2 verses David makes 4 "I will" statements, all declaring praise and worth to the Lord.

He chooses to: 1. Give thanks. 2. Recount all God's wonderful deeds. 3. Be glad & exult the Lord. 4. Sing and praise the Most High God.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Take time today to recount the wonderful deeds of God? Take a walk outside. Look through some old photos. Spend time with a friend, your family or spouse, and share what things you have seen God do.

- Journal on your own or make it a family event and choose the same things David chose to remember and worship God for.

I will give thanks for...

I will tell others of all God has done. I have seen God's wonderful deed of...

I will be glad in the Lord and exult Him. Today I choose joy because...

I will praise God for Who He is. God is...

BOTTOM LINE:

I choose to worship because God is always worthy of it.

Day 8 : PSALM 13:1-6

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Feeling abandoned is a horrible mental and emotional feeling. To feel like no one is listening or even worse, that no one cares, can bring people to a pretty low emotional state. When my spouse and I struggled through infertility, the most painful part wasn't so much God telling us "no" or "not right now," it was the feeling that God was not even with us. There were many times when we asked the same questions David asked; "Will you forget me forever?" (vs. 1) and "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and have sorrow in my heart?" (vs. 2). As months turned into years and everyone we knew kept having children, the frustration and sadness continued to plague us. Why can't it be easy for us? Where is God? But through that journey, we realized how often we related 'getting what we want' to whether or not God loves us. Our oldest daughter's love language is gifts, and she would be happy to get one every day. However, we limit the number of things we buy her to help develop her character because we love her. In those times when we feel forgotten, we must rely on the truth that God is love (1 John 4:16) and His love for us is unfailing (vs. 5)

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Do you relate God's love directly to what He gives you or does for you?
- When you feel abandoned by God, do you turn and walk the other way, or does that push you to seek Him?
- Write down one to two unanswered prayers, and surrender them before God. You could pray something like this: Lord, I seek Your favor and as Your child I am asking for Your blessing. I will trust in Your love because of Your word regardless of how You answer these prayers.

BOTTOM LINE:

God's love is not measured by my current circumstances.

Day 9 : PSALM 16:1-11

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

“Am I loved?” “Am I valued?” I believe these are the two questions that each of us wants answered with a resounding “YES!” and when we don’t get that reply from friends, family, and loved ones, we start to seek out other sources of validation. Psalm 16 addresses these vital human questions with the resounding “YES!” that our souls need from the One who matters most.

The Psalmist reminds us that God has loved us enough to offer a clear path, security, and joy filled heart (vs. 5, 11). How often have we noticed that in an effort to find validation and love, we overstep our boundaries; for example, indignation with not receiving something we feel is deserved?

“You are my Lord; apart from You, I have no good thing” (vs. 1). When we ask Our Father in Heaven if we are loved and valued, what is His response to us? How can we live our life in a way that shows that we truly feel that God has answered “YES!” to our fundamental human questions?

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Be reminded that the Lord is your portion and cup, that He makes your lot secure (v 5). Life may not look or feel the way you think it should, but know that you are loved and you are valued.
- Take a moment to thank God for this truth.

- What does verse 6 say that you can expect? How does this verse prove that your answer is “YES!”?

- What truth does God want me to apply to my own life?

BOTTOM LINE:

Remember who you are and whose you are. What one action step can I take based on the knowledge that I am fiercely loved, and I am highly valued by God?

Day 10 : PSALM 17: 8-9

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Recently, a friend of mine was looking into a bird's nest. What they thought was the fattest bird they had ever seen was, in fact, a mother bird using her wings to cover and protect her newborn chicks. These baby birds were so protected by their mother that the outside world could not touch them. The strength of their mother's wings and the warmth of her body will keep these birds safe no matter what storm or predator comes. This is the protection that David prays for in this Psalm. He is not asking God for strength for himself; rather, he is coming to the Lord asking for his God to spread His mighty wings of protection over him. In the face of enemies that were seeking to destroy him, David chooses to take refuge in God's strength. So often in life when those around us attack us, we try to handle it on our own. When you are surrounded by people or situations that seem to have it out for you, who or what do you run to? Do you put your life in your own hands?

In my life, many times my spirit has been crushed when I see the problems I face or the people that seem to be against me. It's at those moments when I picture God spreading His loving wings over me. In my own strength, I could never stop the trials in my life, but God's protection ensures refuge even in the worst situations.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What does God's protection look like to me?

- What "enemies" am I currently facing?

- Have I been going to God for protection in my life?

- Who in my life can I share this encouragement with?

BOTTOM LINE:

True refuge is found in God's strength, not ours.

Day 11 : PSALM 19:1-14

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

"The heaven's declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (vs. 1). Have you ever experienced the glorious beauty of nature? Have you ever seen something that God made and knew that He was great? Maybe the Midwestern wind blowing off of miles and miles of open country blew right into the center of your heart. Or maybe a prairie field radiating the heat of life and summer enveloped you with an inexplicable joy. Most of us lack the poetic skills of David, but it is what we mean when we tell people how beautiful our vacation spot was.

But what happens in this Psalm? There is a strange shift in verse 7 away from the wonders of a beautiful world that speak about God, to the wonders of God's words themselves. We are meant to take our feelings for a beautiful world, and transfer them to our feelings for God's beautiful words! This makes perfect sense when we remember that by God's very words, every blade of grass and every rustling leaf came into existence. These words are beautiful. These words are better than any scenic overlook could ever be! God's words are *"More to be desired than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb"* (vs. 10).

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Can you take a moment this week to open your eyes to the beauty around you?
- Have you ever had that lucid moment when the Bible allowed you to see God himself? What words were they?
- How often do you think about the Bible as "beautiful"? How can you come to say that God's words are more desirable than gold?

BOTTOM LINE:

Take your feelings for a beautiful world and transfer them to feelings for God's beautiful words!

Day 12 : PSALM 20:1-9

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Sometime this summer, you will probably go to a parade and see soldiers marching. The rest of the parade might feature tractors, candy, politicians, or classic cars. But when the soldiers come, you see something awe inspiring. Imagine an army in fully formal military display to get the picture being painted in this Psalm. See the rows and rows of soldiers in glinting armor all marching with precision. See the perfect uniforms and hear the stomp and clash of synchronized might. See the banners waving in the wind and listen to the shouts of victory. Now read the Psalm again, and notice the energy and power of every line.

This Psalm reminds us that we are involved with something much bigger and much more awe-inspiring than commuting and soccer practice. We are in this army and we have the victory that only the Lord can bring. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God" (vs. 7).

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Does your heart soar when the national anthem is played? Let these swelling feelings be for God!

- What are you trusting in today that is less powerful than God?

- How does God want to use you in His army and His Kingdom?

BOTTOM LINE:

Trust in God more than anything else and remember that you are marching along with others in God's great army.

Day 13 : PSALM 22:1-31

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Psalm 22 is for those who have reached utter despair. Often Christians present a smiling antiseptic version of life in Christ. Psalm 22 breaks this illusion. A couple of years ago, I faced so much anxiety and distress that I didn't know what to do. My anxiety reached such an intensity that I was in a constant state of panic for almost a week. I couldn't sleep, and I didn't want to eat. "My strength is dried up like a shard of pottery, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death" (vs. 15).

Despair is real. It is part of being human. But take comfort, Jesus has faced despair as well. On the cross, He cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Words from this Psalm! Jesus' despair was real, brought on by the agonizing reality of the cross and divine payment for sin. But God doesn't leave us in despair; He comes and rescues us. This is how David says it: "For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him" (vs. 24). God healed my despair, but not right away. He allowed Jesus to experience the fullness of despair and even allowed him to die, but He never hides his face from us.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Have you ever been in a moment of despair? Can you see that God was with you in spite of it?
- Do you think despair or distress is automatically sinful?
- How does seeing Jesus' despair bring you comfort?
- How have you treated others who are in a pit of despair? Did you expect them to turn their Christian smile on? Or did you sit and mourn with them?

BOTTOM LINE:

Despair is real, but God never hides from us or our despair.

Day 14 : PSALM 23:4

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Often when we read this verse, we skip the first part and land on the idea of comfort. This verse becomes a Hallmark greeting card one-liner about us being comforted by God. However, the comfort that is provided is given to David as he is walking “through the valley of the shadow of death.” Another way to translate this would be the valley of deep darkness. David is not simply saying, “Lord you comfort me when I’m safe and sound in my warm bed and everything in the world is okay.” Rather David is saying, “Lord, the world around me is falling apart. I can’t make sense of the present situation, and I can’t see a way out this horrible spot I am in. Even so, God, you comfort me. You walk beside me, and You lead me, therefore I will fear no evil.”

The comfort we have as Christians is not found in ignorance or in turning our face away from hardships. Our comfort is found because we realize that even in the midst of our deepest pain, God leads us through the valley of the shadow of death.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What is a trial that God has lead you through in the past?
- What did God use to comfort you in that time?
- How does this change what you are currently going through?

BOTTOM LINE:

We can find comfort not because we ignore pain and trials, but because we acknowledge the presence of our God.

Day 15 : PSALM 29:3-4

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Before the rumbling treads of tanks, before the loud speakers of a rock concert, before the first takeoff of a fighter jet, there were few things as loud as a thunderstorm. You can relate to the sound David had on his mind. Have you ever been lying in bed at night when a particularly loud crash shakes your house and wakes you up? That sound which has such immense power is what came to David's mind as he thought about the mighty power of God's voice. God's voice, which spoke the entire universe into being, is made available; in fact, you read it a minute ago. The Word of God, our Bible, is God's voice to us. In it, He conveys His power, His glory, and His plan for us. God's word, like thunder, shakes us to the core of our being.

Our response in all of this should be the same as David's: worship. This Psalm calls us to worship and to give glory to God in response to His greatness and power. The next time you pick up your Bible, remember the power of God's voice and reflect upon the majesty of our God who is so worthy of our praise.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- When has God's voice "thundered" in your life?

- What image of God's power sticks out to you?

- How will you worship the Lord today?

BOTTOM LINE:

We give glory to God for the power in His voice and His word.

Day 16 : PSALM 31:19-24

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Someone sitting outside of a perfectly warm house in the rain or cold, stubbornly committed to sticking it out, has become a classic picture of pride and independence. I've seen that very scenario play out in various cartoons and sitcoms over the years.

As far-fetched as the idea sounds, that picture too often depicts my response to challenging chapters in life. The Psalmist describes an abundance of good things that God has in store for those who take refuge in Him. Even though a storm may rage outside, God's design is that we would take shelter in His presence and enjoy the blessings He has waiting for us. Just as He did for the Psalmist in his distress (vs. 22), our God leans in to listen as we cry out to Him. He may not change the situation or remove us from the difficulty we're facing, but He also doesn't ask us to tough it out on our own.

The warm shelter of His presence is waiting for us. All we have to do is let go of the pride and stubborn independence that keeps us committed to doing it on our own (the hard way). The more we sit in His presence, the more peace, encouragement, and perspective we experience. And conversely, if we choose to tough it out on our own, we're leaving an abundance of good gifts unopened.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What practices (listening to worship music, journaling, praying, etc.) make you most aware that you are in God's presence?

- How might having access to all of the good gifts God offers affect a hard season, even if it doesn't shorten its duration?

BOTTOM LINE:

Become not proud lest you forget God.

Day 17 : PSALM 32:1-5

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

I Know What You Did Last Summer was a mystery thriller of four young adults that accidentally ran someone over and then tried to cover it up. They were then terrorized by a mystery figure claiming he knew what they did. The plot was filled with stress and fear of their cover up. The weight of sin can be a heavy burden, especially unconfessed sin. The writer of Psalm 32, David, had covered up tremendous sins of adultery and murder. He equated keeping silent to his bones wasting away (verse 3). David tried to carry his secret but finally broke, and could no longer bear the weight of the Lord's "heavy hand" (verse 4). But God is so faithful even in our defiance. David finally acknowledged and confessed his sin to the Lord, and experienced an immediate assurance of forgiveness in verse 5! David did not have to meet a certain quota of good deeds; he needed to "confess his transgressions to the Lord." You might not be carrying an adultery or murder, but perhaps you have stolen, lied, slandered, or cheated someone. If you are feeling weak from carrying the weight of your sin, God is strong enough to take it. And even if you are in David's boat, be encouraged. Not only was David forgiven, but scripture also says he was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22).

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Have you carried the weight of a secret sin? Did it ever feel like a burden?
- The Bible says that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). What keeps you from confessing your sin?
- Take the step of faith to confess your sins to God to be freed by His unwavering forgiveness, and share with another Christ follower so they can encourage you.

BOTTOM LINE:

God's forgiveness is not conditional; it just requires a repentant heart.

Day 18 : PSALM 33:16-22

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

How interesting that we continue to make the same mistakes, fall into the same temptations, and deal with the same character defect generation after generations. While I don't know that any of us are regularly conducting drills with our own private army, or banking on our world-class thoroughbred to get us out of harm's way, we are just as tempted to put our trust in all the wrong things.

In our case, we may trust more in our own strength, money, resources, or talents to save the day, rather than looking to the Lord. When we fall into that trap, however, it's only a matter of time until things go sideways, and one or all of the things we've put our hope in disappoint us. No one is saved by the size of his bank account, and no one escapes by being wildly talented. A good job, a winsome personality, even a loving family are all great, but still a "vain hope for deliverance," as the psalmist points out (vs. 16 and 17). Nothing and no one, other than the Lord, is a sure help when life gets hard. He alone can offer hope because He alone is above every variable and threat.

Thankfully for us, He is all-powerful and absolutely, wildly, in love with us. He offers us full and free access to Himself and promises to be our defender and provider no matter what challenges we face.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What are you most tempted to put your trust in, in place of God?
- Have those things ever come up short as you wrestle through a challenge?
- Think of a time when God came through for you (answering a prayer, provided just what you needed, encouraged you in a dark moment) and write out the ways He delivered on the promise to be your help and your shield (vs. 20).

BOTTOM LINE:

Nothing and no one, other than the Lord, is a sure help when life gets hard.

Day 19 : PSALM 34:1-8

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

We have all said "I don't like that" without actually trying it. And we have all gotten the response "how do you know unless you try it"? I remember thinking Avocados were the worst food ever. Just look at it. Not attractive from the outside, and the inside has an awful texture. It's like the texture of eating a stick of butter. Oily, slimy, squishy, and let's not forget green. And for all of its bad or unappetizing characteristics, its flavor and versatility in cooking is incredible. I remember when I finally did try it. My world changed. How had I lived without Guacamole for so long? I remember thinking, where has this been my whole life? I may have even said it out loud. Think of all the good food we would miss out on if we had never tried it. Think of all the fun things like a roller coaster, skydiving, and bungee jumping. We would miss out on all of it if we never got over our fears and just tried it. Ok so maybe that's a bad example. But think, what are some other things you would have missed out on if you had never tried it? Here is the thing, many of us do that when it comes to trusting, obeying, and following Jesus. We say we believe in Jesus; "I believe He died for me" - We understand the Gospel, But! I would say very few of us have tasted and seen the Love, the Grace, and the forgiveness of God. The Christian life was never meant to be an observation deck where you come to watch what is going on. Like with sports, the Christian life is not to be lived on the sidelines. It is to be experienced! That is why in Ps. 34 David is calling people to worship. He is calling them to experience what he has experienced, the goodness of God's power, grace, protection, forgiveness, and greatness.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- In what ways have you experienced (Tasted & Seen) God's Goodness?
- Is God still worthy of worship even when things in life are not going well?
- What have you seen God do that you can respond to Him in worship for?
- Today, how can you respond in worship to God?

BOTTOM LINE:

God is good even when life is not.

Day 20 : PSALM 34:11-14

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Fear has taken on a negative connotation in our day and age, and yet we find that there are more than 150 references to fear of God in the Bible and they are done in a positive light. How is this so? The fear of God described in the Bible is associated with a reverential awe. Martin Luther helps us by contrasting between the two kinds of fear. "Servile" comes from the Latin word meaning servant, while "filial" comes from the Latin word meaning son. The first kind of fear would be present in a slave who's genuinely afraid their master will maliciously beat them or a prisoner who is terrified of their jailer. Filial fear is a much different sort of fear: it's a healthy reverence of a child toward his or her parents whom they respect. The children aren't afraid of punishment or torture, but rather want to please their parents out of love and reverence. We can easily fall into servile fear when we forget the work of Jesus on our behalf and what it's accomplished for us! Sinclair Ferguson describes it as "that indefinable mixture of reverence, fear, pleasure, joy, and awe which fills our hearts when we realize who God is and what He has done for us."

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

But what does the fear of the Lord look like practically in our lives? When the fear of the Lord takes up official residence in our hearts, what sort of people do we become? In these verses, we learn that the fear of the Lord transforms the activity of our tongues, feet, and hands in tangible ways. The fear of the Lord teaches us to keep our tongue from evil and our lips from speaking deceit. This encompasses massive and grievous lies as well as "innocent" little white lies that seem to do no harm. The one who fears the Lord wants their tongue to proclaim the truth, for God Himself is the truth! There is no deceit in Him. Not only does the fear of the Lord affect our tongues, but it also affects our feet. Like Joseph ran away from Potiphar's wife who was trying to seduce him in Genesis 39, the fear of the Lord teaches us to turn away from evil and run as if our life depended on it! The fear of the Lord doesn't just stop there! It leads us to turn away from evil, but also leads us to do good with our hands. The fear of the Lord teaches us to say no and run from evil, but also teaches us to say yes and run toward doing good! Over time, our feet find less gravitational pull toward sinful God-dishonoring behavior, and more joy in doing good with our hands, seeking peace and pursuing it. Our feet have a long-term trajectory to them; a kingdom aim.

BOTTOM LINE:

Our tongues, feet, and hands have been summoned by our King; our hearts have been gripped by the beautiful and governing fear of the Lord.

Day 21 : PSALM 34:15-16

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

When you come to God in prayer, what do you imagine His posture toward you being? Does He love to listen or is He bothered? We often tend to think of God one-dimensionally, stating things like, "God is love." But when we define love on our terms, in ways that are comfortable. We forget that God is infinitely more complex than we are, and we don't get the luxury of fashioning Him into our image or defining Him; He defines Himself. In the Bible, God has revealed that He is both perfectly loving, but He is also perfectly just at the same time. He doesn't have to nervously choose between one or the other, but rather is loving and just at the same time. In these verses, we read about two distinct postures that God takes up toward two groups of people: God's posture is toward the righteous and against those who do evil.

His Face Toward the righteous: In the context of this passage, "*the righteous*" are those who've come to know and fear God; those who are set apart in a covenant relationship with Him by faith, have put their trust in Him, and whose lives are increasingly being transformed by Him. God tells us that though the righteous may go through suffering and hard times, His eyes and ears are toward them (i.e. "I hear your prayers, and I'm going to do something in response!"). Ultimately, His message to them is that His face is always set on them, attentive and aware. What good news! Your life circumstances might scream rejection, yet God promises that even in the midst of suffering, He has not abandoned you but rather is with you and will ultimately provide rescue and deliverance (see verses 17-18).

His Face Against those who do evil: Verse 16 might sound a bit harsh at first reading, yet we must acknowledge its seriousness. God's face is set against those who do evil and have no regard for God, His ways, and His people. He doesn't interact with them as He does with the righteous, His posture is markedly different; in fact, it's opposite.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

May we never forget that Jesus, the true Righteous One, laid down His life for evildoers like us and that through faith in Him God's face is turned toward us! Think on that for a moment. Let this sink in and humble your heart: God's face turned away from His righteous Son on the cross so that His face might be turned toward evildoer who cries out for salvation. To all who would call on His name, God would no longer cut off the memory of them from the earth, but rather embrace them and welcome into His family eternally. What a good and gracious God we serve!

BOTTOM LINE:

God is not looking for my perfection, but that I am continual transformed through my pursuit of Him.

Day 22 : PSALM 40:1-3

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Songs have a unique way of connecting with us in ways that mere words alone cannot. Author Hans Christian Anderson's quote rings true: "Where words fail, music speaks." David could have just said this prayer to God, yet he had found himself in a hopeless and helpless situation. Mere words would not do, so he wrote a song. In this psalm, we are reminded that David's life was filled with countless extreme challenges. God's grace took him from a place where he had no footing to a place of solid ground, where he could stand. Do you feel like you are drowning today, like you've fallen into a pit you can't escape? Do you feel like you've lost your sense of direction? Wait on the Lord and seek Him, two actions that work together when we patiently trust Him. The word "wait" does not imply passivity, rather to "wait" like a waiter: serving, asking, and seeking. Remember, one of these days your praying will turn to singing. Your sinking will turn to standing. Your fear will turn security as He puts you on the rock. Just wait on the Lord. He's patient with you. Why not be patient with Him and let Him work in His time? He never disappoints you when you wait on Him.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Is there an area of your life right now that you are waiting on the Lord?

- How are you seeking Him out as you wait?

BOTTOM LINE:

Waiting for the Lord's help sometimes forces you to your limits. But take comfort in knowing that while you wait on Him, God is working out His purposes in your life. Truly, He will give you a new song to sing.

Day 23 : PSALM 42:1-3

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

As a preschool teacher, I fondly remember reading the book “Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.” I’m sure that, like me, you have experienced days...or weeks...or years, when it seemed like everything, was going wrong. A season when you were overwhelmed with disappointment and sadness and you feel that your prayers weren’t going any further than the ceiling. Scripture reveals that even those whom God anointed for leadership went through serious slumps. An immature Moses who lost his temper and killed, he retreated in hiding. Elijah, threatened by Jezebel, responded by running, hiding under a tree, and asking God to take his life. This terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day took place immediately after his best day at Mount Carmel. But God wasn’t absent in these situations, despite the lack of admirable behavior. Rather than leaving Moses in the desert, God, through a flame reminds of his calling and renews his spiritual vigor. He doesn’t abandon Elijah to pity but impresses on him to nap, restores his energy with food, and then appeared to him in a soft voice to rouse him from his depression. Trusting that God will appear with water when you are in the desert seems optimistic. Though we have faith in His Word and biblical history, it is still normal to question when He’ll show up if we’re gasping.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What happened on your most recent terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day?
- What season are you experiencing? If it is a season of thirst, share with someone who can pray and feed your soul with God’s substance.
- Read Hebrew 2:18 and 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. What situation has God used from your sad chapter to encourage someone walking through a difficult season? Or maybe you remember a time when God used someone else sorrowful experience to bring you comfort.

BOTTOM LINE:

The gospel frees us from pretending everything in our life is great when it’s not. God doesn’t demand that we be perpetually happy.

Day 24 : PSALM 42:4-5a

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Psalm 42 was penned by the sons of Korah. These guys originated from the tribe of Levi and were given the task of leading worship. Verse 4 obviously laments the happier times of leading God's people in worship. We all have gone through some type of desert, but we've also experienced some great vacations. We had times when we cheerfully shared the good news with others, excitingly discussed Bible study with our group, or lift praises the minute we wake. Then heartache hits, and we feel like frauds when we continue to sing praises while our souls writhe in anguish. I am so thankful that verse 4 was included in Psalm 42. Instead of rejecting, disheartened people, God presents an engraved invitation for us to express our sorrow. I remember an old song, "Why so downcast oh my soul, put your hope in God and bless the Lord oh my soul...He's the lifter of my countenance...He's the lifter of my head." Our Redeemer allows us to bring everything (disappointment, frustration, and even whining) to Him. From emotional ashes, God creates a beautiful and acceptable offering unto Himself. There is no shame in confessing we feel far away from God; it certainly doesn't surprise Him! The first step to getting our harmony back is being honest enough to admit we've lost it.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What heartache am I experiencing?

- During those times of heartaches, do I lift my voice in praise, casting all my cares on Him?

- How do these verses help me reflect on my times of anguish and be drawn closer to God?

BOTTOM LINE:

Those who've trudged through difficult seasons come out communing with God more deeply.

Day 25 : PSALM 42:8-10

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Most of us do everything we can to sidestep the slightest twinge of discomfort but avoiding pain makes for an anxious existence. Cruising through life in the mode of “happy” can make for an ineffective witness. How can we expect others to connect with our faith story when we’ve edited out the hard parts, the parts that they most identify with? Consider C.S. Lewis who struggled with debilitating sadness and questioned God after losing his wife, Joy, to cancer, was one of the most gifted Christian writers. Charles Haddon Spurgeon battled with severe depression yet in the height of this ministry, 25,000 people bought copies of his sermons every week and he got to preach to ten million people before his death in 1892. These verses are bittersweet to me – bitter because of the continued frustration and pain being expressed, yet sweet because of the way it reveals a believer honestly grieving in his conversation with God. It reminds us of the freedom we have to pour out the messy sorrows of our hearts to God instead of trying to suppress the sad stuff! Researchers are learning that a good cry can actually help us feel better because “tears appear to reduce tensions, remove toxins, and increase the body’s ability to heal itself” Victor Parachin. Consider it yet another way God cares for us even in our grief.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- The Bible records leaders like Job, David, and Jeremiah weeping and even describe Jesus crying over the spiritual blindness of Jerusalem. So why do I think so many seem uncomfortable with tears? How do I respond to someone’s sorrow?
- Hebrews 2:10 “For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Since our Savior consented to suffering, why do we try to avoid it at all costs?

BOTTOM LINE:

Read Psalms 42 and 43 together. God’s love frees us to grieve honestly while never losing sight of the hope we have in Him.

Day 26 : PSALM 51:10-12

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

I have heard it said, "The Christian life is not difficult, it's impossible." This can be very disheartening. We want to do good, and there may even be times in our life when everything seems to be going our way. We are joyful, feeling God's presence, inspired by things around us and deeply involved in ministry and then it hits. Sin. Big sin. We are not sure how it happened, but it is ever present and leaves a deep pit in our stomach. It may be frustration over a situation, or jealousy rearing its ugly head, or some unthinkable indiscretion that you would never believe could have happened to you. We feel alone, helpless and so far from God. All we want is the good ole days, and they seem to be a distant memory. You are not alone. You have plenty of company including one of the greatest Biblical heroes – King David. In Psalm 51:10-12, David pleads with God to restore his joy after he sinned. David knew that only God could bring him out of his despair. God knows how far we have fallen but is always willing to take us back. Only He can provide the joy that we lost and asking daily for a pure heart, and steadfast spirit is just one way to help us navigate this impossible life. We will fall again, over and over, but we have a God who is willing to pick us up over and over and never tires. Ask God for restoration and joy knowing through Him it's available and waiting for you.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What is it that you ask God for daily? Do you ask to be strengthened by His spirit or for personal wants and needs?

- How can a pure heart and strengthened spirit provide you the joy you need to navigate life's turbulent waters?

BOTTOM LINE:

No matter how far you fall, God can restore you. No matter how many times you fall, God can restore you. No matter if you think you are unfixable, God can restore you. Just ask Him.

Day 27 : PSALM 60:1-12

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

This is how hope can arrive for anyone who is mulling through deep confusion about what to do next in life.

Times come when life breaks us down. Others question our abilities or motives. Grueling circumstances tip us over; we wonder how long we can keep getting up. In such times, we tend to point fingers in many directions. David, however, looks to the One who is over every trial: God. He knows that what feels like rejection is better understood as divine discipline. Like breaking hard ground to encourage new growth, loving fathers allow hard times to develop their children.

So take heart. As verse 5 says, our rescue comes by God's power to his beloved. He has not lost sight of us in the debris. And his promise is one of victory! David sees it in terms of promised lands and conquered enemies. Your victory, rather, may come out of the wreckage of self-doubt, addiction, unforgiveness, or anxiety. We each identify our battles differently, but every battle that has a name can be assigned to God.

Make the restoration project that may be underway in your life God's labor of love for you. While we commit to him, he does the real conquering; "he will trample our foes."

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What areas of life do you feel defeated in? Confess those things to God and ask Him for His blessing, protection and restoration.
- Is there anything in your life that you have been trying to manipulate or manufacture the results or outcome of? Now take a moment to journal a prayer of surrendering that to God.
- Today, whenever something seems overwhelming. Stop and pray. Commit that thing to the Lord. Be reminded of the truth that God loves you, and He can conquer this thing you are facing.

BOTTOM LINE:

Human help is worthless. With God we will gain the victory.

Day 28 : PSALM 67:1-7

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Lord, please bless me! How often have we prayed a version of this prayer? What is our motivation for such a prayer? In Psalm 67 the request for blessing is not simply for goodness in our lives its actually so that God's ways will "be known on earth".

In the book A Quest For More author Paul David Tripp, says "There is woven inside each of us a desire for something more- a craving to be something bigger, greater, and more profound than our relatively meaningless day-by-day existence". Let us not ignore that deep craving! How incredibly humbling that we are only a small part of this world! When we are blessed on this earth it is so that others may see who God is and so that they may praise him. He is doing something in and through you to affect others. May others see the magnitude that is God!

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- We play a part in showing others who God is. Read Psalm 67 and be reminded that the blessings that you witness and experience are meant to further HIS kingdom.
- How can you live out verse 1? What does it look like to have 'His face shine on you' ?
- What truth does God want me to apply to my own life? How does God want to use the blessings in my life for is purposes?

BOTTOM LINE:

Don't let the smallness of your world blind you to God and His intended purpose on earth. Each blessing that may benefit us is intended to further the Lord's great plans.

Day 29 : PSALM 70:1-5

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Don't be a diva, eat a Snickers! If only that were the solution to all of life's issues...

You have probably seen that Snickers commercial - or maybe you have children who get "hangry." Low moments are a normal part of life for all of us, but how you respond to your circumstances reveals what you believe to be true. Do you bury your anger and disappointment? Do you wreak havoc in the life of others? Do you go to God in those times?

Psalms 70:1 instructs us to reach out and let God lift our spirit. Allow God to heal your heart in the moments when you are in your greatest need.

However, verse 4 reminds us that our moment of need is not limited when we are feeling low, but also when life goes "right." We are never without need for God to deliver us, strengthen us for our next challenge, and help us. In the heights of life may God deliver you and come to your help, and in the low moments of life may God deliver you and come to your help.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What are the consistent circumstances you find yourself reacting towards negatively?

- What does it mean for God to "deliver" you today?

- What can you do today to remind yourself of your need of God's aid?

BOTTOM LINE:

Take a moment to write your own summary statement of this passage.

Day 30 : PSALM 81:13-16

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

In a recent reading through Psalm 81, I was struck by how our unfaithfulness makes God feel. It must be incredibly difficult for God to bestow free will upon man, and then watch us constantly choose the path of darkness over His clear call to obedience. "Trust Me!" He is saying, "I've instructed you to take the path of light BECAUSE IT'S THE BEST PATH FOR YOU. It's for your benefit." And yet we forget. In Psalm 81, it almost seems like God is confused over the Israelites and their behavior. Here was a people who had been powerfully delivered from an oppressor that was too strong for them, a people who were eyewitnesses to miracles that God enacted on their behalf. And yet now they've apparently forgotten all about these incredible acts. Life has gotten hard again, and they are discouraged. They've chosen disobedience over faith in their Father who mightily saved them from Egypt and led them through the dangerous wilderness. And they've forgotten that God is still mighty to save. I see here a God who is eager to show Himself strong, and yet is unable to because His people refuse to walk in His path. I was reminded of how I often respond when life gets hard and I'm shoved out of my comfort zone. My knee-jerk reaction is usually angst, worry, and a complaining spirit. I am an Old Testament Israelite. And I need to hear God pleading with me to choose His path, because He is able to do great things along that road. The challenges I'm currently facing are easily surmounted by the all-powerful God. My adversaries are nothing compared to His greatness. The choice is mine. Do I choose fear, worry, and anger? Or do I lean on My Father who is able to feed me bread and honey. And not just bread, but the finest of wheat. And not just honey, but honey taken from the rock. Miraculous deliverance is available. Will I trust Him?

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Is God still as strong today as He was back then?
- As believers, the Bible tells us that we are the sheep of His pasture. The Holy Spirit bears witness that we are His children. Do you believe that? Do you believe that He knows what's best for you? Do you believe He is guiding you according to those instructions? Do you believe He is mighty to deliver you in your present circumstance?

BOTTOM LINE:

God is eager to see us trust Him, because He wants to show Himself strong on our behalf.

Day 31 : PSALM 82:3-4

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

The world that you and I live in is a world that is harsh, cold, and hard when it comes to the needs of the poor, the sick, the orphans and the widows. We have an opportunity to respond in ways that are very different from the world that has helped create these desperate situations. Our response is with the love of Christ, a love that is self-sacrificing and a love that is filled with compassion towards the fatherless, the poor and the oppressed. It is our distinct way of responding to these needy ones that sets us apart in our attitude and character.

We must not let our heart grow cold and harsh and callous toward the great needs all around us. The Bible tells us that Jesus was moved with compassion on numerous occasions and then acted out of love. Whether it was the blind, the hungry, the lame, the sick, the poor, those who were mourning or those who were wronged or oppressed. Truly, we will be challenged to give of our sustenance not just of our excess. We will be challenged to give of our temporal things so that we might gain eternal things. Please, keep your hearts open in these days and filled with the compassion that Jesus demonstrated to you and that you now extend to others.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What, if anything, hinders you from showing compassion to those in need?

- What is something you can do this week to demonstrate radical compassion?

BOTTOM LINE:

I am a simple guy. If someone falls down, I do not need a ton of reasons or Bible verses to tell me to help them back up. In this passage, we have heard what God wants us to do: to rescue the poor and offer them the hope of Jesus, to help little children who are suffering, to feed people and love people in Jesus' name. And if we do, perhaps we will see an incredible move of God. There is only one way to find out.

Day 32 : PSALM 84:1-12

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

I remember when I was dating my wife. I loved hanging out at her parent's house more than anywhere else! Why? Because my sweetheart was there! The Psalmist here writes a song for those who were taking the long trip to the temple in Jerusalem. People would have sung this as they walked on the road. One of the best images in this Psalm is in verse 3 when the pilgrim sees the sparrows that have made their nests in the columns of the temple. He wistfully wishes that he could be that sparrow, literally living where God the king was. "My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God" (vs. 2).

And now we are in a time without a temple. So how does this Psalm work for us? The great thing is that rather than a long journey to Israel, we now find God dwelling much closer. You see, WE who follow God are the temples. God dwells with us. Now we sing this song with the full power of the presence of God in our life moment to moment. We don't always feel His presence, but He is still always near. This Psalm can help remind us that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. Let's be where God is!

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- How often do you come into God's presence? How can you increase the frequency of this?

- Do you long to be in God's presence like the song writer of Psalm 84? Can you honestly say, "My soul longs yes, faints for the courts of the Lord?"

BOTTOM LINE:

One day in God's presence is better than a day spent anywhere else!

Day 33 : PSALM 85:7-9

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

A couple of years ago, I walked through an intense season at work. The tipping point came during a project my team worked on every year. Walking into the same project the next year, my prayer was simple. "Lord, it has to be different this time."

God reminded me He is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Chaos, anxiety, and stress dynamically oppose His very identity. Furthermore, He DIED so we can access the peace He offers (Isaiah 53:5). When I give in to those pressures, I deny the promise of peace found in Psalm 85:8.

The connection the Psalmist makes between God's peace and His glory may seem counterintuitive, but that's what makes it so powerful. Because peace amidst stress is unnatural, it becomes an opportunity for God to be glorified. When you're ready to lose it, share a few choice words with your boss, or lose your cool with your kids, you can have peace. And when people ask how, you get to point to God and He is glorified.

So how do you take hold of the peace God offers?

Simply surrender each stressful moment to God as it comes up. It can be as simple as praying, "It's yours God. Give me peace of mind to deal with this in a way that honors You."

Remind yourself of truth. Just like the Psalmist in Psalm 85:8, listen to and remind yourself of God's promises and the truth found in His Word to keep an eternal perspective.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Write out a short prayer you can pray quickly when you feel out of control.
- What fears or frustrations are most likely to steal your peace?
- Identify a key verse that offers perspective and truth to counter each of those. (Tip: YouVersion app or BibleGateway.com make searching for verses about a particular topic much easier.)
- Write the verses out and post them where you'll see them often.

BOTTOM LINE:

Listen to the Lord and hear the peace He speaks into your life.

Day 34 : PSALM 96: 1

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Making your own sourdough bread is easy. By mixing the flour and water and letting it sit out with some air, natural yeast starts to occur from the air around it. By mixing in flour and water every day, you keep the starter alive and you can make wonderful delicious bread in your home. However, if you forget to add more water and flour to your starter, it grows dry and starts to grow mold. Think about this as your worship life. When we have an active relationship with God, we are learning more about Him and praising Him for his mercies which are new to us every day. However, when we forget to “feed” our relationship with God, when we don't spend time with Him or forgo learning more about our God, our worship starts to grow dull as we forget why we are worshiping Him.

This verse from Psalm 96 proclaims that we should sing a new song to our Lord. This isn't just about finding a literal new song to sing to the Lord, it's also about finding new reasons to praise Him. Often, I find that God will use my personal Bible studying to point out lyrics in songs that I never noticed, or put on my heart fresh ideas for worshipping Him. God wants our worship to be new, alive, and growing.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Is your worship alive and growing?

- What has God been teaching you lately?

- How can you “sing” a new song to God today?

BOTTOM LINE:

When we feed our relationship with God, we can keep our worship new and alive.

Day 35 : PSALM 101:1-2

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

As a parent, I am regularly reminding my kids of the expectations of being part of the family. There are just some things we don't do. Some things we don't say. And some things that are non-negotiable. For example, in our family, the expectation is that we always tell the truth. We love & forgive others. We are generous. We do the right thing even when it's hard. We worship God even when life is difficult. My hope as a parent is that as my kids grow up that they are instilled with some qualities and characteristics that honor God & others. In Psalm 101 the psalmist is doing the same thing as he gives some instructions on this thing called integrity. Verse 2 starts off with the king's commitment to model faithfulness in his life. First, he says he is committed to walking with integrity. The words in ESV translation "Walk""Heart"& "Within my house" are his plan to pursue integrity. "Walk" communicates an ongoing commitment, that starts with an internal conviction of "Heart," and would be practiced starting at home, "within my house." This Psalm was written as a kind of standard of expectation for David & his heirs as king over Israel. The qualities and characteristic that are listed in Psalm 101 were not only an encouragement for David and the future kings, but also for us to the kind of people we should aim to be.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- In your life what does integrity or the lack of it look like? What are you modeling for others with how you live?
- Do they see a life that is blameless? Do they see a heart of integrity? Do they see excuses and compromise?
- What needs to change in your life for you to begin walking with an integrity of heart within your house?

BOTTOM LINE:

Integrity is seen when we commit to serving the Lord before anything else.

Day 36 : PSALM 101:3-4

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

It goes without saying that our world now is drastically different than the world David lived in. But the struggle for purity was just as real for David as it is for us today. The visual enticements may be different, but the struggle is still there. The battle for purity rages within our entertainment world. From books to TV, movies, music, social media, magazines, and all the stupid adds online. The purity of our hearts & minds is constantly under attack. In the first two verses, David communicates his commitment to integrity. But verses 3 & 4 reveal David's desire for purity in his life before God. These verses also serve as a practical example of an application for David's and our integrity. A life of integrity chooses to not set its eyes on anything that would not make a positive contribution to godliness, "worthless things." And a life of integrity chooses to keep its focus clearly on Christ & not get distracted by crooked or twisted affection. "A perverse heart shall be far from me." These are not just words to David. He has experienced the consequences of failing in these areas before. No doubt it is for these reasons that David is so passionate & determined to gain victory in these areas. These should also be commitments we make to guard our purity against the attacks of the world we live in.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- When it comes to your entertainment choices, (*Books, TV, Movies, Social Media, Music*) what have you invited your eyes, your heart your life to be a part of?
- How have those things impacted your purity and life with Christ?
- Ask yourself:
 - Why do I want to watch this program or film?
 - Am I seeking to escape from something I should be facing by watching this?
 - What sinful temptations will this program or film present?
 - Am I watching because I'm bored or lazy?
 - If so, what does that reveal about my heart?
 - What is God calling you to change?

BOTTOM LINE:

Integrity is seen in our commitment to purity of heart mind & soul.

Day 37 : PSALM 103:8-13

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

I led a group of high school students for several years that I fondly referred to as “my kids.” One Sunday, during a baptism service, I looked up and saw one of “my” freshman boys standing in the dunk tank!

And not just any freshman boy. It was Jacob. A quieter kid who hung on the fringe, he had struggled through doubts to make the decision to follow Christ, just a few months prior to the baptism. He kept the whole thing a secret so he could surprise us, and it worked!

It may sound silly, but when I saw Jacob in the dunk tank my first thought was, “I know him! That one’s mine!” I imagine the feeling of pride I felt in that moment is a reflection of the delight and love that fills God’s heart when He sees us. “Oh! I know him. That one’s mine!”

In Romans, Paul writes that when we were still sinners, read “before we got our acts together,” God loved us. Here in Psalm 103, we read that God is slow to anger and abounding in mercy (vs 8), and that His love for us is as high as the heaven (vs 11).

Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, God doesn’t look at us and see our sin and failure. Instead, in His grace, He looks at you and at me, and His heart leaps, “That one’s mine!”

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What stereotypes of God are you most often tempted to believe?
- How does the reminder of God’s real feelings about you challenge the image of God you have in your head?
- How does this reminder change the way you see yourself and others?

BOTTOM LINE:

God does not deal with me according to my actions, but according to HIS character & love.

Day 38 : PSALM 116:12-19

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

What do you do when you receive a gift that is thoughtful, perfectly timed... and all you have to give in return is a chrome dolphin keychain you picked up at the local gas station? It's almost embarrassing to receive such a gift knowing full well you cannot return the favor. So when we consider all the good in the world and all that God has done for us, how do we even respond appropriately?!

Psalms 116:12-19 describes precisely this: "What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me?" We cannot possibly give back even a minuscule amount that is worthy unless our God is willing to accept our vastly inferior offering. What kind of God would accept such a pitiful offering? What is more humbling than to be aware of God's goodness considering the fickleness of our hearts and paltry nature of even our greatest offering?

Jesus is the answer to this frustrating reality: Immanuel, God with us. God's desire is to be in community with all humanity – including you. When God is with us our most measly offering becomes fragrant, our tiniest gift becomes invaluable, and we are given the ability to perform the greatest work of all: the renew all things through God's power.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What are you offering to God to be transformed on this day? Your work? Family? Recourses? Future?
- What can you give back to God that furthers his kingdom?
- What can you do today to continually remind yourself of your need of God's aid?

BOTTOM LINE:

What one action step can I take based on the truth in this passage?

Day 39 : PSALM 117:1-2

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Psalm 117 is the shortest of the 150 Psalms, and if you go chapter by chapter through the King James Bible, its smack dab in the center. While it may be short in length, its long in spirit! One of my favorite words can help summarize it: Hallelujah! Hallelujah is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning, "Praise the Lord." In its simplest, our mission is that, to Praise The Lord. To praise Him in all we do in life. Our "hallelujah mission" isn't just church attendance on Sunday morning. It's spending time with your family Sunday afternoon, working your job Monday morning, showing mercy on Tuesday evening, studying God's Word Wednesday morning, acting justly on Thursday, being thankful on Friday, and doing your Saturday chores. Obviously it is more than just those things on those days, but our mission is to praise God in every aspect of life. Your entire life, Sunday through Saturday, is basically a show-and-tell. Just as your God has shown you mercy, you then should show mercy to others. Humbly serve, gladly forgive, kindly act, lovingly help, fervently pray for others. Show them the same mercy you have received. Let them see God's mercy at work in you as you do what the Lord gives you to do as parent or child, employee or employer, husband or wife, student or teacher.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- In what areas do you find it easy to praise the Lord? (...to acknowledge his love/faithfulness?) Why?
- In what areas do you fail or have difficulty in doing these things? Why?
- In what ways is God's response toward you a pattern for your reaction toward others? How should you respond toward others...toward friends? Enemies? Non-Christians? Those who fail you?

BOTTOM LINE:

God's great love for all mankind is central to the theme of scripture and is in fact, quite literally; at its very center

Day 40 : PSALM 119:11

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

The show Hoarders on A&E depicts different people's obsession & struggles with collecting, storing up and hoarding all kinds of things to the point that it makes their home a danger to live in. They have stored up so much stuff that you can't find anything and the camera crews struggle to even move about the home. You may or may not have a hoarding problem when it comes to stuff; but what about when it comes to your heart? What kinds of things, emotions, attitudes, expectations have you stored up in your heart? Is it cluttered by unforgiveness, lies of this world, bitterness, or fear? The Psalmist writes here in Ps 119:11 that he is storing up "Your Word" (God's Word) in his heart. But I love the next line. He is not storing up knowledge, or some good idea to post on a wall as decoration in the house. He is storing up the truth, life, and hope of God's Word with a purpose to battle against sinning against God. If we fill up our lives and heart with what is right (good, pure, lovely, honorable) we don't leave much room for the sins of anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, fear and so many other things that this world & Satan are trying to crowd our hearts with. What will you store up in your heart? Can you truly say "With my whole heart I seek God"?

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- What does this verse say? What does it mean?

- What truth does God want me to apply to my own life?

- How can this passage help me encourage others?

BOTTOM LINE:

What comes out of me reflects what is in me

Day 41 : PSALM 119:66-72

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

WebMD is the #1 ranked site for internet traffic in its category of 'Health-Conditions and Diseases'. People use the site to research symptoms, ailments, potential causes, treatment options, and a host of other information. A question the site cannot answer is why...a question we have been asking since the beginning of time. Just hang out with a toddler to experience the never-ending string of why questions. It is interesting that the Psalmist says in verse 71 "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees". I'm not sure I am in the habit of saying "it is good" when I experience affliction but as the Psalmist notes, God's Word is more valuable than silver and gold (verse 72) and is even worth affliction! Affliction has a purpose, which is pointed out in verse 67, to draw us closer to God. Parents want their kids to listen to their advice but often we, like children, choose to learn lessons the hard way! God's word may not always point out an immediate why but there is a peace in these verses that comes from knowing God's law. This is a peace that brings delight as stated in verse 70. May we seek God's Word with greater fervency than our Google searches.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Think of a time you felt afflicted/distressed. What were some of the feelings you had during that time?
- Did you seek answers for why this was happening? Did you seek information from books, websites, friends, or family?
- What keeps you from seeking God's Word for answers or comfort?
- Commit to pursuing scripture as your source of truth. Consider topical booklets that can point you to scripture for various topics when you are feeling a certain way (i.e. Depressed, Angry, Offended, Betrayed, etc.)

BOTTOM LINE:

I can cling to God's Word for my hope and truth because God is good and what He does is good.

Day 42 : PSALM 139:1-6

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Every time I read this passage, I am in awe of God's love for us. The fact that He knows when we get up in the morning, what we do during the day, and what we think about, is a huge and powerful indication of how important each of us is to Him. Like the author David, it's hard for us to comprehend how much interest God takes in our lives. So often we fall into the trap of thinking that God has bigger things to worry about. With everything else going on in the world, why bother Him with our petty problems? What an awesome God we have. As the Bible says, He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. This same Lord knows how many hairs are on our heads right now, the unconfessed sin in our hearts, and loves us all the same. With that assurance, how can we not give our best for Him who has done so much for us? Truly, there is no better feeling in the world than to know you are completely known and completely loved. God already knows every horrible thing we've ever done or will do and yet still He loves us more than we will ever understand. Don't be tempted to fight Him on that.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Do you really believe God knows you and loves you as much as Psalm 139 says? When do you find this truth easy to believe? When is it difficult to believe?

- Do you live like God loves you that much? How is this easy/challenging for you?

BOTTOM LINE:

Take heart and trust God's amazing love for you so you can boldly follow where He leads you.

Day 43 : PSALM 143:1-2,7-10

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

I don't remember the setting, but I recall the feelings. I was desperate, betrayed, broken, and utterly vacant of joy - dare I say depressed? Between years of chaos, sexual sin and dealing with my assurance of salvation, I was at my wits end and didn't know how to deal with it. Then I came across Psalm 143. It is amazing how many times this sad and raw Psalm has brought me out depression. It has brought me through countless times of chaos, heartbreak, relational hardships, and divorce. Till this day the Lord still has not released me from this Psalm, for every time I am desperate for help he gently steers my heart back to Psalm 143. What is it about Psalms like these that bring such peace to a suffering person? How is it that seeing these servants of God pained, brings us a sense of comfort? I would say it is the comfort in knowing others like us; even people who were titans of the faith suffered just like us. We find comfort in knowing we aren't the only ones. Even more so, there is one greater than David, Moses, Paul and John and He has suffered like no one else has known. He is more capable of relating to and understanding all our pain than any other. That person is Jesus, our King. So we should remember that when we suffer, we are not alone, we can read and pray these Psalms and know we join in a chorus of saints and Jesus who have uttered these very words themselves.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- When have you felt your "Spirit failing" like this Psalmist? How did you cope with that? Was God a part of it? Why or why not?
- What are some enemies in your life? People, sins, temptations? What can you do to handle these situations the biblical way?
- We are reminded that even Jesus - Son of God - knew pain and suffering well. How can that bring us comfort? Do you ever feel like God can't handle your raw pain and suffering prayers? Where does that come from? Why is that not true?

BOTTOM LINE:

We can come before God just as we are and use Psalms like these to help us express our heartaches to a compassionate and understanding God.

Day 44 : PSALM 144:1-2

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

For me, the Christian life isn't always a warm and fuzzy experience and often, I find myself in a battle. At those times, it is easy to feel inadequate, alone and vulnerable. Yet it is during those times that I must remember that I am not fighting with my strength solely. In this Psalm, King David praised the Lord, acknowledging that it was God who had enabled him to prevail over his enemies. More so, it was the Lord who had trained him how to fight and the Lord who was protecting him. Consider yourself a young boxer fighting against a seasoned pro. When it seems like the enemy is winning, it is not over yet. You might be breathing hard, holding on to the ropes, hoping someone throws in the towel. With the sweat dripping down your face and into your eyes, you can't clearly see your trainer standing in your corner. But he wants you to keep fighting and he's got your back. You need to dig deep and remember your training. God's the same way. He's got you solidly covered. He won't hesitate or weaken from day to day. The Lord is loving, kind, and loyal; he will provide a fortress for us during the trials and fights. He is our deliverer, our shield, and our refuge. The fights in life cannot be fought and won by our own strength and knowledge. Truly, you never have to fight alone.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Is there a battle or fight happening right now in your life?
- What is something you can do today to help you remember and draw upon your training?
- How can this passage help me encourage others?

BOTTOM LINE:

Let God train your hands for war and you'll be supernaturally equipped to fight against challenges and trials. And remember, God, your trainer, is your fortress, stronghold, deliverer and shield.

Day 45 : PSALM 150:1-5

REFLECT UPON GOD'S WORD

Psalm 1 begins the Psalms with a description of our duty before God. Psalm 150 ends out the Psalms with the truth that we are to always praise God. I love the flow here from beginning to end... knowing what God requires of us and doing it before Him continually will result in praise to Him. One of the reasons we were created and designed was to worship God. It is in our DNA. I like to believe that music and worship go together in a creative process. That is why we sing with worship songs. Talented musicians and songwriters put praise to music and we sing it back to God. The Bible says that God inhabits the praises of His people. That is because we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works – such as praise God. Think about how interesting it would be to come to church on a Sunday morning and see the instruments being listed in Psalm 150 being used on stage! To be honest, I am truly thankful that some drums, beyond the tambourine and cymbals are being incorporated today. I know that it is not what instruments we use; rather, it is why we use them and how we use them.

RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

- Is it unrealistic to Praise God at ALL times?

- Is it wrong to Praise God even when you do not want to?

- Can you honestly say that Praising God characterizes your life?

BOTTOM LINE:

Praising God is a daily privilege, not a once a week chore.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| Upset | John 14 |
| Weak | Psalms 18:1-29 |
| Lonely | Psalms 23 |
| Sinned | Psalms 51 |
| Worried | Matthew 8:19-31 |
| Anxious | Philippians 4:4-9 |
| Unhappy | Colossians 3:12-17 |
| In danger | Psalms 91 |
| Depressed | Psalms 27 |
| Lack of Faith | Exodus 14 |
| Need Courage | Joshua 1 |
| Need Direction | Psalms 73:21-26 |
| Seeking peace | Matthew 11:25-30 |
| Leaving on a trip | Psalms 121 |
| Struggling with loss | Luke 15 |
| Struggling Financially | Psalms 37 |
| Discouraged with work | Psalms 126 |



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