

October 1 – For the Lord

Today's reading: Psalms 1-5

***“Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself;
the Lord hears when I call to him” - Psalm 4:3.***

God has called you to a life of service during which you will direct your purpose and use your gifts to help other people in many ways. Yet no matter how often or how much you serve others, God must remain the focus of your service. What you do, you do for Him, so that when people are ungrateful, unresponsive, or unapproachable, you will not become disillusioned or discouraged. This principle was reinforced throughout the Old Testament in the symbol of the burnt offering, which was not consumed by the priest, but was to be burned completely (without the blood and fat) as an offering only to the Lord: “You are to wash the internal organs and the legs with water, and the priest is to bring all of them and burn them on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord” (Leviticus 1:13). Do your feelings get hurt when people don't recognize or appreciate you? Are you doing what you do ultimately for the Lord? Do you mind being a burnt offering, consumed in the fire of God's service and presence, as a sacrifice to Him in your service to others? *Lord, there are some people that I need to forgive today, people who have injured me and probably aren't even aware they have done so. They have not recognized my kindness to them, and I took it personally. I forgive them and I commit to continue to do good because you require it, not so others will recognize it.*

October 2 – Be Childlike

Today's reading: Psalms 6-10

***“Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger” - Psalm 8:2.***

God often confounds the strong not through other strong people, but through those who are least likely. This theme ran through Jesus' ministry as He taught that you must be like a child to enter into the things of God: “And he said: ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’” (Matthew 18:3). What does this mean exactly? Children are dependent and trust easily. They are joyful and let their joy overflow to others. Children know how to work at play, their favorite activity. They are open to new things and they are teachable. Paul took this theme and explained it more fully:

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:27b-31).

Where do you need to be more childlike where the things of God are concerned? Where have you become too grown up and sophisticated toward spiritual things? Do you trust your Father like a child, or have you seized control of your life and shut Him out?

October 3 – Keep Your Word

Today's reading: Psalms 11-15

*“Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain? . . .
. . . who keeps an oath even when it hurts,
and does not change their mind” (Psalm 15:1, 4b).*

Psalm 15 gives a few behavioral tendencies that the Lord expects from His people. The psalm starts with two questions, and then goes on to answer them with specific practices. In verse four, the behavior to focus on today is keeping your word and not being fickle. The violation of this principle is rampant among believers. When you say, “I will pray for you,” and then don't, you have broken your word. When you say, “I'll be there,” and you're not, you have broken your word. When you say, “I will call you and we'll get together,” and you don't, you have broken your word. When you say, “I'm going to pray more,” and you don't, you have broken your word. When you say, “I will be part of that group or team,” and then don't show up, you have violated the principle David described in verse four. It would be better for you to say nothing than to give your word and not follow through. Are you in the habit of doing this? Where do you need to go back and apologize for your lack of follow through? Do you even see this as an issue or is it not that important? From this point forward, try not to say so much and then just go do it, rather than promise and disappear.

October 4 – Fight for Victory

Today's reading: Psalms 16-20

*“For who is God besides the Lord?
And who is the Rock except our God?
It is God who arms me with strength
and keeps my way secure” - Psalm 18:31-32.*

It is interesting that David was the focus and author for much of the book of Psalms, and while he was a king, poet, song writer and shepherd, he was also a warrior. Much of what he wrote had to do with war, and much of the book of Revelation also contains the war theme. If David was a warrior and Jesus is depicted as a warrior, then the warrior must be part of your identity, too! God wants to teach you to fight for your inheritance, for the fighting will enhance your appreciation for your victory and will give you incentive to keep your winnings and not give them away cheaply. Paul wrote his beloved disciple Timothy and mentioned the warrior aspect of faith to him when he said,

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to

faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith (1 Timothy 1:18-19).

Is God arming you with strength? If so, for what purpose? Where do you need to fight for your victory in Christ? For family? Career? Finances? Ministry? Overcoming a prevailing sin?

October 5 – Little by Little

Today's reading: Psalms 21-25

*“Through the victories you gave, his glory is great;
you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty” - Psalm 21:5.*

Yesterday we looked at your need to fight for the blessings God has in store for you. Today, we see the rest of the story, and that is that God gives you the victory in Christ. After the battle, God shares some of His glory with His servants who engage in the fight and see it through to the end. In Exodus, God shared His strategy for His people taking the land He had promised:

I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land (Exodus 23:27-30).

Are you experiencing victory in your life? Is it going more slowly than you would like? Could it be that God is doing it little by little for the reasons mentioned in the Exodus passage? Can you thank God for the ultimate victory He promised, even if you can't see it in its totality today?

October 6 – Confident in Trouble

Today's reading: Psalms 26-30

*“Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident” - Psalm 27:3.*

It is an important discipline to remain strong and confident when things are going against you. In today's verse, David made two astounding statements worthy of your attention and emulation. First, he had chosen *not* to be afraid even if any army besieged him. When the finances, relationships or work goes against you, can you say the same thing? Or do you worry about things, thinking, “Have I done something wrong? Have I missed the Lord? Will this situation end badly for me?” All those questions and others like them are fear questions. Second, David said he would maintain his confidence even if war broke out against him. Can you exhibit that same confidence when you are under attack, confidence not in your own ability but in the Lord?

Elizabeth said something to Mary that you need to hear today: “Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” (Luke 1:45). Can you believe God's promises toward you even when there is a war raging against you? Can you keep your confidence in the Lord in the worst of times?

October 7 – Your Hiding Place

Today's reading: Psalms 31-35

***“You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance” - Psalm 32:7.***

Did you ever have a hiding place when you were a child? Or maybe you have one now – a place where no one knows you or would think to look for you. David had a hiding place, and it was in the Lord! David was confident that God could veil his presence and keep safe from his enemies. For many years, David was on the run from murderous Saul who wanted to keep David from inheriting his throne, but God hid David and did not deliver David into Saul's hand. What's more, David undoubtedly wrote and sang songs speaking of God's protection from trouble, testifying to God's deliverance while his enemies were still all around his hiding place! Peter experienced this kind of deliverance when the angel escorted him out of prison and no one even knew he was going:

Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him (Acts 12:8-10).

Is God your hiding place? Have you learned to trust in His ability to protect and even hide you from trouble? Can you sing a song of deliverance before your safety or deliverance is secured as you put your trust in Him?

October 8 – Quenching Your Thirst

Today's reading: Psalms 36-40

***“For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light” - Psalm 36:9.***

Throughout the gospels, Jesus referred to thirst as a spiritual condition, and the psalmist did the same in today's verse. The writer also introduced the concept of God bringing light to any life or situation, and Jesus expanded the concept when He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Then Jesus brought in the water metaphor when He spoke with the woman at the well:

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" (John 4:10-12).

Are you thirsty and trying to quench your thirst by way of your career, cars, education, travels, or relationships? Are you searching for light or answers in other philosophies outside the Lord and His word? What can you do to drink from the right source where your life, work and ministry are concerned?

October 9 – Waves of Trouble

Today's reading: Psalms 41-45

***"Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me" - Psalm 42:7.***

The psalmist was describing his current situation, and the only thing he could compare it to was the roaring of a waterfall and the pounding of waves over his being. In other words, God was sending more his way than he thought he could handle, perhaps more than he ever expected. When God tests you, He often sends situations that seem overwhelming, but He does it for two reasons. One is to show the depth of His work in you, for if you reflect, you probably could not have handled what you are going through five or ten years back. The second is to prove to you His ability to save you to the uttermost from the uncertainties and perilous nature of life this side of the Lord's return. Paul experienced an example of this waterfall of trouble when he wrote Timothy to say, "Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done" (2 Timothy 4:14). Are you experiencing the overwhelming waves and waterfall of tribulation? Does it seem like you will drown? There may be some consolation in knowing that God is still with you and you will have a testimony of His faithfulness whenever the waves stop pounding your soul.

October 10 – Be Quiet

Today's reading: Psalms 46-50

***"He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth'" - Psalm 46:10.***

There is a lot of noise all around you every day. When there isn't noise, you may create it by putting on some music, turning on the television, or going to the mall. Yet to hear the voice of the Lord or just to get in touch with your own thoughts and feelings, you must create some quiet space where you open yourself to the life of your inner being. That can be scary, for what if the

Lord speaks to you? What if you have to confront your own guilt, fear or insecurity? The psalmist directed you to be still so that you can get a better perspective of who God is in all His glory and power. When you do that, your current situation, which may be a challenge for you, will fade into the awareness of God's awesome power that will ultimately be expressed in the Second Coming of Jesus. Take some time today and every day this week just to compose yourself, pen and journal close by, and then quiet your heart and mind to listen to God and sharpen your focus on His majesty, greatness and purpose for you and for all His creation.

October 11 – Riches

Today's reading: Psalms 51-55

***“Look what happens to mighty warriors
who do not trust in God.
They trust their wealth instead
and grow more and more bold in their wickedness” - Psalm 52:7.***

Wealth and riches are deceptive, causing you to put your trust in them and not in the Lord. The challenge is that you may not see yourself as wealthy, but when you compare yourself to the rest of the world, you may very well be! And that may cause you to put your trust in your credit cards, your earning ability, the marketability of your college degree, your savings, or your retirement fund, instead of the Lord. Jesus warned us about the dangers of money when He said, “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Luke 16:13). Where has the power of money crept into your thinking and life philosophy, like the gold ring in *The Lord of the Rings*? How do you think you can guard against this insidious disease? Do you think that generous giving may be one way? What other ways can you think of?

October 12 – Clever Lies

Today's reading: Psalms 56-60

***“I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?
What can mere mortals do to me?” - Psalm 56:11.***

Today we return to another familiar theme in Psalms, and that is fear. We have not paid much attention to the thematic titles that some of the psalms have, but the heading for Psalm 56 states that David wrote this, “regarding the time the Philistines seized him in Gath.” It was in this instance that David attempted to escape from Saul not by trusting in the Lord, but through the use of clever lies:

David heard these comments and was very afraid of what King Achish of Gath might do to him. So he pretended to be insane, scratching on doors and drooling down his beard. Finally, King Achish said to his men, “Must you bring me a madman? We already have enough of them around here! Why should I let someone like this be my guest?” (1 Samuel 21:12-15).

When you are "cornered," do you resort to your own plans to escape? Have you employed clever lies and deception to protect yourself instead of trusting Him? Are there any of those lies that you need to correct with the truth and set the record straight with other people and with God?

October 13 – Thirst for God

Today's reading: Psalms 61-65

*“O God, you are my God;
I earnestly search for you.
My soul thirsts for you;
my whole body longs for you
in this parched and weary land
where there is no water” - Psalm 63:1.*

David was in the desert and he was probably thirsty. Yet he indicated his spiritual thirst was as great if not greater than his physical thirst. David went on to say, “You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy” (Psalm 63:5). Are you spiritually thirsty? If so, what are you doing to quench and satisfy that thirst? Bible reading is one way to accomplish that. Another is prayer, and another is not just reading the Word, but engaging in a systematic study that could lead to a certificate or degree. One thing about thirst is that you may quench it once, but it can reoccur the next day, so it's a never-ending process to keep it under control. That is not a weakness, but a blessing, for Jesus said, “God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice [righteousness], for they will be satisfied” (Matthew 6:5). Are you thirsty? If not, what are you using to treat that thirst apart from the Lord? Do you think there is a way to increase your thirst for God? What may those things be?

October 14 – Remember

Today's reading: Psalms 66-70

*“When you, God, went out before your people,
when you marched through the wilderness,
the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain,
before God, the One of Sinai,
before God, the God of Israel” - Psalm 68:7-8.*

David obviously wrote when he was in trouble, which was pretty much all of the time, and his writing must have helped him process his situation and regain his perspective. His complaints or laments almost always ended in praise, and he was especially effective at remembering, as a way to encourage himself in his troubles, all that God had done, not just for him, but for all the people of Israel. In today's passage, David went all the way back to the story of the Exodus and reiterated how God worked on Israel's behalf during that period of history. Jesus also emphasized the need to remember and established a rite to be practiced for the rest of time to commemorate what He did for His people: “And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me’” (Luke 22:19). Do you

take time to remember what God has done not just for you but for all His people, of whom you are a part? Are you in a church where you celebrate the Lord's table regularly? Do you take time to read in the Bible the things God did for His people in the past and count them as if He did them for you? Why not take some time right now to reflect on God's goodness?

October 15 – Bitter Trouble

Today's reading: Psalms 71-75

*“Though you have made me see troubles,
many and bitter,
you will restore my life again;
from the depths of the earth
you will again bring me up” - Psalm 71:20.*

Once again we turn to the topic of suffering and trouble, a common theme throughout both the book of Psalms and this devotional. The title of Psalm 71 does not indicate that David wrote it, but it certainly sounds like him as we have seen other verses that he wrote that are similar to today's. The psalmist had great hope that God would restore his fortunes and took consolation in that fact. Paul also carried this same hope through his own trials and tribulations when he wrote,

Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you (2 Thessalonians 1:4-6).

Are you experiencing many bitter troubles? Can you keep your eye on the future, and thank God for when they will end and things will be back to “normal”? Can you even trust that God will “take care of” those who have made trouble for you?

October 16 – The Sincerity Trap

Today's reading: Psalms 76-80

*“Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them;
let all the neighboring lands
bring gifts to the One to be feared” - Psalm 76:11.*

Believers are people of the Word, so obviously words are important to them. They listen to words, encourage others with words, pray with words, and study ancient words to gather more insight into what the Word may mean. That means when someone promises something using words, that someone may believe, if they were sincere, that commitment is as good as doing it, regardless of whether or not that someone follows through. According to that thinking, a statement, “I'll pray for you” or “I'll be there to help” or “I will give \$15 every month to missions” is something one says but there is no need to actually *do* it if one is sincere when it

was said. That of course is wrong thinking, and today's verse urges you to "make vows and fulfill them." Where have you fallen into the "sincerity trap," substituting and emphasizing intent rather than action? Where have you spoken a vow and not followed through? How can you make up for that flaw that is nothing short of deceptive and a lie? *Once again, I am confronted by my actions not being consistent with my words. Help me, Lord, to be a person that keeps my words few and my follow up true.*

October 17 – Holy Discipline

Today's reading: Psalms 81-85

***"But my people would not listen to me;
Israel would not submit to me.
So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts
to follow their own devices" - Psalm 81:11-12.***

God's discipline is seldom easy or pleasant, but it is much better than being left alone to suffer the consequences and reap the fruit of your own actions, attitudes, or thinking. When God confronts you with some truth about you and helps you escape that unpleasant reality, it is because He loves you. When He leaves you alone, which may seem preferable, then you are really in trouble, with no one to help or deliver you from yourself. The writer of Hebrews explained,

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness (Hebrews 12:9-10).

Are you being disciplined? Do you secretly wish that God would leave you alone, or that He is being too harsh, maybe even unfair? If so, then reconsider your thinking today and welcome God's "interference" in your life, seeing it as an act of love and not that of an arbitrary parent.

October 18 – The Nations

Today's reading: Psalms 86-90

***"Glorious things are said of you,
city of God:
'I will record Rahab and Babylon
among those who acknowledge me—
Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—
and will say, 'This one was born in Zion'" - Psalm 87:3-4.***

It is common in the Psalms for the Lord Himself to speak in the midst of what the psalmist was writing, as happened in today's passage. The psalmist was writing about the "city of God," when the Lord entered in to say that at some time in the future, other nations would be residents in

God's city and not just Israel. This was fulfilled in Christ, who came to Israel but commanded His disciples to go to the ends of the earth to share the good news of the gospel, which they eventually gave their lives to do. The most notable of those early missionaries was Paul, who eagerly went to the nations to fulfill what was written in Psalm 87: "Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake" (Romans 1:5). Do you have a heart to see the people of the nations come to Jesus? Do you pray toward that end? Give money to help the cause? Is there a particular nation that is on your heart? Why not take time today to pray for that nation or people group? You may even wish to get a map and lay your hands on that area where they live and ask God to fulfill the promise of Psalm 87 among them.

October 19 – Assumptions

Today's reading: Psalms 91-95

*"They say, 'The Lord does not see;
the God of Jacob takes no notice'" - Psalm 94:7.*

When God is silent, people come to one of two conclusions or assumptions, both of which are erroneous and potentially dangerous. The first is that He doesn't see what's going on, which is ludicrous. The other is that He agrees with what's going on, which may or may not be true. The Lord Himself addressed the second conclusion in Psalm 50:21: "When you did these things and I kept silent, you thought I was exactly like you. But I now arraign you and set my accusations before you." The first conclusion is addressed by Paul: "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). Have you been misinterpreting God's silence? Do you mistake His hesitancy to judge your attitude or behavior for His approval of who you are or what you do? Do you assume that God thinks like you and has the same "opinions"? Ask the Lord to point out to you where you may be reaching one of these wrong conclusions and then make the necessary course corrections.

October 20 – Joy Commanded

Today's reading: Psalms 96-100

*"Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his faithfulness" - Psalm 96:13.*

The key word in today's verse is *joy*, and it seems out of place, for this verse talks about the Lord coming to judge the earth and the world. While He judges the world with a stern standard, however, He also judges His people with faithfulness, and that is good news worth joyfully celebrating. It is of note that the Lord commanded His people to rejoice when they came into His presence for the annual festivals as reported in Deuteronomy 16:14-15:

Be joyful at your festival—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites, the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. For seven days celebrate the festival to the Lord your God at the place the Lord will choose. For the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete.

Is your joy complete? Do you come into God's presence with gladness or sadness of heart? Do you see that joy is a command? That means it is within your power to control, especially when you approach God and His relationship with you. What can do to turn on the joy spigot today to let your joy flow freely?

October 21 – Rebuilding

Today's reading: Psalms 101-105

*“For the Lord will rebuild Zion
and appear in his glory.
He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;
he will not despise their plea” - Psalm 102:16-17.*

Perhaps you are facing a situation in your life that was damaged or destroyed through sin, negligence or through the uncertainties of life. Maybe your business failed, or a relationship ended that you valued. You could have had a ministry setback or an investment go wrong into which you made a significant deposit. It's even possible that your own sin brought harm to those closest to you. Today's passage speaks to God's role as a Rebuilder, who will respond to your plea for help and partner with you to restore that which was lost, stolen or broken. Even Samson, who made such a mess of his life, was granted a second chance after his hair was cut and his strength lost: “But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved. . . Then Samson prayed to the Lord, ‘Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes’” (Judges 16:22, 28). God heard Samson and his strength and purpose were restored. Are you facing a rebuilding job in some area of your life? Then embrace the task with enthusiasm and ask the God who has restored what was lost for so many to help you restore your lost world. It's never too late. *God, I accept the opportunity to restore what I forfeited in my life through my own negligence. Thank You for the second chance!*

October 23 – Fruitful Fields

Today's reading: Psalms 106-110

*“He turned rivers into a desert,
flowing springs into thirsty ground,
and fruitful land into a salt waste,
because of the wickedness of those who lived there” - Psalm 107-33-34.*

God has created all things to bear fruit as we read in Genesis, fruit that was according to “their kind” (see Genesis 1:22, 24, 28). In fact, today's passage tells us that God has to intervene to stop the fruitfulness process, and He intervenes when there is wickedness – some criteria that is not being met for the fruit to come forth. Therefore, if you are not bearing fruit, something has happened to stop your productivity that God has programmed you to bear. Jesus referred to the fruit-bearing process in John 15: 5-8:

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. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

In what area of life do you bear much fruit? Can you describe your fruit? What does it look like? If you are not bearing fruit, where have you cut yourself off from Jesus who is your source of productivity? You can examine what has led to this lack, but in most cases, it is fear that has caused your vine to shrivel and led to your barren fields.

October 23 – Optimist or Pessimist?

Today's reading: Psalms 111-115

***“Surely the righteous will never be shaken;
they will be remembered forever.
They will have no fear of bad news;
their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord” - Psalm 112:6-7.***

When you put your trust in the Lord, you should have an optimism for life that is based on God's faithfulness and steadfastness. It is not an optimism that emanates from your trust in the economy, your company, or the reliability of other people. It is a confidence in the Lord Himself. The opposite of optimism is pessimism, and that brings an outlook on life that expects the worst instead of the best. The problem is that optimists and pessimists have a tendency to fulfill their own expectations, so that expecting the worst often helps deliver it. Today's passage speaks to fact that the righteous will not fear bad news. That doesn't mean bad news will never come; it simply means you are not looking for it with every unexpected phone call, message that the boss wants to meet with you, or expectation that someone you like or even love is going to reject you. Paul was confident and optimistic as he explained in 2 Corinthians 3:4-5: “Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.” Have you trained yourself to be pessimistic, to expect the worst so you won't be disappointed? Do you see that it is possible that when you expect the worst, you create the environment for the worst to happen? Can you also see that you learned to be pessimistic, and that means you can learn to be optimistic?

October 24 – Get Ready

Today's reading: Psalms 116-120

***“When hard pressed, I cried to the Lord;
he brought me into a spacious place” - Psalm 118:4.***

The psalmist was in a difficult place, perhaps hemmed in by negative circumstances, enemies or his own limitations. He cried to the Lord and God not only heard him but also removed the limitations and put him in a place where he could grow. God is able to change your fortunes overnight, as the Lord spoke that He would do in Isaiah:

Sing, barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,' says the Lord. 'Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes (Isaiah 54:1-2).

Where have you felt limited and restricted? Can you see that God is going to bless and prosper you, and that you need to get ready today for the blessings that will come, before they actually appear? Can you thank God for your breakthrough today, even though it is on its way and hasn't arrived yet? Think of it as a big shipment of furniture that is on its way to you, and you need to start making room and rearranging things now before it arrives. Get ready, for your blessing time is on its way – in fact, it's already here.

October 25 – Persecution

Today's reading: Psalms 121-125

***“Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy on us,
for we have endured no end of contempt.
We have endured no end
of ridicule from the arrogant,
of contempt from the proud” - Psalm 123:3-4.***

The theme of persecution runs through the book of Psalms, as it does throughout the New Testament, especially in the book of Revelation. God's people can never make peace with this world, for this world's values are totally opposed to the values and principles of God's kingdom. Some withdraw from the world because of the tension, yet some try to fit into and become friends with the world's ways. James warned against the latter strategy when he wrote,

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? (James 4:4-5).

Where have you cuddled up and gotten cozy with the world? Where are you trying to avoid inevitable persecution from or a confrontation with the world system? In what situation have you

hoped what Paul wrote would *not* be true: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12)?

October 26 – Victory in Oppression

Today's reading: Psalms 126-130

*“They have greatly oppressed me from my youth,
let Israel say;
‘they have greatly oppressed me from my youth,
but they have not gained the victory over me’” - Psalm 129:1-2.*

Keep in mind that the psalms were edited into their current order -- and a few of them were written – when Israel was in Babylonian exile. There they were subjected to ridicule and idolatrous customs. Yet the Babylonians could not break their spirit. Perhaps you are in a bad ministry or job situation with a cruel overseer, or facing oppression from some other source. How can you keep that from gaining the victory over you? First, extend forgiveness, even if it means forgiving your oppressor(s) on a daily basis! Second, keep your commitment to obey the Lord strong; don't blame or be angry with Him over your situation. Third, have hope and remember your past, and live in the reality that God is with you and will one day make things right. Fourth, keep in mind that God is an avenger, and He will one day give to your oppressors as they deserve. Fifth, pray for mercy for your oppressor(s) so that you can also receive mercy from God. Finally, read Daniel's story in Daniel 1-6 to learn from how he handled his own Babylonian exile, for there you will see that while he was a prisoner, he always had the victory, even over his conquerors.

October 27 – Signs Are for Unbelievers

Today's reading - Psalms 131-135

*“He struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
the firstborn of people and animals.
He sent his signs and wonders into your midst, Egypt,
against Pharaoh and all his servants” - Psalm 135:8-9.*

Right before Israel left Egypt for good, the Lord unleashed the last of the plagues, which was the death of each firstborn creature in the land (except for those in Israel, of course). This finally convinced the Egyptians to release the Israelites so they could journey toward their Promised Land, but the plague did not convince the Egyptians to serve the Lord. That is a curious thing, for God proved His existence and power to them, but they did not believe. Many people have said, maybe even you, that if you had some kind of sign, then you would believe God was speaking to you. That is probably not accurate. In most cases, God performs signs for the unbeliever to prove that He is real or that He is speaking to them. Yet, they can be so steeped in unbelief that they miss the message altogether! The same can happen to you. It is not faith that demands or looks for a sign, but unbelief, and still the sign is no guarantee that you will respond in faith. Where in your life are you waiting for sign that, even if it came, may not move you to

action? Can you see that the problem is not God's lack of confirmation, but your fear and lack of trust? Perhaps today you stop holding God's purpose for your life hostage, demanding a sign in return for its release?

October 28 – Your Creativity

Today's reading: Psalms 136-140

*“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.
His love endures forever” - Psalm 136:1.*

Psalm 136 was obviously a song used during corporate Temple worship. The leader would probably sing a line and the people would respond with their own line throughout the entire psalm. Someone had to compose this psalm, expressing his creativity as He was led by the Spirit of God. You also have creativity that God wants you to express just like Adam did when he named the animals:

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals (Genesis 2:19-20).

God did not whisper those names to Adam, nor did He “lay them on his heart or mind.” God directed Adam's work, but Adam produced those names as an expression of his God-given creativity. Are you expressing your creativity, whether it is to write, sing, paint, rhyme, sculpt, or dance? Is your creativity expression some other activity not mentioned in that list? Do you see whatever that creativity is as a divine assignment? How can you develop and release it more regularly and effectively?

October 29 – Surrounded

Today's reading: Psalms 141-145

*“Keep me safe from the traps set by evildoers,
from the snares they have laid for me.
Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
while I pass by in safety” - Psalm 141:9-10.*

It is common practice to thank the Lord for the things you know He has done for you, things like heal your diseases, provide financially, forgive your sins, and on and on. That being true, do you thank the Lord for the things He has done of which you are not aware? The psalmist in today's passage prayed for those unseen instances when he needed God's help, didn't realize what was going on, and moved on safe from harm. The Lord promised to go before you but also to be your guard to protect you from what you cannot see: “But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard” (Isaiah 52:12), as He had done for Israel during the Exodus: “Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front

of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them" (Exodus 14:19). Spend some time today thanking God for the things from which He has saved you and of which you are not aware. Pray David's prayer found in today's passage, asking that God will surround you to protect you from both the traps of life and those sent by your enemies.

October 30 – Praise Him

Today's reading: Psalms 146-150

***“Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,
praise him with timbrel and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,
praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals” - Psalm 150:3-5.***

The book of Psalms ends with an entry that is entirely devoted to praising the Lord. After all the topics that included questions, agony, joy, questions, answers, issues, and other challenges of life, the psalmist ends it as is fitting: with a call to worship! Like the psalmist, your life is full of surprises, pain, happiness, good and bad relationships, bad and good bosses, children who please or disappoint you, financial gain and loss, and circumstances for which there is no answer or solution. What do you do with all that? You focus on the One who changes not and you praise Him – not to get what you want as a manipulative practice, but as an expression of love and adoration for the one being in your life who is consistent, faithful and loving. When Daniel tried to figure out what all his visions meant, he wrote this: “I, Daniel, was worn out. I lay exhausted for several days. Then I got up and went about the king's business. I was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding” (Daniel 8:27). Daniel could not understand, so he learned to live with his limitations and went back to work. Are you trying to figure out the why's of life? Perhaps it's time to stop, live with it, and praise the Lord. *Lord, help me to know my limitations. There are some things I want to understand, but cannot, so I need to accept that and focus on those things that I can comprehend.*

October 31 – Fellowship with Believers

Today's reading: Psalm 119

***“I am a friend to all who fear you,
to all who follow your precepts” - Psalm 119:63.***

The psalmist declared that his loyalties were with God's people, and not just those who claimed to be believers, but those who followed God's precepts as outlined in His word. This concept was radically applied in the days immediately following Jesus' Ascension, as reported by Luke:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs

performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

Do you have friends from your church world? Do you have the singular focus we read about in today's verse that is on the Lord and His people? Do you have regular fellowship with committed believers? Are you hospitable and generous toward other followers of Jesus? What changes do you need to make in your life to make the same proclamation found in today's passage?

November 1 – Bad Partnerships

Today's reading - Psalms 1-5

*“Not a word from their mouth can be trusted;
their heart is filled with malice.
Their throat is an open grave;
with their tongues they tell lies” - Psalm 5:9.*

It has been a constant struggle for God's people to realize that they cannot expect Christian behavior from non-Christians. Yet, they continue to go into business, marry, and enter into agreements with those whose values are not biblical, and suffer the consequences. While this can happen even when agreements with believers are entered into, it is much more likely when the partner is an unbeliever. Paul was clear in his warning against such alliances:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

Where have you expected good results from a bad partnership? What can you do to limit the damage or get out of the relationship altogether? Where do you need to repent that you relied on your own understanding, which was limited, instead of God's infinite and endless wisdom?

November 2 – Where's God?

Today's reading: Psalms 6-10

*“Why, Lord, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” - Psalm 10:1.*

We return to the common psalms theme: trouble and God's role in it. Obviously, the psalmist had expectations that were not being met, for he thought the Lord would intervene to either prevent or relieve his troubles. It seems that the Lord did neither, leading to the psalmist's question and frustration. Yet God has His own plan and purpose for in your trouble, and He does not always respond to your cries for help as you wish. Jesus made a prediction in John 16:33 that speaks to the nature of the problem: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus did not promise freedom from trouble, but His victory in the trouble – and that victory may not come the way you thought it would. Are you wondering what exactly God is up to in your life? Is He not responding as you hoped, wished or asked for? Can you accept by faith that He is present and working, even though you cannot see, hear or touch Him?

November 3 – Poor Causes

Today's reading: Psalms 11-15

***“Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain? . . .
who lends money to the poor without interest;
who does not accept a bribe against the innocent” (Psalm 15:1, 5).***

Psalm 15 provides a list of those who meet the criteria of the questions posed in verse one. In today's verse, you see that those who use their money not for personal gain but to help others, especially the powerless, are counted among God's special people. Yet, it is not just money to help the poor that separates them in God's eyes. God also honors them when they do not side against the poor for some personal gain, advantage, or privilege. At this time of year, it is customary to reflect on what can be done for the poor, but this should be a year-round consideration, not just for what you can give but also for how you can take sides on an issue that will benefit the poor in education, government policy, or housing. Jesus is the ultimate role model when it comes to ministry to the poor, as Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." Are you eager to help the poor, or is it just talk? Do you constantly spend on yourself with nothing left over for the poor? What more can you do not just to give money but also to support the cause of the poor?

November 4 – Can

Today's reading: Psalms 16-20

***“With your help I can advance against a troop;
with my God I can scale a wall” - Psalm 18:29.***

David didn't just talk about advancing or scaling a wall in battle. He did not just brag about his potential in the Lord, but rather He did what he talked about doing. When you say that you *can* do something, it doesn't mean you will do it. If you say, for example, "I *can* be a nice person," it doesn't necessarily translate into you being a nice person. *Can* is a word that states potential, but it remains potential until you act to fulfill and express that potential. Jesus said, "With man this is

impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27). Where are you under-living your life, content to discuss all the possibilities in Christ, but also content to do nothing with them? Do you realize that for God to do the impossible, He must use you or someone who is willing to not only believe and talk about His power, but who also actually acts so that God's power can be deployed? Against what troop does God want you to advance, or which wall does He want you to scale? When you identify it, then start advancing and scaling today!

November 5 – Loneliness

Today's reading: Psalms 21-25

***“Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted” - Psalm 25:16.***

It is not a problem for many to be alone, but when they feel lonely, it can be a debilitating, depressing state of affairs. The interesting thing is that you can feel lonely even when you are in the midst of people, and this can stem from a variety of reasons. Friends and family are the antidote to loneliness, but you cannot have these relationships only for what you can get, but rather for what you can give, if you serious about overcoming loneliness. Proverbs 18:24 gives some advice for how to obtain friends: “A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend *who* sticks closer than a brother” (NKJV). This indicates that you cannot sit back and demand that life give you friends; you must be friendly to attract those friends. Then you must be loyal to your friends in times of their trouble. Both scenarios require you to give, rather than moan or complain when others don't “give” whatever it is that you feel you need. Are you battling a sense of loneliness? What can you do to proactively break out of this predicament? Whose pain can you help carry while in the midst of your own pain? Whose friend can you be today?

November 6 – Family Matters

Today's reading: Psalms 26-30

***“When my father and my mother forsake me,
then the Lord will take care of me” - Psalm 27:10.***

When Jesus came, He often had a polarizing effect, for some in a family believed in Him while others did not. That often set the family members at odds with one another, and Jesus did not apologize for that ramification of putting faith in Him. In fact, Jesus had this to say about family and following Him:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to “set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law”; and “a man’s enemies *will be* those of his *own* household.” He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does

not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it (Matthew 10:35-39).

Jesus was saying that a decision to follow Him was the highest priority in life, even more important than family. Is Jesus more important to you than family? Are you following Him regardless of how your family feels about it? Or have you altered your walk with the Lord in order to please your family? Can you see that you have your priorities out of line if you have done so?

November 7 – Horses and Bigger Barns

Today's reading: Psalms 31-35

*"No king is saved by the size of his army;
no warrior escapes by his great strength.
A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
despite all its great strength it cannot save" - Psalm 33:16-17.*

It is not known who wrote Psalm 33, but let's assume it was David. David was a king and warrior who probably knew how to use a horse in battle, and had a large army at his command. Yet he came to this conclusion: none of that mattered in battle if the Lord wasn't on his side. There are some who put their trust in their bank account, marketable job skills, a lot of powerful connections, or life experience, but none of that will help them in the day of trouble if the Lord is not on their side. What's more, at some point, their life will end and none of that will help them make their transition to eternity. Jesus told a story about a man who put his trust in his business acumen: “

Then he said, “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain.” And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God (Luke 12:18-21).

Are you rich toward God or rich in the things of the world? Where have you put your trust - in your retirement fund, as the man did in the parable, or in God's ability to provide and protect?

November 8 – Mind Your Business

Today's reading: Psalms 36-40

*“Cease from anger and forsake wrath;
Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing” - Psalm 37:8.*

The context of this verse is anger that comes from observing the wicked and seeing how they seemingly prosper and enjoy a carefree life. The psalmist advises the person who is fretting over

someone else's good fortune, especially someone who seems to be unworthy, to let it go! If you spend your time fretting over the inequities of life, you will become more and more consumed with the issue, and your anger will spill over into other areas of your life – making you a not-so-nice-or-happy person to be around. What's more, it's really not much of your business how God chooses to deal with anyone else. The disciples were angry when the Samaritans showed disrespect to Jesus, and this is how Jesus responded to their anger:

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them" (Luke 9:51-55).

Are you angry at someone else or some other people group? What is that anger doing to you? Would Jesus approve of your attitude? If not, what are you going to do about it?

November 9 – Wishful Thinking

Today's reading: Psalms 41-45

***"I know that you are pleased with me,
for my enemy does not triumph over me.
Because of my integrity you uphold me
and set me in your presence forever" - Psalm 41:11-12.***

It is easy to read into a verse what you think, hope, or even want it to mean. In today's passage, the psalmist wrote that his enemy did not defeat him because God was with him. You can interpret that to mean that your enemies will not only never triumph over you, but also that they will never *try* to triumph over you. If that is how you read this, then you are mistaken and are opening yourself to great disappointment and perhaps even disillusionment as you serve the Lord. Your enemies will most certainly try to overwhelm you, and your greatest enemy is Satan himself, as represented through his evil forces, principalities, and powers. Jesus said something similar to what the psalmist said when He told Peter, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). Jesus did not say that evil gates would not *try* to overcome the Church; He simply said they would not be successful when they do try. Are you struggling with the fact that you and God's people are under intense attack? Did you fall victim to wishful thinking that this would not happen to you? Can you stand in the truth of the promise that they will not be successful, while fully embracing the truth that they will try again and again?

November 10 – God's Silence

Today's reading: Psalms 46-50

***“When you did these things and I kept silent,
you thought I was exactly like you.
But I now arraign you
and set my accusations before you” - Psalm 50:21.***

It is common for people to consider their opinions and doctrines to be the exact replica of what God thinks and the Bible presents. The problem is that they have reached a dangerous conclusion, for God's silence may be simply a hardened heart on the listener's part that causes deafness to the voice of God. You may be thinking, “How can anyone not hear God when He speaks?” but there are several examples when that exact thing occurred. One example is found in Acts 9:7: Why didn't the companions of Saul who heard what he heard ever testify on his behalf or come to faith in Christ with him? They could not hear or see what God was doing since they too were on their way to persecute believers. And then there this example: “Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.’ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him” (John 12:28-29). Where have you assumed that God's silence indicated His approval of your behavior or position? Are you ready to ask God today to show you where your attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are not in alignment with His will, and are you also ready to change what He shows you? Can you see when you have said, “God, speak to me,” that He may be speaking but you may not be hearing?

November 11 – Honest Prayers

Today's reading: Psalms 51-55

***“Let death take my enemies by surprise;
let them go down alive to the realm of the dead,
for evil finds lodging among them” - Psalm 55:15.***

Some are surprised at the tone of David's prayers in the psalms, for he did not mince words. He called on God to take out his enemies in the harshest of terms. David's enemies, however, were not just criticizing David; they were trying to kill him. Most of us have never faced that kind of enemy, so we should not judge David for his prayers. What's more, David was not seeking his own revenge, but rather was trusting in the Lord to fight his battles. Finally, David was not glossing over what was in his heart, but was putting it all before God, allowing God to sort through his emotions and motives to adjust them as He saw fit. In fact, David was simply praying to God using God's own words:

It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them. The Lord will vindicate his people and relent concerning his servants when he sees their strength is gone and no one is left, slave or free (Deuteronomy 32:35).

Are you putting your heart into your prayers, not holding back your emotions and feelings? Do you acknowledge when you have less than "Christian" thoughts, realizing that God already knows them? Are you pretending to be someone you are not when you pray?

November 12 – Mercy Dispenser

Today's reading: Psalms 56-60

*“Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me,
for in you I take refuge.
I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings
until the disaster has passed” - Psalm 57:1.*

You can never underestimate your need for mercy. You are not saved by mercy and then required to keep your salvation through meticulous Law-keeping. Your life requires mercy just like it does oxygen, water, and food, for without mercy, you lose the most important aspect of life – your relationship with the Lord. Mercy is what brings you to God, and mercy is what maintains that relationship. Therefore, you should live a life of mercy, both receiving and giving it freely. Jesus taught a parable about a servant who had been forgiven a huge debt but then refused to have mercy on his fellow servant:

Then the master called the servant in. “You wicked servant,” he said, “I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed (Matthew 18:32-34).

Are you a dispenser of mercy? Do you remember that God has had mercy on you yesterday and today, and will do so tomorrow? Upon whom can you have mercy today, not because they deserve it, but because you have been the recipient of it?

November 13 – Joy Required

Today's reading: Psalms 61-65

*“The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders;
where morning dawns, where evening fades,
you call forth songs of joy” - Psalm 65:8.*

God expects His people to be joyful. This verse tells you that at the start and the end of each day, God looks for songs of joy from you. Regardless of whether or not your work is going well or your relationships are painful, God is worthy of joyful praise for who He is and what He does. This was such a serious requirement in God's eyes that the Lord issued this warning to Israel:

Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you (Deuteronomy 28:47-48).

How do you start your day? How do you end it? Do you take time to acknowledge that God is the Lord? Are you careful to come before Him at least some of the time with joy instead of constant complaining, lamenting or petitioning?

November 14 – Old Testament Focus

Today's reading - Psalms 66-70

*“For I endure scorn for your sake,
and shame covers my face.
I am a foreigner to my own family,
a stranger to my own mother’s children;
for zeal for your house consumes me,
and the insults of those who insult you fall on me” - Psalm 69:7-9.*

David wrote this psalm about his own situation, but as you can see, the description also fits the Lord Jesus and His ministry on earth. In fact, much of the Old Testament is a prelude to the coming of the Messiah, describing His character, nature, mission, and persecution. Once the Messiah came, we are able to look back into the Old Testament and see Jesus everywhere. For example, when Jesus cleansed the Temple, John told us that Jesus' disciples thought of today's passage: “To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!’ His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’” (John 2:17-18). The point is that Jesus is the focal point of all Scripture, and He is to be the focus for your life and worship as well. Anything that takes away from Jesus is to be avoided, and that includes the fear-mongering, misguided end-time prophets who seem to focus more on the Antichrist than the Christ. Is Jesus the centerpiece of your biblical studies? When you read the Old Testament, do you see and think of Jesus as His disciples did as described in John 2? Have you gone off on a tangent to study about trivial things other than what God the Father did in and through His Son and their implications for your life?

November 15 – Your Testimony

Today's reading: Psalms 71-75

*“My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds,
of your saving acts all day long—
though I know not how to relate them all.
Even when I am old and gray, . . .
do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your mighty acts to all who are to come. . . .
My tongue will tell of your righteous acts
all day long,
for those who wanted to harm me
have been put to shame and confusion” - Psalm 71:15, 18, 24.*

In today's three verses, the psalmist made a strong commitment to produce a constant stream of testimonies to draw attention to what the Lord had done in his life. This required that he was aware of all that God was doing in his life and not take it for granted. He wanted to tell the next generation what God had done for him so that they would be encouraged and equipped for their own walk with the Lord. And finally, the psalmist recognized that God had thwarted his enemies who had evil intent toward him, and wanted to recognize God's role in his deliverance and protection. Jesus alluded to this need to proclaim God's goodness when He said, "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs" (Matthew 10:27). What are you doing to give your own testimonies to God's faithful love in your life? Are you writing them down for others to read? Are you putting them into words when you talk to your family and friends? Do you stand up in church to testify when given the opportunity? What more can you do to formulate and broadcast your testimonies, even on a daily basis?

November 16 – How Long?

Today's reading: Psalms 76-80

***“How long, Lord? Will you be angry forever?
How long will your jealousy burn like fire?
Pour out your wrath on the nations
that do not acknowledge you,
on the kingdoms
that do not call on your name;
for they have devoured Jacob
and devastated his homeland” - Psalm 79:5-7.***

The psalmist was asking how long God would take sides against His people and not judge those who did not know or serve the Lord. God, however, is more interested in shaping His own into the people they need to be than in judging the nations, which will happen in due time. Peter referred to this same pattern when he wrote about God's attention being focused on God's people first and foremost:

However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" (1 Peter 4:16-18).

Have you had those same thoughts expressed by the psalmist that are the equivalent of, "God, why don't you go and deal with someone else for a while?" If so, can you see that it is much better that God be involved in your life, even if it's to correct you, than it is for God to ignore you? What's more, God won't allow your discipline or hard times to last one day longer than they need to last, so thank Him for the discipline and rejoice, even though times may be tough.

November 17 – It's Not About You

Today's reading: Psalms 81-85

***“With cunning they conspire against your people;
they plot against those you cherish.
‘Come,’ they say, ‘let us destroy them as a nation,
so that Israel’s name is remembered no more.’
With one mind they plot together;
they form an alliance against you” - Psalm 83:3-5.***

The Lord takes it personally when anyone persecutes His church and His people. When Saul was on the Damascus Road on his way to arrest and harass believers, the Lord Jesus appeared to Him and said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5). Therefore, when you are persecuted – and you will eventually suffer for His name sake – it's not about you, so don't take it personally. If you are suffering for your relationship with the Lord, the persecutors hate the Jesus in you, and not only you. That is why you should be able to witness to them and pray for them, because you realize their eternal destiny is at stake. The good news is that, along with persecution, there will be tremendous blessings as well:

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30).

Are you praying for your persecutors? Are you thanking God for your blessings, or allowing your suffering to mar your perspective of the blessings you have in Christ?

November 18 – Your Legacy

Today's reading: Psalm 86-90

***“May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us—
yes, establish the work of our hands” - Psalm 90:17.***

You don't only want God to bless your work, you also want Him to establish it – to give it a foundation and lasting power that it may maximize its impact on others for the Lord. This is commonly referred to as a legacy, some ongoing effect that your presence on earth has made. In the New Living Translation, the latter half of this verse is worded, “And make the work of our hands stand strong. Yes, make the work of our hands stand strong.” Most people will not have a building or sports arena named after them, so it will be their memory that will last in the minds of those closest to them, especially their family – and that will be their lasting work. The writer of Proverbs put it in vivid terms: “The name of the righteous is used in blessings, but the name of the wicked will rot” (Proverbs 10:7). What is your lasting legacy? What work do you pray that God will establish and make strong? What memories are you creating in the minds of those who know you? What remarks will people make in your eulogy at your funeral? Whatever you want them to remember about you in the future is what you need be doing now.

November 19 – Profound Thoughts

Today's reading: Psalms 91-95

*“For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord;
I sing for joy at what your hands have done.
How great are your works, Lord,
how profound your thoughts!” - Psalm 92:4-5.*

The psalmist was obviously enamored with God and all that He did. The writer also stated that God's thoughts are profound. Have you ever considered that God's thoughts are profound? That means they are full of meaning, insight, and knowledge. Where are God's thoughts accessible? Of course, they are present in God's word, which is why you must not only read the Word, but also study it, as well as listen to it preached and taught by one of God's anointed servants. When Nehemiah rebuilt the city walls, he invited Ezra to come preach and teach about God's word, and the people spent six hours listening to Ezra read and comment:

So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law (Nehemiah 8:2-3).

How much time are you spending in God's Word, interacting with God's profound thoughts? Who is teaching you God's word? Who are you teaching?

November 20 – Empty-Handed

Today's reading: Psalms 96-100

*“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come into his courts” - Psalm 96:8.*

When the Lord instituted the concept of an offering, it was not because He needed anything from mankind. It was simply to make mankind mindful that all he had came from the Lord. At the same time, the offerings were used to support and feed the priests who carried out their priestly duties according to the ordinances of the Lord. Nothing has changed today, for God still requires that you come to Him with offerings, which keep you grounded in the knowledge that it is not your efforts that feed you – it is the Lord who provides. Such was the importance of the offering to the Lord that these were His instructions for the Jewish festivals when men came to Jerusalem:

“Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles. No one should appear before the Lord empty-handed. Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you” (Deuteronomy 16:16-17).

Do you appear before the Lord empty-handed? Do you give the Lord something of substance, or just a few pennies according to what you have left over? Do you see that your giving is an act of worship, and not an economic transaction?

November 21 – Rhythm of Life

Today's reading: Psalms 101-105

*“He made the moon to mark the seasons,
and the sun knows when to go down.
You bring darkness, it becomes night,
and all the beasts of the forest prowl.
The lions roar for their prey
and seek their food from God.
The sun rises, and they steal away;
they return and lie down in their dens.
Then people go out to their work,
to their labor until evening” - Psalm 104:19-23.*

There is a rhythm of life, established by God through His wisdom and creativity. Psalm 104 focuses on God's creation, which includes not only the objects you see, but the patterns that men, animals, and planets follow. The psalmist is reminding the reader that if God is in control of all that, then He has no problem being in control of your life as well. Jesus repeated this lesson when He taught, “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (Luke 12:5-6). Are you fretting over your financial or professional situation? Do you see the lesson in today's verses, and are you ready to apply them to your life where you are right now? Can you also see how silly it is to worry about whether or not God will provide for you?

November 22 – The Unexpected

Today's reading: Psalms 106-110

*“He turned the desert into pools of water
and the parched ground into flowing springs;
there he brought the hungry to live,
and they founded a city where they could settle” - Psalm 107:35-36.*

If you visit Israel today, you will visit the Jordan Valley, where the desert has been transformed into a lush agricultural area, the fruit of which is exported to cities all over Europe! That is exactly what the psalmist said God is able to do – take that which others say is useless and make it useful and productive. He can do the same in your life, business, or ministry so that your focus will not be on your own talent, intelligence or resources, but on Him and His goodness. This theme is found throughout the Bible and is summarized in Ezekiel 21:26: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly

will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low.” What opportunity have you passed up because it did not “look” good? What vision did God give you of prosperity, but you are ignoring it because right now it looks like poverty? Where is there a desert where God wants to do the unexpected and convert it to a garden and make you the beneficiary?

November 23 – Trust Reminder

Today's reading: Psalms 111-115

*“All you Israelites, trust in the Lord—
he is their help and shield.
House of Aaron, trust in the Lord—
he is their help and shield.
You who fear him, trust in the Lord—
he is their help and shield” - Psalm 115:9-11.*

These verses are in the midst of a series of psalms that encourage the reader to trust in the Lord, no matter what people say to discourage such thinking or what the circumstances look like. It is interesting that the theme of trusting the Lord comes up over and over again in the psalms. Of course, that means we need to be reminded over and over again of our need to trust in the Lord and not ourselves or others. In fact, even when God has proved Himself to us, we tend to stray and put our faith in other things, as did Israel:

. . . in the wilderness. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place.” In spite of this, you did not trust in the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go (Deuteronomy 1:31-33).

Are you in a panic right now, even though God has shown Himself strong on your behalf over and over again? Are you living in the worries of tomorrow, instead of the joy of today? Are you fretting over what might not happen next year, instead of thanking God for what you have today?

November 24 – Goals

Today's reading: Psalms 116-120

*“I was pushed back and about to fall,
but the Lord helped me.
The Lord is my strength and my defense;
he has become my salvation” - Psalm 118:13-14.*

David was not simply a defensive warrior, but he often went on the offensive and met with stiff resistance. Then there were times when his enemies tried to push him back, but he refused to yield any ground, and called on the Lord for help. The Apostle Paul was also a warrior, and he encountered the same opposition from external forces as well as internal forces like fear. How

did Paul keep from retreating or falling back? He set goals and those kept him on the advance as he reported in one of his letters:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14).

Are you advancing and progressing in life, or are you stagnant or even losing ground? Do you have goals? Are they enough to press against what's resisting your progress so that you can move forward and grow? Write out two or three goals that will help you regain the momentum that the Lord would want you to experience.

November 25 – Jesus' Priority

Today's reading: Psalms 121-125

*“For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your prosperity” - Psalm 122:9.*

Jesus gave His life not only to save souls, but also to place those souls in a Church that He was building. The Apostle Paul realized this truth, and gave his adult life to found, structure, and nurture churches all throughout the Roman Empire, not considering his work a success until he saw a church with elders founded where he had preached. A few of Paul's letters were to individuals like Timothy and Titus, but the majority of his letters were filled with instructions for the church that were to be read in the church assemblies. If Jesus and Paul gave His life to establish the Church, it was obviously His top priority, and you would do well to make it your top priority as well. Jesus told Peter,

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:18-19).

Are you doing what you can to assist Christ to build His church? Do you give to your church? Do you contribute your spiritual gifts to help edify and build up your church? What more can you do?

November 26 – Faith to Replace

Today's reading: Psalms 126-130

*“Restore our fortunes, Lord,
like streams in the Negev” - Psalm 126:4.*

It is common to experience loss in life due to its fragile nature. The good news is that God is with you in those times of loss, and He is able to restore what was lost in His own way that is also meaningful to you. For example, you can lose a business but start another one consulting with people about how not to lose a business! You can lose a relationship only to have the Lord replace that loss by giving you other relationships to take its place. God is a God of restoration, replacing what was lost as He promised His people:

I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm—my great army that I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed (Joel 2:25-26).

Have you experienced some loss recently or in the past? Have you allowed yourself to mourn that loss? Is it time to stop mourning, and begin praying that God will “restore your fortunes”? Can you have faith and hope that God will replace what was lost, and perhaps even increase today what was lost yesterday?

November 27 – Weaned or Unweaned?

Today's reading: Psalms 131-135

*“But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content” - Psalm 131:2.*

If you have ever been around older children who are still feeding on breast milk, you know it can be an awkward scenario when those children are hungry. When they are hungry, the child doesn't care where he or she is or who their mother is with, they will find their mother and look for lunch. David wrote that he was like a weaned child in God's presence, not straining or grasping to get something, but simply there to enjoy God's presence and His person. In other words, David did not pursue God for what God could give or what David needed. Jesus warned against seeking God only out of your need when after He had fed the 5,000, the people eagerly sought Him out:

Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval (John 6:26-27).

Are you like a weaned or un-weaned child with the Lord? Do you spend time with Him to enjoy His presence, or to make your list of demands and requests, only to move on after that when you get what you want? Why not take a few minutes today and simply read His word, talk to God, or listen for His voice not because you need anything, except to be close to your Lord, Friend, and Master?

November 28 – The God of Creation

Today's reading: Psalms 136-140

*“Who by his understanding made the heavens,
His love endures forever.
who spread out the earth upon the waters,
His love endures forever.
who made the great lights—
His love endures forever” - Psalm 136:5-7.*

A recurring reference in the entire Book of Psalms is the creation story from Genesis 1 and 2. Why is that? Keep in mind that many of the psalms were written when the author was in some kind of trouble. Then the psalms were edited and given their final order and format during the Babylonian Exile, when Israel was far from home, wondering when God was going to restore their Land and national identity. In the midst of personal and national trouble, the community of faith encouraged itself with the reminder of God's great power as evidenced in His creative acts to establish the universe. They correctly concluded that if God could make all they could see around them, then He was capable of acting on their behalf to change things for the better. Perhaps you need a similar dose of their thinking. Look around you today, and consider all the works of nature and creation. They were all made by the God you serve, the same God who loves you and has made wonderful promises to you, some of which may seem light years away at this point in your life. Can you encourage yourself today like the psalmist did? Can you make the transition from knowing that God *can* do anything to the confidence that God can do - and *will* do - anything for you?

November 29 – Mind Battle

Today's reading: Psalms 141-145

*“The enemy pursues me,
he crushes me to the ground;
he makes me dwell in the darkness
like those long dead.
So my spirit grows faint within me;
my heart within me is dismayed.
I remember the days of long ago;
I meditate on all your works
and consider what your hands have done.
I spread out my hands to you;
I thirst for you like a parched land” - Psalm 143:3-6.*

You are probably surprised (not) that David was in trouble again, so he penned this psalm telling God of his troubles, and his desperate need for the Lord's presence and help. David was fighting battles against his enemies, but notice that that he was also battling an internal one, and that was his thoughts. He forced himself to focus his thoughts on God's works of old, including what God had done for David in the past. David also confessed that his greatest need was not for deliverance, but for God Himself! Your mind can be your greatest ally in times of trouble or your

greatest enemy, for that is where you assess the threat and risk of your current situation. You can either give in to your fears, or combat them with massive doses of God's word, along with flashbacks and reruns of your past testimonies and victories. Don't be surprised at how long and difficult the process is to keep your mind at peace. Just fight the fight, and don't give in to despair, terror or worry.

November 30 – Language of Praise

Today's reading: Psalms 146-150

*“Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.
Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness” - Psalm 150:1-2.*

The Book of Psalms ends with the simple admonition to praise the Lord, not just for what He does, His “acts of power,” but for who He is, His “surpassing greatness.” Where is the appropriate place to praise? It is not only in church or “his sanctuary,” but also anyplace in His creation, His “mighty heavens.” If you are going to praise the Lord in and out of church, you are going to need a language of praise, which can only be developed as you practice. What do you say to the Lord when you praise Him? Are you specific? Do you have your own language of praise that you use regularly? Do you praise the Lord and tell Him why you are praising Him? This is not for God's benefit, for He knows who He is. It is for your benefit, so that you can be clear in your own mind and heart as to who God is compared to the other relationships and priorities in your life. The end of Jude's epistle is a good example of a language of praise, which you would do well to imitate:

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jude 24-25).

December 1 – Go to Bed

Today's reading: Psalms 1-5

*“In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, LORD,
make me dwell in safety” - Psalm 4:8.*

There is one sure sign that you trust the Lord and have put all of life's circumstances in His hands, and that is you are able to sleep. When you have, you do not lie in bed and reflect on all your problems, frantically trying to figure out what you are going to do. When you realize that everything is up to God, you go to bed for one reason, and that is to get some rest. It can be a difficult thing to achieve this kind of freedom, for no one enjoys not being in control of their

lives at first. Once you have reached that point, however, it brings great peace, just like it did for Jesus:

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm (Luke 8:22-24).

Notice that Jesus was the One who initiated their trip, so He undoubtedly knew the storm was coming. He knows your imminent storms, too, but He has everything under control. He wants you to learn to put your trust in Him and not your own strength. Can you go to bed and sleep when your storms are raging? If not, then you have some work to do to shore up your trust in the Lord.

December 2 – Enemies of the Cross

Today's reading - Psalms 6-10

***"In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,
who are caught in the schemes he devises.
He boasts about the cravings of his heart;
he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD" - Psalm 10:2-3.***

David wrote with elegance and flair, and his description of the wicked in Psalm 10 is no exception. He described their activities, and showed that arrogance and pride were their motivators as they persecuted and tormented the righteous. David pointed out that pride distorted their priorities, for they blessed the greedy and reviled the Lord! Unfortunately, it is possible for a believer to also have his or her values out of kilter, as Paul warned in Philippians 3:17-19:

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

Paul was not describing unbelievers in those verses, but indicating that there are some believers who actually walk as enemies of the cross because their priorities are misaligned. Are your priorities those of the world or of Christ? Don't answer too quickly, but spend some time praying, asking God to show you if any of your priorities are indeed flawed, and listening for His response.

December 3 – Poor Benefits

Today's reading - Psalms 11-15

***“Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan,
I will now arise,’ says the LORD.
‘I will protect them from those who malign them’” - Psalm 12:5.***

The poor are mentioned 21 times in the psalms, so it is safe to say they are a priority to the Lord. Therefore, they should be your priority as well. At this time of year, it is common to pay attention to the poor, for the holidays remind those who have to share with those who have not. Yet the poor should not only be a priority during the holidays, but a focal point for your giving all year round. There is tremendous spiritual benefit to helping the poor, as Jesus described when He rebuked the Pharisees for being outwardly righteous but inwardly full of darkness:

You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—*be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.* Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone (Luke 11:40-42 emphasis added).

Jesus insinuated that when you are generous to the poor, it creates a clean heart in the giver, for it is an act the benefits of which can only come from God and not from the poor themselves. Are you generous to the poor? What can you do now and in the coming year to remember the poor on a regular basis? *Lord, I have prayed throughout the year that I would do a better job of helping the poor. Now I am at a time of the year when opportunities abound. I commit not to allow fear to keep me from doing all that is in my heart to do this month, and that what I do will set my course for the coming year.*

December 4 – You Done Good

Today's reading: Psalm 16-20

***“The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.
For I have kept the ways of the LORD;
I am not guilty of turning from my God.
All his laws are before me;
I have not turned away from his decrees” - Psalm 18:20-22.***

At first, David's claim in these verses seems a bit boastful, for David declared his own righteousness to be sound and without flaw. Yet, it was a true assessment when you consider the early days of his career, when he was obedient and humble. In fact, the title of this psalm says this: “He sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.” Paul gave an interesting admonition in his letter to the Romans when he wrote, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you” (Romans 12:3). Paul's warning was not to think of yourself at all, but to think with appropriate, non-exaggerated judgment. Then Paul went on to speak of the fact that each member of the body has spiritual gifts, including you.

You have probably chronicled your faults, but what are your strengths? What are your spiritual gifts that, when you employ them, there are good results with God's help? Where have your spiritual disciplines been what they should be? Where has God rewarded you for your faithfulness? Where have “you done good” in the Lord?

December 5 – The New Covenant

Today's reading: Psalms 26-30

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

The Lord is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. He is the One who initiated the covenants, which have been defined as “a mutual agreement between two parties usually ratified in blood.” The blood indicated the seriousness of the pact, which was a life and death bond between those who entered into it. When you are in covenant with God, He is obligated to fulfill the terms of the covenant, as are you. What are God's terms of the new covenant made in Christ? Jesus told us at the Last Supper when He said, “Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Matthew 26:27-28). God's role in the new covenant is to forgive sins. Your role is to acknowledge your sins, ask forgiveness through Christ, and accept God's forgiveness. Then you are to forgive others as God has forgiven you. Are you walking in the terms of the new covenant on a daily basis? Do you ask for forgiveness of your sins? Do you accept that forgiveness, forgiving yourself as the Father forgives you? Do you see that you cannot earn forgiveness, but God grants it freely as one of the stipulations of the new covenant made through Jesus' death on the cross?

December 6 – KISS

Today's reading: Psalms 26-30

***“One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple” - Psalm 27:4.***

David asked for one thing: to dwell close to God all the days of his life, never to feel or be separated. David's requests were streamlined and simple. He did not ask for many things that would gratify his desires and wants. He did not have a laundry list of wishes that He made known to God. David simplified his life by focusing on the most important thing, which was his relationship with the Lord. How about you? Are your desires that simple, or is your life complicated and full of drama because you want so many things, like career, relationships, possessions, success or fame? John's first epistle warned us to keep things simple, like David did:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:15-17).

Perhaps it's time to apply the words behind the acronym KISS, which stands for “Keep It Simple, Silly!” Where has the love of the things in this world made your life complex? Are you sharing your heart that belongs to the Lord with too many other things? What can you do to simplify?

December 7 – Do Your Part

Today's reading: Psalms 31-35

*“I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.
Those who look to him are radiant;
their faces are never covered with shame.
This poor man called, and the LORD heard him;
he saved him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,
and he delivers them” - Psalm 34:4-7.*

When Adam and Eve hid from God after they sinned, it was because they were afraid. They also covered themselves with fig leaves because they were ashamed of their nakedness. Thus, fear and shame were the first consequences of the Fall, and Adam and Eve's children are still encumbered with those two problems. David's report in today's passage tells us that his relationship with the Lord relieved him of those two human experiences. In order for that to happen like it did for David, however, we see some key action verbs in these verses: *sought*, *looked to*, and *called*. Are you seeking the Lord until you get answers from Him? Are you looking to Him as your source of wisdom and strength? Do you call on the Lord not just when you are in trouble, but for all your life needs? And finally, do you fear the Lord, which is a healthy fear that keeps you from sin? The point of all this is that if you want to be free from the negative fear and shame that all Eve's children have, then you must engage concrete actions to make that happen. In other words, you do your part and God will do His.

December 8 – No Shortcuts

Today's reading: Psalms 36-40

*“I waited patiently for the LORD;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
Blessed is the one
who trusts in the LORD,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods” (Psalm 40:1, 4).*

The first thing to notice in these verses is that David had to wait patiently for the Lord. God does not operate according to your timetable. There is a song that says, "He may not come when you want Him, but He always comes on time." Even while he was waiting, however, David kept on crying out to the Lord for help. The second thing to see is that while you are waiting, there can be a temptation to take a shortcut to look to the proud or for help from those who trust in false gods. Those who do not give in to that temptation are blessed because they maintain their trust in the Lord, even when the Lord doesn't seem to be moving in their direction. Moses was a good example of this kind of trust, as described by the writer of Hebrews:

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:24-27).

Are you trusting in the Lord, all the while praying to Him for deliverance or direction? Are you resorting to shortcuts, as Moses could have done, or are you doing what he did, and that is trusting in the Lord with your whole heart? Do you see the One who is invisible and thus persevering in your faith?

December 9 – Is God at Fault?

Today's reading - Psalms 41-45

*"If we had forgotten the name of our God
or spread out our hands to a foreign god,
would not God have discovered it,
since he knows the secrets of the heart?
Yet for your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.
Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever" - Psalm 44:20-23.*

In today's passage, the psalmist was bemoaning the state of Israel, which had obviously fallen on hard times. The writer was stating his case that the nation had done nothing wrong, yet the Lord had given them over to their enemies. Does this happen in life? Do bad things seemingly happen to good people? Does God at times appear to be asleep, as the psalmist asked in verse 23? The answer to all those questions is "yes," and God seldom explains or justifies Himself when those things do happen. Yet those events are occasions when believers need to humble themselves and search their own heart according to the truth that Paul wrote: "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:22-24). Are you willing to examine your own heart and be open to your own wrong when considering circumstances beyond any explanation? Are you also willing to put your trust in God's faithfulness when your

situation would seem to call that faithfulness into question? Do you need to release any judgment you have made against the Lord?

December 10 – Leaving an Inheritance

Today's reading: Psalms 46-50

*“Why should I fear when evil days come,
when wicked deceivers surround me—
those who trust in their wealth
and boast of their great riches?
For all can see that the wise die,
that the foolish and the senseless also perish,
leaving their wealth to others.
Their tombs will remain their houses forever,
their dwellings for endless generations,
though they had named lands after themselves” - Psalm 49:5-6, 10-11.*

The psalmists were all excellent writers, inspired by the Spirit of God to pen words that were poignant, picturesque, and profound. Today's verses paint a picture of the wealthy who put their trust in their riches, only to see death like everyone else, consequently their money, property and possessions serving no purpose as their empty, worthless legacy is buried with them in their graves. The righteous has nothing to fear, even though those with money throw their weight around and intimidate others. Proverbs 13:22 states, “A good person leaves an inheritance for their children’s children, but a sinner’s wealth is stored up for the righteous.” How do you define a successful life? What inheritance and legacy are you leaving for your children and grandchildren? Is it only land, stocks and money, or is it also a righteous life well-lived, a life that cared for the poor and downtrodden, that invested money and time in God's kingdom work? What do you need to do that you will receive the endorsement from God that everyone should want to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”?

December 11 – Confidence or Dread?

Today's reading: Psalms 51-55

*“Do all these evildoers know nothing?
They devour my people as though eating bread;
they never call on God.
But there they are, overwhelmed with dread,
where there was nothing to dread.
God scattered the bones of those who attacked you;
you put them to shame, for God despised them” - Psalm 53:4-5.*

David was once again calling out to the Lord because he was in trouble and the evildoers seemed to have the upper hand. Then he looked again and those same evildoers were overcome by God's superior power that He deployed on behalf of His people. One of the characteristics David

noticed that his enemies were afraid, when there was nothing to be afraid of. This is reminiscent of what the wisdom writer wrote in Proverbs 28:1: “The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.” Are you overwhelmed with dread when there is nothing to dread? Do you live in fear of a particular sickness or disease? Are you afraid of losing your job, or of being humiliated? Do you fear poverty? What is it that causes you to cower in fear instead of boldly proceeding with full confidence in God's ability to protect and preserve you? Have a talk with yourself today and then keep the conversation going, using Bible verses, past testimonies, and future goals that will enable you to move beyond dread to confidence as stated in Psalm 71:5: “For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth.”

December 12 – Missions’ Mind

Today's reading: Psalms 56-60

*“I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;
I will sing of you among the peoples.
For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches to the skies” - Psalm 57:9-10.*

David's desire was to worship not only in Israel, but also among all the nations. This came from David's awareness that God was not just the God of his people, but God of all the people on earth, whether those people realized it or not. David saw it as his duty to make them aware of his and their God, thus making him a missionary of sorts. Jesus picked up on this theme when He came, trying to instill a missions’ values into His disciples, who were slow to embrace that perspective, preferring instead to stay among the people with which they were familiar. It was the Apostle Paul who championed the cause of missions in the early church, and his zeal took him all over the Roman Empire to preach the gospel and plant churches. The Apostle Peter also understood God's desire for the nations when he said, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (Acts 10:34-35). Do you have a missions’ mind for the nations, or is it just for your own people and culture? Are you supporting others who have a missions' burden through prayer and giving? Are you open to some kind of foreign missions involvement for yourself, whatever that may look like?

December 13 – Bread and Water

Today's reading: Psalms 61-65

*“You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water” - Psalm 63:1-3.*

David was a poet who had a way with words. While God inspired the words, David used his gift, perfected his skill, and gave God something to use as David wrote the psalms. God does not use people with potential; He uses people who have taken the time and made the effort to develop their potential. In today's verses, David expressed his desperate need for God, likening his need to the quest of a thirsty person in a desert. Jesus likened Himself to bread from heaven and water for life, indicating that He was and is the answer for anyone's most basic need for life: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14) and "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die" (John 6:47-49). Is that how you feel about your need for God? Is that a sometimes-thing, or an always-felt need? Is Jesus your daily bread and water? How do you express and meet your need for Him?

December 14 – Blessed in Need

Today's reading: Psalms 66-70

***"But as for me, I am poor and needy;
come quickly to me, O God.
You are my help and my deliverer;
LORD, do not delay" - Psalm 70:5.***

David acknowledged his poverty before God, and that meant David was in constant need of God's help, as we have seen throughout this study. There are many who reject the Lord and church attendance because they claim it is a crutch for the weak, and they are exactly right! This neediness is a good thing, for then it frees the needy person to cry out to God for help. Jesus Himself told you how good it is to be needy and to recognize it:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man (Luke 6:20-22).

Are you needy and encountering all sorts of opposition in your life? Then according to Jesus, you are blessed! Do you see yourself as blessed, or do you wallow in your neediness, desperately trying to find some way to become self-sufficient? Do you see that when you try to make your own way, you are resisting the situation that God has established so He can be your Helper and Deliverer? *I do see how I have tried to make my own way, Lord, and I am missing a wonderful opportunity to trust You. I am scared, however, that You won't come through or won't act in a timely manner, which is silly. I promise to let go and let You work on my behalf.*

December 15 – Proof

Today's reading: Psalms 71-75

***“Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever” - Psalm 73:25-26.***

The psalmist was declaring his absolute allegiance and devotion to the God of heaven, stating that he had no other heavenly interests apart from the Lord. The way you can prove your own devotion is not only to proclaim it, but also to prove it by obeying God's word, which are His instructions from heaven for how to live here on earth. Peter explained the role the Word is to play in your life when he wrote,

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Throughout this devotional, your reading and study of the Word have been emphasized over and over again. That's because the psalmists themselves stressed the importance of the Word. Does the Word have a central place in your life? What proof do you have that it does? As a new year approaches, what goals can you set that relate to your growth in the knowledge and application of God's word? *Lord, it is the time of year when I think about my goals for the next year, and today I am thinking about my goals where Your Word is concerned. I have been talking about doing something to grow in the knowledge of the Bible for some time, and now is the time to do something. My goal is to get into a study program next year that will help me learn more, not just for the sake of learning, but that I may know and do more of Your will for my life. That also may include me teaching others, and I welcome the opportunity to do that. Amen.*

December 16 – Depriving Others

Today's reading: Psalms 76-80

***“We will not hide them from their descendants;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done,
and they in turn would tell their children. . . .
Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands” - Psalm 78:4, 7.***

You have a testimony, probably many testimonies of what the Lord has done for you, your family, your business, or your ministry. You are obligated to tell others your story for two reasons. The first is so that God will receive glory from what He has done, causing people will say, "Praise the Lord," or "Thank You, Jesus!" The second is so that people will be encouraged to put their trust in the Lord and keep His commands, as the psalmist wrote in today's passage.

When you don't write, publish, broadcast, preach, speak, or converse about your testimony, you are depriving others of what they may need to move on in the Lord. When you belittle your testimony, thinking, "This isn't very significant," or when you engage in false humility, "I had better not draw attention to myself and just be quiet," you may seem like you are being spiritual, but you are not. You are being disobedient. When your heart pounds, your breathing rate increases, your fear level rises, and you focus on what may happen to you if you do share, *then* you should press through and definitely find a way to tell your story, whether it is a few sentences or 500 pages. Where have you been talking yourself out of declaring the wonders that God has done for you? Do you see how you are depriving others of their hope and God of His glory? *I see that when I close my mouth, Lord, I am cheating others out of the help they can derive from how You have worked in my life. I have been afraid of what others would think or say, or I have underestimated what I have that can help others if I share it. Forgive me for being so self-conscious and help me to step out and have more opportunities to share in the days to come.*

December 17 – The Church

Today's reading: Psalms 76-80

***“Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Awaken your might;
come and save us” - Psalm 80:1-2.***

Most people apply the psalms to personal problems and read them for personal benefit, and there is nothing wrong with that. Yet some of the psalms were corporate in nature, and Psalm 80 is one of them. The psalmist was not praying "I" or "me" prayers but rather "us" and "we" prayers, for he was concerned about the state of the people of God. The writer knew that his destiny was tied in part to the destiny of the covenant community. This was not simply an ethnic concern, since all of them were Jews, but a concern for the state of the "church." You also should have a concern not just for your own welfare but also for that of the church, for which Jesus shed His blood for it to be established. Paul wrote about Jesus' love for the church in Ephesians 5:25-30:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body.

Do you love the church? Are you part of one? Do you pray for its welfare? And how about your concern for the larger Church? Do you desire to see it doing well so that your fellow believers can prosper and that God can be magnified in the earth?

December 18 – Life is Short

Today's reading: Psalms 86-90

***“Remember how fleeting is my life.
For what futility you have created all humanity!
Who can live and not see death,
or who can escape the power of the grave?” - Psalm 89:47-48.***

The psalmist was pouring his heart out to the Lord, burdened by the pressures of life and God's seeming withdrawal of His presence from the writer's situation. The psalmist was reminding the Lord, and perhaps himself, that his life was short, and God must help him to get free from the trouble so he could pursue God and God's purpose without interference. Do you have that same mindset that leads to the same kind of prayers? Are you living like your life is short? Do you make the most of every day, and are you living in the urgency of this moment? Do you live like you are dying, which in a sense you are? Read these verses and then set goals for tomorrow and the coming year that are consistent with the truth of today's verses:

“However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 11:8-10).

Lord, I don't know how many days I have left on this earth, so I need to make the most of the ones I have. I am not guaranteed tomorrow, so I want to live today to the max. Help me to move beyond the attitude that I have all the time in the world to one that is more urgent is living life and serving You.

December 19 – Properly Placed Trust

Today's reading: Psalms 91-95

***“Who will rise up for me against the wicked?
Who will take a stand for me against evildoers?
Unless the LORD had given me help,
I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death” - Psalm 94:16-17.***

The psalmist was in trouble and danger, and he asked a rhetorical question for which there was only one answer: The Lord was his only help. The writer raised a good point that was that no one can take the place of the Lord or be as faithful or loyal as He is. Men and women will often disappoint you, but the Lord will not. Paul, Jesus, David, Joseph, Daniel, and others had people fail and even betray them, which only made their commitment to God that much stronger because He was their only source of help and strength. Given this truth, God still requires you to

give yourself to others in friendship and service, realizing that they may not reciprocate and will often disappoint you. Jesus is your example in this, for He certainly served people but kept His expectations in His Father: “But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person” (John 2:24-25). Are you dealing with disappointment over a betrayal of friendship or unmet expectations where another person is concerned? Do you see that God may be showing you not to put unrealistic trust in others, but to place all your trust in Him?

December 20 – Part of the Group

Today's reading: Psalms 96-100

***“Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture” -Psalm 100:3.***

You are a “sheep,” a follower of the Lord, no matter how mature you are or how many years you have walked with Him. Notice also that the psalmist was talking about multiple sheep, which constitute a flock. This means you are part of a larger group, which of course is known today as the church. All this requires humility – the understanding that you never arrive and that you are never to be alone, for you need the gifts, insight, and opportunities for love, personal growth and generosity that are afforded you in your group setting. Therefore, you are not only to focus on your personal well-being, but also of the health of your group or church. Paul wrote most of his letters to churches and not individuals, and had this to say about the church in his letter to Timothy:

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

Are you part of a church group? Do you have its best interests at heart? Do you just show up from time-to-time, or do you invest time, money and your spiritual gifts to benefit others?

December 21 – Your Thoughts

Today's reading: Psalms 101-104

***“May my meditation be pleasing to him,
as I rejoice in the LORD” - Psalm 104:34.***

The psalmist prayed that his meditation would be pleasing to the Lord. That meant that the psalmist was not only careful to give God verbal praise, but he was also mindful of his thoughts, making sure that those were pleasing to the Lord as well. You have a running dialogue all day with yourself, and God is listening in while you talk. Have you ever thought about God listening to your thoughts, and making sure that they are acceptable to the Lord? The objective is not to

think one thing that is inappropriate but then say something appropriate. to cover that thought. Your goal should be that your thoughts *and* your speech are sources of pleasure for God. The psalmist gives a tip on how to keep your meditation acceptable, and that is to rejoice in the Lord, thus providing fertile ground for good meditation. Jesus showed that God is concerned with your thought life when he confronted the Pharisees: “Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were **thinking** in their hearts, and he said to them, ‘Why are you thinking these things?’” (Mark 2:8). What is your thought life like? Do you even pay attention to your thoughts or realize how important they are? What can do today to maintain your joy so that your thoughts are as pure as God wants them to be?

December 22 – Getting and Giving Mercy

Today's reading: Psalms 106-110

*“Some became fools through their rebellious ways
and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.
They loathed all food
and drew near the gates of death.
Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress” - Psalm 107:17-19.*

There are times when you mess up, and then reap the consequences of your actions financially, relationally, professionally, or spiritually. Those consequences can be serious, but the Lord is merciful and will listen to your cries for help, if you are not proud and choose to humble yourself to ask for forgiveness and assistance. You don't deserve His help, but that's where mercy comes in, for mercy is not getting what you deserve (and grace is getting what you don't deserve). Once you have received mercy, the best thing to do is to extend that same mercy to someone else, as Jesus made clear in His parable on forgiveness:

Then the master called the servant in. “You wicked servant,” he said, “I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart (Matthew 18:32-35).

Do you need to humble yourself and ask for God's mercy for something you have done? Do you need to extend mercy to someone and forgive them for what they have done to you?

December 23 – Seated on High

Today's reading: Psalms 111-115

*“The LORD is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.
Who is like the LORD our God,*

*the One who sits enthroned on high,
who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?” - Psalm 113:4-6.*

The Lord is exalted high above all things, which means He oversees them, but does not need them. His people are also seated with Him in that lofty position, and Jesus summed up their situation and status well when He said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36). That means God's people should be involved in politics, business, and social work, but they should not take their identify or give their allegiance to any of those. Paul described the posture of God's people when he wrote, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6-7). Are you seated on high with a heavenly view of the things of earth, or are you immersed in this life to the extent that it robs you of your heavenly peace? Do you love this world so much that it waters down and affects your commitment to the Church?

December 24 – Family Joy

Today's reading: Psalms 116-120

*“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you.
The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar” - Psalm 118:26-27.*

This is the time of year to celebrate and rejoice, for all heaven and nature sang to announce the birth of Christ. Rejoicing was a common element in almost all the Old Testament feasts and holy days. For example, here are the Lord's directions for families when they assembled together to celebrate:

Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice. And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own (Deuteronomy 14:26-27).

Notice that God commanded them to feast, and the feast included “wine or fermented drink.” The most important thing was that the people were to rejoice in families, and also remember to share their joy and provision with the priests who were serving among them. Why do you think the Lord commanded His people to feast and rejoice? Are you rejoicing and feasting with God as your focus? Are you sharing with your spiritual leaders as you celebrate? Give some thought to the necessity of joy as part of your walk with the Lord as a family, and see what else you can do this holiday season to let the good times roll.

December 25 – God’s Favor

Today's reading: Psalms 121-125

***“LORD, do good to those who are good,
to those who are upright in heart.
But those who turn to crooked ways
the LORD will banish with the evildoers” - Psalm 125:4-5.***

The words of the psalmist in these verses are vaguely reminiscent of the words the angels said to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14). The Lord's favor was on Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and the Magi, who were all upright in heart, while God relegated evil Herod to irrelevance, after he tried everything possible to destroy Jesus, who he perceived (correctly) as a rival to his throne. Part of God's favor is His guidance, and on one hand, God showed each character in the Christmas story exactly what they were supposed to do through various messengers: the shepherd's angels, Caesar's decree for a census, Joseph's dreams, and the Magi's star. On the other hand, Herod rejected God's directive to worship Jesus, and instead tried to wipe Him out. What does God's favor on your life mean to you? Are you obeying God's guidance through the means He has chosen to use? Take some time to read the Christmas story in Luke 2 and Matthew 1 and 2 today, looking for examples of God's favor that you can apply to your life right now. *Lord, I thank You for Jesus and the story of His birth. You loved mankind so much that You sent Your Son to reconcile us to You. I rejoice today in Your goodness and I pray that I may live the reality of the Christmas story not just today, but every day. Help me to take the joy I have today and live it throughout the year!*

December 26 – Earned Joy

Today's reading: Psalms 126-130

***“The LORD has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy” - Psalm 126:3.***

The Christmas story is full of joy. Joseph and Mary were joyful that they had a son. The shepherds were joyful that the angels had announced the birth to them. The angels were joyful that God's purpose was being fulfilled through the events in Bethlehem. And the Magi were joyful, for after having traveled hundreds of miles, the star led them to the exact spot where Jesus was residing:

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were **overjoyed**. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:9-11).

Can you see that the Magi paid a price to find Jesus, and so, in a sense, they earned their joy because they responded to the star in faith, and were rewarded? What star is God showing you that you need to follow? What will it be like when you find what the star is taking you to?

December 27 – God with Us

Today's reading: Psalm 131-135

*“He swore an oath to the LORD,
he made a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob:
‘I will not enter my house
or go to my bed,
I will allow no sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,
till I find a place for the LORD,
a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob’” - Psalm 132:2-5.*

David swore an oath that he would build a house for God's presence, and that house, the Temple, has been the focus of Israel for the last 3,000 years! Yet David's preoccupation with a building is not God's highest priority, for God is more interested in living in His people's hearts than in a building. Today, God's people are still concerned, sometimes infatuated with “God's house,” when it is only bricks-and-mortar, a functional place to house worship activities. Joseph had a dream that Mary was going to have a baby boy and that His name was to be Jesus, and Matthew explained why the significance of that name:

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means 'God with us')" (Matthew 1:21-23).

Does God actually live in a building, making it holy? Are you more concerned with church buildings, or God's presence in the hearts of His people, including your own? What are the implications that God is living inside you? *Lord, I carry You with me wherever I go! That is an awesome thought, but it also means that You can't go where I don't take You. This coming year, I need to do a better job of introducing You into more of my work, family, church or school situations. I want to be a God-carrier to those who are hurting and need to know You. Amen.*

December 28 – A Little Longer

Today's reading: Psalms 136-140

*“The LORD will vindicate me;
your love, LORD, endures forever—
do not abandon the works of your hands” - Psalm 138:8.*

David wrote of his confidence that the Lord would vindicate him and make everything right that had turned so wrong. The word vindicate is defined as “to clear, as from an accusation, imputation, suspicion, or the like.” It can be difficult to trust the Lord to vindicate you, especially in this age when people regularly resort to the court system to gain the advantage or revenge over those who injure them. God is clear that vindication and vengeance are His responsibility, and not yours. In the book of Revelation, we see those who were martyred inquiring of the Lord about their vindication, and He gave them this response:

They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been (Revelation 6:10-11).

Are you tempted to seize control of the timetable for your vindication? Is God telling you to wait a little longer? Can you trust the Lord to clear your name, even if it happens after you are gone from the scene?

December 29 – Trained for War

Today's reading: Psalms 141-145

***“Praise be to the LORD my Rock,
who trains my hands for war,
my fingers for battle.
He is my loving God and my fortress,
my stronghold and my deliverer,
my shield, in whom I take refuge,
who subdues peoples under me” - Psalm 144:1-2.***

We know David as a king, psalmist, prayer champion, and poet, but he was also a king warrior, who was trained for battle by God Himself. In the midst of all his battles, David acknowledged that God was everything he needed – fortress, stronghold, deliverer, shield, refuge, and loving battle Companion, who taught David how to take the offensive. God wants to be all that for you, but you must be willing to engage the battle and allow God to train you to be aggressive, not expecting God to do for you what only you can do for yourself. David had mighty men around him, and one of them fought so long and hard that his hand was stuck to his sword:

Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty warriors, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the Israelites retreated, but Eleazar stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead (2 Samuel 23:9-10).

God brought the victory, but Eleazar stood his ground and fought. What do you think your part is in the spiritual battle in which you are presently engaged? Are you doing your part, or waiting on God to do your part – which He won't do?

December 30 – Membership Has Its Privileges

Today's reading - Psalms 146-150

*“Extol the LORD, Jerusalem;
praise your God, Zion.
He strengthens the bars of your gates
and blesses your people within you.
He grants peace to your borders
and satisfies you with the finest of wheat” - Psalm 147:12-14.*

God is not only concerned for the individual, singular *you*. He is also concerned for the corporate *you*, which in modern terms is the local church. Paul wrote 13 epistles, four to individuals, and nine to churches outlining both theological issues, but also explaining expected behavioral norms for the body of Christ in general. In today's verses, we see this pattern continue, for the psalmist was addressing Jerusalem as a whole, describing how the Lord would bless the residents of the city with security, peace and food. There was a credit card company who had a slogan that stated, "Membership has its privileges." The same can be said for involvement in a local church, where you are expected to contribute your finances and spiritual gifts in return for God's blessings. Paul wrote this about your involvement in the church: "What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the **church** may be built up" (1 Corinthians 14:26). Are you coming together with other believers for prayer, worship and Word ministry? Are you acting in the best interests of your church, building up the body of Christ through your presence? What blessings have you received for doing so?

December 31 – Thought Guidance

Today's reading: Psalm 119

*“Direct my footsteps according to your word;
let no sin rule over me” - Psalm 119:133.*

Psalm 119 contains many verses that make wonderful prayers you can pray for yourself. Today's verse is a good example. The writer was asking God to guide him and keep sin from having dominion over him. Who should *not* be praying that prayer? God is able to guide your steps, and you will not even be conscious that He is doing so. What's more, He is protecting you from things so subtly that you are often not aware of His protection. The Amplified Version of Proverbs 16:3 is a wonderful paraphrase of how God will often guide you: "Roll your works upon the Lord - commit and entrust them wholly to Him - and He will cause your thoughts to be agreeable to His will, and so shall your plans be established and succeed." Have you made a commitment to do God's will *before* you know what it is? Then you can count on God directing your steps by directing your thoughts. What ideas do you have that you can assume are from the Lord because they have been present in your mind for many years and do not violate any principle in God's word, and upon which you need to act in the coming year?