

Read Psalm 1

For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Psalms 1:6

When our family moved to Memphis from Missouri, all I had to go on for directions was Mapquest. So as we were getting closer to our new home, I turned off on the exit that the website had given, which I soon regretted. We must have arrived in the same Memphis ghetto that inspired Elvis to write his song. It was congested and difficult to get the U-haul through some of traffic that we were encountering. After finally arriving at our apartment, my brother-in-law who was following us in his car suggested that next time I just look at a map instead of blindly trusting a website.

Have you ever just taken someone's word on the right way to go? Unfortunately, we live in a society of know-it-alls. In an effort to appear more important or smarter than they really are, some people are willing to simply say whatever comes into their head. I would like to tell you this is an epidemic amongst the lost only, but there are plenty of believers who get wrapped up in self-importance and can lead us astray. Believers have to remember that when man is confused, God is not. Surround yourself with godly people who can give you counsel, but remember that ultimately God's going to reveal His will for your life to you. This verse says that God knows the way of the righteous and it literally means He "approves" it. God has set out what we should do and what we should not. **Are you seeking the Lord for answers, or man? Are you reading the Bible for yourself or accepting what other people claim it says? God knows what you're supposed to do next...don't neglect His counsel.**

Read Psalm 2

Worship the LORD with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Psalms 2:11

In a recent conversation, I was talking to someone about worship in our church. I made the statement that I would like to see our congregation understand that worship doesn't begin at the first or second service. Worship begins when we walk in the doors and greet someone with the spirit of Christ. Worship begins when we see what is undone for Sunday morning and we handle it without recognition or fanfare. These are a part of worship because they are a part of honoring God. But then my wife pointed out that worship has to go beyond the doors. What if came in the doors on Sunday morning having already worshipped? What if we left continuing to worship by our words and actions?

Here in Psalm 2, the kings and rulers of the earth are put on notice: There is a better king coming! And in verse 11 they are told to worship the Lord, but do you think this applies simply to an appearance in His temple? When we confine worship to the church building, we might as well confine our faith there as well. Let us worship with reverence and trembling. This God is worthy of more than we give Him. He loves us even when we ignore Him. **How are you approaching worship on Sunday? Has it become a habit or even a chore? More importantly, what does your worship look like outside the**

church doors? Think of creative ways to spark worship in your life. Some people play music during their prayer time, or they pray using specific scripture they just read in the Bible. Let us realize that every day is an opportunity to worship God through our lips, thoughts and actions.

Read Psalm 3

I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me. Psalms 3:5

During basic training, I remember our first night out of the barracks. While we were out in the field, our Drill Sergeants were giving us a first-hand lesson on security in our tents. It became clear they were sneaking up on tents where soldiers were asleep, and stealing their M-16's just before throwing a gas grenade inside. So I slept with my weapon in my sleeping bag with me, and kept my gas mask right next to my face. However, my sleep was pretty sporadic due to the shouting of those who were getting gassed. We had just completed a long march and I was physically exhausted, but the stress of what might happen kept me from resting.

Have you ever been so stressed that you were unable to sleep? Do you find yourself thinking about problems well into the night? David was going through a terrible time in his life here in Psalm 3, but he says he could sleep and arise because the Lord was with him. God is able to sustain us in any situation, but your inability to sleep indicates that you're afraid to give up your problem for 8 hours. If something is weighing heavily on your mind, ask God to relieve you of it. Sleeping poorly and thinking about an issue all night will not cause you to make wise decisions the next day. **Satan loves it when we worry, because he wins as we move from faith to worry. Prayer should not just something we do in between our worry sessions. Ask God to move in a specific way in your life, and then trust Him to do it.**

Read Psalm 4

But know that the LORD has set apart the godly man for Himself; the LORD hears when I call to Him. Psalms 4:3

During college I used to listen to a comedian who wrote funny songs instead of jokes. One of those songs was about his answering machine, and all these years later I still remember the main line, "I love my answering machine, I love my answering machine. It keeps the people I know away from me." Before the age of answering machines and caller id, I did what most people did when the phone rang: pick it up and hope it's not a telemarketer. Our technology today lets us know who is calling and we can choose if we want to have a conversation.

In our relationship with God, I'm glad He doesn't use caller id. God is ready to listen to anyone, but He has certain expectations upon what we say. If an unbeliever calls out to God, He is ready to listen if the person is ready to repent. If God answered the prayers of the lost, what would be their motivation to enter into a relationship with Him? They

would feel they are already getting the benefits of God without the expectations. But God is ready and willing to hear the prayers of His people. He sets apart the godly man and listens to him when he calls to God. **What does it mean to be godly? Simply put, is God the central priority of your life? Are your daily decisions and activities influenced by your relationship with His son, Jesus Christ? If not, then you are literally living an ungodly life. If you are making requests of God, make sure that you're fulfilling His requests of you first.**

Read Psalm 5

For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You.

Psalms 5:4

During a Wednesday night Bible study with some teenagers, Megan began talking about how God works in our lives for good. She mentioned several difficult circumstances that had led her to trust God more fully. Then she mentioned that she thought even sin brought us closer to God because repentance brings us closer to God. Certainly repentance brings us into a close relationship with God, but you can grow closer also by resisting the sin in the first place. I told her that I was confident that God does not lead us to commit any sin, and Psalm 5:4 backs that up.

This is more of a theological point today, but it does have application to our lives. One truth we know about God is that He is sovereign. God can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants. If He wanted to start moving your body around like a puppet He could do it. Why doesn't He? Because God has given us free will, meaning He gives us a choice. Even though He could force compliance, He doesn't. His desire is that we will choose to love and serve Him and not that we would do so by force. **The Bible tells us that God has great plans for our lives, but does that plan include sin? No. The Word of God repeatedly warns us against the dangers of sin, and never invites us to take part in any God-ordained disobedience. Is there sin in your life? What are you doing about it? Recognize that when you allow sin to remain in your life it will cause grief and guilt. Turn from it now and choose to resist sin and embrace holiness. God wants us to obey out not out of compulsion, but as a simple gesture of love back to Him.**

Read Psalm 6

Return, O LORD, rescue my soul ; save me because of Your lovingkindness. Psalm 6:4

I have read a series of books on the Long Range Army Patrols (Lurps) of the Vietnam War. These were six-man teams made up of the most elite soldiers the Army had to offer at the time. One account is of the teams hearing that two helicopters went down on a mountainside not far from their base. None of the Lurps knew these chopper pilots personally, but the code of never leaving a man behind motivated them to go into an area entrenched with fog and enemy soldiers. They knew that the men were likely dead, but it was important that someone look to be sure and bring the bodies back for the families. It

wasn't based on the worth of the men that were missing. It was based on a principle that every soldier is important enough to account for.

David's Psalm is of his unworthiness, and his need for God's mercy. He knows that the only one that can save him is God. But David also understands that the only reason God would save him is because of who God is and not because of who David is. I think that as believers we understand at the beginning that we have been saved despite the fact that we don't deserve it. However, after a few years we may think we're not really bad people after all. We believe that perhaps we were somehow deserving of being saved, based on how much we personally do for the kingdom. **Why did God save you? Do you recognize it's because of His lovingkindness? You can never deserve your salvation or earn it, but you can live in light of it. Today as you live your life, remember that your life has meaning only because of Him. What do you think He would like for you to do today?**

Read Psalm 7

I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High. Psalms 7:17

Pastor Adrian Rogers was great at giving you easy phrases to understand important truths and concepts. He once said, "There is no promise God cannot keep, no prayer God will not answer, and no problem too hard for Him to solve." The point is that God's character is one of righteousness. He always does the right thing. It may be difficult for us to see, but if we have turned it over to God we must be prepared for the results. Whatever He has brought about is the best thing for us, and we need to thank Him for that righteous result.

Why am I thankful to be a Christian? When I began to read the Bible, I completely understood that I was a sinner and needed to be saved. I'm thankful that Jesus was willing to extend salvation to me despite who I am. I'm also thankful to serve a good God. I don't serve God because I have to, but because I want to. He has brought many good things into my life. Sometimes they didn't look so great in the beginning, but when allowed to run their course they have changed me and molded me for the better. **Have you thanked God lately for his righteousness? He always makes the right decision. He always is on the lookout for our lives. As David did, give God thanks this morning simply for who He is and how He works in your life.**

Read Psalm 8

Yet You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You crown him with glory and majesty! Psalm 8:5

When I was in the Army, ranks were sometimes confusing to me because of how we treated certain officers. After the rank of Captain there is Major, Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, and then four different ranks of General. So during basic training we constantly read our Army manuals teaching us how to address officers in different situations.

Despite the fact that a Lieutenant Colonel was below a Colonel, we noticed that the sergeants and even regular Colonels referred to a Lieutenant Colonel as simply "Colonel". It was pretty confusing. In the minds of these regular military men, the difference between the two ranks was only a matter of years in service, and not of military merit. They both performed similar duties and had only slight differences between them.

Just as with officers, the difference between angels and Christians is also a thin line. Billy Graham called them "God's Secret Agents." They do many things behind the scenes that we'll never know. God used angels at several important turns in Scripture: they guarded the entrance to Eden to prevent Adam and Eve's return, spoke to prophets, and even announced the birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible says we are a little lower than the angels. Angels and Christians are both servants, but we have a special relationship with Jesus. They call Him Lord, but we have the privilege of also calling Him Savior. We have been brought into the family of God in a way that angels cannot fully appreciate. **You may not have the power of an angel, but you still have the calling of a servant. How are you serving God? Give examples in your mind right now. What is something simple and perhaps even unseen that you could do to serve the Lord today?**

Read Psalm 9

The nations have sunk down in the pit which they have made; in the net which they hid, their own foot has been caught. Psalms 9:15

A general manager for a clothing store in Denver was arrested for setting up a camera in the women's dressing room to record unsuspecting women. He also unknowingly recorded himself setting up the camera in a discreet location of the room before any women used it. The camera was digital so it recorded onto a hard drive instead of a removable tape. The manager used the camera and then returned it to the store he bought it from, thinking the footage was erased. But, the retailer who took the camera back discovered the video and called the police. The trap this man set for unsuspecting women caught him as well.

We generally dig our own pits. When we attempt to blame others, we only dig the pit deeper. Living a victorious Christian life can occur when we confess the times we were less than conquerors. Jesus desires to work in my life from whatever starting point I provide. However, it's much easier starting your day above ground than below it. **What pit of sin are you digging for yourself? Who are you blaming for digging it? Today, let's be honest before God and ask Him through repentance to fill up the pit and to give us the strength to leave it filled. If it seems we're talking about repentance a lot, that's because there isn't a day goes by that we're not in need of it.**

Read Psalm 10

The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek *Him*. All his thoughts are, "There is no God." Psalms 10:4

Sometime ago I watched "Expelled" by Ben Stein, the Clear Eyes guy (that's how most people know him). Interviewing Richard Dawkins, a notable atheist, Dawkins said that Christians that try to put creation and evolution together are making a huge mistake. I've often thought that evolutionists would support the idea of Christians who attempt to say that God used evolution (which is a lie), but Dawkins' problem is that there is no God and no intelligent design within Evolution. At every turn, Dawkins works all problems and discussions with one important constant, "There is no God."

How do you answer someone like Dawkins? If someone said there's no way to prove that God exists, how would you respond? Here is the point: it takes as much faith to believe there is no God, as it does to believe there is. Both are statements of the unseen. I cannot prove God beyond my faith. Creation is an evidence of His existence according to the Bible, but if someone doesn't believe in Creation then this isn't valid proof to them. **Your relationship isn't about physical proof, but it's about faith. Ask God to prepare you for moments of discussion like this. Don't get angry, but remain in control of your emotions. Don't allow your passion to become anger towards someone who needs to trust in Jesus Christ. Pray today for the wisdom to answer questions you haven't even been asked yet.**

Read Psalm 11

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Psalms 11:3

Our family watched an episode of Extreme Home Makeover that helped a family in California. The husband died, and the wife was left with a couple of small children and a farm to run. Their house had been built 100 years ago and was in very bad shape. When the design team inspected the house, they noticed the foundation was completely rotted away. Normally an excavator is used to tear down these houses. This time they just cinched a hook to the back of four cars and into each of the four walls of the house. It was so weak, that the cars were able to pull the house apart and it collapsed on itself.

When you're missing a foundation, everything suffers. In America we have seen several foundations slowly fade overtime. Our foundation of faith in a real God has eroded until there isn't much left. Even Israel faced a similar circumstance. Too often the foundations God set were dismissed by people who worshipped whatever was easiest. **What foundations have begun to rot in your own life? There were issues you used to believe were right and wrong, but have become compromised in your life over time. Our convictions can be shaken by time and apathy, but Jesus Christ is the everlasting foundation. The Word of God allows you to build on that foundation as you study it for the direction of your life. What are you building on the foundation Jesus laid down in your life? How are you building up your personal relationship**

with Jesus? How are you building up your family and church family? Write down answers here on this page of what you are doing, or could be doing.

Read Psalm 12

You, O LORD, will keep them; you will preserve him from this generation forever. Psalms 12:7

When I was growing up, I thought Doogie Howser was a great TV show. It was a kid who graduated from high school, college, and medical school while still a teenager. At the end of every episode, he would write down his thoughts in a journal on his computer and talk about his day. I thought that sounded like a cool idea, so I started writing in a notebook to keep my journal, but I quit after about three days. I realized I didn't really have anything to say, and no one would really care to read what I was writing.

Words can be powerful things, but the speaker and the hearer must both have confidence in them to be effective. People have attempted to eliminate the words of God for thousands of years. Bibles have been burned, believers oppressed, and countless other steps to stop the spread of Christianity. A pastor once said that when Rome tried to stomp out Christianity in Paul's day, all they did was splash it all over the map. God's Word will not change, and you can change in one of two ways as a result. **Either you change into the man or woman God wants you to be as a result of understanding and applying His words, or you change as you choose to disobey because you think some parts of God's Word don't apply to you. I've seen people who confess to be believers choose both paths. Which are you? God has preserved His Word to give you the opportunity today to choose your response. Has God's Word been changing you, or are you attempting to change His Word to mean something different for your life? Are you even contemplating His word once you close your Bible? Listen to God over yourself.**

Read Psalm 13

How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? Psalms 13:1

When my daughter Lauren was 3 she began having some trouble in dealing with her siblings, and resorted to yelling at them sometimes. One day I heard her yelling and I sent her to her room and said to wait until I came to let her out. She finally came out about 20 minutes later and asked her mom if she could leave her room. Honestly, I had forgotten that she was back there and I only intended for her to be there for about 5 minutes! I felt like a bad dad.

Have you ever wondered how long? How long do you have to be here? How long do you have to do this? Does God remember what you're doing and what you're going through? He certainly does, and if you're going through it then He must have a reason for it. God forgets no one, even those who have forgotten Him. A person can live his entire life separated from God, but at the end if he truly calls upon God then God is there. Just because the Lord hasn't acted in the way you want, doesn't mean that He's absent from the

situation. **Today, ask God to remind you of His presence. Ask Him to work your current circumstances to your benefit, and ask Him to help you be a part of that work. God has not forgotten you. Have you forgotten Him? Ask God to show you the big picture in the circumstance you face.**

Read Psalm 14

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds ; There is no one who does good. Psalms 14:1

The flat earth society is made up of people from around the world who believe that the earth is actually flat. They claim that space agencies have faked space launches and footage from outer space that indicates the earth is round. However, you don't have to go to outer space to prove the earth is round. Columbus first determined it by watching ships sail away from the harbor. He noticed that at great distances he could only see the top of the ship as it sailed away, indicating some curve or slope to the earth since the ships didn't just disappear at great distances. It doesn't require going to outer space to prove this truth, and can only be denied by a choice that is made separate from the facts.

Often people who claim that they don't believe in God, do so to prove their intelligence to others. Instead, all it does is prove them as a fool to dismiss the greatest truth that man can know. How do you react when someone tells you they are an atheist? Do you get defensive or upset? Remember that the primary reason for their disbelief isn't due to a lack of evidence, but their desire to live as they see fit with no oversight on their life. We have to make a choice to have an honest discussion with these people, and not a pointless argument. **If you're a believer, are you at times living like the atheist? You know that God is omnipotent and omnipresent, yet you live as though there are times that He isn't around. Atheists live as if there is no God with no plan. Let us live as people who believe in the ever-present God. Let us remember we serve a real God who has purposes and plans for our lives. Let us remember that there is a moral authority and we are to be more concerned about answering to Him instead of for Him.**

Read Psalm 15

O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? Psalms 15:1

Who should we allow in the church? It's a more complicated question than you think. Obviously, everyone is welcome in the doors to hear the Word of God. But, who is welcome to join the church as a member? It should be people who have clearly indicated a relationship with Jesus Christ, given a good testimony of salvation, and give evidence of living daily for the Lord. Our problems arise in the church when we allow someone who seems to believe in Jesus as a member of the church. People don't want to question the new person too much for fear of offending them. Getting a clear answer on someone's testimony is not offensive, but defensive. We are defending the importance of the gospel when we confirm its root in the life of a new member.

This entire Psalm indicates those who will abide with God forever in His holy city. Notice that God's standards are much tighter than that of the church. Only those who live opposite of the selfish sin nature will be in Heaven with Him. Does this mean God will reject Christians? No, because a Christian is someone who rejects the sin nature, maybe not at every moment, but in life as a whole. Many of our problems arise in church when we allow loose standards to bring in unholy people into the fellowship. Their carnal (sinful or flesh) nature keeps them from working towards the Kingdom of God and instead they focus on their own kingdom. **It's time for us to raise the standards as a church. Let's love everyone, but let's love them enough to point out when their lives fail to honor Christ. We want to protect people from a false sense of salvation. If our standards in accepting members are loose, then undisciplined people can believe they are saved by their relationship to us as a church. Pray for those who are coming into our church. Pray that they will understand the gospel message and that we will confirm it in their lives.**

Read Psalm 16

I will bless the LORD who has counseled me; indeed, my mind instructs me in the night. Psalms 16:7

We were so excited during our first snowfall in Pennsylvania. We hadn't used sleds much and we bought two kinds: one straight sled that seated two and a small disk sled. Kaitlyn and Lauren got in the two-person sled and tried to go, but it didn't get very far. I told them how to sit in it and how to get started. I also showed Tyler how to run and jump onto the disk sled to get better speed, and pretty soon everyone was flying down the hill, much to their mother's concern! It was fun to teach them how to do something and then see them actually use my instructions.

Did you know that you can bless God? The God of all creation who knows all and is a perfect God, can be blessed when our little sinful selves make a choice to follow His counsel. God counsels us both directly and indirectly. Sometimes we hear God's instructions in a sermon or bible study and later on we remember it in a specific situation. Other times we need counsel for a specific situation, and the Lord provides when we ask. He is blessed not when we hear His counsel, but when we follow it. **Are you blessing God? Have you asked for wisdom on how to accomplish something, but ignored that wisdom because it didn't match what you really wanted to do? The verse finishes and says his mind instructs him in the night. It refers to a work of your conscience and Holy Spirit (which are separate). If you're going the right way, your nights will be peaceful. But, if you can't sleep as a result of worry or decisions you've made, perhaps you should re-examine your choices in the situation. There may be a reason you're not sleeping soundly.**

Read Psalm 17

Wondrously show Your lovingkindness, O Savior of those who take refuge at Your right hand from those who rise up *against them*. Psalms 17:7

When Tyler was 6, he suddenly became very motivated to ride his bike, but he couldn't do it on his own. He wanted me to help teach him, but I really didn't know how to teach someone to ride a bike. What do you say? "Well son, sit on this seat and pedal, and don't fall off." So I stood on his left and held on to the bike seat while he pedaled. When I was right there, he was pretty confident in learning, but when I stepped away or tried to get him to ride on his own for a bit, he started wobbling and turning the handlebars too quickly. He quickly worked himself up to riding on his own, but he needed the confidence of knowing someone was there to help him learn.

David, an Old Testament believer, understood that a Savior was coming. More than that, he understood that this Savior is at the right hand of God and that He is our refuge. But at what times should we take refuge in Jesus? Many understand that we take refuge in Him as we seek Him to be our Savior and Lord. However, He desires to be our continuing refuge. He remains with us to guide us in those shaky moments of life. When things are going badly people often run to Jesus, but not in the good times. There is one clear problem that stems from this decision: good times turn to bad times when we live them apart from God. **People don't realize that the way they live in one season of life influences the next. Teenagers often grow into young adults who aren't much different than they were at 15. Why? Because they have built and established habits that graduation can't break overnight. Are you seeking refuge in your Savior? Do you attempt to be your own refuge at times? He didn't save you so you could live apart from Him, but so that you'd live as a part of His Kingdom. Does your self-confidence overshadow your willingness to place your trust in an ever-present Savior? Don't answer that one too quickly; Who's making your decisions?**

Read Psalm 18

The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me. Psalms 18:20

God blessed me with a great job at an insurance company when I was in college. One day I got a call from my boss to come into her office when I had a minute. My mind started racing as I worked to figure out what I had done wrong. After about five minutes I finally got up and went back to her office. She told me to close the door and sit down. She said that evaluations and reviews weren't coming up yet, but my work level had caused her to approve a raise for me ahead of schedule. I was blown away. I couldn't think of a reason to be worried because there was none. I was simply being rewarded for diligent service.

We have seen the story of David when Saul was chasing Him, but now we get to take a look inside David's head. He knew that he had been serving God and so when the day came that he needed to call upon God in his distress, God heard him. It wasn't because God was feeling particularly generous that day, but was a result of the daily relationship that David already had with the Lord. David was blessed because he was obedient. **Sometimes people believe the term "Christian" entitles them to be heard by God. However, God is ready to listen to the person who listens to Him. David**

prayed in distress and in good days. David showed the same reliance on God no matter what the circumstances were around Him. Are you listening to God, or just expecting Him to listen to you? What would happen if He repaid you according to the work of your hands yesterday or last week? Would He repay for you for service or for sin?

Read Psalm 19

Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Psalms 19:11

A claymore mine is an explosive that soldiers will use when they have to stop for the night or for an ambush. You put a few of them out about 5 meters from the inside of your camp, and you have a quick way to stop an advancing enemy. I thought the writing on it was unnecessary at first glance. The mine is designed in a convex fashion so that the explosion radiates out, yet the front says, "Face towards enemy." I thought this was the most unnecessary printing in the history of the army, until I heard about someone who faced it the wrong way and had a very bad day. The writing was plain to see, but someone ignored it or didn't pay very close attention.

This might be one of the best explanations of Scripture that I have ever read in the Bible. I've even read this chapter before, but I didn't remember this very simple explanation. When you read the Bible, you have been warned. If you say yes to what God said no to, then remember you were warned. When we choose to accept the warnings of God, there is great reward. We protect ourselves, and even our relationships with others when we follow the Word of God. **What warnings are you ignoring? We have to remember that any short-lived pleasure that comes from sin, will be outweighed by the great rewards of obedience. Let us read the Bible as instructions vital to our daily lives. You don't have to focus just on this verse. Was there another verse in Psalm 19 today that Holy Spirit pointed out to you?**

Read Psalm 20

Some *boast* in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God. Psalms 20:7

I love the snow. There are so many reasons, but one of my favorite childhood memories was playing tackle football. For some reason, we thought that if you tackled in the snow, it wouldn't hurt as bad. It may not hurt as much when you hit the ground, but the initial tackle will still rattle your teeth. So when all of us lined up, who do you think was taken first? It wasn't the best quarterback, or the best receiver or runner. It was always the biggest guy. I didn't really care about how good he was, just as long as I knew he would be tackling the other team. It certainly gave you more confidence to have the big man because you knew your opponent would probably just lie down instead of taking a hit.

When two armies would face each other on the battlefield, the big boys on the field were chariots and horses. Any army could come up with soldiers, but to have these weapons of

war definitely swung the balance. However, armies that put their trust in military strength often found themselves defeated as a result of the God of Israel. Israel's army was willing to fight, but they knew that God would be responsible for the results. **Where are you placing your trust? Is it your job? People are surprised every year as they lose the job that seemed so secure. And we all know that people around us, even those who love us, will let us down at times. If you are trusting in anything or anyone other than God for your future then disappointment awaits you. Trust in God and His leading for your life. Don't trust in anything that you've built for yourself. A lack of prayer can be a good indicator of how much we trust ourselves.**

Read Psalm 21

You have given him his heart's desire, and You have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah. Psalms 21:2

How can you tell what someone loves? One good way is to listen to what they talk about. I've met several people that I can remember figuring out their real loves within a few minutes. Josh loved video games. It's all he talked about and apparently all he thought about. Candace loved sports. It was what she was good at and enjoyed doing and it came up in most of her conversations. David loved music ministry and constantly thought of ways to get better at it. In all these situations, their lips revealed the desires of their heart.

David says that the desires of his heart have been granted by God as he requested it from His mouth. There are a couple important points here. First of all God knew David's request, but He didn't honor the request until David brought it to Him through prayer. Secondly, does God honor every heart desire? We know that the heart usually plans wickedness and that we don't need every desire granted. As a Christian, you made a decision to change your heart desires. We pledge to allow God to be the influencer of our heart. **So as He changes you from the inside out, your heart's desires should be an area that falls under His control. He leads us to desire the things He desires, and then He is ready to fulfill them. I didn't know ministry would be a heart's desire for me, but as I've allowed Him to change me from the man I was, ministry has become a passion I often talk to Him about. Where has your heart been most recently? What are you dwelling on, and can God use it?**

Read Psalm 22

From You comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him. Psalms 22:25

Perhaps you remember the 2008 story of San Diego resident Dong Yun Yoon. Yoon lost his wife, two baby girls, and mother-in-law when a Navy fighter jet lost control and slammed into his home. The pilot ejected and survived, but I thought how distraught this husband and father must have been. I watched a press conference he held and he said to pray for the pilot, that he would not suffer as a result of the loss of Yoon's family. He called the pilot a treasure of our country, and seemed genuinely concerned for this survivor. Not every man would have this reaction, but Dong was a Christian. He said he

knew that his family was with God, and the fact that he could have any composure speaks of his genuine faith.

Psalm 22 contains many familiar statements if you have ever read the gospels. There is much prophecy regarding the crucifixion of Jesus throughout these Scriptures. Jesus spoke of the love and watch care of God, and then suffered a brutal and violent death. Despite the circumstances, the Father was in control. **How would you have reacted if you had been in Dong Yun Yoon's shoes. Would you have felt an assurance that your family was with God? Would you have been asking why God did this to you? Christians are not discouraged from having human emotions, but we are encouraged to remember that God is worthy of our praise even in grief. When we praise Jesus in front of those who do not understand, we prove our devotion to our Lord and our faith to the faithless.**

Read Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Psalm 23:1

I have taken care of several kinds of animals in my lifetime, but horses are some of the easiest. If you walk up to them holding flakes of hay, they are your best friends. In fact, they can get a little pushy waiting for you to drop it in the designated spot. Chickens are pretty annoying. Even after several weeks of the same feeding routine, they still go crazy with roosters trying to peck you and hens running everywhere. I've had to care for hamsters, fish, pigs, dogs, cats, horses and other animals in my life. They generally didn't understand the different ways I took care of them, but they were all taken care of regardless.

The 23rd Psalm is certainly one of the better known passages of Scripture in the Bible. David says that we are like animals under the care of a shepherd. We are responsible to follow the leading of the Shepherd and as a result, we will find our needs taken care of. The passage ends saying I shall not want. It doesn't mean that God provides for wants and desires above your needs. The Hebrew means that you'll never lack anything that you require for your life. I haven't always understood the plan God was using to provide for me, just as animals under my watch care haven't always understood I was doing what was best for them. **I trust God that He is doing what is best for me. It may not be in the way I would have liked or imagined, but I have not lacked anything that I have needed in my life. Are you prepared to follow God as your shepherd? That means you follow His leading out of faith, and not always out of understanding. Confirm His will by prayer and scripture, and leave the details to the Shepherd. Faith doesn't demand to understand...faith simply trusts.**

Read Psalm 24

Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! Psalms 24:7

I was watching video of a pee-wee football game on a sports blooper show one evening. Every game the parents made a banner for the kids to run through as they made their way on the field. It seems someone got a bit overzealous in their construction of one of the banners, because as these 7-8 year-old-players hit the banner, they found themselves thrown backwards on the ground. None of them could bust through the dramatic entrance that had been made for them.

There is not a gate, door, or banner for that matter that can hold God back. But while He can never be held back, we have an obligation to throw open the door to every entrance. What doors are these? Is the door to your home open for God to walk in? Is the door to your marriage always ready for a visit from the Lord? Imagine every aspect of your life as having a door. Now visualize whether that door is flung wide open for God to visit and examine, or if you are making a feeble effort to keep certain doors closed and locked. **He wants to come into our lives to bring about victory. Don't board up any strongholds for the enemy. Pray today, asking God to reveal to you the areas you are withholding from Him. You may be surprised at what He shows you, which is the very reason the Scripture encourages us to ask God for this periodic examination.**

Read Psalm 25

Good and upright is the LORD; Therefore He instructs sinners in the way. Psalms 25:8

Dog the Bounty Hunter is one of my favorite TV shows. Dog is a former murderer and convict who has turned his life around thanks to the saving power of Jesus Christ. Now he works as a bail bondsman and helps people get out of jail. But if they don't show up for court, he hunts them down and brings them in. Dog can be a rough guy at times, but his main motivation is to see people get a second chance. He works hard to help people get into rehab or out of the situations that have brought them into a life of crime. Dog admits that often people simply become what they hang around.

Before my relationship with Jesus began, I took instruction from many different places. Maybe it was my idiot friends or things I saw on television or movies. Ultimately, Satan was the source behind the bad advice that I was taking and applying to my life. When I gave myself over to Jesus, my life changed because now I was taking my instructions from Jesus. He is good and upright, and is unable to guide us to any kind of life except one of righteousness. **When you find yourself being less than good, remember who you are taking your cues from. You are ignoring the Father of Salvation to listen to the father of lies. Who have you been listening to this morning? Last night? If you're unsure, look at the results of your life over the past 24 hours and answer honestly. Where is the first place you look for answers?**

Read Psalm 26

Examine me, O LORD, and try me; test my mind and my heart. Psalms 26:2

I absolutely detest going to the doctor. Maybe it's a result of one too many Army physicals performed by heartless military personnel. I always felt fine until it was time to walk in there. Then I would wonder what would they find wrong with me? How long did I have to live? These were the sudden fears that would fill my mind as I waited to be examined. Then after it was all over, I was always glad that someone had verified the current state of my health. Usually I went back home feeling better, and wondering why I had worried so much. Probably needlephobia.

I think sometimes people view an examination by the Lord in the same way as a physical doctor. We think we're living pretty well for the Lord, but in the back of our minds we know who we really are. David indicates that God's spiritual physicals for us are pretty thorough. He examines us and tries us in certain situations. Not so He knows what we will do, but so that we will. He tests both our minds and our hearts, ensuring that they are working together for Him. **Does your faith match your decision-making, or do you often make choices as if your faith is separate from your daily life? You should ask God to examine you, but in all honesty He already has. When we ask God to examine us, we are really asking Him to reveal the results of that examination to us. Where are you spiritually sick? Holy Spirit is constantly giving us a diagnosis of our souls, but we need to stop and listen. The next time you pray, make your first prayer priority to be listening to God's diagnosis of your faith.**

Read Psalm 27

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple. Psalms 27:4

It's not uncommon for people to buy tickets to the Super Bowl months before the game is even played. They don't even care if their favorite team is playing, just as long as they're at the big game. But while they have their tickets, I'm sure that none of them are sitting in the stadium right now waiting for the game to start. That ticket doesn't entitle a person to sit in their seat anytime they want leading up to the game. They have to wait until gameday.

I think some Christians view Heaven as the Christian Super Bowl. Some would consider death to be the beginning of the rewards of the Christian life. Notice when David wants to dwell in God's house; "all the days of my life". David was not waiting to die in order to live in the presence of God. He was living it daily through his personal relationship with His redeemer. **Are you looking forward to dwelling with God forever? Do you realize that your forever began when you gave your life to Jesus? You are already living a forever life that will only be momentarily interrupted by the event of your death. Don't wait to die in order to live in the presence of God. Choose that life now.**

Express to people that the gospel isn't something that helps us when we die...it's something that helps us live.

Read Psalm 28

Because they do not regard the works of the LORD Nor the deeds of His hands, He will tear them down and not build them up. Psalms 28:5

The state of Washington was in the news a couple of years ago due to a sign that was placed next to the capital rotunda nativity scene. The sign was placed by the Freedom From Religion Foundation and part of it read, "There is only our natural world. Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds." Somebody came along and stole the sign which was later found in a ditch. Did the person who stole the sign forget what country he lived in? I'm a Christian and I'm glad to say it. I willingly have given myself as a slave for whatever God wants out of me. Our constitution gives me the right to articulate my faith, and gives an atheist the right to talk open about their lack of faith. We can't have one without the other.

David says there are many who will stand against believers. No matter how sacred the Word of God is to us, they will malign it. No matter how much we praise God for answered prayers, they will point only to coincidence. But God will stand against the unbeliever. He will not build them up, but tear them down in order that they see their need for Him. Not all will turn to Jesus, but as long as their freedom doesn't infringe upon mine, I can live in peace with atheists. In fact, if I don't, I've lost any opportunity to share with them the truth of Christ. **Are you fighting for God? Do you take offense to every greeting of "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas"? Jesus took upon Himself more offense than you could ever imagine, and He never lost His love for the very people that hung Him on the cross. Instead of getting angry at non-believers, what if we respect their freedoms so that we might win one through witnessing instead of fighting a war of words?**

Read Psalm 29

"The voice of the LORD is powerful, the voice of the LORD is majestic." Psalm 29:4

I'm more of a talk radio guy when I'm driving in my car. I like music, but for some reason I'd rather listen to discussions when it's just me in the car, and there are several radio hosts that I really enjoy listening to everyday. Over time, I usually begin to develop a picture of what these people look like based on their voice and in almost every case, when I finally see them their picture is never what I imagined them to look like. Their voice gave a certain impression, but ultimately it was just a voice.

As I listen to God's voice, I imagine what He looks like. And no matter what I imagine, I've come up short in describing Him. God's voice is powerful and majestic. God has the power to speak and see those words become actions. God is a King whose words are worthy of being followed. And how many times have we missed the voice of God? Maybe it was unintentional. Maybe we prayed, but we weren't really listening to what God wanted to say. Or perhaps you just didn't take the time to pray for whatever good

reason you had. As a result you missed the powerful and majestic voice of God. **Are you going to listen for His voice today? Despite all that power and majesty, God speaks to those who simply listen. Today don't just talk, but listen to what God is saying. His words are meant for progress and change in your life as you serve Him. Be willing to sit silent in your prayer time and give Him a chance to bring people and prayers to your mind.**

Read Psalm 30

Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones, and give thanks to His holy name. Psalms 30:4

I heard about a pastor recently who really loves music, even though he is extremely tone deaf and usually sings the right notes only by accident. One Sunday morning during the music, the pastor realized his microphone was on and that everyone in the sanctuary could hear him singing. He frantically worked to turn it off, and apologized to the congregation during his sermon for making them endure his singing.

I think instead of this pastor apologizing for giving praise, many in our congregation should apologize for not doing so.

David implies that we give thanks to God's holy name as a memorial to what God has done in our lives. God is always working for our good, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. But should those tough circumstances cause us to forget the previous ways He has blessed us? **Those who love God should be revived and not reserved in a worship service. Who knows what freedom we could experience in our worship if we wouldn't concern ourselves with the guy behind us, but the Father above us? Have you sung praises to God today? Why not? In church are you quiet for fear that someone might hear you? The only one worth singing to is God, and He loves to hear your praise. Stop going to church. Start attending worship. Focus during the music, the message, the invitation and the offering times in order that God would be praised throughout.**

Read Psalm 31

You will pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, for You are my strength. Psalms 31:4

Our family went through a major ice storm during a particular Missouri winter. Power was out for nearly a week, and we were roughing it. I soon realized how unprepared I was for this type of emergency. I had a flashlight with almost no batteries, a few candles, and that was it. Many people in town never went without anything because they had a generator, camp stoves, propane, candles, flashlights, blankets, and a number of other provisions. People often don't think of their need for these items until it is too late.

Life often brings the unexpected more than the expected. David says that he trusts in the Lord to protect him when secret traps ensnare him. David knows that God is never surprised by the events we cannot anticipate. In my ministry, I began praying a long time ago, "Lord prepare me for the circumstances and questions that will walk into my office

that I do not expect. Give me the wisdom to know how to answer these challenges." God has honored that prayer in my life, because it's a prayer of faith. **How do you react when the unexpected occurs? Does your trust in God increase, or do you trust in yourself during emergencies? I trust in God at all times, because His plans are prepared beforehand, regardless of whether I expect them or not. Today ask God to prepare you for anyone or anything that may come your way.**

Read Psalm 32

You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah. Psalms 32:7

I've always had mixed feelings about hide 'n seek. It's a fun game, but I was always such a good hider, I often remained in dark places too long. When my sister and I played, my favorite spot was to jump in the hamper and put the dirty clothes back on top of me. I was never found until I came out and was well away from my spot by then. At my grandma's house, I would hide in the darkest room of her basement knowing that the people I played with wouldn't spend much time down there either.

Hide 'n seek can be lonely when people don't have a clue of finding your hiding places. When I find myself in serious circumstances, the Lord is my hiding place. Though I am in full view of everyone, no longer hiding in hampers or under porches, God's unseen hands protect me in ways even I cannot imagine. David admits to being a secret sinner at times. He is able to hide it from others, and even himself, but all the time God is waiting for David's offer of repentance. And when David provides it, the One that he was hiding from is now the One he is hiding in. **That's the greatness of God. We know that we disappoint Him greatly at times, and yet He is still ready to take us in His arms and protect us. Have you repented, but you still feel like hiding from God? Instead of hiding from Him, hide in Him. Do not keep silent, but surround yourself with songs of salvation. If you attempt to distance yourself from Him out of shame, you'll find yourself in more of that same sin that hurt you before. God is always waiting for the child who runs back to Him.**

Read Psalm 33

Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy. Psalm 33:3

When people say they don't like the new songs in their worship services, I wonder how they would have reacted to all the new music that sprung up between the 17th-19th centuries. Would they have hated "How Great Thou Art"? What about "Amazing Grace"? Would they have preferred the prevalent Gregorian chants over all the newfangled hymn music? The Missouri Baptist Convention has a man who helps churches with resources for worship in their churches. He said that new music is honoring to God, under Scripture such as Psalm 33:3. He wrote, "Jesus has heard the old songs thousands of times. Why don't we sing Him some new ones?"

While I love new and old music alike, I don't think this passage is so much about musical taste, but more about our testimonies for God. David was a musician so when God did

something amazing in his life, David sang about it. It created a new song within him. If he had been a painter, perhaps he would have painted a new canvas. If a poet, he might have written a new work. David took his talent and used it to magnify the work of the Lord in his life. **When God does something amazing in your life, is there a testimony that goes along with it? Do you share that work with people in your circle of influence? Does God get the credit and glory for the amazing things He does in your life, or do you just keep "singing the same old songs" as if nothing ever happened in your life? I don't know what talents God has given you, but use them to share the testimony of the continuous changes that he is working your life.**

Read Psalm 34

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. Psalms 34:6

I went to seminary with a man named Marcus. He looked the part of a future preacher, dressed in a sports coat everyday and working hard towards his seminary degree. One day Marcus told me about his past. He grew up in inner city Memphis, and found himself homeless and hopeless. One day out of desperation, he wandered into a shelter for food. While he was there, someone told him about Jesus. Marcus had heard many times, but this was the first time he understood his need for Jesus. After he was saved he worked in the shelter for a while, and eventually started working regularly and went to college. He got married, finished school, and started his own cleaning business for many of the office buildings around Memphis before being called into the ministry. God had rescued him when Marcus called out as a poor man, and as he sought after God, God took care of him.

I've often looked at the homeless and wondered how they got in the situation they are in. I think about what could cause me to find myself in their place. David says as the poor man cries out, God rescues him. This doesn't mean that God wants all His people rich, but it does indicate that God delights in providing for His people. He also goes on to say that God is looking for the person that is looking for God. Marcus stopped the dead-end living he was in, and started looking towards God to see if there was a plan for his life. And as Marcus served God, the plan became clear. **How do you view the poor and homeless? Sometimes they may tell you they are Christians, but if they are it is of the most marginal sort. I'm not a wealthy man in terms of money, but I am rich in family and God supplies my needs and even some of my wants. Pray that God would make you compassionate and attentive to the poor. Jesus was, so we should be too.**

Read Psalm 35

Judge me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness, and do not let them rejoice over me. Psalms 35:24

Until I got into ministry, I always viewed the church as a happy place. I enjoyed being good friends with nearly everyone in my first church. Then after I was called into a position of leadership in that church, I began to realize all the behind the scenes nitpicking and jockeying that goes on in a church. It didn't take long before people I had

known as friendly suddenly were not. Having a difference of opinions is one thing, but being accused of wrongdoing was a shock when my only aim was to serve to the best of my abilities. Instead of ignoring their comments, I decided to approach my pastor with them and ask him if I was possibly doing the very things I was accused of. He assured me that taking a stand will often times cause others who are far from God to stand against you.

David says in the midst of all the attempts by his enemies to bring him down, he asked that God would judge him. David was willing to admit he was not a perfect person, but if he was going to be brought down he wanted God to do it. Even an accusation from the greatest antagonist should cause us to evaluate the accusation. A broken watch is right at least twice a day. While I knew that many of my accusers were simply unhappy and unspiritual people, that didn't cause me to believe that I was never without fault. David understood the same thing, and in order to be blameless he sought for God to judge his conduct. **Many of us have enemies or people that seek to make our lives difficult. How do you respond to their accusations? Do you dismiss every one, or do you evaluate to ensure that they will have nothing to accuse you of? If someone accuses you of sin, no matter who they are, be willing to take that accusation to God and ask Him if it is true in your life or not.**

Read Psalm 36

Let not the foot of pride come upon me, And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away. Psalms 36:11 I am thankful for butterflies. Not the insect kind, but the intestinal kind. God has clearly given me an ability to preach, but every time I get ready to do so my stomach turns. It's not because I'm not prepared but more of a nervous feeling as the time approaches that all eyes are on me. And I'm thankful of that reminder that my job is to turn eyes from me to Him. Jesus has given me the ability to speak and to teach. He has given me the ability to read, understand and apply the Bible to my life and the lives of others. I'm willing to endure nausea in order to keep pride at bay in my life.

David has contrasted two types of people in this chapter: those who follow sin and those who follow God. David thanks God for His patience with David and the love that is shown to him. David makes two important statements for us as believers in verse 11. The foot of pride is simple to understand: as you attempt to lift yourself up you only hold yourself down, like a foot on the back of your neck. Only God can lift us up, and He does so at His choosing. Wicked hands will attempt to drive you away as tools of the Devil, and to get you to justify the actions of the wicked by joining in with them. **What is driving a wedge between you and God? Are you allowing wicked people to influence you more than you influence them? Are you quick to accept praise for God's accomplishments in your life? Choose to stand close to your God acknowledging Him in all areas of your life.**

Read Psalm 37

Depart from evil and do good, so you will abide forever. Psalms 37:27

In teaching my son to tie his shoes, the biggest challenge is always the knots he causes when he tries to untie them. He just keeps pulling on the ends, until it takes me several minutes to get the laces undone. Once I get it, we have a fresh start on getting his shoes tied, and his frustration level goes way down. He's putting in effort, and doesn't understand why it keeps getting worse. That's a good picture of turning from our lives of sin to a life in Jesus. You can be putting a lot of effort into life, but that effort can be for evil as easily as it is for good.

Does this verse establish the idea that doing good things will get you to Heaven? It says we should do good things and we get to go to Heaven forever. However, the Hebrew word for depart means "to turn aside" from evil, or even to "undo" your life. Do you realize that your life before Jesus was evil? If it wasn't for God, no matter how tame your sin appeared to you, sin is evil. When we accept Jesus, we commit to turn aside from the old life and do the will of God, which is good. **In other words, it's not the good works that grant you eternity, but turning aside from the old life in Jesus Christ that does so. Our good works are just a natural result of living a life under the forgiveness and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Have you fully departed from evil? Are you more in the new life or the old life? Do you serve God or self?**

Read Psalm 38

For I confess my iniquity; I am full of anxiety because of my sin. Psalms 38:18

My wife and I went on a cruise to the Bahamas one summer, and my 5 year old son asked me to bring him back a coconut. On one of our island stops, I found one. I brought it back on the ship, and was very excited about trying to give it to him. Then I read that fruit and produce from other countries cannot be brought back into the United States. I knew friends and family that had snuck it in, and so I decided to keep it in my suitcase and ask the bag checker if there was any way I could take it. Just before customs, there was a sign declaring all the different items that could not be brought back into the country. On the list was coconuts, and warning of the \$50,000 fine for trying to bring it in the country. I quickly threw the coconut away, when I realized that failing to declare it could cost me lots of money.

When David says he will "confess" his sin, the Hebrew means to "declare it". It's not just saying, "God I sinned and I'm sorry." It's more like, "God I yelled at my wife, and I withheld my tithe and stole from you, and I lied to my boss." That's declaring your sin. Being completely open before a God who knows it all anyway. Just as the coconut brought me anxiety, sin does the same thing. When we harbor something we know shouldn't be in our lives, it never works out for our benefit. **Are you ready to declare your sin? Today when you ask God for forgiveness, like you should everyday, tell Him specifically the sins you are repenting of and willing to move on from. Get rid of your anxiety and be open before God. Find a prayer partner to keep you accountable. Make the choice to be specific regarding your sin.**

Read Psalm 39

"Turn Your gaze away from me, that I may smile again before I depart and am no more." Psalms 39:13

I feel like this is a good verse for explanation, although I also considered verse 2 where David says he kept his mouth shut, even preventing him from doing good. His hope was that if he did nothing, he couldn't mess things up any worse. People forget that making no decision is still making a decision. However, I think some would want to know why David wants God to look away here in verse 13. I used to hate "the look" my mom would give me. It was harsh and burned right through me, and I knew I had done something wrong. I would look away as if that might in some way stop her stare, but it never did.

David talks in this chapter about the futility of a life lived in sin. He is willing to live as a motionless statue in order that he would no longer sin. But God doesn't turn His gaze towards us to freeze us in place, but in order that we would take action against our sin. David is asking for God to turn His gaze away so that David can attempt to move forward. However, God's eyes remain on the repentant sinner in order that we would be quickly warned when we are heading towards the same mistakes. **Do you sometimes feel God is beating you up over your sin? Instead, you need to realize it is the sin that is beating you up, not God. God has a standard and He expects His children to live by it. It is a standard of holiness, of being set apart from the common sinner of this world. He expects us to resist sin and to be disgusted by it when we choose it. The gaze of the Lord is to be a reminder to change, but I'm glad He loves me enough to keep looking at me when I can barely look at myself. Embrace the gaze and conviction of God.**

Read Psalm 40

Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; my ears You have opened ; burnt offering and sin offering You have not required. Psalms 40:6

Duct tape is just an amazing thing. Most people don't realize it was actually invented to cover holes in duct work and prevent expensive replacements. Over time I've seen it used to hold cars together, keep a mailbox on its pole, and a thousand other uses. While duct tape can do these things, that doesn't mean it's the best option. I know few people that would prefer duct tape over just having an undamaged car.

David says here in the Old Testament that God doesn't desire the sacrifices that the people offer. It's not that God doesn't care about offerings for sin, but David says in the following verses that God would rather that we live totally submitted to the Word of God and not need the sacrifices. David realizes that instead of saying, "I can pray for this sin later and fix it" that God desires for us to avoid the sin and the repairs for it. **Are you thankful for the forgiveness of God? So am I. Do you take that forgiveness for granted? So do I at times. God desires a life rightly lived, not well repented. He forgives us, but it's in order that we would take the fresh opportunity to do things right the next time. I would rather have the approval of God over the forgiveness of God. We do that by making the right choice before we sin, and not after it.**

Read Psalm 41

The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness.

Psalm 41:3

My seminary had preaching chapels, and one evening Dr. Adrian Rogers came. I was starting to wonder if he would show up because no one had seen him. Just after the service started, he walked in with his wife. His battle with cancer was coming near the end, and he didn't look well at all. But when he was introduced to preach, he stood up and it seemed all his color returned. He stepped into that pulpit and delivered a strong and convicting sermon like he had always done. When he was finished and walked down, it seemed that the sickness took back over, but I had seen how God strengthened him to deliver that sermon.

What should our expectation be in sickness? Some Christians say that sickness indicates that you have sin in your life. Others say that you need faith when you ask God to remove the sickness. As you look at this scripture in David's psalm, he says the Lord promises two things: that He will sustain us and restore us. I have known many godly people who got very sick and never recovered. It seemed they had so much life left to live and so much service to God left to give. To sustain and restore means that God will give us assurance that He has not left us, and that He holds the end of our sickness in His hands. Sometimes that means restoration to health, and sometimes it means that God releases us of that sickness through death. While it's sad to those left behind, a believer that goes to Heaven wouldn't trade it for their old life. **Have you been sick or dealing with sickness in your family? All we can do is be assured that God is not ignorant of what's going on and that we can ask Him to sustain us. The way He chooses to restore is up to Him. Are you prepared to accept whatever method He chooses for restoration? Many believers have seen physical sickness and handicapping as a blessing from God to remind them of His control on their lives, and to be restored to His service even if their health was not.**

Read Psalm 42

As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. Psalm 42:1

Riding horses on trail rides is a lot of fun. I always thought it was interesting to watch our horses when we came down off the bluffs and crossed the river. My mom taught me to let the reins very loose, and let the horses drink as long as they wanted. In fact, when we would come down off the trail and you could first see the river, our horses would often try to pick up their gait. Sometimes I let them, and sometimes I didn't. I knew they wanted the water and that's where we were going. That instinct for water and survival can be a very strong one when you're parched.

The Psalm here equates our desire for God with an animal's desire for a necessity. So often we treat our relationship with God as a hobby. We could go days, maybe even weeks at a time without talking to or thinking about God. We just try to fit Him in as we have time. The psalmist says that he constantly seeks after God as he would after any

other life sustaining element. We don't forget to drink. We don't forget to eat. Why would we forget the necessity of our relationship with God? **Have you thirsted after God today? Is this devotional as far as you'll go today? Let's evaluate how serious we are about our relationship with God. If you had to choose between breakfast and Jesus, which would you choose?**

Read Psalm 43

O send out Your light and Your truth, let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling places. Psalm 43:3

On my recent 16 hour trip home, I had a lot of tools to get me there. I obviously used our van and a map I printed off the Internet. But we also included a DVD player for the kids, snacks, drinks, books, coloring paper, new CD's, pillows and blankets to bring about some extra comforts for our kids. If you were to ask my wife and I, these are all essentials. They allowed us to get where we were going with the least grief possible. However, sometimes people seem to think they need a lot more than they do to get to God. It doesn't require a laundry list of items, but simple things bring us before God.

The Jewish people knew where God was. He's on His holy hill, His holy mountain. They said there were two things to bring you to God: light and truth. We know that Jesus would later say that true worshippers, those who come before God, worship in spirit and truth. This is a similar understanding to what the psalmist is saying. Truth is always a factor in coming before God. God is truth, and never the opposite. So if you're in a church that doesn't believe, teach, or live the truth, you CANNOT enter into God's presence in that church. The light that we have comes from Jesus Christ. He is the light of the world so that we as His followers can be the light of the world. If we're in His light, we are being led by the Spirit of God, just as Jesus said we should be. **Have you complicated the worship process? Do you think that there is a certain type of music or sermon required to meet with God? Does your church need to have a certain Sunday school program or Bible translation? The most important thing as believers and a church, is that we would seek the light of Jesus (a changed life) and the truth of God and we will not miss the presence of God. When we elevate the "instruments" of worship, we devalue the pillars of worship.**

Read Psalm 44

In God we have boasted all day long, and we will give thanks to Your name forever. Psalms 44:8

I have been a Missouri Tiger fan for many years. I followed the basketball team closely, and was always disturbed at our crowds. We have a hard time selling out our arena, even when the team is good. It always bothered me to see the place empty on TV, but then I realized that I was part of the problem. I wasn't at the game cheering them on, or buying tickets to watch them. I talked about them throughout the day and claimed fanhood, but I never even went to a real game.

The psalmist here says that Israel knows that every time success came to them in the past, it wasn't due to the army, might, or leadership of Israel. It was always a result of the God who loved them and fought for them. It says that they boasted in God and gave thanks for His name, but there isn't anything mentioned regarding what they did as a result. Talk only goes so far, but there is a time for action. In the last part of Psalm 44, Israel finds themselves in a tough spot and they don't know why. We can never know every reason for why God does all that He does, but it is possible that they talked more than they walked. **Are you talking about God, walking for God, or both? I know people that talk about Him at church, but do so little for Him outside those walls. Let's evaluate this morning; what are you doing outside the church walls to make a difference for the Kingdom? Who have you reached? Who have you served? Bumper stickers on your car and books on your shelf prove very little.**

Read Psalm 45

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows. Psalms 45:7

I was always small growing up, so as a result I knew many bullies in my day. When I was a freshman, my 7th grade sister was taller than me. That's always going to spell trouble. So while my once skinny frame was chased by many a bully, I never knew a happy bully. They were always sour, and I guess their anger was directed more at their own situations than anything I had or had not done. Fortunately, I was pretty fast back in the day so it was more verbal abuse shouted at my back than actually being beat up!

What causes a person to be joyful? What gives them that cheerful personality that grates on so many people? For the Christians I have known, they really loved the things of God. When you spend your time focusing on God's priorities instead of your own, you will find yourself disappointed a lot less. Everyone who goes after their own priorities are choosing wickedness. **We may not like to label it that way, but selfishness is wickedness. We're choosing times and places that God can be ignored. If you lack joy in your life, it's probably because you're focusing on yourself. If you focus on the things of God, you will see eternally important events going on around you. And you can be a part of them. Who's priorities will be your priorities today? Joy comes from choosing God.**

Read Psalm 46

Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations , I will be exalted in the earth." Psalms 46:10

When one of my kids is wronged, you better look out. They come up to me and they are ready to give me the blow by blow of what happened and why it was wrong and what am I going to do about it anyway? One of the first things I often tell them when they're too worked up is to calm down first. They get so excited and worked up that they often can't even give me complete sentences. Once they are calm the situation suddenly isn't as terrible as it had been a few moments before and they're ready to let me deal with it.

In this passage when God says to "cease striving" the literal definition is "relax". Everytime things get tough in our lives what do we usually do? We work harder, fight harder, try harder. The passage is referring to the preservation of Israel despite being in the midst of many nations that want to see Israel fail (not unlike today's world). God says that their first step is to relax and know that God is God. It's a simple fact, but one that is easily missed as we walk around today in a world that tries increasingly to forget about God. **You may have some stresses in your life. Maybe things are difficult for you at work or home. Perhaps difficulties have driven you to a crisis of faith. The first thing you need to do is relax. Stop thinking and start thanking. Remember all that God has done for you in the past and remember that this present will one day be past also. Put away all other theology and just remember that God is God. He will never fail to be so. He is the victor, and as a child of that King, so are you.**

Read Psalm 47

For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm. Psalms 47:7
I have been singing and playing instruments in church worship services for years. One of the most frustrating times is when I was involved with music leaders that put little to no thought into the music that we would be singing to the Lord as a congregation for that day. The leader might show up 30 minutes before church and pick out the music and then we just hoped that everyone knew how to play it. Over time I could even guess the next song because we had done certain medleys so many times in a row. There was little effort really being put into our praise to God.

I hear so many people worry that they shouldn't be singing because they are poor singers and no one wants to hear them. Well I assure you that God wants to hear you. In this passage it says that we are worshipping God because He is the King of all the earth. He has complete control over this world and over your life, even at times you think that He doesn't. That's why the Bible says that one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. Even if they didn't recognize it in life, it is still the reality. As a result of God's greatness we are to sing a skillful psalm of praise to Him. This doesn't mean American Idol skillful, but the word literally means a "contemplative poem". **It means that you would think about what you're singing. You would put your heart behind the words of your hymns. Do you sing mindlessly going through the motions? Are you seeking to praise God, or sing songs when you're in church? If you're part of the worship ministry in your church, are you taking time to ensure that the service is done with excellence for a deserving God? Is your attitude right as you step towards the throne in praise?**

Read Psalm 48

They saw *it*, then they were amazed; they were terrified, they fled in alarm.

Psalms 48:5

When I was in first grade, there was a construction site close to where I lived. I had considered going over there to play when the workers were all gone, but had never gotten up the nerve since I had been told "Don't go play around the construction site." Well that

peaked my interest, and 4 of my friends convinced me we could all go together and have fun. So after school we went over there and there were no workers at all. But around the entire foundation of the building, there was a huge trench dug and you had to walk across this 8-foot trench on a 2 x 4. It was probably 5 feet deep, and suddenly we were not as confident as we had been. We thought that if we tackled it as a group it wouldn't be so scary. We were wrong.

The Psalm says the temple of God is impressive, and there is no mistaking it as the dwelling of God. He is speaking somewhat to the temple in Jerusalem that was so impressive that people thought it laughable when Jesus said it would ever come down. This appears to be more a reference to the Zion of God's heavenly temple that one day will be on the earth forever. People may think they can stand against God, or that God has no real power. The kings get together and discuss how they will bring God down and then when they see God's house, let alone God himself, it causes them to flee. **One day you will stand amazed in the dwelling place of the Lord after your death. Will your amazement quickly turn to fear and make you wish you could run away? Or will your amazement turn to reverence as you fall before your Lord and Savior? You won't be able to walk up with friends to make it easier. It will just be you and God. Are you prepared for that? Are you walking in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ? If so, is it as close as it could be?**

Read Psalm 49

Both low and high, rich and poor together. Psalms 49:2

When I was a teenager, our church was not located in the nicest part of town. The majority of people that went to our church were middle to upper class and had gone to the church for years. Over time we had new people come into the church, and it was built bigger and had hundreds of people in it. Despite all this, never once did we reach out to the community around us. Efforts were made in the wealthier neighborhoods across town, and people came from those neighborhoods. But, how effective could we have been in reaching out to people around us who really needed love and care to be shown to them?

A very clear declaration is made regarding every man's need for salvation. It's not something that can be bought, and no one is more worthy of it than another. Salvation is for people who are known and unknown, rich and poor. However, too many American churches are going for people that are known and rich. Jesus didn't spend his time on the "important" people, but on the common people living their daily and difficult lives. **Is there someone you're unwilling to reach because of their position in life? Are you more willing to greet the person in the suit or the person in old jeans who comes to visit your church? We must remember the only person of importance in our church is Jesus. Whatever a person's status is outside the church should have no bearing on their status inside the church? Ask God to give you heart for people that aren't like you? Ask Him to help you look beyond fancy houses or tattered clothes and look at the soul contained inside every man and woman, waiting to be redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.**

Read Psalm 50

I shall take no young bull out of your house nor male goats out of your folds.

Psalms 50:9

I consider myself a pretty modern guy, except when it comes to bill paying. Almost every bill I receive in the mail encourages me to set an automatic withdraw. That means that they access my bank account and take out the amount owed on the day it's due. The problem with this is that I've had companies take out too much. Maybe it was a billing error or a mistake in the transaction, but one way or another they took too much of my money. If you want to bang your head against a wall for a while, try to get your own money back from the phone or electric company some time. I decided I'll pay them on my own time and with my own stamp.

There are many interesting statements in this chapter, but this is the one that caught my attention. Even though God owns everything, and animals were being presented as a sacrifices for sin, God would never take one from anybody. It has to be offered by the person who needs the forgiveness. God wants our offerings, and it is a step of Christian maturity when we present them to Him without hesitation or complaint. But, God is not going to remove the offering by force. **God doesn't need your talents, money or time, but He chooses to use them as we serve with Him. Are you giving to God? Are you withholding your money from being used in your local church? Are you denying the service that He wants from you because you don't want to sacrifice the time? God will not take His offering from you, and He also will not bless one who withholds those offerings from Him.**

Read Psalm 51

Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.

Psalms 51:13

During my short tenure as a substitute teacher, I really enjoyed the junior high speech class I worked with. I had a roomful of kids that had never given a speech, and I wasn't their regular teacher to boot. They had to write their first speech ever, which was introducing a famous person as if the person had come to their school as a speaker. The teacher had left notes on how to "teach" this 30-second speech, but the kids weren't getting it. So I picked a famous person and did the speech off the cuff. Once they saw it, and I gave them some tips on mistakes to avoid from my speaking experience, they picked it up quickly and did really well with it.

There aren't any benefits to sin, but there are many benefits derived from being repentant over your sin. If you repent then you lose the guilt, and you can be restored to the joy of your salvation as David writes in verse 12. The other benefit of repentance is that you can teach others about the consequences of sin. This will require you to open up and be honest, but I have seen people moved by the honesty of a believer. Some were lost and saw a Christian that didn't view himself as better than a lost person. Some were saved, and found a genuine Christian who was living in the daily struggles against sin. **When you repent, you have something to teach. If you don't know what to say to a lost**

person, simply tell them how God has changed your life from the selfish to the selfless. Who are you teaching? Who are you sharing the truth with? Is there something in your past that God has brought you through that could be an encouragement for others? Don't hide your victories, but allow others to know victory is possible through your example and for God's glory in your life.

Read Psalm 52

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The lovingkindness of God *endures* all day long. Psalms 52:1

Whether it was in my first job working at Ryan's Steakhouse in high school, SEARS in college, or serving in the military, there is always one guy who sought to corrupt me. I would like to say that I'm vocal about my faith, but not condemning. In every job one of the non-believers would not only live his life in opposition to God, but he felt inclined to tell me the sleazy details. I don't know if it made them feel better hoping that I might toss my morals aside to live like them. I gave my co-worker at SEARS this scripture telling him that boasting of evil is just wasting time. God still loved him and wanted him to make a change in his life through Jesus. None of these people ever did.

Doeg was an enemy of David that didn't just do evil, he talked about it. If he were a basketball player, he would have been a trash-talker, getting in your face everytime he beat you and probably even a few times he didn't. The picture in this Psalm is of God's patience for a man like Doeg. Even though he boasted of evil all day long, God's lovingkindness was still patiently waiting on him to stop attempting to stand against God. People often say that picture of God in the Old Testament is of a mean and wrathful God. The truth is, God protected His people with a vengeance, but He was available even then to non-Jews (Rahab and Ruth are two examples). **Is there someone around you that brags about their sins? How should we handle it? You need to remember that when your patience with the person has worn thin, God's hasn't. Don't dismiss the person, but don't condone their actions either. Love them. Let them know God loves them and wants to give them better things to do with their lives. When the Bible says to treat someone like a lost person, it doesn't mean to disassociate from them, but to share the Good News with them.**

Read Psalm 53

God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there is anyone who understands, Who seeks after God. Psalms 53:2

Have you ever watched a marching band perform live at halftime? If you're standing on the sidelines, it doesn't look like much, but if you're up in the stands or the press box, you see the designs and the patterns that are created by the band. I remember being in the band in high school and doing a show, which I always enjoyed. Later that night, I was watching a replay of the football game on a local cable channel and they showed our halftime show. I was floored! I had never seen the results from above to know what we were doing something that looked so cool!

In the same way you need a bird's eye view to watch a marching band, you need a God's eye view to find understanding in people. The amount of time you spend watching someone's life is just like standing on the sidelines. You get a little bit of it, but God is the one who sees the whole picture. I realize that I judge people too much based only on what I see. What if I could see them like God does? His eyes are looking for people who have understanding and seek after Him. I may look at someone and think they put little effort in pursuing God, but I don't see them early in the morning. I don't see them late in the evening. I guess it might be more important that I think about what God sees when He watches me. He has a God's-eye view of my life at all times. **What is God seeing as He watches you? Is He watching a life that is dominated by understanding of spiritual things? Is He looking down at someone who is looking up at Him? I pray that today God is pleased as He watches me. I hope you pray the same thing.**

Read Psalm 54

Willingly I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to Your name, O LORD, for it is good. Psalms 54:6

My son has several checkpoints on the way to his badges in Cub Scouts. He has really impressed me at how hard he works to memorize his pledges and mottos for the Scouts. One of his requirements was to come up with a chore to do at home that we could do together. So he decided we would clean snow off the front walkway. We did it and it looked great, and I told him to put the brooms back in the shed. He didn't, because he wanted to clean off our back porch, which is incredibly large compared to our walkway. I didn't ask him to do it, but it was a job he saw that needed done and he was willing to give up his time to do other things and do this instead.

David is talking about a similar offering. He says that he offers his sacrifice "willingly". It means it's of his free will. He's not doing it to receive favor from God. He's not doing it as a requirement of his faith. He's doing it as part of giving thanks to the name of God who has protected him so many times before. I worry when I see people willing to take a break from giving to God. When people cease to give their offerings to God, I know they are also withholding their free will offerings. They are not seeking to go above and beyond their current relationship with Jesus. **They're happy just to float along and honor God when it's convenient for them. How do you say thanks to God. With words only? Do you try look for opportunities to show Him how thankful you are for His love and forgiveness? How will you give of yourself freely to Him today?**

Read Psalm 55

Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken. Psalms 55:22

In my years of youth ministry I've learned a valuable lesson: if you want to spice up a game, make the kids spin with their foreheads on a bat first. I can't count the number of times that adding dizziness added a lot of fun and excitement. I soon realized some people have a very poor equilibrium and they will veer a little too far off course, like into the road. So I have the group stand in a semi-circle around the spinner so that when they

first come off the bat, someone can hold them up and steer them in the right direction. Even though the participant has lost the ability to stand, there are plenty of people around to help him get where he needs to go.

As I read this verse, I could see people saying, "I'm righteous through Christ, and I feel like He's allowed me to be shaken a few times." This is where a study of the original language helps us out. There are two important words that go together here: "sustain" and "shaken". The word sustain is pretty easy, simply meaning that God "holds you up." Sometimes there just isn't a great word to use when translating from one language to another. The word shaken literally means "to slip or fall". I think David's referring to a permanent fall, i.e. Hell. Once you belong to God, He will never allow that fall to occur in your life. So God will sustain you, and there doesn't have to be a fear of Hell in the life of the believer. **I'm dealing with a lot of people lately who say they are Christians, but they worry about Hell. They're not sure if they're really saved or not. A friend recently shared his testimony and told me of the moment that God finally helped him understand the gospel. He felt God saying to him, "The gospel is easy. It's not hard to understand." If you've given your life to Jesus, then that's who holds it. He'll never let it go. Thank Him for that promise and ask Him to overcome your doubts regarding your salvation if you've given yourself to Him.**

Read Psalm 56

In God, *whose* word I praise, in the LORD, *whose* word I praise Psalms 56:10

Before I was married, I thought it was crazy that so many people use the exact same terms for their spouses. Honey, sweetie, and babe seem to fly all over the place and I determined I would not use those names. I wanted to come up with something original. So I told my wife, Nikki, that I had come up with one...Kiwi. She didn't think that was so hot. So, I call her honey, sweetie, and babe. While those may be common terms of endearment, it only means something to you when it's coming from your spouse though. The importance is not on the name, but on the special relationship behind it.

David has two sentences in this verse, saying that he will praise the word of God and of the Lord. The word for God is the common "elohim" that simply means God. Many people just believe in God. They pray to Him on occasion. They go to church on Easter. They believe that He will be standing around waiting to weigh their lives when they die. But when David says "Lord" it is the more intimate name of God, Yahweh, that He told to His people Israel. David knew Him as God and as Lord. His relationship with God had gone beyond the superficial and was an intimate relationship with God as his friend. He recognizes that God has brought salvation to him before death. **How do you view God on a daily basis? The answer to this question really shows who you are more than any other I could ask. Do you view God as "the man upstairs" or is He someone a little closer? I think of God as the One who is always near me. He never seems far away because I know Him too well for that.**

Read Psalm 57

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises! Psalms 57:7

I've been speaking to someone recently who has been going through a real crisis of faith. As is often the case, he has sinned and now wonders how God could really love him, and wonders if he is really a Christian at all. After listening to his concerns, I explained that God is a God of love and forgiveness. He is disappointed when we sin, but he never disowns one of His children because of it. About a week later, the guy came back with similar questions and concerns and basically asked his question all over again. I explained to him that I couldn't do anything else for him. There is only so much explaining someone can offer about Jesus; there comes a point you have to make up your own mind and then stand firm.

David wrote this while he was hiding in caves from Saul. Saul hated David and thought that everything would be better if David just went away. In the midst of trying to escape, David writes that his heart is steadfast. David had not committed any sin, yet there was a difficult circumstance in his life. But David didn't allow the low points of life to shake his faith. He was steadfast and firm. When the trials of life come, we should grow closer to God, not further from Him. Trials are a great evidence of our faith, which is why God allows them. Anyone can claim a great faith when things are fine, but doing so in the trials takes a steadfastness for sure. **Are you steadfast for the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you have a take it or leave it attitude with Him? Or do you deal with doubts because of your sin and bad choices. You need to stand firm for Him now, in this moment. Don't wait until later or when a crisis happens. Make the decision now that He died for you and you'll live for Him.**

Read Psalm 58

O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth; break out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD. Psalms 58:6

Have you ever read the term "toothless lion"? I enjoy reading history and staying current on world events, and this is actually a pretty common term. It simply refers to someone whose threats aren't backed up by the ability to act. Iraq in 1991 would be a good example of this. They made many threats against anyone that tried to come in and rescue Kuwait, but when the United States decided to act, the war was famously named "The 100 Hours War" because Iraq had no real ability to fight against us. In other words, they were roaring, but had no teeth behind the noise.

It's interesting to me that the idea of a toothless lion is used in this verse. We read a few days ago in Psalm 52 when David asked why people boast of their evil? Here we learn that God will break out the teeth of the unrighteous. They can roar, but they cannot act. The great preacher Matthew Henry notes that God broke their teeth and not their necks. He eliminated their ability to do all the evil they boasted about, but He didn't eliminate the people. God was allowing them to live and repent. **Are you bothered by toothless lions? We all deal with a jerk or two that just can't get enough of talking about us to**

other people. Are you letting their talk bother you? I decided long ago that anyone who accepts the words of a gossip over my own aren't worth convincing anyway. I need to learn to thank God that His work is more powerful in my life than man's words, and I need to learn to pray that my lions will repent.

Read Psalm 59

My God in His lovingkindness will meet me; God will let me look *triumphantly* upon my foes. Psalms 59:10

Have you ever been somewhere unfamiliar, waiting for someone to give you some direction? My wife and I flew to Orlando to go on a Christian cruise, but when we got to the airport, we really didn't know where we were supposed to go. When a man arrived with a van to take us to our ship it was a big relief. I worried that we'd be forgotten about or unable to find the right place to go, but while we were looking for them they were looking for us at the same time.

David was trapped in a house surrounded by men who wanted to kill him. But David didn't have to travel to God, because God came to him. David learned that God loves His children enough to take the time to meet them, if they'll seek Him first. Do you wonder where God is some times? The Bible says that God will meet us, but that indicates not one traveler, but two. God will move towards us as we move towards Him. He desires a close relationship with us, but allows us the free will to choose the depth of our relationship with Him. It's comforting to know that when I realize I've made mistakes and I make my way back towards God, that He does the same thing in my direction. **God's lovingkindness is a word that indicates His patient love. How can God be so patient with me? I have no idea some times, but I'm glad He is. I'm glad to know that when I cease selfishness and seek my Savior that He is waiting the whole time to meet with me. Do you need to meet more intimately with God? Guess who needs to take the first steps? Let's pray today that we don't make God wait so long when we know we need to come back to Him, and let's thank Him that when we make the right choice He doesn't leave us hanging.**

Read Psalm 60

You have given a banner to those who fear You, That it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah. Psalms 60:4

The banners in the high school gym always seemed to contain legends for us in elementary school. There were names of the state champion basketball teams from the 60's. As I grew older, I noticed our small school didn't put many of those banners up. In fact, most of them were 20 years old and looking like they had never been dusted. It was on display, but I doubt the accomplishments of a bunch of old people ever instilled much fear into visiting teams.

David is once again in a battle situation. As he waits on God in his present situation, David says that God provides a banner to His people that is displayed because of the truth of God. The banner was a reminder that God doesn't forsake His people. The banner was

a reminder that God is a promise keeper. But do you know what you need to make a banner usable? People to hold it up. If I have the greatest banner in the world to display for my God, and no one to help me hold it up, then the message will be hard for others to hear. How does God say that we verify truth? By the witness of more than one. It's the reason that someone cannot be condemned to death in Old Testament law by the testimony of just one person. **Are you helping to hold up the banner of truth for the world? Every Christian that lives a secret faith allows those who have ignored Jesus to believe that He's not very important in their everyday lives. The word banner there can also mean a standard. It's something that was carried into battle. It went before the people of God when they arrived for battle to announce God first, and his people second. Is your life announcing God to others? Before you just say yes, think about how you're doing it.**

Read Psalm 61

So I will sing praise to Your name forever, that I may pay my vows day by day. Psalms 61:8

When I was in first grade, our school had sign ups for an after school gymnastics program. I heard about all the amazing things they would learn to do, and so I signed up. It only took two practices to realize that there was a problem...practice was during Zorro. So instead of going to gymnastics like I said I would, I went home and watched cartoons I had already seen a million times before. One day, the gymnastics group had an assembly in our school and the kids had been practicing for about 2 months at this point. We all sat and watched as they did flips, walked on their hands, and a variety of other things that they had learned. I tried to tell some people that I had been in the group, but they didn't believe me or care because I was sitting there with the rest of the non-gymnasts.

David acknowledges the eternal nature of a relationship with God. We will sing His praise forever, because He has given us a forever life. However, too many Christians act as if eternity is the only part of Christianity that matters. David not only will sing for eternity, but he will pay his vows day by day. David is saying that while he's alive on this earth, he will keep a daily commitment to God. Most everyone accepts Jesus for the end result: salvation after we die. However, just like I grew weary of my day by day gymnastics commitment, people grow weary of their daily commitment for Jesus. Heaven sounds great, but living for Jesus here on earth is tough. **There are a million distractions, but distractions don't count as excuses. Are you living a daily life with Jesus, or just waiting for eternity? Jesus saves us in life so that we can serve Him. You have the opportunity to grow closer to God in this life and as a result, lead others to the same commitment. When we claim Jesus but have no daily commitment to Him, the world sees that. Jesus wants more than your Sundays.**

Read Psalm 62

My soul *waits* in silence for God only; from Him is my salvation. Psalms 62:1

My children aren't very good at waiting. As we've prepared to leave for vacation, Kaitlyn is the worst at asking the constant question, "How many days until we go on vacation?" I try to put myself in her shoes to understand why she would torture herself like this. When I was a kid, I would try to forget about big things coming up so they would be more of a surprise. But Kaitlyn's going to wear herself out so much waiting for our vacation to come that she will truly need a vacation to recover! Maybe she will learn to enjoy today instead of always waiting on tomorrow.

David said his soul waits in silence for God. Our soul is that part of us that remains forever. It's the part of us that allows us to be conscious of God. There was only one thing that David's soul waited for...God. And how did he wait? Literally David wrote he was "still waiting". You might say he waited in untimed silence, not putting God on the clock. He was waiting not in hope that God would speak, but in expectation. In fact, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God constantly attempts to speak to us; the true problem is we're rarely silent enough to hear Him. **Think about what is ruining your silence? Is it an overbooked calendar or a strained relationship? Are you worrying more than you're waiting? David was willing to wait on God, knowing that as he waited silently and quieted his life, the stronghold that is God would bring stability in times of uncertainty. Where is your life too loud today? Do you see how that noise is distracting you from God's best for your life?**

Read Psalm 63

Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory.

Psalms 63:2

Have you ever tried to tell a story about something you saw or heard, and you realize that it's just not making sense to the person you're telling? Some of my college friends would often listen to my story without saying a word. Then when I finished they'd say, "That was a good story. Why don't you tell it again." That was a sarcastic way of saying, "Your story was stupid." I realize that not every story is relevant to every person... sometimes you just have to be there to get it.

Psalm 63 wasn't written while David was chilling out in his house or the palace. This was a time of loneliness for David as he was running in the wilderness to escape Saul. David was hungry and cut off from people. But while he's out there, he recalls seeing God in the tabernacle back in Jerusalem. His relationship with God didn't disappear while he was away from the church of the Jews. Unlike my old stories, God is not confined to one location in our lives in order to be relevant. David didn't have to be at church for God to be relevant in his life. David remembers God, even in the midst of his difficulty, and he is remembering that the same God that cared for him amongst the people of the tabernacle, cares for him in the isolation of the wilderness. **Your circumstances, job and environment may change in your life. You may at times feel cut off from people and alone. But God isn't stuck at church. He is not confined to a building, but He wants to work actively in our lives wherever we are. Most of us would say that we certainly acknowledge God's presence when we are in the sanctuary. But do you seek to meet**

with Him at your home, in your car, or even at your workplace? God loves you, and He never leaves us, even when we appear to be far from Him.

Read Psalm 64

To shoot from concealment at the blameless; suddenly they shoot at him, and do not fear. Psalms 64:4

During a summer of training in Wisconsin, my artillery unit suffered a "rogue round". The forward observer gave us the right spotting for our target. I entered in the right coordinates and gave it to the right gun battery. The gun battery fired the correct round with the correct charge. But for one reason or another, that round went somewhere it wasn't supposed to...right in the middle of our forward observer's camp. They shouted over the radio to cease fire because their humvee, tents and other items were on fire. They hadn't been hit by an explosive round, but a white phosphorous round that spreads burning pieces of phosphorous just before impact. While none of them were hurt, it caused us to think a little more about what happens on the other end of one of the rounds that we send down.

As Godly people always do, David had many enemies in his life. And while David dealt with public enemies like Doeg and Saul, there were hidden people who were taking their shots from the periphery, not thinking or caring about the damage they were doing. These people are always in our lives, choosing secret gossip instead of open conversations. And as frustrating as that can be, isn't it time we recognize that sometimes we're the target and sometimes we're the archer. **We are quick to blame others for their evil attitudes and actions towards us, but even quicker to justify ourselves when we do the exact same things. We pray against those who shoot arrows and ignore consequences, but we unleash our own rogue rounds with our tongue as we speak to or about people. When people malign you, choose an attitude of godliness instead of worldliness. Pray for those hidden archers that ruin your day. And pray that God would make you aware when you join their ranks.**

Read Psalm 65

Who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples. Psalms 65:7

I loved playing in my high school band. It was just a lot of fun to put the work into perfecting a piece of music and then presenting it to an audience. The curtains would already be drawn back and we would come and sit down and everyone would start going through last checks on their instruments. Trombone players were adjusting their pitch slides, trumpet players were emptying their spit on the floor (I always thought that was cool) and I was tuning in the timpani or whatever percussion instrument I was playing. There was plenty of noise as a bunch of individuals all did their own thing. Then our conductor would walk out and call us to attention with his baton. Suddenly everything grew quiet and ready for his command. It was always my favorite part. We are ready to play. The audience is ready to listen. Let's start the music.

There is no greater conductor than the Lord our God. Psalm 65 goes through a list of God's might and power, but I really love verse 7. God created the waves and He can still and silence them. It evidences God's power because only He can do that. The verse says that God also calms the tumult, or the roar, of the people. My life before God was like an unready orchestra. There were competing desires in my life all screaming for attention and all demanding to be heard and acted on. But when I gave my heart to Jesus, He settled my desires. He showed me that He is to be my greatest desire and as a result He has hushed the roaring of my life. That's not to say I don't face difficulty, but I certainly don't face it alone and that calms me. **Has God stilled the roaring in your life? God is constantly working to get your attention so that He can conduct your life, but are you paying attention? Imagine a clarinet that ignored the conductor. It's just one instrument, but it would have ruined the band. The same goes for church members that ignore God. You may just be one person, but your actions affect the entire church. Ask God to calm your fears and change your desires, and then work with Him as He does so.**

Read Psalm 66

If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear; Psalms 66:18

A pastor of mine once used a great illustration that applies here. Imagine you're going in for surgery. The surgeon has you laid on the table and you're completely out of it. He reaches for the first instrument and realizes that he hasn't sterilized them from the previous operation. What would that surgeon do? Of course he would delay the surgery until he had clean instruments to use. Certainly the scalpels would get the job done for the second time, but the risk of infections is too great to risk such a move.

I think some people have a misunderstanding of how God deals with a Christian who is in sin. This Psalm tells us that we should remember all that God has done in our past and give Him the praise for it. And towards the end of the chapter it's mentioned that wickedness causes the Lord to disregard our prayers. Is that what you believe about God? We know the Bible says that we will sin, but it also says that we should have a repentant heart when we fall into sin. The verse says that God will not hear when we regard wickedness in our hearts. This is not talking about some fleeting sin, but one that you are well aware of and one that you know repentance is needed for. It's the sin you need to jettison, but instead you justify. **Why should God answer the prayer of an unrepentant child? If He ignored our sin and answered our prayers, then He would be sending us a message that our sin is not a big deal. Clearly that's not the case. Have you been ignoring sin during your prayer times? Do you want God to work in your life? Then our repentance should always come before our requests. God doesn't want to use dirty instruments to bring about holy results.**

Read Psalm 67

The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. Psalms 67:6

After a particularly long winter, I stepped on the scale and got scared and motivated all at the same time. Gluttony was my sin for many years, and I often finished breakfast wondering what I would eat for lunch. But I decided at that moment of hitting 240, that I wanted to be able to play with my kids and grandkids and be healthy enough to serve my church well. So I repented of my gluttony and adopted a phrase from a friend of ours, "Eat to live, don't live to eat". I also committed to turn my hobby of working out into a discipline. One particular day I wasn't feeling like working out until I was struck by the fact that there are handicapped people that would happily work out if they suddenly had the ability to use their legs. That was motivation to no longer take my mobility and my health for granted. And now nearly 40 lbs down, I'm motivated for more!

We take so much that God does for granted. Verse 6 even says that God has blessed us by the produce of the earth. We take for granted the fact that when we plant things in the ground, they grow. We take the water cycle for granted that God uses to keep us hydrated. Whether you know God or not, He has blessed you based on the things He has done to make our planet habitable. **What else has God done in your life that you've taken for granted? God led me to the home that I live in. God provided the car I drive and the food I eat. If you say, "Wait a minute, my job provides those things by my hard work", remember who it was that gave you a body and mind that is capable of such work. Not only should we be specific in our repentance, but also in our thankfulness. God desires for us to be thankful people (1 Thess. 5:18)**

Read Psalm 68

God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, only the rebellious dwell in a parched land. Psalm 68:6

A professor in seminary once used the term "redemption and lift" in a class. He said that when someone is saved and truly gives their life to Jesus, you'll often see an economic lift in their lives. He wasn't talking about being a millionaire, but finding that financial stresses often eased. Soon after this, I led Brenda to the Lord. She was constantly in financial need almost as much as she was in spiritual need. Soon after her salvation she found a job at a grocery store, and then a few months later she was hired to work in an insurance office. Several months later after God called me to another church, Brenda sent me a card with \$10 in it. She wanted to thank me for introducing her to Jesus, and wanted to give me that money because of all the financial help I had given her so long ago. It was neat to see that she had trusted Jesus with her soul and her life, and He had taken care of her. A woman who had always been an asker, was now a giver.

Jesus is not just a savior of souls, but of lives. This verse talks about God's care and provision of His people in need. I've always wondered about homeless people who claim Christianity. Why isn't God taking care of these people? Often after talking to them for a while, I learn what the disobedience is that has put them in their current state. God blesses the obedient life. It doesn't mean that He blesses it to the point of being a millionaire, but He provides prosperity so that we can live and function. You may not consider your current position one of prosperity, but I'll bet there are many people around

the world that would be very excited for an opportunity to have what you have. **Is there a real need in your life that hasn't been met? Have you asked God to meet it? Is there disobedience in your life that you already know is hindering your prayers? Are you giving back to the local ministry of your church through your tithes and offerings? Even as God provides for us, He has lessons He wants us to learn. The lesson here is that God is faithful to us, but He expects us to be faithful to Him. God has met the financial needs of my family, and I trust Him more than any paycheck I'll ever have coming my way.**

Read Psalm 69

But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD, at an acceptable time; O God, in the greatness of Your lovingkindness, Answer me with Your saving truth. Psalms 69:13
My daughter, Kaitlyn, loves to play games, and her personal favorite lately has been chess. I try to be ready to play when she asks me because I don't want her to develop the dreaded "middle-child syndrome" that I've seen come out in her sometimes (Not the oldest, not the baby). We've played quite a bit, but she doesn't understand that I can't play everytime she asks. It's hard for her to understand, because in her mind it's always a good time for chess! I'm teaching her there are certain times for certain activities.

In Psalm 69 David shares a time of waiting on the Lord when he's in a real pickle (there's a term I don't use enough). There are people after him that are hostile towards David and towards his God. And in this trial, David prays to the Lord at an "acceptable time". What is an acceptable time of prayer? I think David stopped everything else he was doing, and focused on the Lord as he prayed. Additionally, 1 Thessalonians 5 tells us to pray without ceasing, so it seems there isn't a bad time. Some people pray when things are good and some when they are bad. However, I've heard people say that they don't want to pray when things are bad, because they don't want God to think they only talk to Him in the bad times. But, if we feel like we only talk to God when things are bad, that should convict us that we need to have a more constant dialogue going on with Him. If you need to talk to God, then it is an acceptable time. **Even if you've been living in repressive sin, God is ready to hear a prayer of repentance at anytime. Have you been waiting for certain moments to pray? Have you been sharing your problems more than your praises? Then today is a new day for you. Take the opportunity today to talk to God as a loving Father who wants to hear your heart. Keep prayer simple...it's conversation.**

Read Psalm 70

Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; and let those who love Your salvation say continually, "Let God be magnified." Psalms 70:4

You probably know people in your life who magnify their problems and often make them bigger than they really are. Much of my life has been lived as a glass half-empty person, allowing problems to overshadow solutions. In fact, if I'm eating pancakes (which require drinking milk) I fill up my glass when it is half-empty because I'm just sure that I'm going to run out before breakfast is over!

A Christian should really be a positive person. The one thing that should constantly keep us rejoicing is our salvation. Today if I were to die in some tragic way, I would be saved from my sins and begin my eternity with God. David says that if you love and appreciate the salvation that comes from God, then magnify Him in your life. That means don't let your problems become your god. Don't make them your focus and what you spend most of your time thinking about. Don't allow your own kingdom to over shadow God's kingdom plans for your day. **God has plans that go beyond our problems, but we have to be willing to take a moment to believe it. So today will you choose plans or problems? How will you attempt to publicly magnify God in your life today?**

Read Psalm 71

O God, You have taught me from my youth, and I still declare Your wondrous deeds. Psalms 71:17

I've come to a decision in my life: as I get older I will not get boring. I am so thankful for the relationships I have with older people in our church, and how much they teach me. But in life, you run into older folks who just don't seem to have much joy in their lives. I like to laugh and have a good time with people. I like all sorts of music, and I'm sure that I would be open to just about any kind of tunes when I'm 70. I want to be energetic and committed to Christ and to serving Him in my later years as much as I am in my early years...if my 30's still count as early!

The Psalmist is stating that age will not put any distance between himself and God. This man has known God as a child, but continues to declare the God he has known since his childhood. Adulthood hasn't caused him to think more "rationally" and to place reason above faith. In fact, as this man gets older he wants to ensure that God will continue to use him. I love older people. My great-grandmother spent a lot of time watching me as a child and telling me stories from her life. When we ignore the lessons of seniors, we set ourselves up to learn them ourselves the hard way. But being a senior citizen doesn't mean you have to stay home from church, watch "The Price Is Right" everyday, or go to square dances. **As you grow older are you growing closer to God, or do you allow the pressures of adulthood to get in the way? Is there an older Christian that you could encourage in their faith? Ask them about their testimony, or find a way to plug them into a ministry you serve in through the church. Sometimes seniors quit serving not because they don't care, but sometimes they need to be asked because they fear they'll just be in the way. What kind of senior will you be one day: a server or a sitter?**

Read Psalm 72

Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders. Psalms 72:18

I was not a Chicago Bulls fan during the era of Michael Jordan. He was a great player and I didn't dislike him, I just always wanted to see the underdogs win instead. While there were always 12 active guys on the roster, the other 11 didn't matter. It was always Jordan and four other dudes on the court. It didn't matter who played with him, because

Michael made it happen. Guys who appeared to be good playing next to MJ would go to other teams and bomb because the championship wins didn't have much to do with them. In short, a highlight reel of the six Chicago champions would simply be a Jordan highlight reel.

Michael Jordan is not God. But just as Jordan brought others along for the ride, God is the One who truly works in the world. He may use us at times in a variety of ways, but ultimately God works the wonders. We don't save anyone, but we share the wondrous message of salvation with others. Even if I preach, I recognize that only by Holy Spirit do I have the ability to read, understand, and preach His word anyway. We need to rely on God more and ourselves less. **He must be greater, I must become lesser. Who are you trusting to bring about glorious things in your life? Are you leaning on Him or yourself? Don't answer that too quickly. Be honest about who is the go to guy in your life when the chips are down. Do you pray, or do you attempt to win the game by yourself? Do you recognize that anything good, even if God used you in the process, was ultimately the work and will of a loving and holy God? Other people will praise you for your service...be a praise deflector.**

Read Psalm 73

Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence Psalms 73:13

Have you ever felt like Lucy working the conveyor belt at the chocolate factory? (If you don't get that reference, you need to watch more TV Land). My summer landscaping job sometimes assigned me to work in new house builds on days that it was raining outside or slow. What was the important job I was assigned? Sweeping the house and picking up trash. If you've ever been in a house build, you know there's sawdust, trash, and mud everywhere. My job was to go through the rooms and clean it all up. But, the next day it would just be trashed again. I began to think this was a fruitless job, until it dawned on me how dirty it would be if we didn't clean it from time to time. It was a job that needed constant attention, but gave you little to show for it.

Have you ever felt that keeping your heart pure is a fruitless task? We live in a world that is trying to grab our hearts at every opportunity and has succeeded a few times. A dangerous lie the Devil tells is that you can't be perfect so you should stop trying to beat every temptation that comes your way. So should we just pick and choose our moments to stand for God? Remember David; one sin of lust led to physical adultery, murder, guilt, the death of one child, and rebellion from another. I'm sure David often resisted sin, but that one sin that he allowed brought so many others. **Do you consider it vain to resist every sin? Resisting sin requires our constant attention, just like the dirty house. Remember that Satan doesn't want to bring sin in just for a moment. The old saying is true: "Sin takes you farther than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs you more than you want to pay." Make the choice today to stand up against every temptation. Don't consider any of them minor or impossible to battle. Pray that today you would be sensitive to Holy Spirit so that you might recognize temptation quickly, so you may readily turn from it.**

Read Psalm 74

Your adversaries have roared in the midst of Your meeting place; they have set up their own standards for signs. Psalms 74:4

In basic training we were all divided into 50 man platoons. For the most part these platoons did things separately, until we were ready to go out for the overnight trainings away from the barracks. All four platoons would be in a training area, and we set up our tents by platoons. Pranks had been off limits the entire time that we had been in basic, but our drill sergeant dropped strong hints that he would like to have the flags (guidons) of the other platoons. So here you have a bunch of young and well-trained soldiers coming up with operations to try to steal the guidons of the other platoons. We waited until dark and three of us walked right into fourth platoon's camp, grabbed their guidon and tore off like crazy. Except that when we got back to our camp, our guidon was missing too.

It was no secret that Israel worshipped the Lord. Everyone knew about it, and so when nations would rise against Israel they would often try to tear down the temple and any place that Israel would worship. The world today is attempting to infiltrate our meeting places and houses of worship. Not to hear a message of hope, but to change the nature of the church. Churches are asked to take new standards of tolerance and community service. The world wants the church to be a club and accept their limited standards instead of holding to God's. **Are God's standards replaceable in our church? The world is trying to steal away what we stand for, and many churches have let them out of fear. Who cares if the government steals away our tax-exempt status? I'd rather the church pay taxes and we preach the truth. Let us hold to the standards God has set, even when they're not popular. Let us preach the truth with love, and reject the false with respect. And don't let the standards be stolen from your own life. Read the Bible for all it's worth; read God's standards and make them your own.**

Read Psalm 75

The earth and all who dwell in it melt ; it is I who have firmly set its pillars.

Selah. Psalms 75:3

During a trip to Chicago, I rode a tourist trolley that went all over the city. When the ride came to an end, we were in front of the Sears Tower, and the guide encouraged us all to take a ride to the top and look around. I'm not big on heights, but I took the ride up, and the view was incredible. We were told that you could see a distance of 20 miles away, which looked about right. But, I was unsettled because I was just sure I felt the building move. Not like a boat rocking in a hard storm, but I felt just a bit off. I later learned that the tower actually leans 4 inches to one side, and is not completely vertical. On a windy day, the building will sway a few centimeters to an inch, and suddenly things can feel very unstable if you're susceptible to motion sickness, like me.

To get the real understanding of this passage, I think we need to redo the word "melt" here. A more literal meaning is "totter" or "to be unstable". I felt very unstable at the top

of the Sears Tower, yet the foundation that was provided is assured to hold up the building. Someone a lot smarter than me was a part of the construction of that building and actually built it so that it would sway slightly in the wind. But the world has never seen a greater foundation layer than God. From the very start of Creation, God did it all. And when it comes to His work in your life, He is just as trustworthy. There are lots of people in today's tough economy that have lost jobs, have bills piling up, and a lot of uncertainty on the horizon. I'm sure they feel like they are tottering and just hoping to keep themselves upright. But with God, you don't have to worry about that. God set the pillars of the earth, and He can set solid pillars in your life. **The only times that we find ourselves tottering is when we're trying to build upon our own foundations. Does your life feel a bit unstable today? There is no easy fix. You just have to be willing to trust the foundation maker. God has plans for your life, and at no point is He uncertain on what to do. Ask Him today to give you a sense of His stability, though your life, marriage, or finances seem shaky. Trust Him when you totter.**

Read Psalm 76

You are resplendent, more majestic than the mountains of prey. Psalms 76:4

When my sister moved near L.A., I saw some pictures of their new home and neighborhood. The streets looked nice and they had a great house. In one picture, I didn't notice the neighborhood as much, because the background was filled with mountains. They weren't little hills, but large, beautiful, and majestic mountains located within sight of her house. Mountains are attention-getters and certainly hard to ignore. As humans we find ourselves immediately impressed by such large and imposing figures.

I've been around mountains with both lost and saved people. Those who don't know God personally are so quick to be awed by the creation instead of the Creator. The Psalmist says that God is resplendent. He is bright like a beacon or a lighthouse. If God were standing amongst the most magnificent mountain range in the world, you wouldn't even notice the mountains on account of Him. **Have you forgotten the majesty and glory of God? When our prayers are short and trivial I would say yes. When we take a break from God, I would say yes. He is great and worthy to be praised. Let's interact with Him like the God He is, and not as if He is just normal like the rest of us. Look around and marvel at what God has created around you.**

Read Psalm 77

Your way, O God, is holy; what god is great like our God? Psalms 77:13

Dontrelle Willis was a rookie pitcher with the Florida Marlins in 2003 when he won the Rookie of the Year award. What made Willis so tough as a pitcher is that he is just a mass of arms and legs all flying around, and then a baseball comes whizzing out of that confusion. Willis has shared stories from high school when he would dominate visiting teams. Parents from the other teams would come to Willis' mother and ask who her son's pitching coach was. Many of those parents were paying big hourly rates to have major leaguers or minor leaguers work with their sons. Dontrelle's mother assured them that he had no pitching coach, and that his style was unique and unteachable.

A professor used to tell me that one of the most important things while sharing the gospel is to stress to a lost person that God is holy. To be holy means He is "set apart". He doesn't do things like anyone else and He doesn't submit Himself to our expectations of Him. The Psalmist recognizes that when times are tough, part of the problem is that God works in such a unique way, it is hard for us as humans to understand it. Instead of always looking to understand the current situation, we're encouraged to remember the past when God worked on our behalf. Maybe not the way we wanted, but the result was truly a work of God. Let's remember today that God is holy. Because He is unique and set apart, He often does things in a way we don't understand. **Don't demand to understand, but submit to His work in your life. Ask God to remind you that as He is set apart and different, we are to be the same way in the world. We are in it, but we should live our lives in a way that is contrary to the lives of a lost person. Be ready to live different today and serve a God who acts in the same way.**

Read Psalm 78

That the generation to come might know, *even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, Psalms 78:6*

Children are so cool because all the stuff that is old to us as adults is still new to them. My kids are now telling the same, "Why did the chicken cross the road jokes?" They heard the amazing story of Noah and the harrowing tale of Daniel for the very first time. They've even learned how to blame each other when something goes awry. They have asked us questions about God, and we have been glad to answer and share how God has been working in our lives. Even while Nikki was pregnant our children were hearing about Jesus through choir specials and our own words spoken to our unborn children.

This passage brings up an interesting question: aren't we brainwashing children in Christian homes? Do they really have a chance to choose or reject Christianity? Clearly the answer is yes because children come out of these homes lost all the time. I want my children to know what truth is. Why do we teach them what 2+2 equals? Because it's the truth and will benefit them to know. Why do we teach them about God? Because He is the ultimate truth, and I want my children to know who He is. **Should we beg or push our children to become Christians? No, just as we shouldn't do so with an adult. Whether the child is yours or not, tell them the truth about Jesus, but we wait until they choose to respond to Jesus. He said to let the little children come unto Him. If they understand, don't hold them back. And if they don't understand, don't push them forward. And one day, if that faith is genuine, I expect to see my children tell that truth to their children. Pray for your children and/or pray for the parents of children in our church.**

Read Psalm 79

Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake. Psalms 79:9

When I arrived in high school, there was some discussion about whether or not our school mascot should be changed. We were the Kewpies, named after the big, fat, naked baby dolls of the early 1900's. It wasn't very cool, and some wanted us to do an Alabama thing and call ourselves the "purple tide". Eventually the name was kept mainly because it was unique. How many schools pit wildcats vs. wildcats or tigers vs. tigers. We never once played another school with our mascot name, and it was a great decision to keep the tradition and uniqueness of that name.

God's name is very important, because it is unique. God actually goes by many names throughout Scripture because people often came up with new names to call Him in order to match His unique characteristics. But despite all the gods of the nations around Israel, foreigners knew when the God of Israel had acted. He was unique. No other "god" displayed the power that Israel's God displayed. But when God acted on Israel's behalf, it wasn't so they would be glorified, but so that He would. Why did God pick an entire nation to watch over? So that people from outside that nation would see the difference between their lives and Israel's and make a choice for Yahweh (foreigners like Rahab, Ruth and others came to live amongst Israel as a result). **When you ask God to work in your life, why do you ask? Is it so that your life will be improved? Sure. But do you also seek that God would receive the glory as a result of your life change? If God changes your circumstances, others should know that it's a result of His work. When God saves you, it's for the sake of His name so that others will know who He is by how He works in the life of those who know and love Him. Share with someone today some of the things God is doing in your life right now. Make sure you give Him the credit when others credit you.**

Read Psalm 80

Then we shall not turn back from You; revive us, and we will call upon Your name. Psalms 80:18

Our daughters are not big fans of cleaning their room. In fact, Lauren went through a period she would get very upset over the request. Her main beef wasn't that she thought her room was clean, but that she would ask Nikki and I to help her clean up. Our words were always, "You messed it up so you clean it up." She thought this was so unfair that her loving parents didn't love her enough to clean the room for her. But it was her mess and she needed to take responsibility for it. And in Lauren's defense, as she's grown older and matured, this request has been pretty infrequent. But every once in a while...

Psalm 80 keeps asking why God built Israel up so much only to allow it to be torn down. It gives great description of how Israel was taken out of Egypt like a vine and planted in a new place to thrive and grow. I was starting to wonder if perhaps they were in a Job moment, where God was doing something and they really had no idea why. But then verse 18 comes up and the Psalmist admits that the people need to remain faithful. He promises they won't turn back, if only God will bring revival and restoration. There is a difference between Israel and Lauren's situation. Lauren needed to admit the mess was hers and clean it up. Israel needed to admit the mess was theirs, and let God clean it up. God's salvation comes in and makes even the worst situations clean by the blood of Jesus

Christ. And when we receive God's forgiveness, it should be a reminder to avoid that situation the next time. **Is there still something in your life you need to take responsibility for? Think about that before you answer too easily. What sin or conflict are you attempting to ignore? Are you willing to let God clean up the messes in your life, or are you trying to do it yourself out of shame or embarrassment before God?**

Read Psalm 81

Let there be no strange god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god. Psalms 81:9

I think it can be a very good thing to ask yourself the same question in different ways. Sometimes I ask God to show me my sin, and I believe He does but maybe not always at that moment. I heard a great message on idols some time back that registered with me. The pastor asked if any of us have any idols, and then assured us that we probably did. We may not hand carve things anymore, but we are setting them up for our attention and devotion. One of the idols he mentioned was entertainment, and I realized that was mine. I like to play video games and watch movies, and my wife has always been fine with that because she considers it my opportunity to unwind from the pressures of ministry. But I don't have to do these things every day. Am I more centered on entertainment or devotion to God? It was an important question I needed to answer based on the time invested in both.

Israel needed to keep strange gods out. That didn't mean they looked funny or required weird practices that had to be followed. Strange can even be translated as "adulterous", meaning it's something that would steal away Israel's attention and affection from the one true God. As a result, that would be strange choice for a God-follower. But they would allow these gods in through marriages to unbelievers or during times that other nations overtook them. **Do you have some strange gods in your life? Is there some idol that is taking your time and affection away from God? If you find yourself thinking about "it" more than Him, then you have a problem that only you can address in your life. When you're devoted to those things in your life, you're missing God's messages for your life. Be honest about your idols today.**

Read Psalm 82

Nevertheless you will die like men and fall like *any* one of the princes. Psalms 82:7

I caught a bit of the recent Academy Awards on TV, but I don't really care about the awards. The Memoriam tribute of actors that have passed away in the last year always catches my attention. The crowd of actors and notables grows so quiet you can hear a pin drop, and when it's over the somber mood lasts for a while. Celebrities receive so much attention in our society, and it seems that the most important news of the following day is what someone was wearing, doing, or saying. But, that Memoriam is a reminder that no matter how famous you are, your time will end. Though your legacy can be captured on film for people to enjoy many years later, everyone dies in the same way.

In Psalm 82, God is speaking to the rulers of the nations. The word for magistrates or rulers is often translated as "gods", which does pick up on the irony of God's message to them. They have set themselves up as more than they really are. They will one day die and see their lives end just like anyone else. There will be a final curtain call, and then the judgment as they stand before God. No longer will they cast their judgments on others, but they will stand before the only divine God and answer to Him. **Are you ready for that day? Does it seem so far away with still so many opportunities to correct your mistakes? Death waits for no man, and living life doesn't exclude death's inevitability. We can leave a legacy beyond that of movies or pictures; we can influence the lives of those around us (spouse, family, co-workers) and encourage them to live for Jesus Christ every day. Let us live today as if it could be our last. I'm not hoping that it is, but I'm prepared if it is.**

Read Psalm 83

Fill their faces with dishonor, that they may seek Your name, O LORD. Psalms 83:16

When I was a teenager, my parents would usually have the radio on as we drove to church. They always controlled the stations, so there was preaching on the radio while we were on our way to hear preaching (overkill!). I can't remember exactly who the preacher was, but one morning I heard a statement that has stuck with me to this day: "You shouldn't wish for someone's demise." Often I hear Christians talk about a person who is hostile to the gospel and the Christian says, "One day, they'll bow that knee." While this is true, shouldn't we hope and pray they do it on this side of Heaven? To fall into the hands of God without the blood of Jesus to cover your sins is a dangerous and frightening thing.

These people who are taking their stand against God and his people in Psalm 83, have a wonderful prayer lifted up to God on their behalf (though they might argue that fact). The writer prays that these people will fall on bad times, in order that they might seek after God. He doesn't pray for their unmitigated destruction, but instead for their repentance. **Have you ever prayed for a jerk in this way? I've had plenty of people I didn't like, and I'll be honest, I didn't always pray that they would repent. I prayed they would go away. No matter how badly someone treats you, the one thing they are always worthy of is forgiveness. Jesus offers it to everyone, and so should we. Identify someone today that you need to start praying for instead of complaining about.**

Read Psalm 84

For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand *outside*. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. Psalms 84:10

I still remember the first time I went to Busch Stadium in St. Louis to see the Cardinals play. When we got to the front of the stadium they had statues of some of the Cardinal greats like Stan Musial, Bob Gibson and others. Just standing there at the gates before we

even got in was amazing to me. Many years later I attended my first minor league baseball game after years of going to St. Louis. I didn't know any of the players, and the level of play felt more like high school baseball in a bigger stadium. They may have been playing the same game, but the experience wasn't even close.

I first became familiar with this scripture through the song "Better is One Day". To be in God's courts for a day is so amazing that 1000 days anywhere else would just seem boring. But, the writer goes another step and says that he would rather stand at the door of God's house than to live in the houses of the world. The man isn't talking about the church building. He's talking about the heavenly dwelling place of God. So few people truly long for Heaven. But, we don't have to wait for Heaven to commune with God. We are able to come into His presence through prayer even while we live and serve Him on this earth. **Do you attempt to spend time in God's courts now? Or does the world distract you so much that you can't find time to spend with the Lord? The world has nothing to offer that can match the presence of God. Figure out what's distracting you from the courts of the Lord and reprioritize your life. Some of my past issues that kept me from the presence of God were: AM Sportscenter, Sleep, and Family. Evaluate what distracts you from spending more time with a loving God.**

Read Psalm 85

You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You covered all their sin. Selah. Psalms 85:2

Baptists have a running joke that we are incapable as a denomination to sing the third verse of any song. Growing up we always sang the first, second, and fourth verse (God help us if the song had five verses). We had sung "It is Well with My Soul" hundreds of times, but one day we sang the third verse, which caused me to fall in love with the entire song. It includes the words, "My sin not in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord O my soul!"

Psalm 85:2 conveys a similar message. God has forgiven the iniquity of His people and covered all their sin. This Psalm appears to refer to a time that God rescued Israel from the hands of an oppressive nation. In most cases, Israel found themselves defeated by their own sin, and not by the nation that was ruling them. As God brings them back from their captivity, He forgives all the sins that got them there in the first place. **We all have some sins that weigh us down more than others. Sometimes they are leftover memories and regrets from our lives before Jesus. The good news is that Jesus doesn't forgive part of our sins, but all of them! Are you still worried about a couple of old sins in your life? Have you asked forgiveness for them, or just felt bad? God forgives all sins, past, present and future. Forgiveness is His thing; trusting that forgiveness is ours.**

Read Psalm 86

For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You. Psalms 86:5

My house is always on the verge of a wrestling match. My three kids will ask me from time to time if we can wrestle, and usually I do. Recently I was playing with our youngest daughter and we started to wrestle a little bit. My son heard us from the other side of the house and instantly came running, as did my older daughter. Without even asking they threw themselves into an impromptu Wrestlemania! Even when they hadn't asked about wrestling, it's clear that they're still thinking about it.

God is always on the verge of forgiving someone. God loves it when we say we're sorry. Sometimes we worry about discussing certain sins with God because we're ashamed or embarrassed. Maybe it's a sin that we promised Him we would avoid from now on. But God is ready to forgive. He waits for you to admit that you need forgiveness and then he provides it. He's lovingly waiting on any that will call upon Him. **Much of the reason for our guilt and shame is simply because we've never asked God to forgive us. We most go beyond recognizing our sin, but actually repenting specifically of it. This morning, remember that God is "ready to forgive". He knows we're not perfect, but He wants to work in our lives to bring us ever closer to perfection. Take a moment to confess your sins today. Sit silently during your prayer time for a few moments after you ask God to show you your sin. Be ready to ask forgiveness over what He shows you, and don't discount whatever the Holy Spirit brings to your mind.**

Read Psalm 87

The LORD will count when He registers the peoples, "This one was born there." Selah. Psalms 87:6

When I watch college sports, I notice there is usually a commercial break where both schools have a commercial shown. There is the "academic" commercial that shows students sitting in class and caring about the lecture (yeah right) and there are always some students in a lab with goggles and a chemistry set. For my money, I think the effective commercials are the ones that tell of the alumni that have gone there and made a difference later. A good commercial by University of Illinois points to an Academy Award-winning director and the first female space shuttle commander among their notable graduates. The commercial's point is that you can go far by attaching your name to their university.

The city of Zion can refer to two places: Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem of Heaven. In this passage, it appears that there is more of a reference to the New Jerusalem. This is a city you definitely want your name attached to. It says God will count the people with the statement, "This one was born there." The reference is that we have been born of Heaven, not at our natural birth, but at our spiritual one. There is so much to salvation we understand, and so little we grasp. I think our inheritance in Heaven is one of those. I'm thankful to God that my heritage isn't just the little town in Missouri where I was born. I have a heavenly home to go back to because Jesus has made me new and brought me into His family. **Are you looking forward to Heaven as your home? I try to remember that I am a child of God and my daily role is to represent my "hometown" well. I want others to change their city of birth. Let's reflect the joy and hope of the home**

that we are waiting to return to as we tell others about the love, grace, and newness of life that is found in Jesus. Are you reflecting today that you are a citizen of Heaven? Did it reflect as you drove your car this week? What about when you talked to your family members?

Read Psalm 88

But I, O LORD, have cried out to You for help, and in the morning my prayer comes before You. Psalms 88:13

You should really work to floor people with forgiveness. I can think of a few times that people have come to me and asked me to forgive them. After listening to them, I always tell them they are forgiven. I often will then work the conversation to something else before they walk away, so they can see that I have already moved on. And I always make sure during that following week to call them or stop them and talk about anything except what they asked forgiveness for. I want them to know that I show my appreciation by not bringing the issue up again that caused the problem.

Many people choose not to ask for forgiveness because they worry that they won't be accepted by the person they offended. The Psalmist has been writing about how serious the situation is in his life, making him fear that death is on the horizon for him. He feels cut off from God and from people. But, he is consistent each morning to bring his prayer before God. He is not worried about whether God wants to hear him. Maybe he hasn't truly repented, or there is something left for him to bring up before God, but the great truth is, even when we are in a royal mess, God is available to hear us if we are coming to Him in repentance and truth. **What prevents your prayers? Do difficult circumstances cause you to worry to the point that you actually quit praying? Do you get worked up looking for your own solutions that you ignore what God wants to do in every situation of your life? Do fail to keep lazy promises that you'll do it later? Never allow any reason to cause you to quit praying. That's when your relationship with God will begin to be very disconnected. Or did you know that already?**

Read Psalm 89

The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and all it contains, You have founded them. Psalms 89:11

This verse stands out because it was my prayer last night. We live in a pretty rural area, so we don't have light pollution from surrounding houses. On a clear night, the sky is simply stunning outside our windows. Recently the moon was as close to the earth as it has been in a couple of decades, and there were no words for that beautiful moonlit night. Last night as I prayed, I thanked God for His creation. I acknowledged that if He could place every star, planet, and moon in place, then He certainly has detailed plans for my life. I ask to know them so I can follow them and have a result anywhere near the results of His creation.

All that we admire in creation belongs to God. He has complete ownership because He made everything. Sometimes as we look at creation, we lose sight of the Creator. The sky

is beautiful, the mountains are beautiful, the ocean is beautiful. But, these are the beautiful creations of a beautiful God. His love is beautiful, His patience is beautiful, His salvation is beautiful. No wonder people fall into idol worship. It's so easy to worship the final product and forget the maker. **Today, let's thank God for His creation. Let it be a reminder to you as you pray your petitions to Him that if He can order the orbits of planets, then He can order the panics of your life. Today I praise God for His creation, and that I have been created for His purposes and pleasure.**

Read Psalm 90

You have placed our iniquities before You, our secret *sins* in the light of Your presence. Psalms 90:8

I was about 16 and I was lying on my bed reading a book in the room my brother and I shared. Suddenly my parents burst in and went for the closet. I knew that mom had probably found my brother's stash o' beer that he had been hiding in there. Since he didn't know how to get rid of the empty bottles, he was putting them back and it pretty much stunk in there. Mom was holding the trash bag and my Dad was filling it up. Mom looked at me and said, "How many of these did you drink?" to which I replied, "You must not know me very well." My brother came home and my parents didn't say a word to him. Later he was in the closet and realized his stash was all missing. Our parents were waiting for him to come to them.

Sometimes we talk in church about bringing our sin before God, but this verse gives us a slightly different take. God actually brings our sin before Him. He's just waiting for us to meet Him in prayer to repent. Repentance is simply us agreeing with God about our sin. We agree it harms us, weakens our relationship with Him, and can even damage our relationships with those around us. I once had a friend who was going into the ministry, who had such sinful addictions that it nearly destroyed his marriage, let alone his opportunity for ministry. But he repented. He didn't have to bring his sin before God; it was already there. **Are you still trying to keep secrets? With God there are none. Speak to God today regarding your sins. They're already before Him and He is waiting for you to make the next move. Remember, God is pleased when His people say, "I'm sorry." It's not defeat to admit your sin. Sin was the defeat...repentance is the victory.**

Read Psalm 91

He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. Psalms 91:15

As you get older, you may look back on your life and ask, "Why aren't I dead?" I've been warning teenagers for years with the story of the time I put my life in the hands of others. Some friends and I met at Kristin's house outside of town so we could go to the library together for a project in high school. We all piled into her car and things were fine until we came to a series of hills. Suddenly, she floored her sports car and we went FLYING over this hill! She did it one more time, and I was just sure I had peed my pants. Later I

thought about what would have happened if there had been a slower car on the other side of the hill in front of us.

Some people look at verse 91 and call this their "skydiving verse". This means that they feel that a Christian can live a life of danger and get away with it because God will rescue them. It is true that God watches over His children, but that doesn't mean that harm can never come to you. In verse 15, God says He will be with us in trouble. I think some people read the chapter and ignore that verse. God is not saying that we will never fall into danger, but that He has complete sovereignty over what will happen to us. **No Christian's troubles have ever taken God by surprise. You may be in a time of trouble right now. Perhaps it's some health or financial trouble. That doesn't mean that God has ignored or forgotten about you. He is fully aware of your situation. But instead of just hoping He's around, call out to Him as the verse says. Some people never see God move in their troubles because they never asked Him.**

Read Psalm 92

How great are Your works, O LORD! Your thoughts are very deep. Psalm 92:5

I heard it from my parents so many times, you'd think I could come up with a specific instance. The conversation would go something like this: "What were you thinking?" My response was usually a shrug or "I don't know." (My parents knew it was really bad if I did both). Some actions that only took a moment, often had much longer consequences. We all have these moments and we look back and we say, "What was I thinking?"

There are so many awesome attributes of God that we've been finding in Scripture, but the fact that God is a God of purpose is comforting to me. God never acts on a spur of the moment. He never starts something without knowing what the ending will be. So it's no wonder that in verse 5 we see two important points: God's works are great and His thoughts are very deep. It means they're abundantly deep, deep beyond deep. Think about how much thought you give to a decision. Maybe if it's a big one, you even spend a couple of days on it. God has spent on eternity on the works of His hands. **The point of Chapter 92 is to thank God for his work in our lives. You need to thank Him for all of it, the stuff you liked and the stuff you didn't. God has a purpose behind all of it. Do I like the fact that I moved my whole family to a church where I only served nine months? No. But, as time has passed do I see that there was a purpose in what God was doing? Yes, and I thank Him for lessons learned, friends made, and lives impacted. Let us thank God not just for His results, but for His planning in our life as well.**

Read Psalm 93

Your testimonies are fully confirmed; holiness befits Your house, O LORD, forevermore. Psalms 93:5

I worked in a Ryan's restaurant in high school and after working there for a year, it was a place I had decided I would never eat at again. Over the years I would see one and try it, and always be disappointed. Recently I had several different people all tell me I had to try

a particular restaurant in a nearby town, and I was shocked when they told me it was Ryan's. I assured these people that they were mistaken, but different people keep coming to me and saying the same thing. So after many endorsements I tried it and found that it had significantly improved since 1995. Go figure.

I needed several testimonies to confirm that Ryan's was worth eating at. Psalm 93 says there are several testimonies that have confirmed who God is. Today we find those testimonies in the Bible. Whether it's Noah, Abraham, Rahab, or Ruth we see accounts given of who God is. This verse says that as a result of these testimonies, it is totally appropriate to view God in holiness. He is a God who reigns forever, but not as a result of the testimonies of others. We share testimonies of God's work in our lives, not to validate His work, but to share it with others. **God was great and loving before I ever knew about Him, but the testimonies of the Bible and of believers helped me to see that there was a God who was waiting for me. Have you shared testimonies of who God is to people around you? Are there lost people that you could be influencing by showing them who God is? The world is giving a constant picture of God: aloof, vengeful, unfair, and unnecessary. As believers, we should give the true testimony. Our silence only validates the testimony of the world.**

Read Psalm 94

When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul. Psalms 94:19

When I played basketball in junior high, I always liked tournaments. You got to be away from home all day, and you had plenty of time to sit around and eat hot dogs while the other teams played. Of course, there were always the bad tournaments when you lost those first two games and found yourself in the consolation game. This is the game where the losers are pitted against each other to try to scrounge one win. And the worst part, is they give the winner of that game a trophy! Our coach never put the consolation trophies in the case. If we could have skipped playing the games, he would have let us. He didn't see a loser's trophy as being any consolation for having a bad tournament.

God doesn't give out cheap trophies. We all get bogged down with losses and failures in our life. When God gives consolations, they are comforts that bring delight. We never delighted or rejoiced over a consolation trophy, but God's comforts always help me to move forward. He reminds me that if I woke up this morning, then He has a plan. The worth of my life is not based on my successes or failures. Dr. Rogers liked to say, "God doesn't love us because we're valuable. We're valuable because God loves us." **Where do you find your value? In trying to be the greatest success at work or school? What happens when you fail? God wants us to give up anxiousness and unproductive worries. God's consolation is His comfort. And if you'll stop worrying and start worshipping, you'll find the circumstances don't control our lives. God does.**

Read Psalm 95

For forty years I loathed *that* generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways. Psalms 95:10

One of the great difficulties for all youth ministers is watching what happens with teens you taught as they grow up. I always worked to make sure that my students knew Jesus and knew the Bible. Then a year or two after I left, I'd see kids in jail, pregnant, and marrying non-Christians. I felt sick thinking about where I went wrong, or what I could have done differently. Eventually I came to a conclusion: I can give them the information, but I can't make the decisions for them.

It seems to be pretty strong language for God to say that he loathed someone, even if it was this generation of Israel that wandered 40 years due to disobedience. But, there are some interesting items to note. The word "loathe" in the Hebrew comes from an older word that means "to cut off". It doesn't mean God cut off the people, but they cut Him off. They cut Him off from their daily decision making and only came to Him when they wanted something. The error of their hearts was their sin. But it wasn't sin that came through weaknesses or quick mistakes. These indicate voluntary actions that caused them to continue in their wanderings and to remain separated from God. **Are there some habitual actions in your life that God loathes? As a result of them you not only violate His law, but you actually put up a wall of separation between you. The old adage appears to be true, "If you feel far from God, guess who moved?" You have free will to make your own choices, but remember that all choices produce results.**

Read Psalm 96

Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name; bring an offering and come into His courts. Psalms 96:8

When I was working with church websites on a regular basis, the idea of collecting offerings online was brought up. The thought of the church leadership was that there are some who want to give, but aren't disciplined enough to do it yet. So they kicked around the idea of an automatic debit from the people's checking account or sending an email reminder to pay with their credit card. Other churches give people pre-paid envelopes to send their tithe in during the week if they forget. And one church in California has credit card readers at the back of the sanctuary where you can swipe in your offering on your way in or out.

Notice that bringing an offering before God in the temple and God's glory are in the same thought. We don't give just so the church can function, but we do so because God has commanded us as Christians to be giving people. We gave our lives to Jesus, and now we seek to give of ourselves on a regular basis. The problem with all the methods of giving that I mentioned above is that they do not ascribe glory to God. These churches have simply turned the offering into another bill that we pay. When we give like we're paying the cable bill, that's not the mark of a cheerful giver, and there is no indication that the offering will be blessed, because it's not really an offering. Instead the money is being given as an obligation or an appeasement to make the giver feel they're OK. **How do you**

give your offering? Are you furiously writing a check or digging in your wallet as the time of offering comes up in your church? Do you decide at that moment what you will give? Have you allowed the church to make giving too easy for you? This is a time of worship. We are giving to God so that the earthly ministries of our church can function, while we also indicate our trust in Him that we can give up this money and still know that God is able to securely take care of us.

Read Psalm 97

Hate evil, you who love the LORD, who preserves the souls of His godly ones; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Psalms 97:10

I remember when "The Passion of the Christ" came out in theaters. Many churches started putting together groups to go see it together and there was a lot of buzz in churches to see Hollywood produce a movie about Jesus. The movie was rated R due to the violent content that was in the movie surrounding the beating and death of Jesus, and it was appropriate. But, there were some who said a Christian should never see an R rated movie, and they spoke loudly against those who were going to see it. These people had made a commitment that they would never see a rated R movie, and they wanted others to do the same.

This passage says that we are to hate evil if we love the Lord. How do we prove that we hate evil? By following a bunch of rules, some of which we've made up for ourselves? A person isn't more or less godly for seeing the Passion movie. Godliness isn't based on walking around with a list to follow. Godliness comes from loving Jesus and being prepared at any moment to do as He leads. Sometimes those items are on a list (do not covet, do not steal, etc) and sometimes they're not (go share Christ with this person, show this lonely person love). **So what does it mean to hate evil? It means you love God. Don't just attempt to follow rules, but live in the relationship that Jesus Christ established through the cross for all that accept Him. Let us pray that we love God more than the evil things of this world. In days when the world chooses greed, may we choose to give. When the world chooses godlessness, may we choose godliness. Ask God to help you identify the evil that you have permitted in your life that you may have become callous to.**

Read Psalm 98

Before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity. Psalms 98:9

The reason people watch professional basketball is for the dunks. Sportscenter and other highlight shows are usually an hour of dunks, no look passes, and more dunks. During the NBA All-Star weekend they have a slam dunk contest in which judges watch and then hold up a number between 1 and 10. The problem is that the judging is so subjective. Too often they give a guy perfect tens on his first dunk and then there's no where to go from there but down. There is always a lot of controversy because there is not a standard way to choose winners and losers.

I'm thankful that God doesn't work on such iffy terms. As a result of my relationship with Jesus Christ, I know that I'll be judged on the basis of His work on the cross instead of my work in the world. Some unbelievers who have little understanding of God view Him as an unfair judge. However on the day of judgment, they will find there has never been more fairness shown to them in their entire lives. God tells us ahead of time what the standard of holiness is to come into His presence: perfection. And we cannot reach that standard apart from Jesus Christ. **When you hear someone talk about how God is unfair, take the time to talk about the righteousness of God. Make it clear that God judges everyone by the same standard, and gives everyone the same opportunity to reach that standard through the cross. I'm thankful for God's judgment, because it opened the door for God's mercy. I rely on that mercy to avoid His judgment. Have you thanked Him for his salvation? He has allowed us to avoid judgment and entered into reward one day because of His Son. Don't forget to be thankful.**

Read Psalm 99

Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His footstool; holy is He. Psalms 99:5

I love history, but particularly Presidential history. While reading about some of our most recent Presidents, I found information about state dinners. These dinners are part serious and part silly. Nothing of any importance happens when dignitaries come to the White House to eat. They rarely have access to the President, and the dinner is mostly a formality. But the planning that goes into a state dinner is meticulous. Careful considerations are made on how seating arrangements should be done. Just being seated at the President's table may not be enough for some dignitaries, so further plans are made regarding who sits on either side of the President. Some feel they are more important than others and should get the place of honor with the President.

How do we act in God's presence? Do we come before Him as if we deserve to? We must remember that only by the blood of Jesus Christ do we have that right. Verse 5 says to worship God at His footstool. This is certainly not the most glamorous location to be, however it is within the presence of God. God doesn't need more arrogant people, because unfortunately the church has provided plenty of those over the years. God needs more people that are prone to humility. They understand the greatness of God in relation to our insignificance. **While we come before the throne of grace boldly, that doesn't mean without humility. That passage refers to the fact that we can pray at all, and not an attitude in our hearts. My confidence that God hears my prayers is because I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, which is the name above all names. Think about how you've been coming before God lately. Are you demanding the throne, or will you accept the footstool? Do you require position to prove your importance?**

Read Psalm 100

Serve the LORD with gladness; come before Him with joyful singing. Psalms 100:2

I try to let people in my churches know that they're appreciated. Often times, we take for granted the ministries that go on every morning that seem to run with little thought. The sound works during the course of the worship service, and the nursery workers got

through the morning without losing a child. The praise team was up on stage doing their thing, and we lose sight of all that goes into it. I sent a card to a Preschool teacher once who said she was having a tough week, and my note of encouragement and thanks really brought her up. I told her that I knew working with little ones can be difficult, to which she replied, "Yes, but it's such a blessing."

There are two elements that should be a part of us as we serve the Lord: to do so with gladness and joyful singing. Too often we come back to the ministry we've helped with every week for months or even years. Even the most dedicated Preschool Sunday School teacher will tell you it's rewarding and wearying all at the same time. But just like that teacher, it comes down to what you focus on: being busy or being blessed. She viewed her role beyond some job, but as service to God Himself. You might relate to that, but say that singing isn't for you. **The point is, how you serve God; are you serving Him while regularly looking at your watch, or are you serving Him by regularly looking at the people He has put in your path. Thank God today for the ministries He is allowing you to serve in. Seek strength to continue that work. And if your burden has moved from what you're currently doing to something new, then make the change. If God removes a burden of ministry from your heart, then He's likely placed it within someone new to come and serve as you have been. Serving God is an awesome privilege, so let's take the time to thank Him for it.**

Read Psalm 101

I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not fasten its grip on me. Psalms 101:3

As 2000 was rolling around, many companies were moving to more internet based business. The company I worked for was switching from using mainframe terminals to providing PC's that allowed for many more functions and capabilities. One of those capabilities was providing us with the internet. It was a great tool, and we were allowed some freedom to use it during our breaks. Michael decided to use his to check the website, "Pick the Hottie on the Beach." He was brought in by our boss and told they monitor our web usage, and that he should avoid such sites. So he waited until the bosses left and did it again, not realizing they checked our after hours usage. He was fired from a very good job, because he couldn't keep his eyes off of junk. I wonder how explained his previous firing to his next prospective employer?

We all know that sin is constantly at our door. Temptation is always around us, just waiting for a moment that we're not on our guard. The danger with repeatedly putting worthless things before us, is that eventually they grab onto us. Addictions rarely start full blown. People get there slowly, and sometimes so slowly that they wonder how they got to the point of addiction. **Giving sinful things a place in your life will lead to you falling further away from God, and eventually you will come to a point that you feel you cannot even escape the sin. What are you allowing in your life right now that needs to be stopped? Maybe you're flirting with someone who's not your spouse, or stealing change from your petty cash at work. While these are sins, it's more likely**

that your sin will increase if you allow it to have a regular place in your life. Seek escape from sin instead of excuses for it.

Read Psalm 102

To hear the groaning of the prisoner, to set free those who were doomed to death Psalms 102:20

One story from history has always fascinated me, and was later turned into a movie called "Mutiny on the Bounty." The HMS Bounty was a small British cutter with a crew of 44. They were sailing from England to Tahiti and while still 1300 miles from their destination, mutiny broke out. Eighteen men joined the mutineer, Fletcher Christian. Lieutenant William Bligh, who was in charge of the ship, was placed in a launch with 22 loyal men and left to drift at sea. I'm sure many of these men thought themselves doomed in this small boat. But, Bligh decided to make an attempt for a British outpost on another island. The journey was over 3500 miles, but he made it in 47 days with no compass, charts, and only one casualty. His abilities as a navigator saved the lives of his loyal sailors.

I'm sure that when Bligh told his men, "Let's start paddling", it seemed like a worthless exercise. These men all knew about the different ways you could die at sea: running out of food and water, falling overboard, or being destroyed in a storm. But, being forced into a small boat in the middle of the ocean probably seemed like a death sentence. But, they had a leader who didn't give up on them and who rescued them from what seemed a certain death. Do you see the parallel with Jesus Christ? I was doomed to death. **My sin had condemned me, and I was only getting worse. Then Jesus showed up and said He could change my life. I didn't easily believe that I could be a different person, but I wanted forgiveness and I knew I had to change. And Jesus has done amazing work in my life. I still fear death, but not for me; I fear it for those who have never had the opportunity to share Jesus. Do you think those sailors ever told the story about how Bligh saved them? I'll bet they shared the story nearly everyday. Let's remember the miracle of how Jesus saved us. He didn't just save us for Heaven, He saved us from Hell. Let's tell somebody!**

Read Psalm 103

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalms 103:12

I know nothing about fixing cars. If my car ever broke down, I'd probably lift the hood because that's what I always see people do. Beyond that, I have no clue what the next step is. And when I take my car to the shop, there's one thing I always expect: I expect defective parts to be replaced. I've never had a mechanic replace a water pump in my car and then put the old one in my trunk. It's broken and I have no need or use for it, so he simply trashes it. No matter how much money you might have to spend, I always find it very satisfying to drive my car after it comes back from the shop. I know that the problem that sent me to the shop is over and for a while I feel I can drive my car worry-free.

In the same way a mechanic removes defective parts from a car, God removes our defective behavior through the blood of Jesus Christ. It doesn't say that Jesus white washes our lives or soaps us up. The forgiveness that God offers completely removes our sin from us as far as the East is from the West. No matter how far you travel East, you'll never begin going West. They are complete opposites, just as our life before and after Jesus should be. Satan wants you to simply throw your sin in the trunk for future reference, but that is not God's way. **When people choose repentance, God chooses removal, and Satan chooses reminders. When you tell God you're sorry and ask Him to forgive you, you have to accept the simple fact that He does! And without sounding too psychological, if God has forgiven you then you need to forgive yourself. Beating yourself up over your sin will not make the difference, but repentance will. If you have sin that needs to be dealt with, then here are the steps of repentance to take in your life: be sorry over your sin and take it seriously, ask God to forgive you and give you the strength to stand against it the next time, accept the forgiveness of God and walk in victory instead of guilt. Ask Him today to help you to feel the newness that He brings through repentance.**

Read Psalm 104

Let my meditation be pleasing to Him; as for me, I shall be glad in the LORD.

Psalm 104:34

A lot of stores used to have a comment box. These were places that you could go to fill out a slip of paper and place it in the box anonymously. If you had a good or bad experience, you could write a note to the store manager who could reward or rebuke as necessary. I remember us having one at SEARS when I was in college, and nothing good ever came out of that box. If people had a good experience, they kept it to themselves, but a bad experience found itself in the comment box. As much as we hated it, so did the managers because they knew they were getting only one side of the story.

This word for meditation in verse 34 can translate as "complaint or concern". So the meditation being talked about is our act of prayer. Sometimes I complain to God and bring up concerns in my time of prayer. Have you ever worried or wondered if you're complaining too much to God? I never bring up my concerns with Him before I thank Him for the concerns of my past that He has already taken care of. The reason that God can be pleased with our complaints is because we are glad in Him. Ultimately, we are happy because of our relationship with God, apart from anything He might do as a result of our prayers. **Do you focus on making your time of meditation pleasing to God? Or do you find yourself acting like a human: praying scattered, praying for yourself 95% of the time, and forgetting that you're talking to God? Me too at times, but less so since I realized that my time of prayer isn't so I can talk. It's so I can hear from the Holy Spirit who speaks to me as I bring up a request. How many times have I asked, only to be answered on the matter during that very prayer.**

Read Psalm 105

Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually. Psalms 105:4

I hate losing my keys. I usually don't realize that they're missing until the moment I have to leave for work, and then I find myself trying to back track. My wife has put a key hanger right next to our front door. I'm supposed to put the keys on there as soon as I walk in the door, but despite knowing it would be better for me, I don't always do it. When you lose your keys, how long are you willing to look? Usually until you find them. My keys have my church key on them, so I can't just grab another set of car keys, because I'm still missing what I really need.

I've never heard anyone say that they lost their keys in their house and they gave up looking for them. We always keep looking because they're so important. Yet with God, when we can't find Him right away we give up too often. How should we seek the Lord? Verse 4 says we should do so continually. We should view Him as so important that we're unwilling to quit. God only seems hard to find when we have sin that is separating us from Him. **For us to truly seek God, we have to seek out our sin and deal with it. Have you given up on trying to find God? Are there other things in your life that are more important than Him? I seek the Lord constantly, and I realize that at those moments that it seems hard, the difficulty is not because God is hiding from me. It's because I'm trying to hide things from Him. Let's be believers today who continually seek after God. He's more than our Sundays; He's our everyday.**

Read Psalm 106

They quickly forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel, Psalms 106:13

As a St. Louis Cardinal's fan, my favorite player on the team was Ozzie Smith. Ozzie was not the greatest hitter of all time, but the guy could field like a vacuum cleaner. And despite not having big power numbers, he was consistently able to come through in the clutch to get game winning hits, or make a big play on defense. In 1994, the Cardinals had a new shortstop named Royce Clayton. Clayton was ok, but he was no Ozzie. Eventually the manager forced Ozzie out for Clayton, and many Cardinals fans were outraged. I know that I personally felt that Ozzie had done so much for the organization, that he should be allowed to play as long as he wanted.

Royce was the next new thing, and Ozzie had been forgotten. How many times in our lives could we say that has happened between us and God? Forget the fact that your salvation alone is amazing enough that we should worship Him, and simply think about the other ways that God has acted in your life. I suppose when we forget what He's done, we can attempt to ignore what He says. The idea here in verse 13 is that God's works and His words are not so far separated. Because the people forgot His works, they didn't wait to hear His words. **God has a lot to say to you, but are you listening? Are you rushing through your prayer time, or are there moments that you are open to hear the Holy Spirit speak? Are you attempting to apply Scripture to your life as you read His written word? Remember and be thankful for all that God has done in your life. When you remember His works, you'll be more likely to listen to His words that will set you on a path of purpose with God.**

Read Psalm 107

He changes a wilderness into a pool of water and a dry land into springs of water; Psalms 107:35

I went to Cheyenne, Wyoming for a mission trip during my junior year of high school. We were helping a church in town, and then we would have some time off to go hiking and exploring outside of town. As we were riding in the bus, I was looking out the window as we approached the edge of town. Suddenly the grass, houses, even the sidewalk just ended at the exact same line. Now all I could see was brown dirt and stubbly brush. There's obviously a lot of water and maintenance required to keep the town from being taken over by the wilderness that surrounds it, but the line between them was so pronounced that it was shocking.

Our God isn't a magician or an illusionist. And he's not a simple city planner, trying to fight off degradation. Our God has power and when He comes to our rescue, it's not to drop off a bottle of water. Our God changes a dry and barren wilderness into a pool of water. He brings springs to dry lands. Have you felt like your life was in the middle of a wilderness or a dry land? Sometimes we look around and we see no hope for our situation. We think maybe we can walk in a particular direction to find what we need. The good news of God is that He can start the renewal right where we stand! **If you're life has been dry spiritually, you don't have to find the pastor or the church to get it right. You can start from right here and right now! Stop waiting to do the right thing, and stop looking for the right opportunity. It's here in front of you. God can change your surroundings without you even moving from your current spot. Why don't you ask Him to help you find spiritual renewal in your life through repentance and recommitment to His plans for your life today?**

Read Psalm 108

Oh give us help against the adversary, for deliverance by man is in vain. Psalms 108:12

When entire countries hit hard financial times, it creates turmoil for everyone. The worse the situation seems to get, the more people expect our government to do. The problem is that problems aren't solved by throwing money at them. Problems are solved through wise solutions. Many people in our country continue to practice the same unwise spending habits, and hope that they will get bailed out with a check from the government. So many people, including Christians, have started waiting on the government, that they have forgotten to wait on God.

There are two places you can look to for help on this earth: from God or your fellow man. When we rely on men there will be disappointment. Maybe someone bails us out a time or two, but a time will come when the people around us let us down. That's not the case with God. The solutions of men often just plug holes, while God changes hearts. He has the ability to make long-term changes in the circumstances around us. **Who are you looking to for help? Maybe your parents? Possibly you are looking for your church to help? While these people have a responsibility to help in various situations,**

ultimately we must look to God for our help. He can work through the people around us and often does. But you need to figure out today who you trust more: do you trust men or the Maker of Men.

Read Psalm 109

In return for my love they act as my accusers; but I am *in*prayer. Psalms 109:4

Have you ever had that person you just couldn't win over? Maybe someone at work or school or maybe even a neighbor. No matter how kind you are towards them, they just refused to like you. I remember in high school that my drum line director didn't like me. I wasn't the greatest drummer, but I wasn't the worst either. But for some reason no matter how helpful or respectful I was, he always seemed upset with me. Part of it may have been that he was clearly gay, and I was clearly a Christian. I never said anything disparaging about or to him, but as a Christian I guess he assumed I hated him. I could have polished every drum in the building and it wouldn't have made a difference.

We all want to be liked. There are some people that you meet and you can tell right away that something isn't sitting well with them. Maybe at work you got the promotion they thought was theirs, or they felt that your general comments on a situation were directed at them. No matter how hard you try to repair these relationships, they are not guaranteed as David points out here in Psalm 109. There were people that he bent over backwards for and showed love to, but those people accused him of wrong doing. David says he is "in prayer". He didn't try to win the argument with his accusers. He simply brought the matter before God and allowed God to do as He saw fit. **As a believer in Jesus, not everyone is going to like you. Many will see your faith alone as an indictment on many of their sinful behaviors. You need to show them the love God would desire to come from you, but don't feel responsible for the person's reaction. You show love. Who do you feel alienated from? Is there something you've been doing to allow the hostility to continue? Make sure it's been dropped on your side and that you have turned it over to Jesus.**

Read Psalm 110

Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; in holy array, from the womb of the dawn, your youth are to You *as* the dew. Psalms 110:3

After about 2 weeks in basic training, we were taken way out into the plains away from the base. We sat down on a set of bleachers and about 200 yards from us was a series of machine gun bunkers. Further out, maybe a quarter of a mile, were old tanks and jeeps. Suddenly a group of soldiers ran out of a small building to our left and began attacking the bunkers. They were using rocket launchers, grenades, and rifles as they flanked together to take out the unmanned bunker. Then they started working the radio and we saw enormous rounds impacting the tanks and jeeps. It was an amazing display of firepower and training. Our sergeants then introduced the soldiers to us: they were all just a couple days from graduating and had just finished basic. Any of us that had doubts as to whether we could learn all that we needed, found a new confidence seeing these soldiers that had sat on the same bleachers just weeks before us.

None of us are totally who we need to be in Christ. We all have failures and issues that cause us pain in our relationship with Jesus. This chapter is talking about the rule of Jesus Christ, and I love the fact that God's people will volunteer freely to serve Him.

Sometimes when we live by faith and not by sight, we find it difficult to do all that we need to do. Just as those soldiers encouraged me, so does this. I know a day is coming that my sin nature will be gone. I'll no longer struggle between what I should do and what I selfishly want to do. But, let us not rely too much on that day. **Since our sin nature has not been eliminated yet, should we not fight against it? Should we just wait for Heaven before we live a life of selflessness? I take pleasure in knowing that I will be different in Heaven, but I will not wait for death to live the Christian life. Are you delaying living as you should, because the struggle is too great? Don't wait for Heaven to be in a close relationship with Jesus. Choose now to resist sin and walk with Him.**

Read Psalm 111

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*; His praise endures forever. Psalms 111:10

Our youth group was playing in a basketball tournament for youth groups from around Missouri. Matt was our tallest guy and he had to leave one of the games after only 10 minutes. I was really the tallest guy left, which wasn't saying much, and I had to guard a guy who was at least 6'5". So I would get the ball and shoot it, and this kid would block it halfway down the court. During a timeout, Matt said, "Stop going straight up with it. Pump fake, get him in the air, and then shoot." Matt was right, because this kid started fouling me a lot. I wanted to just take the ball right to him every time, but I realized that my determination wasn't helping. I had to respect the guy's height, and not just act like it was no big deal.

This chapter talks about the work of God, as does much of Psalms, but the point is to respect His work. Don't ever take the Lord for granted in the way He works in and around your life. The word fear doesn't mean to literally be afraid of God, but to respect Him. But so many treat God in a trivial way. He's "the man upstairs", or someone that they think will only show love and never discipline. Those who follow the commandments of God have a good understanding, because they have learned to respect and revere the Lord. They realize His instructions are commands, and not suggestions. When we willingly ignore God's word and choose to sin, we are showing no respect to God. **Do you fear the Lord? If you're unsure, think about how you pray. Do you do so believing He will act, or is it just words that put a mark on your checklist? The Bible says that those who do as Jesus commands are His friends. While He wants to be your friend, that doesn't mean that He doesn't deserve our respect. Repent today for those times you have not feared the Lord, and instead you've simply been dismissive of Him in your life.**

Read Psalm 112

Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Psalms 112:3

I will never forget the first time I heard a "name it and claim it" preacher. He was talking about the fact that he needed a new car. So he prayed for God to give him a car, but not just any car. This man wanted a gold Cadillac. And after telling this story about how he wanted it and how he prayed, he ended the story by saying, "And I have my gold Cadillac." That preacher had his gold Cadillac for one reason: he bought it. He sells tons of books and charges for every speaking engagement. He didn't get a Cadillac because God gave it to him, but he simply went out and bought it.

I'll bet if that preacher were to read this verse, he would say, "Look! God wants you to be rich. He wants you to have stuff!" There is no doubt that God blessed many heroes of the Bible with great wealth (Abraham, Noah, Solomon). But if you read this entire Psalm, you will see that the wealth and riches are not money to be spent on extra stuff for you. Verse 9 says that this "wealthy" person gives freely to poor and in verse 5 it says that he lends "graciously" (certainly not at 22%). So what is really the message of this verse? A Christian can have riches and wealth because he/she isn't spending it on wanton pleasures. Think about why you have less money than you could. Debt, poor spending, and simply funding your sin are all reasons that Christians don't have the resources they could. **God is not saying that you have riches for being a believer that are just sprinkled down to keep you fat and happy. He is saying that with God as your master, money becomes a tool and you begin to look at ways to serve others with it instead of yourself. You save and prepare for those moments. Is your household ready to help others, or is your financial hole so big you can barely help yourself? Ask God to help you eliminate debt and poor spending so that God can use your life and resources for the benefit of others. I have seen God answer this prayer in my life by providing finances I did not expect, so I could use them to eliminate debt.**

Read Psalm 113

From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised. Psalms 113:3

I heard a conversation between a teenager and his parents when he was asking to go out for the night. He told them he would be back home around midnight. His dad looked at him and said, "Son, nothing good happens after 11pm." I remember thinking as an adult that this seemed like a pretty harsh assumption. Then I started to think back on my own life, and I realized he was pretty accurate. Sin can happen in the daylight, but there is something about late at night that causes us to forget who we are in Jesus Christ. Whether alone or with friends, it's a time period that sin has the upper hand in.

So does verse 3 mean that we should only praise God while the sun is shining? Not necessarily, but think about the major event that takes up your day. It could be school, taking care of your house and children, or going to a job. When you wake up, are those the events of greatest importance to you? Whether in school or work, I have always

remembered that the end result of my day will be seen by the Lord. Did I seek His wisdom in difficult situations? Did I think about how my actions would reflect on my Lord? During the course of our day, God should be praised through our lips and our lives. **If you are doing this, then your life after the sun goes down won't be much different than when it was still up. I know you have a to-do list today, but is your relationship with God anywhere on there? Remember that you don't pray, praise, and serve God because you have to, you do so because you GET to! Our relationship with God is an amazing thing, and I will praise Him throughout my day because I know that He cares and He listens, and I am so thankful for that.**

Read Psalm 114

Tremble, O earth, before the Lord, before the God of Jacob, Psalms 114:7

It seems that people in our world have a concept of the end of the world. They just don't have a biblical one. After the movie "Armageddon" came out, people were all asking what we'd do in the event that our planet was ever in the path of a killer asteroid. I remember one scientist saying that our galaxy is like a pool table, and earth's the 8-ball. You avoid it for a while, but eventually you have to sink it to win the game. And though it is losing steam, we've been hearing for years how global warming is going to melt the ice caps and sink the continents. If that is true, then why did we rebuild a city that sits below sea level? Why is Miami still around despite sitting right at sea level in so many places?

Do I believe we should be good stewards of the earth? Absolutely. I don't think we should litter and loot our planet just for the fun of it. But the Bible says the earth will not be destroyed until God is ready to, and so I'm just not worried about it. This chapter shows how the great features of the earth, like oceans and mountains, are in complete subjection to God. Nothing is going to happen to this planet outside of God's will for it. **Do you find yourself sometimes worried about the end of the world? Do you hear people around you talking about their worries for our planet? Are you made to feel guilty for not being more "green"? Take the opportunity to let people know that this planet won't last forever, but their soul will. It's about time we concerned ourselves with preserving souls through Jesus Christ, instead of worrying about the end of the earth. Only God knows when that will be, and as a result, I refuse to waste my time worrying or thinking about it.**

Read Psalm 115

He will bless those who fear the LORD, the small together with the great. Psalms 115:13

Do you ever try to imagine that you're someone else? We all have at some point. How many times have I been playing basketball against a friend and I suddenly hear them say, "Jordan drives to the basket!" Or while playing the video game "Guitar Hero" I've seen people hit the power stance and think they were really amazing guitarists (it's only 5 buttons dude). There's nothing wrong with a little imagination, even as an adult. But why

do you emulate others? Are you able to respect their abilities, or are you envious of them?

Our verse today says that God will bless the small and great who fear the Lord. We've seen that fearing the Lord means reverencing Him and serving Him. So who are the small and the great? This is talking about stature in the eyes of others. In our day men like Max Lucado, Rick Warren, and Billy Graham are all viewed as the important people of Christianity. But what about the pastor of the small country church, the career missionary in the Amazon, or the collegiate campus minister? They may be considered small or less important, but they're not. God blesses all, great or small, if they are serving Him. **Is there a fellow believer that you're jealous of? Maybe he or she possesses great speaking ability or musical prowess. God doesn't want you to be them, or He would have made you them. God made you to be you. No one else can accomplish the plans God has for your individual life. You have been created and gifted for the plan God has for you? Ask God to forgive you for your envy and jealousy of others. You are valuable and useful to Him. Ask the Lord how you can be most valuable to Him today.**

Read Psalm 116

The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. Psalms 116:6
If there were an attack on Washington, D.C. who would have the best chance of surviving? It would probably be the President. There are numerous contingencies on how to get him out of the city or at least protect him in the event an attack were ever to happen. What about the White House secretaries? What about the cab drivers of the city? In all likelihood, they would be on their own for preserving their lives because they aren't considered as essential to the survival of our country as the President is.

I'm glad that with the Lord there are no unessential believers. God preserves the simple, which here means "meek". These are people that have chosen to faithfully serve God instead of themselves. It's similar to the "child-like" faith that Jesus later describes. It is not a statement of mental capacity, but of their spiritual one. The psalmist says he was brought low and God saved him. **A pastor once said, "Satan brings you low to keep you there, but God brings you low to raise you back up." Satan wants to bring you low through guilt and regret. God brings us low for the sake of humility, especially if we've been unwilling to humble ourselves. How do you worship God? Do you simply trust and praise Him, or do you attempt to impress Him with your service? You're relying on God to preserve your soul one day when you die, but do you ask Him to be in complete charge of your life now? God wants the simple. He wants the humble, who desire to do God's will over their own.**

Read Psalm 117

For His lovingkindness is great toward us, and the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD! Psalms 117:2

The day I had to meet my biological father may have been the most uncomfortable day of my life. I was 15 and had never met him before, but since he now had to pay child support for the first time in my life, he wanted to spend time with me. So we went out to eat, and to a movie and walked around the local mall. I talked to him, but I really didn't know what to say. While sitting in our driveway at the end of the day he gave me \$100 and said he wasn't trying to buy my love. I never heard from him again.

This chapter is only 2 verses long, and the first verse says that all people of all nations should praise Him. Even if they don't know Him, they should praise Him. Why? Because His lovingkindness is great towards us. Even when we didn't know who God was, He was thinking about us. That was the difference between my heavenly Father and my biological one. God has been thinking about me from day one. My biological father only thought about me when he was going to start losing money. **Do you know what I think today would be good for? Thanking God not that He loves you or that He wants to do great things in your life. Instead thank Him today because He already had those love and plans before you ever knew Him, and He was simply waiting on you. He doesn't love you for what you can do for Him...He just loves you. Let's really praise Him today. Make your supplication if you must, but make your prayer time today a time of thanking Him.**

Read Psalm 118

The LORD is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me? Psalms 118:6

As a minister I have never understood people's fear in coming forward in church. As a Baptist, we like to have a time at the end of every service where people can come forward and talk to the pastor or a counselor to talk about a decision the person needs to make for Jesus. Maybe they need to be saved, or to speak to someone about an issue in their life. I've heard many people say, "I didn't want to come forward because all those people make me nervous." I always tell them that they'll never find a group of people who are more excited about what Jesus is doing in this person's life than in the congregation of the church.

Really the problem is that the person is afraid of the congregation for some reason. Afraid that eyes are watching them and possibly judging them. No matter how much we say we don't care, it seems impossible for us to truly dismiss the opinions of others. When we enter into a situation that is scary or uncomfortable for us, this passage should be great comfort to us. As a believer, God is for me. It doesn't mean He's for every action I take, because He's never in support of my sin. But, as I seek to worship Him, He is for me and supporting me. Why should I worry about man? The most that a man can do is kill me, but he can never touch my soul. No matter what tragedy comes my way, God is for me. He has granted my soul eternal protection from the death of Hell. **Do people make you nervous? Why? Do you fear their judgments or words? Do you care as much about God's judgments and words for your life? After you die, the only relationship in your life that will continue uninterrupted is that relationship with God. If He's for you, then what are you worrying about? Stop and take inventory on how He showed up the last time you were in a similar predicament.**

Read Psalm 119

Make me understand the way of Your precepts, so I will meditate on Your wonders. Psalms 119:27

When I was in high school, our school bought a large number of TI-82 Graphing Calculators. These things were amazing. You could do just about anything you wanted with them (one of my friends had space invaders on his), including watching them graph your plot points right on the screen. I remember learning how to do logarithms by hand in my Algebra class and after a couple of class periods, we all had it figured out. Then our teacher had us pull out the calculators and showed us how to get the same answer on there in a matter of seconds. Of course someone soon said out loud what we were all thinking, "Why didn't you show us this the first time?" Our teacher explained that he wanted us not to just have the right answer, but to understand why it was the right answer. He didn't just want us to take the calculator's word for it.

So many people listen in church to hear what the right answers are, but so few seek them out on their own. How do you know that stealing and adultery is bad? Probably because you were told that they are bad. Have you ever seen the scripture for yourself? So many Christians are willing to take the word of someone else on what the Bible says. I'm sure that's how the Pharisees gained such control. Since the Pharisees added approximately 500 commandments beyond what Scripture said, there must have not been a lot of personal reading of the scriptures going on. **When you seek a biblical answer, where do you go? Do you go to your pastor, or do you attempt to find the answer for yourself? As the verse says, ask God to make you understand. There is nothing wrong with getting advice and counsel from godly people, but take the time to read the Bible for yourself and draw your own convictions.**

Read Psalm 120

I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war. Psalms 120:7

Rasheed Wallace was not my favorite professional basketball player, though he was an extremely talented player. He's just under 7 feet tall and could work down low like a big man, but could also shoot the outside shot with consistency. Wallace's problem wasn't his game, but his temper. If you ever wanted to see someone who is easily offended, go no further than Rasheed. In 2000 he set an NBA record with 41 technical fouls, which equals one every other game. A technical foul is given when you go beyond just fouling someone. Maybe you call their momma a name, or you push them, or some other infraction that causes a referee to give a harsher punishment beyond the foul. They are not easy to get.

The word here for peace is not speaking only in sense of war. It means "completeness". I strive for peace not only in my relationships, but in my life. When I live in completeness, I don't have turmoil trying to be more than I am, or seeking to have more than I possess. But in our world today, there are many people who would be unsatisfied with peace. They have grasped selfishness and will not let it go. **Do you have peace or war in your life? Are you able to settle on what God has for you, or are you constantly fighting for more? Are you willing to peacefully end conflicts with people, or are you often**

looking for the next fight or offense? Let's choose to be people of peace today. It doesn't mean we are doormats for the world, but it means that we seek completeness. We seek contentment in Jesus Christ. We should pray that today we will seek peace with the people around us. Stop magnifying their faults, and start confessing your own. Don't allow your value to be tied to devaluing others.

Read Psalm 121

My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Psalms 121:2

I think by now I have made clear my love for history, especially military history. I recently came across a letter from William Tecumseh Sherman to the Union Commanding General, Ulysses S. Grant. The letter was written in 1865 as the Civil War was beginning to end, in no small part due to Sherman's total war tactics, like his March to the Sea. General Sherman wrote to his friend and commanding officer, "I knew wherever I was that you thought of me, and if I got into a tight place you would come--if alive."

I'm sure there were some tough times that Sherman looked to the hills and hoped for help in a few of his battles. Sometimes help came, and sometimes not. The great comfort for me as a Christian is that God is always in the hills ready to give me aid. But God's aid is not confined to the emergencies of life. I ask God to give me wisdom and insight before events have even taken place. God is responsible for my triumphs and available in my troubles. I know that I am never alone. **Do you feel so sure? Do you feel alone in your troubles? Perhaps you feel alone because you don't recognize Him in your triumphs. Anything good that comes out of my life comes because of what Jesus Christ has done in me. The changes He has made have made me the man I am today. Every compliment, every talent, every gift I have comes from the Lord. He is my great and awesome help. I praise His name!**

Read Psalm 122

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love you. Psalms 122:6

Since Israel became an officially recognized nation in 1948, there have been two attitudes towards them: those who support Israel and those who want it destroyed. They don't just dislike Israel, but they want it completely eliminated. The nation is roughly 8,000 square miles with a population of 7 million, making it comparable to the state of New Jersey. Yet this small nation has held off repeated attacks, and has one of the most advanced and feared armies in the region. While many nations seem to be bent on the destruction of Israel, it's the little nation that just won't go away.

What should our attitude be towards Israel? Even though they are not a Christian nation per say, they are still God's chosen people. He still watches over them and will give Israel a final chance to repent and turn towards Jesus Christ during the Tribulation. It's very clear that those who seek the peace and prosperity of Israel, find themselves protected too. It's the reason that our politicians every year bring up the subject of Israel. **Can you take a moment today and pray for the peace of Jerusalem? As Christians, our eyes**

should constantly fall to this nation. By watching Israel, we know the direction things are going in our world. As believers, the biological descendants of Abraham should be in our prayers, and their lives will be a great indication of prophecy to come. Remember that the adoption that we receive is because of the promise that has come from Abraham and the Jews down to us as Gentiles. We were on the outside looking in, and God opened the door for us through His Son.

Read Psalm 123

Be gracious to us, O LORD, be gracious to us, for we are greatly filled with contempt. Psalms 123:3

I can't stand when actors repeat lines. You know what I mean. You're watching a movie, and a father and son are standing in the fading sunlight of the early evening. They stand arm in arm as they look at a house. Maybe they went on a long journey to get there, or they rebuilt after a fire. Then as the music builds and the strings come in the son says, "I guess we're finally home Pa." The father, never looking at the son so he can get a great close-up says (you already see it coming, don't you) "Yes we are, Son....yes we are." Why repeat it! No one really does that! Oh, it drives me crazy.

As I read Psalm 123 this morning, all I could think of was the repeating line. The Psalmist writes and repeats "be gracious to us." He is asking for God's favor, or His mercy and the dire situations in the life of Israel warranted such a request. The people are filled with contempt, not because they are hateful people, but due to the hate that is being directed towards them. What is the significance of the writer repeating the phrase "be gracious to us"? It seems to indicate they are ready to trust in Him completely. Verse 1 said they look up for their help, not around. When they asked for God's grace before, it was mere lip service. Maybe they still thought they could get out of the situation by themselves. **Have you ever really felt the need for repentance? Maybe you asked God to forgive you multiple times. You just totally opened yourself up before Him and admitted that you have no excuse for doing what you did. That's what Psalm 123 is talking about. To prepare for the graciousness of God, you have to want it. You have to prepare yourself for it. Don't just expect Him to forgive you. Every time we ask for the forgiveness God readily gives, it's a reminder of our dependence on Him. Always ask for forgiveness. Always remember it's a gift, and we can only count on it by His grace.**

Read Psalm 124

Our soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the trapper; the snare is broken and we have escaped. Psalms 124:7

My childhood summers were often spent hanging out at grandma's house. She didn't have cable, but she had a great yard out in the country. One day I found a grasshopper struggling in a spiderweb, and decided to watch the show. The spider was well away from the grasshopper, and I wondered what he was waiting for. As I kept watching, I noticed that the more the grasshopper struggled, the worse he was caught. Eventually he just couldn't move at all. That's when the spider made his move, and it was all over.

There are souls struggling all over this planet right now. They are caught in the trappings of sin, and they struggle hoping to free themselves. They've damaged their families and the lives of others around them, but they've never turned themselves towards God. They still feel that they can handle the situation on their own. David compares us to a bird caught in the trap of a hunter. The bird is toast unless the trap fails. Sin is a trap that catches everyone, but Jesus breaks the trap. He came along to spring free all who ask Him. Not so we can fly away and leave Jesus behind, but He releases us so we can be free in Him. **On any given Sunday, the church will host people who are struggling to save their own souls, and will miss the salvation that is articulated from the pulpit. Are you trusting your work, or the work of Jesus to save you? If you believe it is only by the blood of Jesus, then who else have you told? There are people caught in traps all around us. We need to tell them how they can be free! If we were really living free and experiencing the blessings that come from it, we would tell others much more than we do.**

Read Psalm 125

Those who trust in the LORD are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever. Psalms 125:1

My junior high school took a trip to the Missouri capital building when I was in 7th grade. Our class was hanging out on the first floor soon after we arrived among some large Roman columns that towered up beneath the second floor and I decided to lean against one of those columns. I don't know why it felt this way, but every time I touched one of these columns (which I'm sure weighed several tons), I had the feeling that they were moving. In fact, it scared me so much that I stayed away from them for fear that I would knock one down and kill my classmates. I was obviously a weird kid.

I just couldn't get past the message of the first verse this morning. We have so many people that have heard the gospel, but they don't really get it yet. They don't get that we are entering into a trust relationship with Jesus. We trust Him not to just forgive our sins, but to lead our lives. When we trust in the Lord, we are as immovable as a mountain. Just as I really couldn't move those columns, nothing can move you from the love of God. There will be friends and family that try to weaken your devotion to God. They will attempt to reshape your convictions for their benefit. And when we give into selfishness, our relationship with Jesus is weakened, but it will never be removed. **Do you feel that you are a bit unstable at times in your devotion to Jesus? We all have those thoughts and moments, because we are still sinners who struggle with selfishness. But, no amount of selfishness or wrong moves will ever remove us from the love of God. Just like winds blow against Mount Zion, so will storms sometimes come against you. But, they can't blow you down and they can't blow you away. I'm thankful that God has held tightly onto me since that day I asked Him to save me. Our God does not suffer from a flimsy grasp or sketchy memory. If you are His, He's got you. So live like it.**

Read Psalm 126

...Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. Psalms 126:2-3

As a huge Missouri Tiger fan, I often tell others how great our football and basketball teams are, even if they really aren't. When I was on campus, you expected to hear people talk about how great the Tigers were, because we were all going to school there. But what was really cool was when a national television or radio broadcast started talking about our Tigers. Suddenly we felt vindicated that our team was really as good as we had been saying they were. A fan talking up his team isn't so impressive, but when outsiders start talking them up, it's an exciting time.

I decided to put these two verses together because they communicate an important message. This chapter is about Israel returning to their home after being held captive in Babylon and Persia. As they return Israel says in verse 3 that the Lord has done great things for them. Being thankful is an important part of being in a relationship with God. We are giving Him praise for what He alone has done. Yet in verse 2, the people of other nations are proclaiming that God has done great things for Israel, again because it was something that was done by God alone. Only by God's work was Israel released from bondage. When we live our lives in front of others, the point isn't to act like we have all the answers or are better than lost people. The point is that we live our lives openly so that those who don't know God can still acknowledge that He must be working in our lives. **When we trust in the Lord, we see Him do things that no one else can take credit for. Are you living openly in front of unbelievers? Would your co-workers or fellow students be shocked to know that you are a follower of Jesus Christ? Let's live our lives openly in front of those we know and don't know, so that God might receive the glory. Give Him the credit for your marriage or your job. If you simply glorify yourself, you're not any better than what lost people regularly see.**

Read Psalm 127

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Psalms 127:4

I remember being young and noticing the plaques of people that had passed away. Sometimes they were on the army bases I grew up on. There would be a picture of a guy with a paragraph that summed up his contribution. As I've been in ministry, I've noticed churches with pictures of former pastors up on the wall. In some churches, the pictures go back 100 years. Eventually I realized that a picture on a wall or commemorative plaque is a memory, not a legacy. Those pictures and likenesses have nothing else to offer the world.

One of the great ways we can impact the world is through what we leave behind. Not money or possessions, but our children. As a parent, I have taught my children who Jesus Christ is, and two of them have accepted Him with no prompting on the part of my wife or I. Now that they know Him, we are teaching our children convictions. I want to see my son and daughters impact this world for Christ. They don't have to be missionaries to do

it. We could use some genuine believers in Jesus working in our schools, stores, and government just for starters. A warrior who was good with a bow could wield an impact on the battlefield from hundreds of yards away. As a parent, I have an opportunity to impact the world from hundreds of years away as my children and their children live out the faith that I lived out in front of my family. **Perhaps you have children already. Are you more concerned with how they serve you or how they serve God? If your children are small, teach them about Jesus, but let them make their own decision. Never attempt to push a child into Heaven. If your children are older and not living that life of faith, take time to acknowledge your mistakes to them as a parent and to seek to impact their lives even now. Maybe you don't have children of your own because you're not old enough, unmarried, or you've been unable to have children. Do not underestimate the impact you can have on children in our church. Many of the people that shaped me as a young person, I never called "Mom" or "Dad".**

Read Psalm 128

How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. Psalms 128:1
A fellow ministry friend and I were riding in His car one day when he played his favorite CD for me. One of the songs we listened to sang of the change that should happen in our lives as Christians. I looked at him and said, "This is the message we have to get across in our churches more than any other." He agreed. So many churches are talking about love, forgiveness, mercy, and all the other ways that God proves His love. But what about us? How are we proving our love to God? It seems that the church is emphasizing what God does for us, which is great. Only by the work of God can we be saved. But, churches are de-emphasizing the role that we are to play as a servant of God. The message of the cross should bring a change about in us.

We have seen plenty of scripture over the past few weeks about the fear of the Lord. I love that this verse speaks also of walking in His ways. Fear means that we reverence the Lord, which certainly includes following His instructions for your life. I just appreciate that this verse spells that out. There are many people who fear the Lord, but so few of them have turned that fear into obedience. They know who God is, but they fail to see their responsibility as a result. I am glad that God loves me, despite how great He is. I am grateful that despite the fact that I deserve punishment for my sin, God has provided salvation because I believed and asked. **The prayer of salvation is not the end of the process. It is the beginning, and now we have the opportunity to walk in His ways everyday. Jesus said that His friends are those that obey His commands (John 15:14). The word friend equates with those who are saved, since we know that those who choose friendship with the world are considered enemies of God. Are you really walking in the way of Jesus? What changes in your life are you putting on hold that God desires for you right now? Just as Jesus promises the Christian forgiveness of sins, we promise to live differently for Him.**

Read Psalm 129

Let them be like grass upon the housetops, which withers before it grows up; Psalms 129:6

My mom threw a fit about me coming in dirty from feeding the horses a time or two. Often I would be covered in hay, mud, or whatever else I had come across with our horses. But I couldn't get myself to undress in our cold garage in the winter, so I would just walk downstairs and change in my room. I eventually went on a trip for a couple of days and when I came back, there was grass growing out of the carpet in my room! This did nothing to counter my mom's impression that my room was a disaster area. I actually had my very own lawn growing from the carpet next to the window. Some of the hayseeds had fallen into the carpet, and we had a water pipe break under the house. So the seeds sprouted, but of course without any dirt they didn't stick around. I was sad, because I was pretty sure I had the only indoor lawn around.

We see people all the time who care nothing for God and yet they seem to be succeeding. Their wealth and fame can cause envy for those of us who may struggle in obscurity. However, people without God are like grass on the rooftops of Israel's houses. The roofs of homes in Israel were flat, so often seeds would land and germinate. Eventually the grass would die because it had no soil and wasn't planted in a spot that it was designed to grow in. **As people, there are places that God wants us planted. The lost may look like they have things figured out, but their lives have no root. They have nothing to preserve their lives other than their own efforts, which always fall short. As a Christian we can also be misplanted at times. We place ourselves in environments that can cause us to wither, or we ignore our relationship with Jesus by failing to read His words and talk to Him in prayer. Do you feel like you're withering? Maybe you need to take a look at where you're attempting to plant yourself: in the world or in the Kingdom.**

Read Psalm 130

My soul *waits* for the Lord more than the watchmen for the morning; indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning. Psalms 130:6

Whenever our artillery unit would set up in a new location, we always had to establish perimeter guards. These guys would surround our entire location at 20 yard intervals. When we were training there was always an "enemy" force that you had to watch out for. Anyone will tell you they will take the daylight shift because at least you can see. At night, you can't see a thing and there are all kinds of noises that constantly keep you on edge.

Any night watchman likes the sunrise. Not because they're morning people, but because they don't like to feel so alone and isolated. A night watchman can have a flashlight, radio, maybe even a gun, but he still feels on edge when something is a little out of the ordinary. Psalm 130 says that our souls wait for the Lord more than the watchman. We know that the darkness contains many dangers, while the watchman only suspects it. The ultimate breaking of the dawn for the Christian is the return of Jesus Christ. It's not just

the relief that darkness will be over, but also that Jesus Christ will come to physically rule and reign. No longer will some wonder WWJD, but they will see Him in action. **Are you waiting on the return of the Lord or do you wish He'd postpone? Many people think that they would like to live their lives without His return interfering. While I'd love to see my children have children one day, I'm ready for any moment that the Father sends Jesus back. Nothing could be better than seeing Him face to face. Let us pray, Lord Jesus come quickly and prepare us for that moment. Let us share the gospel so that others can long for the day that currently they should dread.**

Read Psalm 131

O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; nor do I involve myself in great matters, or in things too difficult for me. Psalms 131:1

It seems that many of my friends have a great knowledge of repairing vehicles. Anytime I ever seem to mention anything being wrong with my car, I have two or three people who tell me how easy it is to repair. "Oh you need new brakes? All you gotta do is take off the tire, pull the calipers back, take off the old pads, put on new pads, reset the calipers and then put the tire back on." That all sounds fine until you mention the part about me replacing the things that make my van stop when I hit the pedal. That's not something I try to save a few bucks on by doing myself. Making my own sandwich for lunch is something I can do myself to save a few bucks, not fixing a vital system on my vehicle.

As humans, we often have a hard time admitting when things are over our heads. We have family issues, but we remain silent before friends and God because we think we can handle it. We often involve ourselves in situations that are none of our business because we think we have the answer that those involved just can't find. **What about the situations and complications of your life? Are you trusting God to work out those situations, or are you attempting to do the work for Him? Do you know what we lack? Foresight. God doesn't make decisions and plans based on what's around us right now. His decisions involve plans for every person on the planet and for a future that we know nothing about. As a result, God will lead you to decisions that you don't fully understand. Being a believer in Jesus Christ means you'll trust Him instead of demanding to understand. If He explained it to you, it's unlikely that you'd understand any better than you already do. Instead ask for Him to strengthen your faith as you wait.**

Read Psalm 132

Surely I will not enter my house, nor lie on my bed; Psalms 132:3

Robert Flaherty was a filmmaker who traveled to the far north. His journey wasn't really for making a film, but while fishing the area, he filmed so much that he returned home with 70,000 feet of film. He decided to make a documentary of his travels and spent several weeks on it. Just as he was finishing up the process, he accidentally dropped a match while trying to light his cigarette, and all of his film was burned up. Surprisingly, Flaherty decided to return to the north once more and shoot the film again. Flaherty later returned to present his documentary "Nanook of the North". It is considered to be a

classic documentary on the lives of Eskimos. I would imagine many in Flaherty's situation would have simply given up. They wouldn't have been willing to spend the time needed to recreate the entire project.

Psalm 132 talks about the determination of David in building the temple. He knew it was something he needed to do and he didn't take the responsibility lightly. He said that he wouldn't sleep or rest until he found the place they would build it. When given the task, David performed it with devotion instead of detachment. I'm afraid that too many Christians give up in their spiritual lives. At work they might be like a Flaherty, making sacrifices and working weekends to excel in their job. Or teenagers will stay up until all hours of the night to have a lock-in or get up early to go hunting. But, when Sunday comes there are so many who claim to be believers who just can't seem to find the time. Not only would David be appalled, but so must the Lord be as well. **We start to read our Bibles, but quit because it's hard. Yet we learn the new interface for Facebook. Or we read all we can on how to get our gardens in the ground successfully. So what spiritual areas do you give up on too quickly? Is it daily devotion to God, or perhaps promises to avoid sin that you no longer keep? Are you devoted to non-spiritual pursuits more than you are to serving God. Look at David. He refused sleep until He had done what He had promised for the Lord. Maybe next time you find it tough to sleep, try praying for people you know who need it instead of turning on the idiotmaker.**

Read Psalm 133

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! Psalms 133:1

When my mom and stepfather got married, it was a big adjustment for my stepbrother. He went from having his own room, to sharing it with me whom he barely knew. It was a little uncomfortable at first because I felt I had invaded his space somewhat, but over weeks and months we began to make it work. There wasn't any big secret as to why: this was the situation we were in and we had to make it work. We didn't always have a perfect relationship, but at the end of the day we knew that we were brothers, even if it was of the "step" variety.

Unity is just too important to ignore. It's a good and pleasant thing, especially among the children of God. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, adopted into His family, and we need to dwell in unity within our churches. It is disturbing to me when I see two Christians within the same church who are avoiding each other. Often times it gets to the point that others will see it and point out that there is a problem. It seems we forget that none of us are worthy of the love and grace of Jesus, yet when we hold a grudge or spread gossip that's exactly how we're acting. **Two questions this morning: do you have an unsettled conflict with someone in your church? If so, you have a responsibility to promote unity within your church by healing this relationship. Secondly, are there two people in your church that you know are having a conflict and no one else is leading them to resolve it? You can be that person. Often times an outside person helps others realize how out of control a situation is getting. A conflict between two**

people in a church can quickly turn into a conflict where multiple people are taking sides. Your efforts to promote unity in your church will go a long way towards your church being a healthy one.

Read Psalm 134

Lift up your hands to the sanctuary and bless the LORD. Psalms 134:2

I remember going to my first University of Missouri football game when I was a kid. Kickoff was coming and I had no idea of any of the traditions that went on in the stadium. Soon there was a low "ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh" as the fans raised their hands straight up in the air. The kicker approached the ball and the yells got louder until the ball was kicked and everyone in unison shouted "Go Tigers!" I was thinking about how many people have come into that stadium and had no idea what was going on, but they figured it out by looking at those who were around them. They were in a crowd of people who were cheering for the same thing...a Tiger's victory.

We saw a call for unity yesterday, and really I think that translates over to today's chapter. People of all different backgrounds can come and cheer their team, yet so often we let strife prevent us from cheering our God. The Psalmist says for us to lift our hands to the sanctuary. This doesn't just mean come to worship or look like you're worshipping, but it means that we are to worship Him in holiness. We worship Him in a way that we worship nothing and no one else. That includes a spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend, job, car, or anything that you care about way too much in comparison to your love for God. How do you bless the Lord? The word for "bless" indicates that you are telling others about Him. **God deserves to be glorified, not just because of what He's done in your life, but for who He is. Even before He saved you, He loved you the same way that He does now. Doesn't that kind of character deserve to be praised and spoken of? Is God the main person of your worship, or do you allow someone else to take up more of your attention? Are you blessing the Lord or shaming Him? There have been times in my life that I can't believe He still loved me, but He did and does. Commit today to have no more important relationship in your life than the one you have with Jesus. The benefit is simple: your relationships with those important people can only improve as you grow closer to God.**

Read Psalm 135

Those who make them will be like them, yes, everyone who trusts in them. Psalms 135:18

Who did you want to be like growing up? Perhaps a great baseball or basketball player, or maybe a singer that you loved to listen to. I had some friends that looked up to an older brother or sister, or even tried to be like their Mom or Dad. All of us recognize people that are better than us in areas, and as a result we often begin wishing we had their talents or simply wishing that we were them. I've known some friends whose personalities changed because they were trying to be so much like another person that they even took on their way of speaking, standing, and sometimes dressing.

This chapter talks about many great things that God did for Israel, but there were still times that people made idols for themselves. They wanted to create a god to worship instead of worshipping the Creator. They thought if they could set their own rules for god, then they could control their lives more. Verse 18 says that you become like the idols you create. God is speaking in terms of those who created the actual wooden images, but I see people creating idols in today's world. Someone builds a big house as the validation for their life. They are constantly empty and trying to fill empty space. Other people spend their money and time on cars, and then find themselves constantly on the go with no time for God or faith. It's true that you can become exactly like the idols you worship. **Does God really have your full attention, or are you divided between Him and some idol? The idol can be your job, family, possessions, or anything else that causes you to cut your time with Him short. We just looked at this same question recently, but it seems clear that God still wants to deal with us on it in Psalm 135. I immediately think of the worship breakers and interrupters that I allow into my life, and changes that I must make now. Don't allow the American Dream to turn into the American Nightmare.**

Read Psalm 136

With a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for His lovingkindness is everlasting. Psalms 136:12

Have you ever seen the lumberjack competitions? They have a variety of events where guys work as fast as they can with an ax or saw, and try to complete lumberjack tasks the quickest. My favorite event is the log roll and I don't think it has any purpose in real lumberjacking. It's a bunch of guys standing on a log in the water, and then they run on it to get the log spinning as they try not to fall off. Recently, I've started noticing a plastic version of this on playgrounds. My best guess is that local dentists have donated the money for these to try to drum up business. I have to hold my kids up on the plastic log roller to the point that they are barely even touching it. They think they're good at it, but if I weren't standing there to support most of their weight, it would end badly.

I love that as each verse ends, it says that his lovingkindness endures forever. God has a perfect, unending love that will never be affected by what we do or don't do. How does God show His love? We know that He has a mighty hand. When you look at the creation around you or even your own body, the might and power of God's hand it beyond dispute. The great news about our God is that He also has an outstretched arm. God is not simply able to work in our lives, but He chooses to do so. Just like the kid on the logroller, sometimes we assume we have control, but the praise goes to God who is watching over our lives. He wants us to seek His work in our lives, and most people know that God has the ability to act. They just wonder if He will. **Have you asked God to work in your life, or do you just hope He will? God has the power and love to watch over you in your circumstances, and He knows what we need in our lives before we even ask. But, if we love Him, we are to humble ourselves to seek that help. If He is so mighty, we should respect that might and ask for His work in our lives instead of just assuming it. He does it because He loves us. Don't live in doubt, but count on His deliverance in your time of need.**

Read Psalm 137

How can we sing the LORD'S song in a foreign land? Psalms 137:4

In our high school, I was part of a pretty large marching band. Our school only set up 3 or 4 sets of bleachers on the visitor's side of the football field which was just dwarfed by home section. Sometimes these schools would bring a small band with them, but as soon as they started up, so would we and they were just drowned out in comparison. Sometimes the other teams brought no band at all, and so the visitors had to hear us all night. It always felt like we were doing our part to help win the game.

I'm sure it was uncomfortable for visiting team fans to cheer their team on our field. They didn't have the numbers or the voice to do so, but they often tried. In the same way, Israel had a hard time singing while they were being held prisoner in Babylon. Often the Babylonians would tell Israel to sing their songs, not for any cultural exchange but just so they could make fun of them. It's hard to sing for the Lord in a world that does the opposite. The world's music is all about themselves, and our music is all about the God who loves and saves us. There may be some areas that you feel constrained to speak on behalf of your faith. It might be at family functions with lost relatives, or out with co-workers when the workday is through. **Do you know the conclusion I finally reached in these situations? If they have free reign to say what they want, why shouldn't I? If I have to listen to their stories of perversion, why shouldn't I share my stories of conversion? Who holds you back from speaking on the Lord's behalf? He doesn't need you to defend Him to anyone, but when we hold back, lost people miss out. They assume our faith must not be too important because we haven't even mentioned it. Ask God to give you the words and the voice to make a difference in the world. And be ready!**

Read Psalm 138

For though the LORD is exalted, yet He regards the lowly, but the haughty He knows from afar. Psalms 138:6

My experience in country clubs is pretty limited, and not all were bad. There are definitely two kinds of people in a country club: those who work there and those who play there and I didn't see much mixing of the two. I remember one club in the south that had all black workers and all white members. The staff wasn't really ever talked to unless it was my pastor doing the talking. We had people invite us there for lunch on occasion, and I always noticed how he carried on long conversations with the staff, while most members simply ordered from them without really looking at them. It was a good reminder to me to not overlook anyone at any moment.

No one is more set apart than God. He is Creator, rule-maker, and perfect Lord. It would seem that such a great God would only hang with the most righteous and holy people. The Bible bears out that God loves all, but there is a special relationship between Him and those who truly seek to love Him. But righteousness is not an outward show. It's not the pastors and the evangelists who have the intimate relationships with God. It's those

who approach Him in humility, understanding what it means to fear and respect the Lord. **How do you approach the Lord? It's a good reminder to look and see if I approach Him as if He can't live without me or as if I can't live without Him. Who do I associate with at church? My friends who are like me, or the less known visitor who showed up not as well dressed as some? Let us remember that the Lord associates with us despite all the reasons He shouldn't. Let's show a similar love and compassion to others.**

Read Psalm 139

How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Psalms 139:17

I've never thought of being hit by lightning as a particularly high-risk worry. I've been out in lightening storms and seen it flash around, but I didn't think about it much. As news stations attempt to outdo each other by having the most powerful weather radars (by the way, how can they all be the most powerful?), one of the new items I saw during the broadcast was the lightning strike sweep. I was totally shocked. They were showing it for only one county that was having a severe storm, and during the previous hour there had been approximately 5,000 lightning strikes on the ground, and the radar showed a dot for each one. Lightening seemed a bit more substantial to me after seeing that.

I think another total that would surprise us, are the number of thoughts that God has towards each of us. I hear people say they are looking for God's will in a particular area of their life, but according to David here in Psalm 139, God's thoughts are so thick for you that He constantly has plans for you. Don't view your life as a series of checkpoints, because that's how most people operate. They ask God for wisdom in going to school, then finding a job, a spouse, a house, etc. **What about all the days in between those checkpoints? What about the day you're living in right now? You might be asking God for guidance in a big area, but He is just as concerned with the "small" ones. How did you treat the employee of that store when you were upset? What did you do regarding the disagreement you have with a fellow church member? God has more thoughts for you than a top ten list for your life. He has thoughts and desires for today. Not just one or two, but more than you can count. Think about what thoughts God might have had for you yesterday that you missed, and be ready to hear His thoughts for you today.**

Read Psalm 140

I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted and justice for the poor. Psalms 140:12

A carpenter friend of mine somehow hit his head on a board in his shop. The next day he was dizzy and vomiting, a pretty sure sign of a concussion. His wife urged him to go to the doctor, but he refused. He wasn't unable to pay the bill, but he felt that it would be a waste of his time. Really there isn't anything a doctor can do for a concussion except to diagnose it and tell you not to hit your head again. Often I won't go to the doctor because there have been enough times that I went and felt that I had accomplished nothing except

losing a few dollars. Then I would walk in two weeks later for a follow-up, and the guy had absolutely no clue as to who I was.

There are few people that had as difficult a life as David. He was constantly hunted and hated and regularly was in fear for his life. As David trusted in the Lord, he always found that God had the answers. It wasn't like visiting the doctor and hoping for a solution, because God always had the solution. He maintains the cause of the afflicted, literally meaning he doesn't forget. The doctor always has to consult the chart to remember who you are and what he did for you the last time. Not so with God. He knows the situation, and He knows the solution. **I know it requires trust, but that's what faith is. Are you trusting God to maintain your life, or are you doing it yourself? We talk about this a lot, but do you "trust" God and have greater "faith" when times are good? That's not faith. Faith is shown through daily trust, which leads us into His daily plans. Faithless days are fruitless days for the Kingdom of God.**

Read Psalm 141

May my prayer be counted as incense before You; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering. Psalms 141:2

In my younger days, I was a little legalistic at times. After I was saved, I grew up in a church that didn't rush to the Bible when an answer needed to be found. So when I later joined a church where the Bible was constantly consulted, I found new standards in my life. Biblical standards are great, but there were too many times I acted like a Pharisee. I read how David rose early in the morning to pray, so I said praying at night is unbiblical, and those who love God will pray in the morning. Years later, I read David here saying that the lifting of his hands, combined with his prayers, in the evening is an offering to God. I guess Paul was right, and we can just pray all day long. (1 Thess. 5:17)

Oh the dangers of mindless prayer. It's not about the time of day, but the attitudes of our heart. David's prayer is that his words to the Lord would be counted as incense before God. Simply put, David wanted the conversation to be pleasing to God. So many people just start rambling trying to think of everyone and everything they can mention in 5 to 10 minutes. After verse 2, David asks for God's power in helping him to watch his words (v.3) and then to keep his heart from leaning to what is evil. That's pleasing prayer. God is happy to hear our supplications, but He wants to hear our confessions. I was so proud of one of our youth recently when I asked why do we pray? The Bible says we don't have because we don't ask, and at the same time it says that God knows what we need before we ask. Tim said, "To show our humility." Mindless prayer doesn't show humility. It shows laziness and a desire on our part to put a check on the checklist. **Check your prayer. Instead of attempting to pray for everything everyday, it's ok to pray for certain things during the week. You could have a "Missions Monday" or a "Family Friday" or a "Thankful Thursday" (where you do nothing except thank Him for what He's done in your life without asking anything in return). Think about your prayer time. Taking time doesn't please God, but making the time meaningful does.**

Read Psalm 142

Look to the right and see; for there is no one who regards me; there is no escape for me; no one cares for my soul. Psalms 142:4

Baseball cards were an obsession for me as I grew up. I bought protectors to hold them in and I would read the statistics and try to determine which ones were valuable now and which ones might be valuable later. The price of baseball cards is based on condition down to very minute details like the corners of the card and the quality of the picture. If a card got bent up and damaged, I threw it away. I knew that the value was so diminished that there was no real reason to hold onto it and waste room in a protective case that could go to a better card.

Just as I closely examined those cards to see their condition, God does the same thing with our lives. His regard for us is better than any protective case that I ever owned. However, God isn't looking to judge us on physical or worldly standards. God looks at us and sees what regular people don't: our soul. God works in the eternal. We all have value and worth because we are all eternal beings. And because we will be somewhere for eternity, God is reaching out to each one of us. As David says, He is regarding us. **There are some people that you'll listen to before you listen to God. These might be your friends, family, or co-workers. But, God is the only one who's truly thinking long-term. All these other people are generally thinking about your life in relation to their own. God is thinking about your soul. He's thinking about the part of you that will exist forever either with Him in Heaven, or without Him in Hell. Your life may look bent up and ready to be thrown away to the world, but God still very much cares about you. He wants to have a close relationship with you forever. Today, will you listen to the long-term words of God for your soul, or the short-term words of people for your body?**

Read Psalm 143

Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground. Psalms 143:10

One of the toughest transitions between college and graduate school was the different standards for writing a paper. Most of my college professors had a different style they were usually shooting for, and if you hit that style you had a good chance for a decent grade no matter what you wrote. When I got to graduate school, suddenly there was one standard for all classes. The form of our paper was measured with a ruler by each professor to make sure the strict guidelines were held to. I hated it, but I made the transition because I wasn't the rule maker. The standard was at the discretion of the school I chose to attend, and as a result I submitted myself to their rules.

As Christians we weren't forced into anything. We made a conscious choice to give our lives over to God. We knew that we needed forgiveness and lacked any meaningful purpose to our lives. God has a will for you, but you have to listen as He teaches. The world has lessons it wants you to learn as well, but it has not paid the price for your ears. Jesus did that. As we listen to the lessons of God, the Holy Spirit leads us on level

ground. That doesn't mean the walk is always easy, but at least we know that we're being led. Even during heartaches in my life, when I'm following the will of God, the level ground I walk is the assurance that God has not forgotten me. Christians that collapse under strain are usually those who have not been learning from God. **Could you tell me what God's will is for your life right now, or are you in the dark? There are moments we may wait for God's instructions, but during those moments we continue with the last task or word He gave us. We should never be idle. If you find yourself on unlevel ground and unsure where to walk, tell God you're ready to listen. Is God your teacher or the world? God has standards and the world has none. Is your life marked by standards or by confusion?**

Read Psalm 144

How blessed are the people who are so situated; how blessed are the people whose God is the LORD! Psalms 144:15

I've met people of many different faiths, and this verse caused me to think back on many of those meetings. I've met Muslims, Hindus, Pagans and people of various other faiths. A common theme among all of them is that they didn't seem happy to me. I'm not saying they never have happiness in their life, but when it came to discussing their faith, there was no talk of joy or happiness. There was no smile on their face and no real discussion on their part of me converting to their beliefs. It made me wonder why they believed what they believed when their lives didn't seem any better.

The word that David uses here for blessed is equal to the word for happy. Now let me defend these people of other faiths by saying that I know many who claim to be Christians who never seem happy about their faith either. The reason I have happiness in my daily life and when I talk about Jesus to others is because I know what my life was like before. I remember the sinner I was then compared to the sinner I am now. I still have sin, but not to the degree that I used to and I trust Jesus to continue to change my life. I am happy to be a Christian! **When people look at your life do they see someone who is happy and joyful? People learn more about our beliefs based on how we act than on what we say. I believe in directly witnessing to people and not waiting around for them to ask about Jesus. But there have been times that people didn't pay much attention to my words, but later talked about faith based on my actions and the happiness that was in my life. Live happy today. Your life with Jesus Christ is great!**

Read Psalm 145

Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. Psalms 145:3

I was thinking last night about how good God has been to me. Specifically, I was thinking about how He spared my life from the hands of the abortionist before I ever had a coherent thought about Him. If I were to write down all the ways that God has shown Himself great to me, I would fail in two respects. First of all, I have simply forgotten so much of what He has done for me. And secondly, those that I do remember, I can never

fully do justice to. There are so many parts of God's greatness that I often fail to appreciate or understand. In spite of these shortfalls on my part, He still deserves to be praised.

The bigger part in here to me is that God's greatness is unsearchable. You can't just go out and search for clues to His greatness. Not because there are too few, but there are too many! Every speck of creation that we enjoy is an evidence of God's greatness. His character is truly an open and shut case. There is no denying who He is and what He aims to do in the lives of His people. **Have you praised God recently for His greatness in your life? If you don't know what to be grateful for, sometime sit down and start writing all the ways that God has blessed you. I'm sure that after only a few minutes you will begin to understand this concept of God's greatness being unsearchable. Let's have a praise day today in our prayer time. Just thanking Him and praising Him for who He is and what He's done. Let's save our supplications for another day. These are some of my favorite intimate times with the Lord.**

Read Psalm 146

Do not trust in princes, in mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. Psalms 146:3
Trusting in a politician to save us from politics is like trusting an alligator to save you in a swamp. Every four years people line up on opposite sides of the political isle and they yell like kids at a pep rally on who has more spirit. They campaign, give money, lie and try several other ways to get their candidate into the White House to "clean up Washington". Then after the election is over you have a bunch of people happy and a bunch disappointed. The problem with is both sides is that they trust man way too much. The title of President doesn't make a man suddenly wiser or better. He is just a man with flaws and faults. That's why every President's chapter in the history book includes their successes and their failures. There is no one President who has a once sentence statement at the end, "We'd talk about his failures, but he never had any."

We are told not to trust in men, even those of high stature. It's ultimately a faith issue. It doesn't mean that a man or even a prince can't help you in life, but they certainly can't help you in death. There is only one name of one man that can save you, and that's because He was an extraordinary man. Do you get too down when your candidate loses? Don't, because the Bible is clear that God has the ultimate control in every situation. It doesn't mean we shouldn't be a part of the political process, but it means we shouldn't trust men with God-sized tasks. **When I was growing up I wondered how an entire world could possibly one day willingly fall under the rule of the Anti-Christ. I now realize that many people care about charisma over character. The Anti-Christ will rule one day, most likely at the thunderous applause of the world. Are you trusting in God who is unseen, or man who is seen? When financial difficulties come do you wait for the government bailout, or the heavenly storehouses? Pray for your leaders, be involved in the political process, and remember God's the one who's actually in charge. Start trusting in the unseen over the seen; that's called faith.**

Read Psalm 147

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. Psalms 147:3

I don't know what possessed me to do it, but I set my sights on a girl when I was in 8th grade. Her name was Jacqueline and I made the mistake that pretty much all guys make: I mistook friendship for "she digs me". So as Valentine's rolled around I scrounged up some money, which was not easy for me to do in those days. I bought her one red rose and a little heart box of chocolates. I waited until the end of school, so if rejection came I would have an exit strategy (I think I hear my bus honking). So I gave it to her, and she seemed hesitantly appreciative. That told me all I needed to know and it hurt because I had this image of how she would accept it, and it wasn't reality.

The Psalm says that God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. The brokenhearted doesn't indicate that your heart hurts, but the Hebrew indicates that it's been splintered. This doesn't happen literally, but figuratively. When Jacqueline told me no, it hurt, but I wouldn't say it splintered my heart. I'm sure when a husband or wife walks away from a marriage, that splinters a heart. When a son or daughter ends up in jail, that splinters a heart. If you've seen a piece of wood splintered by an ax or if you've seen wood splintered by an explosion, you'll know there is a mess everywhere. If I were told to take all the splinters and put that wood back together, I wouldn't even try. And when the shards of your heart are lying around and you don't think they'll ever go back together, God is completely capable of doing it. **What has splintered your heart? Who has splintered your heart? Do you feel there is no recovery? God wants you to know He loves you, not by just His words, but His actions as well. Open up your hurt to the Lord today. Maybe you haven't wanted to be healed and you've wanted to continue in your misery. God has victory for you instead, and He'll love you every step of the way.**

Read Psalm 148

Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven. Psalms 148:13

I never understood how hockey made it as a professional sport until I moved here to Pennsylvania. I heard someone talking about the Caps and after a few moments I realized they were talking very seriously about hockey. I've only known 1 or 2 people in my whole life previously who even followed the sport. Eventually the hockey playoffs will be over and one team will be left holding the Stanley Cup. However, so few people are going to care. Those who follow hockey and love the sport will watch with baited breath (like I do for college football), but if you're not a fan you just won't care who wins and gets the glory.

You don't have to be a fan of God to exalt his name. There will come a day that those who have closely followed God and those who never once acknowledged Him will all praise Him together. The glory of the hockey rink will only extend to those who pay attention, but the glory of God will extend above everything on heaven and earth. Trophies will melt away. Family relationships will dissolve. Bank accounts will be no

more, and the glory of the Lord will be above everything else. The day is coming that only the Lord will be exalted. Even though everyone will bow down before Him, only those who did so in life will be with Him in eternity. **Think about the people around you who don't know Jesus. If they remain in their ignorance and current attitude, there will come a day that everything they care about vanishes. Jesus will be all that is left, and those who ignored him throughout their lives, will be ignored by Him for all eternity. Who do you need to share the life-changing message with? Let's not live as if all choices are equal. Remember that those who live without Jesus have no hope. Let's tell them now before they're shocked on the other side.**

Read Psalm 149

Let them praise His name with dancing; Let them sing praises to Him with timbrel and lyre. Psalms 149:3

Though I never felt a call to music ministry, God has used me in it at various times. As a result, I get a view of the congregation that is much different than when I preach. There are essentially two types of people I see: those who seem ready to get excited during worship and those who are hoping they don't. I'm not sure when in church history it became the norm to act "reverent" (a churchy word for dead) during the singing in the church. I don't believe that churches where people dance and sing with smiles on their faces is necessarily true worship, but it's gotta be closer than the alternative.

Today we're encouraged to praise His name with dancing and with various instruments. The idea is that we're always looking for new ways to praise God. His mercies are new each morning, so why shouldn't our efforts be so each Sunday? Some people frown upon new music, but is the old music bringing them joy or simply nostalgia? I was talking to another music minister and we both agreed that when we're 80 we want to continually be open to new music and fresh attempts at worshipping a God who never grows stale. I know we cross this bridge every once in a while, but since Psalms keeps bringing it up we'll keep examining ourselves. **How are you worshipping the Lord? Do you constrain yourself because of people around you? I sometimes find myself affected by the attitude of those around me, which is absolutely a personal problem. Whether I'm on the drums, on the mic, or in the pews, I need to remember that my worship has absolutely nothing to do with anyone else in the building. We may all be in the same place worshipping the same God, but we are doing so individually. Are you worshipping God or are you just singing, and why?**

Read Psalm 150

Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty expanse. Psalms 150:1

When I watch award shows I see all the actors and musicians heap praise and accolades upon each other on camera. The awards I find of particular interest are the lifetime achievement awards. Often there will be a great montage of movie or musical moments that defined the person's life and what made them so great. You see afterwards a standing ovation from the crowd, but then I get a real sense of that being it. I think the old people

in the crowd are thankful they're not that old yet, and the younger people in the crowd think provide some polite applause for a person who's probably going to be dead soon. These lifetime achievers could be recognized more often, but that 5 minutes on stage is supposed to count as the appropriate amount of attention.

I guess if God were going to get a "lifetime" achievement award, they would probably present it to Him at a mega-church. But is that the only place that God deserves the praise? Among a bunch of people that already claim to know His greatness? We need to see His name praised by the lips of believers among the ears of the unbelievers. The verse says to praise God in his sanctuary, but where is that? It's anywhere that God dwells, including your body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. **Is God praised in your body through your words and actions? You are a sanctuary of the Lord and if your life is not intentionally giving God praise, then you are missing the point of the Christian life. It's not just about dying and going to Heaven, it also involves us living as much for Him now as we will in eternity. What changes do you need to make so that the Lord is praised in your sanctuary? Is your mind unable to praise because of worldliness that you have allowed to saturate your thoughts?**