

January 1 – Faith in Action

Today's Reading: Psalms 1-5

***“For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction” - Psalm 1:6.***

This verse mentions “way” twice, one for the righteous and one for the wicked. All people are walking one of those two ways. The Lord expects you to be on His way, and that way is the road marked “faith.” The word *way* and a life of faith imply movement and progress in the right direction. James 2:17 describes the way for God’s people: “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” There is *always* something you can do in faith, otherwise your faith is useless. Your life matter today is to determine what faith action you can take concerning a particular situation you are facing. What is that action? Be specific, and don’t say you don’t have time. Let’s start the year off with a prayer, shall we? *Father, I thank You for your Word and the chance to study it. I commit these readings to you, and I pray that you will equip and empower me to learn and apply the lessons You have for me, and will be able to apply what I learn by Your grace. I commit this year and this study to You!*

January 2 – Vindication

Today's Reading: Psalms 6-10

***“Let the Lord judge the peoples.
Vindicate me, Lord, according to my righteousness,
according to my integrity, O Most High” - Psalm 7:8.***

It can be difficult to wait for the Lord to vindicate you when you have been wrongly accused or someone criticizes or maligns you. Two common responses to when your reputation is sullied is to take legal action or to counterattack. Yet the psalmist in today's verse chose to trust that God would be the One to vindicate him, a strategy that Jesus employed as Peter explained: “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23). Both Jesus and the psalmist chose to wait for God to do set things right according to His own time and in His own way. Pray this prayer today: *Lord, I put You in charge of my image and my defense. I choose **not** to defend myself, but will wait for You to do so - or not!*

January 3 – Your Thought Life

Today's Reading: Psalms 11-15

***“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?” - Psalm 13:1-2.***

When you are suffering, there are two questions that generally arise: why and how long will it last? David was sorrowful as he battled thoughts of God's possible unfaithfulness amidst the seemingly endless duration of his pain. In this case, David's battle was not external but in his mind and that is where your greatest battle takes place as well. Paul wrote that this work of renewing your mind is like hand-to-hand combat, as he described in 2 Corinthians 10:5: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Are you willing to take on this battle to bring your thought life into alignment with God's reality and will? If so, then pray this prayer: *Lord, today I choose to believe that You are faithful, and I commit to wrestle with my thought life to make sure it accepts and meditates on Your truth.*

January 4 – A Spacious Place

Today's Reading: Psalms 16-20

*"He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of deep waters.
He rescued me from my powerful enemy,
from my foes, who were too strong for me.
They confronted me in the day of my disaster,
but the Lord was my support.
He brought me out into a spacious place;
he rescued me because he delighted in me" - Psalm 18:16-19.*

Time and again in the book of Psalms, the writers wrote and sang about their trouble and how the Lord rescued and delivered them. In today's passage, the psalmist stated that the Lord brought him into what he referred to as a "spacious place." **What does a spacious place represent for you? Ministry or professional growth? A larger family? Greater influence or wealth? A role where you can be who God made you to be, surrounded by people who appreciate and don't envy or limit you?** In your journal, take a few minutes to write about what an ideal "spacious place" would look like for you. Then trust the Lord to help you find such a place!

January 5 – His Kingdom Rule

Today's Reading: Psalms 21-25

*"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters" - Psalm 24:1-2.*

God is the Lord over all people and all things, whether those people acknowledge Him or not. The things over which He rules include every area of life and culture such as business, education, social work, banking, government, church, entertainment, music, and science. Since He is Lord, He has the right to rule and declare His will as he sees fit. The Lord Jesus' first words when He began His ministry were, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 4:17). In

that one statement, Jesus expressed His mission on earth and that was to proclaim, embody, and establish God's government over what already belonged to the Father. When you repent of building your own kingdom and come to the Lord, you accept your role to extend God's Kingdom rule into the spheres mentioned above, according to your purpose assignment. What is your Kingdom assignment? Do you see that you are here to do more than attend church services? Do you understand that you are God's Kingdom representative where you work, in your family, and in your neighborhood? What implications does being a representative have for your attitude and behavior?

January 6 – The Flood, Your Flood

Today's Reading: Psalms 26-30

*“The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord is enthroned as King forever.
The Lord gives strength to his people;
the Lord blesses his people with peace” - Psalm 29:10-11.*

Have you ever watched video footage of a flood or tsunami? If you have, you know it's an awesome and frightening event, as you watch the water pick up boats and cars and carry them like they are toothpicks. Today's passage tells you that the Lord presided over Noah's flood as King. The same King who controlled Noah's Flood sits as King over the flood waters in your life. That knowledge should give you peace and comfort in the midst of flood-like situations that overwhelm and terrify you. Jesus exhibited God's power over your flood when He rebuked the wind and waves that were about to overtake the disciples. With just one word, He calmed the seas! Is there a flood in your life right now? Thank Him today for both empowering you to cope with your situation and also controlling your flood-like circumstances.

January 7 – Hopeful and Optimistic

Today's reading: Psalms 31-35

*“The Lord foils the plans of the nations;
he thwarts the purposes of the peoples.
But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever,
the purposes of his heart through all generation” - Psalm 33:10-11.*

It is easy to listen to media reports and become pessimistic about the state of the world and its future. Someone once said, however, that God is playing chess with the nations, for He matches their every move! The enemies of God may win some short-term battles, but God has already won the war, and the final victory will be declared for all the world to behold at the Second Coming of Jesus. Therefore, you can be hopeful and optimistic, not based on what you see but according to the faith you have in the truth found in today's passage. God's purposes will stand regardless of what victories the nations along with their philosophies and false religions seem to win. When Elijah was depressed about the state of the world, he said to the Lord, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down

your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too” (1 Kings 19:14). The Lord responded, “Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18). Ask God to give you His perspective today, like He did to Elijah, so you can put your faith not in what you see but in what God sees!

January 8 – Anger’s Purpose

Today's Reading - Psalms 36-40

***“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil” - Psalm 37:8.***

Anger is a normal human emotion that God gave you to spur you on to *righteous* action. Anger can become a problem whenever you do two things: 1) internalize it, which leads to your mind running wild with anxiety as you replay the situation that offended you and proceed to develop and rehearse revenge scenarios; or 2) express it improperly through angry words or actions intended to hurt others emotionally or physically. Your job is to control your anger and quickly channel it in positive ways. It will help to remember what Paul wrote: “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26). That verse indicates that you can be angry and not sin. Can you see that anger is intended to motivate you to do something, and it’s what you do that can be the problem, not the anger itself? Have you been trying to suppress your anger instead of facing it?

January 9 – God-Reliant

Today's Reading: Psalms 41-45

***“I put no trust in my bow,
my sword does not bring me victory;
but you give us victory over our enemies,
you put our adversaries to shame” - Psalm 44:6-7.***

It is a lifelong journey to learn how to be God-reliant and not self-reliant. The more talented or experienced you are, the more your tendency to think, "I've got this," and to act accordingly. The psalmist in Psalm 44 was probably skilled using the bow and sword, but he learned to put no trust in them, but instead placed his confidence in the Lord. In what area do you need to put your trust completely in the Lord? Where are you facing a situation that you have handled it in the past, but today you are learning to trust in God's strength and His timing for your victory? Have you begun to put your trust in your gift or skill instead of the God of your gift or skill? If you are being delivered from your reliance on self, then pray this prayer today: ***Lord, I choose to be God-reliant and learn to trust You to help me overcome my enemies and win the victory in every area of life.***

January 10 – Be Realistic

Today's reading: Psalms 46-50

*“God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging” - Psalm 46:1-3.*

The writer of Psalm 46 was realistic and understood that God would not keep him out of trouble but instead would protect him in the midst of trouble. This is an important distinction because if you think God will not allow something to happen and it happens, you can become disillusioned with and even bitter against the Lord. Today's passage indicates that the tribulation in your life can be traumatic, similar in effect to some of the worst natural disasters you can imagine. It is during those times, however, that you come to know God as your refuge and strength. Without tough times, you would only know those aspects of God's character in theory and not reality. Paul and Barnabas encouraged the saints with these words. You should be encouraged by them as well: “Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21-22).

January 11 – Choosing to Give

Today's Reading: Psalms 51-55

*“I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you;
I will praise your name, Lord, for it is good” - Psalm 54:6.*

The act of giving is not only a duty but also an act of worship that you should freely embrace. Your attitude should not be that you *have* to give but rather that you *get* to give. In today's verse, David wrote that he was giving a freewill offering - not something God directed him to do but something David chose to do of his own volition. Paul taught about this attitude toward giving when he wrote:

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8-9).

What is your attitude toward giving? Are you a cheerful giver? Is it something you feel compelled to do or choose to do?

January 12 – Fear Is There

Today's Reading: Psalms 55-60

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you” - Psalm 56:3.

Notice that David did not write "if I am afraid" but rather "when I am afraid." Fear is present in your life, but is a master of disguise, often appearing as rational thought. Therefore, you should go on a search-and-destroy mission to identify where it is operating in your life and limiting your performance, not being surprised when you find it. For example, you may be thinking, "I don't have enough time." That may better be stated as "I'm *afraid* I don't have enough time to do that well" or "I'm *afraid* I will fail, so I won't even try." Second Timothy 1:7 says, "For God did not give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control" (NET). What could you do today if you were not afraid? Are you ready to confront and eradicate your fears today? Ask the Spirit's help so you can uncover fear and replace it with a spirit of boldness.

January 13 – Private Worship in a Public Setting

Today's Reading: Psalms 61-65

***“I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.
Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.
I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.” - Psalm 63:2-4.***

David was reflecting on God's love, but he was doing it inside the sanctuary, probably in the Tabernacle of David, a tent where he had placed the ark of the covenant to make it accessible to all the people, not just the priests (see 1 Chronicles 16 and Acts 15:15-18). In that setting, David glorified God with his lips, uttered words of praise, and lifted up his hands. David's example indicates that worship is to be public and corporate - not just private - and that worshippers are to use their mouths, minds and bodies (in this case, hands) as they worship. Where does corporate worship occur in modern times? It takes place in local churches and the writer of Hebrews taught how important local church meetings are for the believer: "[you are] not [to be] giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but [rather] encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:26). **Are you regularly attending church? When you do, do you involve your whole being, spirit, emotions and body?**

January 14 – Vows to God

Today's reading: Psalms 66-70

***“I will come to your temple with burnt offerings
and fulfill my vows to you—
vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke
when I was in trouble” - Psalm 66:13-14.***

A pastor once said that God will collect on promises we make in times of war during times of peace. What exactly did he mean? When you are in a tough place, you can say, "God if you get

me out of this, I will do such and such” or “If you help me, I will never do this or that again.” You cannot see God, however, and you can easily forget those promises when the pressure is removed from your life. When the crisis passes, God may remind you about those promise you made to Him. We read in Acts 18:18 that Paul, “Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken.” Have you made any promises to God on which you have not made good? Have you made a pledge to give to a cause, and then backed out of your commitment? Have you vowed to read or pray more? If so, then today is a good day to ask His forgiveness and to start fulfilling the vows you chose to make.

January 15 – Money Love

Today's reading: Psalms 71-75

*“But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.
For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” - Psalm 73:2-3.*

It can be difficult to understand why good things happen to seemingly bad people and why they have the resources and opportunities for success that seem to elude you. The psalmist confessed that he had almost succumbed to envy when he beheld what others had. The good news is he did not, and you must not either! Paul wrote about this tendency in 1 Timothy 6:6-10:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Are you envious of someone who has more than you but seems to be less spiritual? Has the love of money gotten hold of your heart? What can you do to set yourself free?

January 16 – Responsible to Teach

Today's reading: Psalms 76-80

*“He decreed statutes for Jacob
and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach their children,
so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children” - Psalm 78:5-6.*

The Lord established a strategy for how His good news will be spread, and that strategy is simply one generation teaching the next. You have an obligation to teach what you know in some capacity, which may take the form of teaching your children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, neighborhood or church children, or children in another land through missions work. Your teaching duty may not be restricted to children, however, but may also include adult Sunday School or even teaching encounters through books, broadcasting or online programs that you write and develop. Do you accept your duty and responsibility to teach the next generation? If so, pray this prayer: *Lord, I accept my responsibility to be a teacher in order to pass along Your ways and good news to others, especially those younger than I. Show me how and where I can do this and I will gladly accept the task.*

January 17 – Remember the Poor

Today's Reading: Psalms 81-85

***“Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked” - Psalm 82:3-4.***

God requires that His people remember the poor through practical acts of kindness, which includes giving alms and special benevolent offerings. Remembering the poor may also involve protecting them from those who would infringe on their rights and take advantage of them. This may require speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves. When Paul was explaining his call to the Jerusalem elders, he wrote this concerning their response to his explanation: “They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along” (Galatians 2:9b-10). Are you remembering the poor? Are you eager to do something on their behalf? What more can you do? *Lord, I thank You for the blessings I have, and I want to be a good steward of the opportunities You give me to share what I have with others. Forgive me when I been insensitive to the needs of others, and give me a heart for the poor and seal my resolve to do more to help them according to Your will. I want to do this, Lord, for those in my own country as well as those in other countries. Allow my gifts to make a difference in the lives of others so they know that You love them. Amen.*

January 18 – Your Anointing

Today's reading: Psalms 86-90

***“Once you spoke in a vision, to your faithful people you said:
‘I have bestowed strength on a warrior; I have raised up a
young man from among the people. I have found David my
servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him’” - Psalm 89:19-20.***

David was anointed, which means the Spirit was with him to help him do God's will. Jesus was also referred to as the Christ, which means the Anointed One as Luke described: "How God

anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him" (Acts 10:38). You are anointed when you function in your purpose, and your purpose work and anointing are not restricted to church work. They are present in your life wherever God assigns you a task, and that may be at work, in school, in a foreign land or with a particular group of people who have a special need. Where do you sense God's anointing in your life? What are you doing when you sense it? Do you understand that God's anointing may be with you when you are working in what some would call a secular setting?

January 19 – God Is Speaking

Today's reading - Psalms 91-95

“Today, if only you would hear his voice, ‘Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did’” - Psalm 95:7b-9.

God can speak through others; His Word; the preached Word; a still, small voice; or through circumstances. This passage warns you not to harden your heart whenever and however God is speaking to you. Notice that in today's verses, God is speaking directly through the author to the reader, and the author recognized that he was hearing from the Lord. This passage is then quoted three times in Hebrews 3 and 4 by another author who was speaking on the Lord's behalf. The point is that God is always speaking and “broadcasting” His messages, many times using others to get the message to you. The questions are: **Are you listening, what is He saying, and how are you recording it to keep it before you?** Be listening today and make sure you stay open and don't harden your heart.

January 20 – Give Thanks

Today's reading: Psalms 96-100

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name” - Psalm 100:4.

It is common to hear those saints who are a bit older thank the Lord for giving them another day. As you get older, you should appreciate life and the grace of God that has gotten you that far. It is a good thing to be mindful that this is God's doing, and to give thanks to the Lord, for it helps you focus on your blessings and the goodness of God in the midst of life's uncertainties. Paul instructed the church in Ephesians 5:20 to “always [be] giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Do you have an attitude of gratitude? Do you see God in the things of life, and acknowledge His presence and grace? Spend some significant minutes today and every day thanking God for your life and the people and things that are in it.

January 21 – Your Self-Talk

Today's reading: Psalms 101-105

*“Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits” - Psalm 103:2.*

David had a serious talk with his own soul, directing it to praise God and remember His benefits. **Have you noticed that you are in a constant dialog with yourself?** This is called self-talk. It is important that when you do something less than perfect, you don't engage your self-talk by saying, “You are stupid” or “You never were any good at that.” David suggested what the content of your self talk should focus on God's goodness to you while praising His holy name. One way to guide your inner talk is to have a robust dialog with others according to Revelation 12:11: "They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." Are you sharing with others how good God is to you? Are you rehearsing God's goodness in your mind according to what you have, or do your thoughts focus on what you don't have or how bad things are?

January 22 – Hope for the Future by Remembering the Past

Today's reading: Psalm 106-110

*“But they soon forgot what he had done
and did not wait for his plan to unfold” - Psalm 106:13-14.*

It can be difficult to wait for God to reveal His will for your life, especially when you don't know what is ahead or how long you have to go on waiting. You can help yourself in the process by remembering God's faithfulness to you in the past, recounting how He acted previously. If God has never failed you, then chances are He is not about to start now! Doing that should help you as you wait for Him to paint the big picture that reveals where you fit in and what He wants you to do. These words from Isaiah can also help you while you are in God's waiting room: “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31). Hope in the Lord and never lose sight of the fact that He cares for you. *Father, I thank You that you do care for me and You always have. Forgive me when I have doubted Your love and faithfulness. Help me, Lord, to know how long I should wait and what I should do while I am waiting – how I should prepare and what You want me to learn during that important time. Lord, I promise to remember what You have done for me by sharing it with others, and then thanking You for Your love on a regular basis.*

January 23 – The Fear of the Lord

Today's reading: Psalms 111-115

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow
his precepts have good understanding.
To him belongs eternal praise” - Psalm 111:10.*

In the midst of the psalms that mostly declare God's praise, this verse in Psalm 111 resembles a verse found in Proverbs: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7). That's because praise and worship, a common theme in Psalms, are based on the fear of the Lord, a common theme in Proverbs. When you worship, you sing, clap, dance, shout, and lift your hands not because you feel like it or it is your preferred mode of worship. You do those things because they please God, acknowledging that He commands them to be performed. Have you given much thought to your demeanor and “body language” when you worship the Lord? When you worship, do you follow your own preferences or God's? Do you know what God’s preferences are?

January 24 – Expectations

Today's reading: Psalms 116-120

*“It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in humans” - Psalm 118:8.*

It is inevitable that at times you will disappoint those closest to you and those closest to you will disappoint you. This can happen through a simple daily event, a casual comment, or a serious life matter in which you were counting on another person for support and help but they were unable to deliver according to your expectations. The closer the person is to you, the more painful the disappointment can be. The Apostle Paul knew this kind of pain for he wrote: “You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes” (2 Timothy 1:15). Armed with the knowledge of this reality, you are best served if you put high expectations on the Lord who will never desert or betray you. It would also help if you adjust the unrealistic expectations you have of others meeting your needs, realizing that you are just as capable of disappointing them, thus extending grace when they fall short.

January 25 – You Live in Him

Today's reading: Psalms 121-125

*“The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life;
the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore” - Psalm 121:7-8.*

You probably have a story or two that speaks to the truth in today's verses – God will protect and keep you from harm. You may have had a close call or two that caused you to realize God was and is watching over you. Yet even when you know that's true, you may still be afraid of airplanes, heights, water, snakes, spiders, failure, criticism, to go on a foreign trip, or apply for a new job. Even though you know God is in control, fear can still stymie what you want or need to do. Paul preached to the Athenians, saying, “For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28a). That means your life is like an aquarium; you are the fish and the water is the presence of God. Are you swimming freely or huddled in the corner of your tank, afraid to move out? Where has fear limited your ability to exercise faith and take action before you have all the information of how everything will work out?

January 26 – Mourning Joy

Today's reading: Psalms 126-130

*“Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.
Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them” - Psalm 126:5-6.*

What is the Lord telling you through today’s verses? Your tears can lead to a harvest of joy. Jesus made a similar statement in Matthew 5:4: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Why should you mourn? You can start with your own sinfulness. Then move on to mourn the injustice in the world, the persecuted church, the opportunities that are lost due to greed, disunity in the church, and the lost who don't know Christ. God does not want you to stay in a state of mourning, however, for your tears lead you to recognize that God wants you to play a role in addressing that need over which you mourn. When you realize that God has something for you to do, you will see that your tears were actually seeds that have led to a harvest. Then you will sing songs of joy and bear much fruit as you find and fulfill your God-given purpose that is designed to address those things over which you have wept.

January 27 – Reconciliation

Today's reading: Psalms 131-135

*“How good and pleasant it is
when God’s people live together in unity!” - Psalm 133:1.*

There is spiritual power in harmony and reconciliation, which is why the devil, our great enemy, stirs up so much animosity, hatred and misunderstanding. You cannot control how someone else thinks or acts, but you can work on your own heart and mind as God gives you grace to do. Your job, therefore, is to make sure that none of those negative attitudes creep into any of your relationships. Where those already function, you must confront and repent from them, as Jesus directed you to do: “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24). Is there anything you can do today to be reconciled with anyone from whom you are estranged?

January 28 – Humility

Today's reading - Psalm 136-140

*“Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly;
though lofty, he sees them from afar” - Psalm 138:6.*

Another word for lowly is humble, and the opposite of humility is pride. Both those traits attract God's immediate attention, for He helps the humble and opposes the proud. Mary understood this truth when she praised God during her visit to her cousin Elizabeth: “He has brought down rulers

from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:52-53). The implications for you from what Mary said are clear: humble yourself and be God's friend, or be proud and risk having God humble or even humiliate you. The choice is obvious but not always easy to do. Where do you need to humble yourself, even if you believe you are right and others are wrong?

January 29 – Guidance

Today's reading 141-145

*“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God;
may your good Spirit lead me on level ground” - Psalm 143:10.*

In this psalm, David was asking God's help as he carried out his dual roles of teacher and leader in the power of the Spirit. David acknowledged that he needed the Spirit's help to do God's will, and prayed the words in today's prayer on his own behalf. Centuries later, Jesus described the Spirit's role in your life in John 16:13: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” Are you praying for yourself? Are you asking in faith that God will guide you, and then trusting that He is answering your prayer?

January 30 – The Church

Today's reading - Psalms 146-150

*“For the Lord takes delight in his people;
he crowns the humble with victory” - Psalm 149:4.*

Some people interpret the "people" in this verse to mean individuals like you and me. Yet the context is not singular but plural. God delights in His people and those people today are His church, which Jesus paid to establish with His life. John saw the church and described it in Revelation 21:2: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” This begs the questions: Are you involved in a local church? Are you utilizing your gifts to help edify her people and reach new converts? While you are special to God as an individual, the corporate church is where God's heart is, and you need to be involved in what matters to God.

January 31 – Word Change

Today's reading - Psalm 119

*"Turn my heart toward your statutes
and not toward selfish gain" - Psalm 119:36.*

Your heart is inclined toward evil, but that tendency can be reversed. God is able to change hearts including yours, but you must want the transformation to take place. It starts when you see

the need for change, then in faith you ask God to change you. After that, you confront your own proclivity for self-interest by studying God's word, all the while praying for your heart to stay focused on Him. Study of God's word is important for reasons explained by the writer of Hebrews:

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (4:12-13).

Are you willing to put in the time and effort necessary so that God's word can change your heart?

February 1 – Critics

Today's reading: Psalms 1-5

*“Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!
Many are saying of me, ‘God will not deliver him’” - Psalm 3:1-2.*

It can be unnerving when you have enemies who criticize or even persecute you because of your stand for the Lord and His righteous standard. Yet you should be more surprised and concerned if you *don't* have enemies based on what Jesus said: "Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). While you should not go out of your way to attract critics, you should not back off or back down from any stance for the Lord just because some people are upset because of it. Are you shying away from any bold public stand for Christ because you fear what others may say or are saying about you? Are you hesitant to be who God created you to be because of fear? What changes do you propose that will take you out of this fear groove?

February 2 – When God Delays

Today's reading: Psalms 6-10

*“But God will never forget the needy;
the hope of the afflicted will never perish” - Psalm 9:18.*

It may seem like God has forgotten you, but He never has and never will. He will delay, however, in responding because there are lessons He wants to teach you. What's more, God will manifest the validity of the work He has done in you by delaying so He can reveal to principalities and powers that you are obedient in the midst of trials. The Lord described this process in Deuteronomy 8:3-5:

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. Your clothes did not wear out and

your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

Is God humbling you and how are you responding to this season in your life?

February 3 – Blessings Inventory

Today's reading: Psalms 11-15

***“But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the Lord’s praise, for he has been good to me” - Psalm 13:5-6.***

There are three verbs in today's passage: *trust, rejoice, and sing*. The context for those three verbs to function is God's goodness, love and salvation He has extended to the psalmist. You also have a track record with the Lord, who has extended the same blessings to you as He did to David. Are you responding with the same actions? Are you trusting? How do you know you are? Are you rejoicing or bogged down in the worries of life? Are you singing, or is your gratitude strictly internal, with no outward expressions of praise? Take some time today, do an inventory of all the ways the Lord has blessed you, and then respond in faith with joy and singing! *Lord, once again You remind me that I must be mindful of Your presence in my life and all the good gifts Your presence has bestowed upon me. That includes salvation, forgiveness of sins, being made holy, my spiritual gifts and Your ongoing love and care. Help me to live with a greater awareness of Your presence in my life, and I vow to praise you for Your goodness and mercy.*

February 4 – Spiritual War

Today's reading: Psalms 16-20

***“He trains my hands for battle;
my arms can bend a bow of bronze” - Psalm 18:34.***

When you become a believer, you inherit many wonderful promises that God stands behind to fulfill. You also inherit a place in God's army, which means that spiritual warfare becomes a way of life, for often you must do battle against God's enemy (who has also become yours) to realize the fulfillment of God's promises. You cannot be passive in this war, but you must aggressively do what Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

How is this war playing out in your life right now and are you an active or passive combatant?

February 5 – God Pleaser

Today's reading: Psalms 21-25

“In you, Lord my God, I put my trust” - Psalm 25:1.

Perhaps you are familiar with Hebrews 11:6, which states, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” If without faith, it's impossible to please God, then with faith it's *possible* to please Him. You can bring joy and pleasure to God's heart when you cease from striving to manage your life in your own efforts, and relax, putting your trust in Him - for career, finances, relationships and ministry. Where are you trying too hard in your own efforts? Where do you need to stop and make a conscious and once-and-for-all decision to trust God? Whenever you do that, rest assured that you have pleased God! *Lord, those are not just words, for I do indeed put my trust in You. Help me to learn new levels of trust as I serve and follow You. Remind me when I take the reins of my life away from You, and forgive me when I am afraid and try to take matters into my own hands.*

February 6 – Fickle Feelings

Today's reading: Psalm 26-30

*“When I felt secure, I said,
‘I will never be shaken.’
Lord, when you favored me,
you made my royal mountain stand firm;
but when you hid your face,
I was dismayed” (Psalm 30:5-6).*

It is easy to be optimistic and make commitments when things are going well, but difficult to keep those commitments when things are not going so well. When you have money, you can pledge your unfailing generosity, but you will be tested on that vow when money is tight. What's more, you can determine what season you are in by how you feel without remembering that feelings can change, and therefore need to put your trust in the Lord regardless of how you feel. In fact, the *less* you feel, the *more* you should trust and rely on your values and previously-made vows to direct your behavior. Where are you too dependent on your feelings to direct your behavior, thereby subjecting yourself and others to your high “high” and low “lows”? Where do you need to be more consistent in your attitudes and behavior? *I confess that I need to be more consistent, Lord, where my emotions are concerned. I still tend to respond based on the circumstances I can see instead of Your unchanging love that I cannot see. I choose today to keep my focus on You and not on my fickle feelings.*

February 7 – Troubles

Today's reading: Psalms 31-35

*“The righteous person may have many troubles,
but the Lord delivers him from them all;
he protects all his bones,
not one of them will be broken” - Psalm 34:19-20.*

When I first met the Lord, I held a strange assumption about my new life in Christ: "I will never again have a flat tire!" Somehow, I thought I was exempt from car trouble because of my faith in Jesus. Needless to say, I have had a lot of car trouble since then along with troubles in many other areas of life. God has used those troubles to teach me about His love and ability to deliver me from my troubles, while teaching me trust, patience and empathy for others who are going through troubles. Are you surprised by your troubles? Do you see the role they play in your walk with the Lord? Perhaps Paul's words will help you as you endure difficult times: "Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:21b-22).

February 8 – Urgency

Today's reading: Psalms 36-40

*“Show me, Lord, my life’s end
and the number of my days;
let me know how fleeting my life is.
You have made my days a mere handbreadth;
the span of my years is as nothing before you.
Everyone is but a breath,
even those who seem secure” (Psalm 39:4-5).*

As I write, I am almost 66 years of age. I am asking, "Where have the years gone?" I am not complaining, for I have lived a rich, full life, but of course I hope I have many years remaining. Today, however, may be my last day, for I am not guaranteed anything beyond this very minute. With that in mind and while looking at today's passage, I want to make the most of every day I have left, doing what is in my heart to do and being as productive as possible. Is that your attitude? Are you putting off doing things in your heart, acting like you have ten, twenty or thirty years more? If you knew that you had two years to live, what would you be doing? You must act with that kind of urgency every day if you are going to make your mark and leave a legacy for others to follow and remember.

February 9 – Rumors

Today's reading: Psalms 41-45

*“All my enemies whisper together against me;
they imagine the worst for me, saying,
‘A vile disease has afflicted him;
he will never get up from the place where he lies’” - Psalm 41:7-8.*

David reported how his enemies had concocted rumors that encouraged them in their vicious attempts to destroy his reputation and life. Those rumors served to diminish David's stature and importance in their minds so they could justify their persecution and ensure their probability of victory. Rumors are a way of life and unfortunately are sometimes the most effective and efficient way of communicating, even when they contain half-truths and lies. Your role should be two-fold: Don't receive and pass on rumors with information that is hearsay and cannot be substantiated. And don't manufacture rumors, especially those that contain gossip and innuendo that can destroy or reduce people's esteem or stature in the minds of others. Remember what Paul wrote: "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (Ephesians 4:25). Are you a source of rumors, either to manufacture or disseminate them? What changes do you need to make to stop that habit?

February 10 – Self-Righteousness

Today's reading: Psalms 46-50

*"I have no need of a bull from your stall
or of goats from your pens,
for every animal of the forest is mine,
and the cattle on a thousand hills" - Psalm 50:9-10.*

The Lord was speaking in today's passage, confronting Israel's attitude that they were doing Him a favor when they offered sacrifices, as if God needed them. The Lord reminded them that He already owned what they were giving Him, and that He really wanted their love and heart, not their external rituals. God does not need your music, money, Sabbath rest or presence in church. He does not require your prayers or fasting. Are you like the Pharisee who came into God's presence and said, "The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get'" (Luke 18:11-12)? If so, then you need to repent of your self-righteous attitude and learn to humbly serve the Lord, which is for your own benefit and not for God's.

February 11 – Fruit

Today's reading: Psalm 51-55

*"But I am like an olive tree
flourishing in the house of God;
I trust in God's unfailing love
for ever and ever" - Psalm 52:8.*

An olive tree produces a lot of olives and does so for many years. There are some olive trees at the Church of All Nations in Jerusalem that are 2,000 years old and would have been there the night Jesus prayed and sweat blood. David wrote that he was like one of those olive trees and his nourishment came from God's presence. God doesn't only want you to be a "nice" person; He also wants you to be a nice, fruitful person, just like an olive tree. Jesus said, "You did not

choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you" (John 15:16). What is your fruit? What are you producing as a result of your relationship with and faith in the Lord? What do you do that when you do it, you sense God helping you produce results? How and when can you do more of that activity?

February 12 - Teaching Trials

Today's reading: Psalms 56-60

*“You are my strength, I watch for you;
you, God, are my fortress,
my God on whom I can rely” - Psalm 59:9-10.*

If you haven't noticed by now, Psalms is filled with cries for help and declarations of trust because David and his people were often in serious trouble. Sometimes the trouble was their own fault and other times it was unjust persecution from their enemies. Regardless of the reason, David learned to call out to God, which is in part why the trouble came - his trials taught David to trust in the Lord. It's important that you learn to watch for, trust in and rely on the Lord just like David did as you encounter your own struggles. Later, David's son Solomon would write the words by which many have chosen to live: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:4-6). Are you relying on your own strength or God's help in your various trials of life?

February 13 – Greed

Today's reading: Psalms 61-65

*“Do not trust in extortion or put vain hope in stolen goods;
though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them” - Psalm 62:10.*

In a world where some have unprecedented wealth, it is difficult not to focus on getting money. The "have-nots" see what others have and can be envious or set their sights on getting a piece of the good life. Most ethical failures in business are based on the desire to get more money. The Apostle Paul clarified the problem when he wrote to the Ephesians: "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or *greedy* person—such a person is an *idolater*—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ephesians 5:5 emphasis added). The desire for more money stems from greed, which is a form of idolatry. Simply put, some people worship money! What are you doing to keep greed from sprouting, taking root and bearing fruit in your heart?

February 14 – Priorities

Today's reading: Psalms 66-70

*“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families,
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land” - Psalm 68:5-6.*

This passage tells you a lot about God's values and priorities. Even though He dwells in holiness, He is intimately involved in the lives of His people. What does today's passage tell you that God does? He cares for widows and orphans. God places the lonely in family settings. He leads those in captivity to freedom from addictions, debt or any other enslaving habit. Yet if people stubbornly insist on doing their own thing in their own way, He leaves them alone. The implications for you are two-fold. If you are lonely, God has a new family for you - if you are willing to have those blessings. If not and you prefer to sulk in self-pity, He will leave you be. Then also, if God is interested in helping the lonely, will you allow Him to use you to help them by opening your home and heart? Can you make God's priorities your priorities?

February 15 – The Needy

Today's reading: Psalm 71-75

*“He will take pity on the weak and the needy
and save the needy from death.
He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
for precious is their blood in his sight” - Psalm 72:13-14.*

God is full of compassion for the weak and downtrodden. If God is going to help them, however, He must use you and me to do so. That means we must have the same compassion and pity, and take action on God's behalf. You cannot expect or wait for God to use someone else, especially if you notice the plight of the needy, for that is another sign that God wants you to be involved. (It's difficult to accept, but some *cannot* see it like you do and therefore will not act.) The wisdom writer taught, "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God" (Proverbs 14:31). Where can you show kindness to the weak and needy? How can you get involved in justice and mercy issues in your country or another?

February 16 – Teaching Kids

Today's reading: Psalms 76-80

*“My people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth with a parable;
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—
things we have heard and known,
things our ancestors have told us” (Psalm 78:1-3).*

Every one of us is to be involved in teaching the next generation, imparting to them the values, attitudes and behaviors consistent with the life of a believer. That teaching may be face-to-face classroom, but it can also occur through social media, broadcasting, or writing and publishing teaching material. With the fragmentation of the modern family, it is more important than ever that you find some role to play in imparting truth to the next generation, remembering the verse in Proverbs; "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it" (22:6 NASB). Do you see that you have an obligation to teach and train? What are you doing? What more can you do? Can you support others who are teaching?

February 17 – Purpose Pilgrim

Today's reading: Psalms 81-85

*“Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage” - Psalm 84:5.*

This verse reminds you that God is your strength. To be more specific, the joy of the Lord is your strength. If you don't have God's joy, therefore, you don't have God's strength. The only substitute for God's strength is your own, and that of course is a poor replacement. Remembering what Nehemiah said, "Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10b), examine yourself to see if you have God's joy. If not, it may mean you are not functioning in your life purpose. Notice that this verse reminds you that you must set your heart like you were on a pilgrimage, for purpose is a pursuit and not a destination. Are you prepared to seek God and His purpose today and for the rest of your days? What implications do you think this will have for your life, work, and family? *Lord, I want and need your joy, for I am tired of operating in my own strength, which is so limited. I am sometimes afraid of my own joy, and don't really trust that you are using it to guide me into Your will. I accept that I am a pilgrim on a journey to find Your will for my life. I trust that You will reveal it to me. Amen!*

February 18 – Attack of the Enemy

Today's reading: Psalms 86-90

*“The enemy will not get the better of him;
the wicked will not oppress him” - Psalm 89:22.*

You can read today's verse and easily misinterpret what it actually says. You may think the enemy will never try to get the better of you or oppress you. That would be incorrect. The enemy will try and try, and sometimes seem like he has the upper hand, but ultimately God will have the victory in and through you. It is important to understand this because when you come under heavy attack, you may think, "I did something wrong" or "God has failed" or "God doesn't love me." This truth is also present in Isaiah 54:17: "No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me," declares the Lord." Have weapons been formed against you? Have tongues accused you? Are you clear that God will keep them from prevailing, not keep them from trying to prevail? *Father, I have sometimes assumed that following You would*

be easy and further assumed that when it isn't, I have done something wrong. Worse yet, I question your faithfulness in those times of war. Strengthen my resolve to serve You no matter what, and protect me from the attacks of the enemy that are ruthless and ongoing.

February 19 – Fruitfulness

Today's reading: Psalms 91-95

*“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;
planted in the house of the Lord,
they will flourish in the courts of our God” - Psalm 92:12-13.*

Flourish is used twice in this passage and its definition is "to achieve success, to be in a state of activity or production." Palm trees grow well in hot climates, with moderate to little rainfall. Yet they grow to stately heights and some produce dates and coconuts. This palm tree simile is one that should describe your life as you walk with the Lord in His "house" and "courts." Jesus described this process with these words: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). What tangible fruit are you producing in your life as part of the vine? Is your fruit only internal or is it external also? What can you do to produce even more fruit?

February 20 – Justice for the Poor

Today's reading: Psalms 96-100

*“The King is mighty, he loves justice —
you have established equity;
in Jacob you have done
what is just and right” - Psalm 99:4.*

God values justice and desires that His people and especially His leadership be committed to establish and administer justice without bias or prejudice. In the New Testament, James, the brother of Jesus, wrote about one form of injustice: bias against the poor. Here is what he wrote:

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are

they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? (James 2:1-7).

Are you doing what you can to further justice in your world, whether it be in your family, ministry or occupation? Is there anything else you can do or be involved in to help the poor?

February 21 – Praise Party

Today's reading: Psalms 101-105

*“Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” - Psalm 103:2-5.*

In this psalm, David once again engaged in something called self-talk: he conversed with himself to keep his soul encouraged and focused. He was not giving himself a pep talk, but rather having a conversation outlining all God's goodness toward David. Here is a list of all the things that God had done for David; forgiven, healed, redeemed, crowned, satisfied, and renewed. David then ordered his soul to praise the Lord in response to God's many blessings. How many of those things has God also done for you? Do you praise Him for His benefits, or are you bogged down in your circumstances that are less than ideal? Remember what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6 and then overcome your anxiety with a praise party every day: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

February 22 – Tell Your Story

Today's reading: Psalms 106-110

*“Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story—
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,
those he gathered from the lands,
from east and west, from north and south” - Psalm 107:2-3.*

The playwright Oscar Wilde once said, “Every saint has a past, every sinner has a future.” You have a past, a story of how God found you, healed you and how He is using you. You also have a story of your failures and how God worked good in and through them. You have a story today that is still being written, with chapters yet to be developed and a conclusion yet to be penned. Are you willing to tell this story? If the answer is “yes,” then how can you tell it? Does God want you to write a book? Make a movie? Give your testimony in person or through some other media? Are you hesitant to do this, not wanting to draw attention to yourself? If you don't produce it (whatever the “it” is for you to produce), it will deprive people of the encouragement

and consolation only your story can provide. *Lord, today describes me. I have been hesitant to draw attention to myself, yet if You don't use me, then who will You use to do Your will? I have a story and a purpose that You want me to share with others. I surrender to Your plan, even if that means I will be "front and center" in the minds of other people. I gave You my life. Now use it was You see fit! xxxx*

February 23 – Idolatry

Today's reading: Psalms 111-115

***“But their idols are silver and gold,
made by human hands.
They have mouths, but cannot speak,
eyes, but cannot see.
They have ears, but cannot hear,
noses, but cannot smell” - Psalm 115:4-6.***

Idolatry is a dehumanizing experience. It causes the worshiper to take on the traits of the object of worship. In today's passage, those traits would be loss of the ability to communicate effectively, or to see or hear accurately - especially spiritual things. The tendency we have was described by a theologian when he said: "The human heart is a factory of idols," so the idol doesn't have to be statue to which we bow down. Paul expanded our understanding of idolatry when he wrote: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). Ask the Lord today to show you your heart to see if idolatry has crept in to rob you of your spiritual awareness. If it has, don't deny it but repent and allow God to restore you.

February 24 – Dealing with Fear

Today's reading: Psalms 116-120

***“The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave came over me;
I was overcome by distress and sorrow.
Then I called on the name of the LORD:
‘LORD, save me!’” - Psalm 116:3-4.***

The psalmist was in life-threatening trouble and he has no where to turn but to the Lord. He was in emotional distress and was almost overwhelmed. The good news is that he cried out for help and God heard and saved his life. The Apostle Paul encountered his own harrowing experience when he was sailing to Rome to stand trial. An awful storm arose and threatened the ship and the lives of all onboard. Here is part of the story:

Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, “Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.” So keep up your courage, men, for I have

faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island (Acts 27:23-26).

The fact that the angel told Paul not to be afraid indicates what Paul was indeed afraid. Once the word of the Lord came to him, however, Paul relied on the word and no longer focused on the storm. Are you in a storm? Where is your focus? Do you see that God has given you an opportunity to trust Him and to apply the lessons from Paul and David to your own life?

February 25 – Mercy Focus

Today's reading: Psalms 121-125

*“I lift up my eyes to you,
to you who sit enthroned in heaven.
As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a female slave look to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the Lord our God,
till he shows us his mercy” - Psalm 123:1-2.*

Today's passage is from the psalms of ascents, those psalms that pilgrims sang or recited as they made their way up to Jerusalem for one of the many religious festivals. The topic of this psalm is focus, for the pilgrims were not focusing on the danger, inconvenience, or rigors of travel, but rather on their time with the Lord during their journey. Your focus should be the same, even though there are many other entities vying for your heart and attention, things like your career, health, church and family. While you need many things from the Lord, you need mercy on a daily basis and one way to get that mercy is to give it, as Jesus taught: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Where is your focus these days? Do you see your need for mercy? Are you extending mercy?

February 26 – Fruit of Your Labor

Today's reading: Psalms 126-130

*“Blessed are all who fear the Lord,
who walk in obedience to him.
You will eat the fruit of your labor;
blessings and prosperity will be yours” - Psalm 128:1-2.*

The psalmist stated that there is a reward for all those who fear and obey the Lord. Those who fear Him are blessed, but God also enables them to eat the fruit of their labor, as well as enjoy blessings and prosperity. The wisdom writer later wrote about blessings and prosperity: “A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness” (Ecclesiastes 2:24-26a). If that's true, and of course God's word is true, then you must ask yourself whether or not you are eating

the fruit of your labor. If not, why not? Are you enjoying abundance? If not, then is there some crack in your foundation of fearing and obeying the Lord?

February 27 – Anointed Work

Today's reading: Psalms 131-135

*“For the sake of your servant David,
do not reject your anointed one” - Psalm 132:10.*

When someone was anointed in the Old Testament, they were marked with oil to indicate that God was with them to perform some special role or task. Today, anointing tends to be restricted in people's minds to church work, but you are anointed to do whatever God is with you to do, which is your life purpose. Isaiah described Cyrus, a heathen king, in the following manner: “This is what the Lord says to his *anointed*, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut” (Isaiah 45:1 emphasis added). What are you anointed to do? What activity or role do you perform when you sense God is with you in a special way? If you are not sure, then pay attention and allow God to show you!

February 28 – The Spirit’s Role

Today's reading: Psalms 136-140

*“How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!
Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you” - Psalm 139:17-18.*

God wants to reveal Himself to you but you need help to see and understand. God reveals His thoughts in His word through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus explained how this would take place in John 16:13: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, **comes**, he will *guide* you into all the truth. He will not *speak* on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will *tell you what is yet to come*” (emphasis added). First, the Spirit will come and dwell within you. Second, the Spirit will guide you, never drive or overwhelm you. Third, He will speak to you personally and in a way you can comprehend. Fourth, the Spirit will impart God's thoughts that you need for your future development and direction. Is the Spirit revealing more of God's truth to you? If not, what are you doing to block that process? Are you spending enough time in God's word?

February 29 – Honesty with God

Today's reading: Psalms 141-145

*“I cry aloud to the Lord;
I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy.*

*I pour out before him my complaint;
before him I tell my trouble” - Psalm 142:1-2.*

You may think that you cannot be honest with the Lord or that there are certain things you cannot say to Him. Think about that for a minute. If He knows your thoughts from afar and knows your words before you speak them, then if He were going to punish you, He would do so *before* you ever say anything! Therefore, honesty with God is not for anyone's benefit but your own, to reveal your inner reality to you so God can change you. Furthermore, when you are honest with God, He will be honest with you and that is the ultimate goal - not just you venting your feelings, but for God to share His flawless perspective. This is exactly what happened in Job's situation: "Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: 'Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me'" (Job 38:1-3). Are you holding back or being honest with God? Do you need to have a conversation with Him today that starts with you talking but ends with you listening?

March 1 – Grace or Works?

Today's reading: Psalms 1-5

*“Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous;
you surround them with your favor as with a shield” - Psalm 5:12.*

God's favor can also be labeled God's grace. What God does, He does because He is motivated by His character of love. When you try to earn what only God can give, you try to establish that God owes you something in response to your labors. Unfortunately, God never owes you anything. When you do good works, you do them in response to God's grace, never to earn it. Paul wrote about good works in Ephesians 2:10: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Do you have a grace or a works mentality? Do you give or perform acts of charity expecting to get something in return, or do you do them out of the riches of the grace that is already bestowed on you?

March 2 – God’s Cause

Today's reading: Psalms 6-10

*“You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted;
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that mere earthly mortals
will never again strike terror” - Psalm 10:17-18.*

God cares for the orphan and those in trouble, yet those are the very people who are often victimized by society through unjust laws and economic practices. It seems that God takes it personally when they are oppressed and deals directly with the oppressors so they will “never again strike terror.” It makes sense that if God values the orphan and the weak, then you should

value them as well. Proverbs 22:9 states, “The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.” Are you sharing your food with the poor? What more can you do to take up their cause, thereby pleasing God? If you are a leader, is your organization sensitive to the needs of the poor? *Lord, I will do something today to help the poor, and will then make it part of my regular worship.*

March 3 – Discouragement

Today's reading: Psalms 11-15

***“Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore;
those who are loyal have vanished from the human race” - Psalm 12:1.***

David was discouraged as he wrote this psalm and uttered a statement that only fed his discouragement. He proclaimed that only he was faithful, and that everyone else was a group of disloyal malcontents. Discouragement causes you to distort reality and leads to a downward spiral from which it is difficult to escape. Elijah also manifested this kind of discouraging talk when he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too” (1 Kings 19:14). The Lord assured Elijah he was not the only one, and that there were 7,000 other faithful people in the land in addition to Elijah. Are you discouraged? To whom can you go or what can do that will help you break your discouragement cycle? What is your self talk like? Is it feeding or curtailing your discouragement?

March 4 – Vindication

Today's reading: Psalms 16-20

***“Hear me, Lord, my plea is just;
listen to my cry.
Hear my prayer—
it does not rise from deceitful lips.
Let my vindication come from you;
may your eyes see what is right” - Psalm 17:1-2.***

David was in trouble so he prayed to the Lord and then wrote down his prayer. He was looking for vindication, which is the process by which people who saw him in a negative light would eventually see that they were wrong. Rather than try to achieve his own vindication, however, David prayed that God would look and judge his situation and then provide vindication on his behalf. In other words, David decided to trust the Lord for his reputation. Jesus did the same thing according to Peter's account:

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his

mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:21-23).

Are you trying to achieve your own vindication where you have been wrongly accused? Can you let it go and trust the Lord for your reputation today?

March 5 – God’s Blessing

Today's reading: Psalms 21-25

*“You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows” - Psalm 23:5.*

God will bless you, but He won't always isolate you when He does. He will bless you in full view of those who opposed, persecuted and criticized you. What's more, your anointing will also be in their presence, similar to how it was with Daniel. God blessed Daniel, but it was in Babylon, far away from his home and culture. We read in Daniel 1:18-20,

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

Are you willing to have God use you in your own Babylon, wherever that may be? Are you willing to have your anointing devoted to bless and help those who may not be part of God's people?

March 6 – Your Comforter

Today's reading: Psalms 26-30

*“You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.
Lord my God, I will praise you forever” - Psalm 30:11-12.*

God is your Comforter. When you are in pain, He will provide solace and encouragement. When you are wounded, He will heal you. If you never know wailing and times of darkness, however, you will never know Him as your Comforter. Yet you can take matters into your own hands and try to comfort yourself through any number of self-medicating actions: addictions like shopping and eating, relationships that you know are not good for you, attitudes like self-pity and anger that make you feel that life and the Lord are not fair. Peter wrote in his epistle,

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Are you suffering? Are you trying to make yourself feel better or are you trusting that God will do that for you, giving you joy in spite of your circumstances? *Lord, I am in a hard place right now, and I am suffering. I offer my suffering to You so that You may use it to shape and mold me into the person You want me to be.*

March 7 – Injustice

Today's reading: Psalms 31-35

*“For the word of the Lord is right and true;
he is faithful in all he does.
The Lord loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love” - Psalm 33:4-5.*

There are many who ask, “Where is God?” when they behold evil in the earth. Today's passage answers the question: He is right here! The earth is full of His unfailing love, for as bad as it seems, it would be much worse if God did not hold back the tide of evil. When Job and his friends questioned where God was in Job's situation, the Lord rebuked them and said:

Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (Job 38:2-7).

Do you ever question of God's goodness in the midst of inequities? Do you see God's greatness even in the midst of sorrow and suffering? If you have, are you prepared to help correct what you see rather than insinuating that somehow God is to blame? *Lord, forgive me, for I have questioned You and Your motives in the midst of the injustices I have seen. Give me Your perspective of the situation, and then show me how I can get involved to be Your agent of healing toward that problem.*

March 8 – Your Reward

Today's reading: Psalms 36-40

*“Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him and he will do this:
He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun” - Psalm 37:5-6.*

There is definitely a reward in store for those who serve the Lord. While your reward may delay, you cannot and should not lose sight of the fact that God does reward His people as they serve Him. Paul wrote the Colossians to encourage them to trust God and serve Him with all their heart, for there is surely a reward for those who do: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24). Are you keeping your eye on the prize of your reward for a job well done? What job or good work are you doing? What is the reward you are trusting the Lord to receive? Do you realize that part of your reward, perhaps even all of it, is the joy that you have when your way is committed to the Lord?

March 9 – Transformation

Today's reading: Psalms 41-45

*“Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God” - Psalm 43:5.*

You can wait for someone to come along and encourage you if you are discouraged, or you can take up the task and encourage yourself! Once again we see in today’s verse that your self-talk and thought life hold the keys to your attitude, mental health and ultimate behavior. David was downcast but he talked himself out of it. By ordering his soul to put its trust in God, David declared that better days were ahead when he would praise God for his breakthrough. This is similar to the concept Paul described in Romans 12:1-2: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Any transformation in your life will only take place when you align your thoughts properly to God’s desired outcome. Is it time you had a talk with your soul? If so, what will you tell it? How do you want it to feel and behave? Be specific and be direct, and don't give up until you talk yourself out of your funk.

March 10 – Wisdom of the World

Today's reading: Psalms 46-50

*“This is the fate of those who trust in themselves,
and of their followers, who approve their sayings.
They are like sheep and are destined to die;
death will be their shepherd
(but the upright will prevail over them in the morning).
Their forms will decay in the grave,
far from their princely mansions” - Psalm 49:13-14.*

There are many forms of wisdom that appeal to man's carnal nature, some of which even sound spiritual. Often those who subscribe to that wisdom become followers and name their group after the main proponent of the philosophy or movement. Today's passage warns you of the futility in such a strategy. God desires and is worthy of your absolute allegiance, and you must not give the best of you are or what you do to any movement that ends in *-ism*. John's vision in Revelation is clear that anything or anyone that exalts itself against God's wisdom will be brought down:

When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!" (Revelation 18:9-10).

Have you become a follower in any area of life of another philosophy that has claimed your allegiance? Where has the wisdom of the world crept into your life's work?

March 11 – Betrayal

Today's reading: Psalms 51-55

*"If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it;
if a foe were rising against me, I could hide.
But it is you, a man like myself,
my companion, my close friend,
with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship
at the house of God, as we walked about
among the worshipers" - Psalm 55:12-14.*

It is a painful experience for a friend to betray you. It is what I call a *Star Trek* that happens when your shields are down and you aren't expecting an attack. Once it happens you can wrestle with issues of unforgiveness for a long time, sometimes having to forgive the person over and over again. When you have to repeat the process, it doesn't mean your last attempt failed. It simply means that you must go deeper and deeper in your heart to weed out the hurt and bitterness. Having felt the pain of betrayal, however, should be an incentive for you to *never* do what someone else did to you. If you do or if they perceive that you did, then you must forgive them or seek their forgiveness: "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times'" (Matthew 18:21-22). **Do you need to forgive a former friend who betrayed you? Have you been the betrayer and need to seek out your former friend to ask forgiveness? Where can you bring some much-needed reconciliation today?**

March 12 – Leadership

Today's reading: Psalms 56-60

*“Do you rulers indeed speak justly?
Do you judge people with equity?
No, in your heart you devise injustice,
and your hands mete out violence on the earth” - Psalm 58:1-2.*

God is watching the ethical behavior not just of leaders who know and serve Him, but also of all leaders. God is a leadership God, which means He promotes leaders to their positions, no matter what the sphere of influence. He then expects those leaders to serve the people and not themselves, and to carry out His will. If you don't believe that, look at Jeremiah, Isaiah or the other prophets and see how often they addressed not just Israel but the other nations. The Lord even refers to Cyrus, a heathen king, as “His shepherd”: “[the Lord] who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, ‘Let it be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Let its foundations be laid’” (Isaiah 44:28). If you are a leader, are you mindful that God is watching you and will hold you accountable, no matter where you lead? If you are an aspiring leader, then are you learning what God expects of you when you obtain a leadership role?

March 13 – Faith for Living

Today's reading: Psalms 61-65

*“Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge” - Psalm 62:8.*

Faith is not an event; it's a lifestyle. It's not a parachute to be opened in an emergency, it is the oxygen of the soul that you are to breathe every day to sustain your existence in the Lord. There is saving faith - faith that you put in Christ to forgive your sins and restore your relationship with God - and then there is living faith - the faith you must exercise to receive anything from the Lord. Faith is natural for you and you use it everyday. When you drive across a bridge, for example, you have faith that it will remain intact and that the other cars will remain on their side of the road. Faith was both an Old and New Testament requirement, as you can read in Habakkuk 2:4, “Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.” Is faith your lifestyle or something you resort to when you are in need? What evidence can you provide that it is your lifestyle? What are you believing God to do that if He doesn't do it, you will look foolish?

March 14 – The Great Commission

Today's reading: Psalms 66-70

*"May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face shine on us—
so that your ways may be known on earth,
your salvation among all nations" - Psalm 67:1-2.*

You pray for God's blessings, not simply for your own benefit, but for your ability to help spread the gospel to other people and nations. In the midst of life - raising children, doing jobs, building local churches - you still have one overriding assignment, and that is to go to the nations to declare the good news. Jesus Himself gave you what is called The Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). What are you doing to contribute toward a foreign missions outreach? Are you praying? Are you going? Are you giving toward those who go? Choose a nation or people group today and ask God to help you reach them with the gospel.

March 15 – Self Prayer

Today's reading: Psalms 71-75

*“Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
May he judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice” - Psalm 72:1-2.*

The 150 psalms were written by numerous authors, one of whom was Solomon. In today's passage, Solomon began his psalm with a prayer, which must have been the theme for his reign, which was getting divine wisdom so he could rule well. Solomon prayed for himself that he would be able to judge the people with righteousness and justice, and God answered his prayer in a big way as reported in 1 Kings: "God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kings 4:29-30). What is your prayer for yourself? Is it working? Are you becoming or receiving that for which you pray? Do you need to pray for yourself more regularly or fervently?

March 16 – Ethical Skill

Today's reading: Psalms 76-80

*“And David shepherded them with integrity of heart;
with skillful hands he led them” - Psalm 78:72.*

David was a great leader who, for the most part, had both an ethical compass that kept him righteous but also had skills that made him effective. For you to be truly successful, you will need both those components working in your life. Skill without ethics can make you proud, believing you can do anything and it will be successful. Ethics without skill makes you "nice" but without the ability to lead and make practical decisions. What's more, you need to work on both of those characteristics, becoming the best you can be at what you do along with knowing the rights and wrongs of your trade or business. Notice what they said about Jesus: "They were utterly astonished, saying, 'He has done **all things well**; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak'" (Mark 7:37). **Do** you do things well? How can you improve your skill level?

And do you at least know and attempt to follow the basic ethical directives in Scripture about your work?

March 17 – Heartburn

Today's reading: Psalms 86-90

*“I will listen to what God the Lord says;
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—
but let them not turn to folly” - Psalm 85:8.*

In today's verse, the psalmist first made a commitment to listen to the Lord's voice. Do you listen to God's voice? He speaks every language, speaks through circumstances, through other people - some who know Him, some who don't - and especially through His word and His servants who preach and teach His word. The writer acknowledged that God promised peace to His people. Do you have peace? If not, is it because you are somehow not listening to the Lord? It's easy to miss His voice as two disciples who knew Jesus well did not recognize Him when He came to visit:

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:30-32).

Is your heart burning with His presence, but you don't recognize it? What's holding you back from acknowledging it? *Father, I want to know You and Your voice. Show me where fear or hardness of heart have prevented me from recognizing when You are speaking to me. I put my trust in Your ability to speak to me and make Your will clear for my life.*

March 18 – A United Heart

Today's reading: Psalms 85-90

*“Teach me Your way, O Lord;
I will walk in Your truth;
Unite my heart to fear Your name” - Psalm 86:11.*

I see three truths in this verse, perhaps you see more. *First*, you never lose your need to learn the ways of God. That requires you be taught by knowledgeable people who know and love the Lord. What are you studying and learning in the Lord? What are you reading? Are you part of a local church that teaches the Word? *Second*, you are accountable to do what you learn, to "walk in the truth." Jesus said, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (John 13:17). Are you doing what you know **you** know you should do? *Third*, God must help you have a heart that is totally devoted to serve and learn from Him as He promised to do: “And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19). Are you cooperating with God's work on your heart? *Lord, my heart is divided. I am totally committed to you in some areas of my life, but my*

heart is far from You in other areas. I pray that You will unite my heart that it is all completely and totally Yours.

March 19 – Stalkers

Today's reading: Psalms 91-95

*“You will not be afraid of the terror by night,
Or of the arrow that flies by day;
Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon” - Psalm 91:5-6.*

There is no lack of dangerous trends that stalk mankind. New, exotic diseases baffle experts and defy any cure. Terrorism is on the rise and seems to be in every corner of the world. Bizarre, violent behavior is present in every country. Economies seem to teeter on the verge of collapse. Yet the words of Psalm 91 remain true for those who know the Lord. Not only does this psalm promise God's protection, it also states that the righteous won't even be afraid of the stalkers. Are you afraid? Do you find your fears affecting your daily activities? Are you consumed by and fearful of the daily media reports of danger? If you are, read Psalm 91 along with the Lord's admonition to Joshua as he was about to enter the Land: “Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous” (Joshua 1:6-7a).

March 20 – Emotions

Today's reading: Psalms 96-100

*“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
make music to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn —
shout for joy before the Lord, the King” – Psalm 98:4-6.*

There are some who say that emotions are potentially dangerous and to be avoided when you serve the Lord. Those people must not have read the psalms, for they comprise a book of emotions – anger, joy, frustration, sadness, and gladness just to name a few. Deuteronomy 6:5 sets the standard for your worship and relationship with the Lord when it instructs you to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” In other words, you are to serve the Lord with your entire being, and that includes your emotions. Are you hiding your emotions when you pray or worship? Has your approach to God been a “mind thing” rather than a “heart thing?” Why are you ashamed of your emotions when you come into God's presence? Do you think He will be offended? Doesn't He already know your emotional state before you come to Him?

March 21 – Mercy

Today's reading: Psalms 101-105

*“He does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities” – Psalm 103:10.*

Our God is a God of mercy. You cannot earn, presume upon, or understand His mercy. You can only thank Him for it, never fully realizing the reason why He chooses to bestow mercy as graciously and as often as He does. His merciful heart is revealed in His encounter with the woman caught in adultery, to whom He said: “Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11-12). Some have believed they should sin more so that His mercy would be revealed more – which is simply foolishness – but even more have either felt like they must try to do something to earn His mercy or have actually rejected His mercy, refusing to forgive themselves for a wrong done or mistake made. How do you respond to God's mercy? Do you thank Him for it, realizing He is not obligated to give it but does out of His love? Do you in return grant mercy to others in response to His mercy toward you?

March 22 – One Way

Today's reading: Psalms 106-110

*“God has spoken from his sanctuary:
‘In triumph I will parcel out Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Succoth.
Gilead is mine, Manasseh is mine;
Ephraim is my helmet,
Judah my scepter.
Moab is my washbasin,
upon Edom I toss my sandal;
over Philistia I shout in triumph’” – Psalm 108:7-9.*

God is the God of all the nations and people groups. Many are in rebellion and refuse to submit, some live in ignorance of God's truth and still others who realize this do little to further the work of missions and world evangelism. In this day of tolerance, there is the opinion that there are many ways to God, but God's word indicates there is only one way: “Salvation is found in no one else [Jesus], for there is *no other name* under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12 emphasis added). What are you doing to help spread the good news of the gospel, not only in your neighborhood, but also to the ends of the earth? Why not adopt a people group or nation and pray for their salvation? Can you give money to help those who are on the front lines of missions work?

March 23 – Your Breakthrough

Today's reading: Psalms 111-115

*“He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
he seats them with princes,
with the princes of his people.
He settles the childless woman in her home
as a happy mother of children” - Psalm 113:7-9.*

God is the God of the turnaround. You can be in dire straits one day and the next you can have all you need to prosper. When you think of it, you are just one phone call, one chance meeting, one idea, one speech, one sales call, one appointment away from the breakthrough for which you are praying. When I read today’s verses, I thought of what Mary said when she found out she was pregnant:

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty (Luke 1:50-53).

Can you thank God today for your breakthrough, even before it comes? Can you encourage yourself today that you are just that close to the fulfillment of your dreams and prayers?

March 24 – Rejection

Today’s reading: Psalms 116-120

*“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes” - Psalm 118:22-23.*

Jesus was a man who knew rejection: “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” (John 1:11). Yet even though He experienced rejection, God chose Him to be the cornerstone of salvation. It is of note that today’s passage is quoted in three gospels, the book of Acts and Peter’s epistle, for God wanted all to know that man’s rejection was not the final word on the matter (take the time to look them up). Your rejection by others is not the final word either, for if God has chosen you, your purpose will prevail as God promised: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31b). Have you experienced rejection from those close to you, perhaps even by the church? Be reminded today that God is with you to help you do what He created you to do. Be encouraged!

March 25 – Trust Focus

Today’s reading: Psalms 121-125

“I lift up my eyes to the hills —

*where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth” – Psalm 121:1-2.*

You may have a great job with wonderful benefits and perks. You may have earned a university degree with highest honors. Perhaps you have inherited family wealth that has made your life comfortable. You may enjoy perfect health and work out to ensure it stays that way. Yet no matter the benefits you enjoy, it's important you not put your trust or faith in your own abilities or strength. The Lord warned against this danger through the prophet Jeremiah: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:23-24). Where have you become self-reliant and stopped or refused being God reliant? *I acknowledge, Lord, that You are my Provider, using my job as the means to provide. I confess my utter dependence on You for my daily bread!*

March 26 – Your Efforts, God’s Help

Today’s reading: Psalms 126-130

*“Unless the Lord builds the house,
its builders labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchmen stand guard in vain” – Psalm 127:1.*

This verse requires careful consideration, otherwise you will misunderstand your responsibility to accomplish God’s will and produce fruit, and also confuse God’s role in the process. If you continue to “wait on the Lord,” you will do little or nothing. If you launch out impetuously, you will find yourself working alone without God’s help. The key is to do what you can do, all the while realizing if God doesn’t help you, your efforts are not enough. You never put your trust in your preparations or strength, no matter how substantial they are, because they are never enough without God’s help. It is almost as if you must do all you can and only then God will do what only He can do. Are you working hard and putting your trust in that? Or are you working hard but still putting your trust in God’s help?

March 27 – Faithfulness

Today’s reading: Psalms 131-135

*“Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord
who minister by night in the house of the Lord.
Lift up your hands in the sanctuary
and praise the Lord” - Psalm 134:1-2.*

There were some priests who drew night duty as they served in the Temple. This psalm urged them to be diligent and faithful to perform their duties, even though the temptation may have

been to sleep or slack off due to the hour when people normally rest. If God has directed you to do something, then it doesn't matter what others are doing or how many hours it takes you to complete the project. If they are sleeping, playing, enjoying leisure or sitting idly, you are to stand watch and do what the Lord wants you to do. Paul wrote, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). In what is God asking you to be faithful? Faithful in school and studies? Faithful to serve others? Faithful to write or teach or stand with a friend?

March 28 – Specific Prayer

Today's reading: Psalms 136-140

*“Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting” - Psalm 139:23-24.*

The Bible is full of inspired prayers that you can employ for yourself and for others. Today's verses represent a somewhat dangerous prayer, for the psalmist was asking God to take a set of spiritual x-rays on his inner being to see if everything was as God would require it. Specifically, the psalmist was looking for anxiety and offensive ways that would prevent him from walking in eternal life, right here and right now. When you get specific with God, He gets specific with you and this prayer is specific. It reminds me of the rich young ruler who asked Jesus how he could obtain eternal life: "When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'" (Luke 18:22). The young man was saddened by the answer. Is there anything you are afraid or need to ask the Lord? When you ask, be prepared to receive the answer. *My goal today is to hear Your voice. Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening, ready to do what You command and direct.*

March 29 – Mouth Guard

Today's reading: Psalms 141-145

*“Set a guard over my mouth, Lord;
keep watch over the door of my lips” - Psalm 141:3.*

The Bible has a lot to say about the words that come out of your mouth. Just put those words in any Bible search site and you will see what I mean. In the New Testament, James specifically addressed the problems that your mouth can cause:

Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell (James 3:5-6).

Are you using your mouth to build others up or tear them down? Is your mouth getting you into trouble or opening doors of opportunity? Do you find yourself thinking of something to say, not saying it and being glad after you didn't? If so, then God has helped you set a guard over your mouth.

March 30 - Properly-Placed Trust

Today's reading: Psalms 146-150

*“His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his delight in the legs of the warrior;
the Lord delights in those who fear him,
who put their hope in his unfailing love” - Psalm 147:10-11.*

Even when Israel had an army led by their warrior king, David, they learned to put their trust in the Lord. Once the Lord directed David to attack the Philistines head on but then the Philistines returned for another round. David could have just gone back into battle using the same tactics, but He sought the Lord:

Once more the Philistines came up and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; so David inquired of the Lord, and he answered, '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.' So David did as the Lord commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer (2 Samuel 5:22-25).

David trusted in the Lord more than his experience or military skills. Have you learned to do the same? Are you seeking God's help with things that you already know how to do? If not, how is that working for you? What changes do you need to make?

March 31 – Oxygen for the Soul

Today's reading: Psalm 119

*“Sustain me, my God, according to your promise, and I will live;
do not let my hopes be dashed” - Psalm 119:116.*

The psalmist had put his hope in the Lord and asked the Lord to keep those hopes alive and not let them be dashed. Someone once said that hope is oxygen for the soul. Hope is wishing for something for which there is no specific promise from God that He will do it, but there is also no reason why He will not do it. You can wish for a new car and then one day you have faith that you will get that car. In a sense, hope is an optimism that God will do good for you regardless of what you are encountering at the moment. It is also described in Psalm 138:8b, when the psalmist wrote, “The Lord will accomplish what concerns me.” **Are you optimistic? What do**

you have hope that God will do for you? Do you act like you have hope or are you pessimistic about the present and the future?