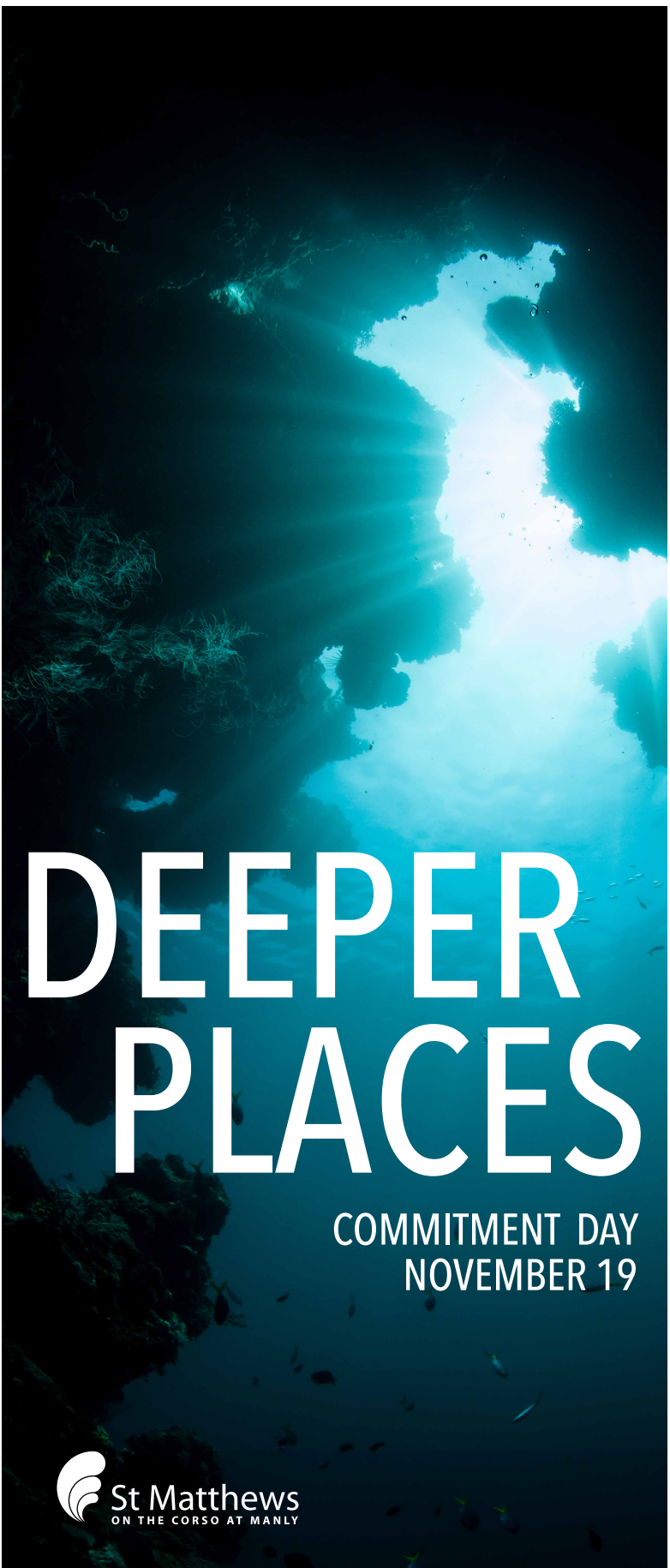


# Devotional Booklet



# DEEPER PLACES

COMMITMENT DAY  
NOVEMBER 19



St Matthews  
ON THE CORSO AT MANLY



## Introduction

We don't live in a culture that is known for its depth. We think in soundbites, we argue in slogans and mottos, we talk in short message service (SMS). We often have short attention spans and obsess about celebrity and vanity. But against this cultural background we also feel a keen desire for depth—deeper knowledge, deeper love and deeper relationship—through all the experiences and complexity of life. The results of the most recent National Church Life Survey confirm this desire for depth. As a church, we desire spiritual growth and spiritual depth.

This Commitment Series is a passage into *Deeper Places*, and the book of the Psalms is the vehicle that will take us there. The Psalms functioned as the Jewish book of common prayer. Used in synagogues and private worship, it was also Jesus' book of common prayer. Since then, the monks, the writers of our Anglican prayer book, and the reformers all centered Christian worship around these ancient Israelite songs.

But they are not just songs for Israelites, or even for Christians alone, they are songs for the human soul. And so, we go to them to learn a language of prayer through all the contours of human experience, and all the ups and downs of the Christian life. We go to the Psalms to learn how to deal with pain, suffering, doubt and death before we arrive at these things. They teach us to pray when we don't want to, and to praise God when we don't feel like it. The Psalms mature our conversation with God. The outstanding contemplative Christian writer and pastor, Eugene Petersen, said of the Psalms,

*"Left to ourselves, we will pray to some god who speaks what we like hearing, or to the part of God that we manage to understand. But what is critical is that we speak to the God who speaks to us, and to everything that he speaks to us...The Psalms train us in that conversation."*

Over six weeks, this booklet of devotionals takes us into the Psalms as they interact with the human experience of complexity, brokenness, lament, desire, contentment and enjoyment. Every week there are five psalms and readings that explore the topic of the week. We encourage you to use them in your private devotions during the Term 4 Commitment Series, and to also use them for encouragement and discussion in your small groups.

Together, let us go to deeper places in our walk with God...

# complexity

kəm'pleksəti/

*noun*

the state or quality of being intricate or complicated.

"an issue of great complexity"

*synonyms:* complication, problem, difficulty, twist, turn, convolution,  
entanglement;

*antonyms:* simplicity

a factor involved in a complicated process or situation.

plural noun: complexities

"the complexities of family life"

## **Week 1, Day 1: The Blessed One**

### **Reading: Psalm 1**

*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked...  
But whose delight is in the law of the Lord.*

We don't use the word blessing very often outside of church, but a blessed life is what all humans are after. Of course, we might have different definitions, but "a blessed life" has universal appeal. It means more than just being happy; it refers to being whole and at peace, experiencing total well-being. Psalm 1 shows us that the key to blessing involves meditation, which might be a surprise, but it's not talking about visualizing success, or emptying our minds. We are to meditate on the law of the Lord; to delight in it, chewing over it and letting the word of God fill our minds.

The great Christian writer Eugene Peterson has shown that the original meaning of the Hebrew word used here for "law" (Heb. *torah*) comes from a verb that means to throw something to hit its mark, as in a javelin. This means to meditate on Scripture does not mean to study it for informational purposes. God's words are living truths "hurled at our heart", which are designed to penetrate our souls, perhaps wounding and then healing them.

When looking closely at the psalm, we discover that even an ungodly life that leads to destruction is also based on some form of "meditation." It begins with "walking in the counsel of the ungodly." So we have a choice: to pursue total well-being by walking in God's wisdom, letting his words penetrate our hearts, or we will meditate on the counsel of worldly, human wisdom, which has an end-point of destruction. That choice confronts all who wish for a blessed life.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. What are some of the concepts of blessing you see in our society, and that you have held?
2. What are some of the promises this psalm holds out to the person who delights in the word of God?

### **Prayer for the day**

Dear Lord,

Thank you for giving us your word, your law, your wisdom.

Forgive us for meditating on all sorts of ungodly counsel.

May your words penetrate our souls as we chew them over in our minds.

Let them do their work in our hearts that we might be blessed and might prosper under your watchful care.

Amen

## **Week 1, Day 2: The Complex Context of Blessing**

### **Reading: Psalm 2**

*The kings of the earth rise up and band together against the Lord and against his anointed... (but) the One enthroned in heaven laughs.*

If you compare v.1-3 of the first two psalms, the differences are astonishing. Psalm 1 is personal and individual; Psalm 2 is corporate, concerning kings, nations, peoples and rulers. Psalm 1 has calm verbs like “walk” and “meditate” and “delight”, while the action of Psalm 2 is aggressive and violent (“conspire”, “take their stand”, “break their chains”). Psalm 1 looks at the internal world of the person who thirsts after God, but Psalm 2 shows us that such an inner journey takes place in an outwardly hostile environment, governed by combative kings and rulers.

It must be good to be God, though. We tend to cower at the reign of arrogant governments, or at least feel powerless to stop their march against God and his will for human life. But he scoffs at them, rebukes them, and ultimately will install his own Son to rule the universe forevermore.

So, what are we to make of these two psalms? Though the very last line of Psalm 2 encourages us that blessing comes to all who take refuge in God, we learn that such blessing comes in the midst of all the varied contours of life in a broken world, and in a world that openly and brazenly plots against God. He will send his Son in all finality—and we have had a foretaste of his rule in Jesus’ earthly life, in which not even death could prevail against him. But until that day the promise of blessing is no simple vision; it is a contoured, complex journey indeed.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Have you been surprised that the journey of following God has not been simpler or easier, given the great promises contained in Scripture?
2. How do these first two psalms correct our expectations of a blessed Christian life, and how do they encourage us to press on?

### **Prayer for the day**

King of heaven,

We praise you for your majesty, and the majesty of your Son,  
in the midst of a scornful world and arrogant leaders.

Help us to celebrate your rule through all the ups and downs of life.

Assist us to serve your Son today, in anticipation of his everlasting rule,

For we take refuge in you.

Amen

## **Week 1, Day 3: Heart-felt atheism**

### **Reading: Psalm 14**

*The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."*

We saw in Psalm 2 that the blessing of God's presence that is advanced in Psalm 1 is not an idyllic escape from the real world, but will be experienced amid conflict and rebellion, from kings and peoples. But this is not the only threat to delighting in the word and will of God as held out in the first song. There is an ongoing risk of heart-felt atheism within us.

Heart-felt atheism is not an elaborately constructed intellectual system that argues away the existence of God. Rather, it's the denial of God's goodness, his instruction, his very existence, because we would rather do whatever we please. Psalm 14 doesn't open by saying the fool *in his mind*, but the fool *in his heart* says, "there is no God". Aldous Huxley, the eminent English novelist and author of *Brave New World*, captured this sentiment,

*"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; and consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure philosophy. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do."*

Though David presents heart-felt atheism as an attribute in his enemies, the Apostle Paul picks up on Psalm 14 in Romans 3, and shows us that we are all susceptible to saying in our heart, "there is no God". We will need to recognise and then resist our own heart-felt atheism, if we are to experience the presence of God with us (v.5).

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Have you found yourself thinking like Huxley—there is no God or no meaning—simply so you can do whatever you want to do?
2. What is the outcome of the heart-felt atheism referred to in Psalm 14?

### **Prayer for the day**

Lord of my heart,  
Protect it from folly,  
Protect it from denying you, simply so that I might do evil.  
Fill my heart with delight in you, and be present with me.  
For I take refuge in you.  
Amen

## **Week 1, Day 4: Beaut-attitudes?**

**Reading: Matthew 5:1-12**

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

An old English minister once pronounced these eight promises at the start of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, as "beaut-attitudes". Which sounds neat, but is this all they are: just an outstanding outlook or a perfect perspective on the Christian life?

Life is not neat. The Christian life is not neat. We need more than a beaut attitude, and more than a perspective. We need promise. And so each beatitude contains for us not just a Christian approach to life amid the complexity, but also a promise for the future. Those who trust in Christ will be comforted, and satisfied, and called children of God, and so on. But the first and last beatitude also contain a promise for the present: disciples can be sure that right now, "theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven."

Blessing is not just for later: in some sense, the kingdom of heaven is present with us now, and this reminds us that we will inherit the unending blessings of God forevermore. So the Beatitudes are announcements more than attitudes, that people who pursue God in this most upside-down way are blessed already, and have great blessing to look forward to.

If you pay close attention to v.1-2 you realize that there is more. The Beatitudes are announcements of blessing to the disciples. But they are also an invitation to the crowds—to experience the early-blessings of the kingdom right now, by following Christ in the ups and downs of the untidy Christian life. And, while doing so to anticipate the blessing to come. Promise, announcement, invitation—so much more than a beaut attitude.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Do you think of yourself as presently blessed, in the untidy ups and downs of the Christian life, or does it only feel like blessing is in the future?
2. What is one promise/announcement/invitation from the beatitudes that you want to claim today?

### **Prayer for the day**

God in heaven,

Warm our spirits with the promise that we already have the kingdom of heaven in some measure.

Steel our souls with the announcement that we will inherit all things if we trust in Christ.

Remind us of the upside-down nature of living for you.

Amen



## **Week 1, Day 5: Apart from you...**

### **Reading: Psalm 16**

*I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing."*

David does exaggerate, doesn't he?

You would think that the King of Israel, at almost the zenith of the Kingdom, might have good things in his life beyond his relationship with God. Like family. Like wealth. Like food and clothing and shelter and friends and music and more. Even within the psalm itself he points to noble countrymen, secure boundaries, an abundant inheritance, and perhaps even an evolving hope in eternal life.

If we trace through each of these things, we then discover that David is saying that God is his safest refuge: the plea of v.1 is answered with the confidence of v.8. God is his supreme treasure, whom both he and his people recognize, unlike those who run after other gods (v.2-4). God is his sovereign provider, who has secured his borders and inheritance (v.5, 6), and God is his wisest counsel who instructs him day and night (v.7). And because God has been all this for David in this life, he has a healthy confidence that God will be all of this, even beyond the grave.

We know something that David didn't, and our New Testaments pick up v.9-11 to show the grounds for David's healthy confidence: Jesus tasted death for us, so that we won't be abandoned to death. And Jesus was raised from death that we might grab hold of the eternal pleasures of God. Psalm 16 reveals that through the complexity of the Christian life, God will bring us even through death to full and everlasting pleasure, if he is our safest refuge, our supreme treasure, our sovereign provider, and our wise counselor, through Jesus Christ.

So, perhaps it is no exaggeration at all to say, Apart from you... Perhaps that is a prerequisite for all who wish to go to a deeper place with God.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Would you be able to say, "Apart from you I have no good thing"? What is stopping you?
2. How does the life, death and resurrection of Jesus give us confidence that God's protection, rich presence, provision, and wisdom will be ours eternally?

### **Prayer for the day**

Pray Psalm 16 as your prayer today.

# broken

brəʊk(ə)n/

*verb*

past participle of break.

*adjective*

adjective: **broken**

having been broken.

"he had a broken arm"

*synonyms*: smashed, shattered, burst, fragmented, splintered, shivered, crushed, snapped, rent, torn, ruptured, separated, severed, in bits, in pieces;

*antonyms*: whole, unbroken

(of a relationship) ended, typically through infidelity.

"a broken marriage"

(of a person) having given up all hope; despairing.

"he went to his grave a broken man"

*synonyms*: defeated, beaten, vanquished, overpowered, overwhelmed, subdued

## **Week 2, Day 1: Hide and seek**

### **Reading: Psalm 139**

*Search me, God, and know my heart;  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Hide and seek is a favourite children's game. Actually, it's not just for kids, there's even an adult hide and seek world championship held in Italy each year (called *Nascodino*, the Italian word for hide and seek). The rules are a little different, and the seeking team is made up of Italian rugby players whose main job is to discover hiding teams and then "prevent" them from reaching the safe place in the middle of the playing zone. *Nascodino* goes on for two days until the final winner is declared.

Many adults have a *nascodino* of their own, hiding from God, just as the first humans did in Eden. Even as Christians, at the very time that we declare his praises, we can attempt to hide our true selves from God. What a fruitless game! Psalm 139 begins with the affirmation that God has not only searched *for* us, but has searched *us* and knows us. He knows our thoughts and our ways. He knows our words before we say them, and he knew us before we were born because he made us. There is nowhere, no place, we can go to escape him. We cannot hide in heaven or hell.

It appears that the Psalm takes a sinister twist in v.19. But the real turn comes in v.17 where, rather than hiding from God, David resolves to think God's thoughts after him. The Psalm lands where we need to land: not hiding from God, but inviting him to search us, and know us and lead us, even unto eternal life.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Have you found yourself hiding from God in one form or another, even as you declare his praises in song and prayer?
2. What part of Psalm 139 encourages you to pursue honesty with God rather than hiding from him?

### **Prayer for the day**

All-knowing One,

I praise you that you know me and guide me and hold me fast.

Forgive me for hiding from you in many ways.

Search me, God, and know my heart, see if there is any offensive way in me,  
And lead me in the way everlasting.

Amen

## **Week 2, Day 2: Create in me a pure heart**

### **Reading: Psalm 51**

*Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.  
Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

The title is unflinching: *A psalm of David when the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.* And the psalm itself is equally unflinching. Having been confronted by his deep and wilful sinfulness, Israel's king does not try to justify himself or rationalise his behaviour or make excuses. He knows that he cannot hide from God. He has been found out, and coming clean is actually the way to do just that, become clean.

David's confession in Psalm 51 is about as open and unobstructed as you could imagine. He has not merely made one little slip, but acknowledges a pattern of sin in his life (v.3) that stretches all the way back to his conception. And he acknowledges God's absolute justice and righteousness. There is no spin here for the king.

Our sin puts a barrier between us and God, even though we know that his presence is engulfing. But the way to move through this barrier is not to try to justify our behaviour, or to try to somehow make up for it (you do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it, v.16). It is only through contrition, confession, and repentance that God can do his work in our lives.

David's confidence in God's forgiveness, cleansing and restoration is muscular, just as his confession is exposing. And there is a movement through this psalm from confession to cleansing, and then to ministry, where David can teach other transgressors of God's ways (v.13). We can have this same confidence, of forgiveness and cleansing, and then to become useful instruments in God's hands. But to experience joyful restoration with God we must first admit our shortcomings with an unflinching openness before him.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Have you been tempted to justify or rationalize your sinful behaviour? What effect did that have on your relationship with God?
2. Have you experienced the same journey as David here: sin, contrition and confession, the joy of salvation, then usefulness in service and ministry?

### **Prayer for the day**

Pray Psalm 51 for yourself today. Try to be specific in your confession of sin.

## **Week 2, Day 3: Like streams in the Negev**

### **Reading: Psalm 126**

*Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev.  
Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.*

The Negev was the desert to the south of Israel, where for the most part everything was bone dry. But apparently, a sudden downpour in the mountains could turn the dry valley into a rushing river and overnight fill the desert with grasses and wildflowers. In other words, the desert rain brought forth colour and life.

The writer of Psalm 126 applies this word picture to our journey with God, particularly to remind us that our tears ought not to be wasted, whether they are the tears of suffering or repentance. It is not automatic that tears will bring forth spiritual life as we journey with God. 2 Corinthians 7:10 advises that there is a difference between godly repentance and worldly sorrow. And suffering can make us better people, if we let it, but it can equally make us bitter people, if we let it. The difference will be the degree to which we give over our brokenness to God, and experience his forgiveness and healing. In that way, we can sow with tears and reap with joy.

Psalm 126 represents the Christian life as there are three verses of joy and three verses of weeping, but joy is the ground note and has the final word. Tim Keller opines,

*“Christians are people who do more of both weeping and laughing than others. We weep more because we see people who are lost, and because we know how much sin grieves God. But we rejoice more because we know that our bad things will work out for good, our good things will never be taken away from us, and the best things are yet to come.”*

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Have you experienced a time when you sowed with tears and reaped with joy?  
Can you remember a time when your tears did not lead to forgiveness and healing?
2. Do you agree that Christians are people who do more of both weeping and laughing than others?

### **Prayer for the day**

Dear Lord,

We do not want to waste our tears of suffering or repentance.

Protect us from worldly sorrow, and from becoming bitter.

We give you our brokenness, and seek your forgiveness and healing.

Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev.

Amen

## **Week 2, Day 4: The dangerous quiet**

### **Reading: Psalm 32**

*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

The greatest boxer who ever lived, Muhammed Ali, is not often associated with silence. He had quick hands and a quick wit—an expert with one-liners and the artful comeback. But even he acknowledged that, “Silence is golden when you can't think of a good answer.”

Quietness has other benefits. To counter the noise and rush of busy, modern life, the mindfulness and minimalist movements have encouraged us to embrace silence, to think, to focus, to rest and to pay attention to what's most important in life.

But quiet can also be dangerous, even in our Christian lives, if that silence is our reticence and unwillingness to admit our failings and confess our transgressions. In Psalm 32, David's silence was like a long strength-sapping illness, so heavy had the Lord laid his sin before him.

In Psalm 32, the result of confession is not only forgiveness. It is noise, sound, song. It is songs of deliverance and the rejoicing of those who have been forgiven (v.7, 11). But, of course, what makes all the difference is the one with whom we break our silence. Queen Elizabeth 1 warned, “Do not tell secrets to those whose faith and silence you have not already tested.” God is the one who takes our secrets, forgives them and turns them into songs. He replaces our silence with singing. His unflinching love surrounds the one who trusts in him.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Have you found yourself unwilling to confess your sins or shortcomings, preferring to groan in silence before God?
2. Psalm 32 starts by saying, “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven”. Why don't we want to confess our sin when it leads to blessing and joy?

### **Prayer for the day**

Dear God,

You are always more ready to listen than we are to talk.

We confess our transgressions before you.

Forgive our sins.

Change our groaning to gladness, and our silence to singing.

For we put our trust in you.

Amen

## **Week 2, Day 5: Move under to move over**

**Reading: James 4:1-10**

*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

In small town America in the 1950s a couple drove down the road in their car. Most of the cars in those days had a front bench seat, and as they drove the wife noticed that in many other cars with couples in the front seat, the woman sat close to the man as he drove along. She asked her husband, "Why is it that we don't sit that close anymore?" He quietly answered, "It wasn't me who moved."

If we are far from God, He hasn't moved. James 4:8 promises that when we draw near to God he will draw near to us. And how we do that is both the simplest thing in the world, and also something that many people find very difficult because it requires us to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, says James. Easy to say, but difficult to do. Easy to understand, but painful to practice because it requires us to jettison our pride. It requires us to look at ourselves and our lives in cold sobriety, to mourn over our sinfulness, to resist the devil (who will then flee from us), and to move ourselves under God's mighty hand.

There are some wonderful promises in this section. God gives us more grace (to humble ourselves). The devil will flee from us (should we resist him). God will lift us up (should we submit ourselves to him). And God will come near to us, if we come near to him. Put simply, we move under him to move closer to him. And then he will lift us up.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Why is pride so difficult to jettison, and humility so hard to embrace?
2. Which of the promises in this section speaks to your soul?

### **Prayer for the day**

Gracious God,  
You show favour to the humble and give grace upon grace.  
Forgive us for our pride and cleanse us from our sin.  
Help us to resist the devil and humbly obey you.  
We move under you, that we might move over to you.  
Lift us up.  
Amen

# lament

lə'mɛnt/

*noun*

a passionate expression of grief or sorrow.

"his mother's night-long laments for his father"

*synonyms:* wail, wailing, lamentation, moan, moaning, groan, weeping, crying, sob, sobbing, keening, howl, complaint;

a complaint.

"there were constant laments about the conditions of employment"

*verb*

express passionate grief about.

"he was lamenting the death of his infant daughter"

*synonyms:* mourn, grieve (for/over), weep for, shed tears for;

express regret or disappointment about something.

"she lamented the lack of shops in the town"

*synonyms:* bemoan, bewail, complain about, deplore, regret, rue;



## **Week 3, Day 1: A cry from the cave**

### **Reading: Psalm 142**

*I cry aloud to the Lord, I plead aloud to the Lord for mercy.  
I pour out my complaint before him, I reveal my trouble to him.*

The word you first notice in Psalm 142 is the word “aloud”—it’s there twice in v.1. Apart from saying grace, and perhaps leading prayer from the front at church, most of our conversation with God is not audible. Perhaps we’re not sure that we’re permitted to speak out loud, apart from in church. Maybe we’re quite sure that we’re not permitted to complain to God out loud. And yet that is precisely what David does in Psalm 142, as he hides in the recesses of a cave from the pursuing Saul. You could imagine the echoes off the cave walls amplified David’s pleas. Aloud indeed.

Lament is a prominent expression in the Psalms, and a major type of song within the book. To lament is to express great sorrow or grief—and out loud is better.

Singer-songwriter Michael Card puts it this way,

*“It seems to me that we do not need to be taught how to lament since we have so many models in Scripture. What we need is simply the assurance that it’s okay to lament. We all carry deep within ourselves a pressurized reservoir of tears. It takes only the right key at the right time to unlock them. In God’s perfect time, these tears can be released to form a healing flood. That’s the beauty and the mystery of the prayer of lament.”*

As David audibly complains from the cave in Psalm 142, he acknowledges his own weakness and details his abandonment at the very time of his attack—no-one stands, no-one cares, there is no refuge (v.4). But his tears bring forth the very healing that Michael Card speaks of. By the end of the psalm David has moved from complaint to praising God’s name, and from isolation to being restored into community (v.7). Not that everything is always neat, as we’ll see in the coming days, but the cry from the cave ends with a statement of God’s generosity.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Do you feel like it’s okay to pour out complaints before God? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree with the words of Michael Card above?

### **Prayer for the day**

Dear Lord,

I cry aloud to you.

Turn my complaints into praises.

Turn my tears into a healing flood.

I am in desperate need, but you are always good to me.

Amen

## **Week 3, Day 2: The sleepless night of the soul**

### **Reading: Psalm 6**

*All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.*

Most of us have had sleepless nights. Perhaps it's too hot to sleep well, or we're worried about the meeting tomorrow, or worried about something else. But some of us know the particular, throbbing sleeplessness of long-term anguish, which torments the body as well as the spirit.

In Psalm 6 there are multiple dimensions to David's pain. It's certainly physical—he is faint and his bones are in agony (v.2)—but it's also spiritual and somehow relates to his enemies, whether they have caused his pain directly or are merely rejoicing over David's distress. Whatever the precise combination of these factors, he is fatigued from extended misery, and urges God to deliver him from death (v.5).

But there is an unusual twist in v.8, where he speaks confidently that God has—past-tense—heard his cries and accepted his prayers. There is an abrupt change of direction, and of certainty. He is so sure that God will deliver him from his deep anguish, that he can speak with confidence that his enemies will be overwhelmed, and that he will be restored because of God's unfailing love. This change is instructive for us; it teaches us that suffering does not have to end for a person to regain their footing and confidence. David's circumstances have not changed by the time he reaches v.8. Instead of waiting for our situation to improve, we need to “pray our difficulties to God.” And that is the point at which we can experience “peace which transcends all understanding” (Phil 4:7). That is the point when the sun sheds light into the sleepless night of the soul.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. When are tears a sign of spiritual strength and character? Are David's tears a sign of spiritual strength?
2. Can you recall a time when you have prayed your difficulties to God? Did you experience peace which transcends normal human understanding?

### **Prayer for the day**

Lord,

Do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath.

Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint.

Heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony.

Turn, Lord, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love.

Amen

### **Week 3, Day 3: The sound of silence**

#### **Reading: Psalm 88**

*But I cry to you for help LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you.  
Why, LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?*

There is a sound to silence. At times it is sweet and peaceful, and enables us to step away from the noise of daily life to contemplate deep and abiding truths, to enjoy some of life's simple pleasures, or even just to rest. But there is a silence that allows no peace, no pleasure, no rest. It is the silence of God, when we speak to him in prayer or consider him in the thoughts of our hearts, but we sense our prayers remain unheard and unanswered, and no pleasing thoughts enter our spirits. Mother Teresa, the eminent Catholic nun who devoted her life to the destitute in the ghettos of Calcutta, India, spoke of the silence that accompanied her work with the sick and wretched, "The silence and emptiness is so great that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear... I call, I cling, I want, and there is no-one to answer, no-one."

The sound of silence is what confronts the writer of Psalm 88, and it will likely confront us all at some stage. The psalmist petitions and pleads as he anticipates death, but is met with only an empty echo.

But it is only "apparent" silence. The writer can sense God's hand, his sovereign reign over the affairs of his despairing situation (denoted by the repetition of "you have" in v.6, 7, 8, 18). And he remains persistent in prayer. Simply by praying we are expressing faith in Him even if we can't muster the strength to praise Him. Many of us just stop praying when we are suffering, or wallow in our silent wonderings. But Psalm 88 reminds us of our need to process our suffering through sustained prayer, and we know that the silence will not last.

#### **Questions to ponder**

1. When have you prayed amid despair, but been met with the apparent silence of God?
2. What does Psalm 88 teach you about processing our suffering through ongoing prayer?

#### **Prayer for the day**

Sovereign Lord,

We praise you that you speak to us in your Scriptures, and in the person of your Son. Forgive us for giving up on you amid our troubles.

Help us to remember your silence is only passing, and to process our pain through sustained prayer.

Use these times and this prayer to draw us closer to you.

Amen

## **Week 3, Day 4: For God has been good to me**

### **Reading: Psalm 13**

*But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.*

“How long, LORD”, is one of the catch-cries of the lament psalms. How long, LORD, must I suffer pain and agony? How long, LORD, will my enemies prevail over me? And perhaps most forlorn of all, How long, LORD, before you show your face to me? Each of these cries are present in Psalm 13:1-4.

But in the midst of this long stretch of despair, in v.5 David switches to a note of firm resolution and hope. Within those early four verses David does not only question God. He also questions himself, and his spiritual knowledge, as it were. By analysing his inner hope in God, the dark reality of his situation is not permitted to stand alone, but stands in tension with the reality of God's nature and promises. Hope arises when a recollection of God's goodness, and love, and even salvation, is injected into an open heart. This heart has been wounded by the reality of life, but can also be determined to rejoice in God's nature and salvation.

“For he has been good to me”, is not just a distant memory, but is an ongoing truth throughout all the uneven realities of our earthly lives.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. What is the thing that causes you to cry out, How long, LORD?
2. How has the Lord been good to you, and how does that change your resolve during a long stretch of despair?

### **Prayer for day**

Pray Psalm 13 as your prayer for the day!

## **Week 3, Day 5: The scorn of those around us**

### **Reading: Psalm 44**

*You have made us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us...  
All this came upon us, though we had not forgotten you.*

Detroit, Michigan, was once known as Motor City because the city was inseparably connected to motor vehicle production. With Fords, Dodges, Chevrolets, Chryslers and Cadillacs all rolling out of Detroit, the city prospered through one Great Depression and two World Wars. In the 1950s, more than three of every four cars in the world were built in Detroit. But just a few decades later, the motor industry has gone, along with more than half the citizens. Motor City went into bankruptcy and Detroit is now the punchline for jokes, and a byword for urban decay and high crime, through no fault of its own.

We can feel the same as the Christian church in an increasingly indifferent or even hostile culture. We previously occupied a place of honour in society, but now we are being pushed to the margins, and viewed as outdated, suspicious, or even sinister when all we have done, from our viewpoint, is to keep the faith.

We are not the first to feel this, and no doubt will not be the last. In Psalm 44 the nation of Israel laments how they have fallen into disgrace, particularly in view of their previously lofty position (v.1-8). There was no need for the people to repent of obvious sin, as their suffering was not connected to any rebellion—they had not forgotten God nor forsaken his covenant promises (v.17). Still, they call on God to visit them and restore them. As the people of God today, perhaps having our own wilderness experience in modern culture as the “peoples shake their heads at us” (v.14), we can echo the petitions of this song. In the face of scorn and derision (v.13), we can cry out to God to help us. We can be confident of his unfailing love.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Do you feel surprised that Christians are increasingly being pushed to the margins of culture, given our previous prominence?
2. Is our current position in society an indication that God has given up on us, or that we have obviously moved away from his ways? How does this psalm help us to understand our place in the world?

### **Prayer for the day**

Dear God of the nations,

We praise you for being with your people throughout the generations.

Remind us that you are with us today, when the peoples shake their heads at us.

Rise up and help us; rescue us because of your unfailing love.

We will praise your name forever!

Amen

# desire

dɪˈzʌɪə/

## *noun*

a strong feeling of wanting to have something or wishing for something to happen.

"he resisted public desires for choice in education"

*synonyms:* wish, want;

## *verb*

strongly wish for or want (something).

"he never achieved the status he so desired"

*synonyms:* wish for, want, long for, yearn for, crave, set one's heart on, hanker after/for, pine for/after, thirst for, itch for, be desperate for, be bent on, have a need for, covet, aspire to;

## **Week 4, Day 1: Let me look upon the beauty of the Lord**

### **Reading: Psalm 27**

*One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.*

We humans have a funny relationship with desires, and a funny approach to dealing with them. On the one hand, we are encouraged by the world around us to indulge our desires, in the expectation that quick gratification will bring us real life. Alternately, we can believe that suppressing our desires will lead us on the path to fulfilment. But we were built with desire, so restraint will be just as faulty as indulgence.

We need our desires to be liberated, so that the deepest desires of our heart are fulfilled in relationship with the Deepest Heart, with God himself. In Psalm 27, David faces the potential threat of enemy invasion (v.1-3) and parental abandonment (v.10, i.e. outward attack and inward disquiet). And he imagines a reordered life, in which he is neither king nor son, but a priest living in the temple courts permanently, enjoying unbroken contact with the presence of God.

To “gaze upon the beauty of the Lord” (v.4) is to appreciate God and sense him for all that he is: his majesty, perfection, wisdom, purity, compassion and love. And to “seek him in his temple” is to inquire of his will for us, which we discover in Scripture. Whilst we cannot be plucked out of our normal lives, any more than David could swap careers from king to priest, it will take quiet time for this profound sense of God’s presence to become real to us. The rest of Psalm 27 anticipates a long process of calling and seeking, teaching and leading (by God), waiting and persevering. This might sound more involved than instantaneous gratification, or even harsh restraint, but if our desires are to be liberated, we need more than a hasty look upon the beauty of the Lord.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. What is your relationship to desire like? Are you more likely to indulge your desires, or suppress them?
2. How will you seek to integrate “gazing” and “seeking/inquiring” into your life?

### **Prayer for the day**

Beautiful One,

We praise you for all that you are: majestic, perfect, pure, gracious, wise and loving. Forgive us for seeking ultimate satisfaction in the rapid indulgence of our desires, or in the harsh restraint of them.

We know we were built to desire you, to live with you and to live for you.

Help us gaze upon your beauty, and inquire of your will, without rushing.

Amen

## **Week 4, Day 2: Whom have I in heaven but You?**

### **Reading: Psalm 73**

*Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.*

The Bible is relentlessly realistic about the injustice and contradictions of earthly life. It is not given to sentimentality and idealism, and does not trick us into thinking that life will be fair. But how do we deal with our doubts, confusion and anger as we look at the world around us, where the wicked seem to prosper in a carefree existence? This Psalm of Asaph acknowledges that the fortune of the wicked is not just a temporary blip in history, but the settled pattern of the world. In fact, Asaph nearly lost his faith—that's what he admits when he says, "my feet had almost slipped, I nearly lost my foothold" (v.2). His deep, unanswered, intellectual questions and internal anger had left him dangling in a precarious situation—out of balance with so many doubts he was ready to abandon faith in God entirely.

The turning point comes in v.15-17 when Asaph enters the sanctuary of God, that is, his presence in the temple. This is when God turns from being just the subject of philosophy or speculation, and becomes the object of worship. And this is the key to liberating our desires, when we see God as the ultimate desire, and the one ultimately worthy of our greatest desire. All else, like the fortune of the wicked, will fade away. Our relationship with God is an end in itself, satisfying and delightful. He alone can satisfy us, uphold us, love us and support us.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Have you envied the lives of others, believing that they had a carefree, fortunate life, with all their desires met?
2. How can you remind yourself that apart from God we have no good thing?

### **Prayer for the day**

Sovereign Lord,

I praise You for being You.

Forgive me for envying the lives of others when I have You.

Please be for me not a subject of abstract philosophy, but the object of my worship.

Content me with your goodness,

Be the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Amen



## **Week 4, Day 3: The Great Command, our Great Desire**

**Reading: Mark 12:28-34**

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul  
and with all your mind and with all your strength.*

Loving your neighbour as yourself has become known as the Golden Rule, the benchmark of how humans can relate well to each other. But the Golden Rule is not the first and most important commandment; the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all that we have—heart, soul, mind, strength. Heart, soul, mind and strength are not meant to be neat little divisions that indicate our emotions, spirit, intellect and body; they are listed as if to say, with all that you have and are, love God. We give to him our deepest affections, our most sincere gratitude, our most robust efforts; we let his word and will shape our intentional decisions, our greatest longings, and our firmest hopes.

This is not easy in our culture where there are so many competing voices vying for our affection and devotion. But there have always been attractive alternatives to loving God with all we are. An old Creole proverb says, “Tell me who you love and I will tell you who you are.” How would we answer that question honestly, and what would it say about us?

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was once asked about the secret of his “success”. Booth responded, “From the day I got the poor of London on my heart and the vision for what Jesus Christ would do for them, I made up my mind that God should have all of William Booth there was; and if anything has been achieved, it is because God has had all the adoration of my heart, all the power of my will and all the influence of my life.”

In short, William Booth refused to return God’s whole-hearted love half-heartedly. We should pray that we might do the same.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. How would you answer that question, “Tell me who you love...” and what does that say about you?
2. What gets in the way of loving God whole-heartedly, and how can you navigate through, or around, those obstacles?

### **Prayer for day**

Great lover of my soul,  
I praise you for your whole-hearted love for me.  
Forgive me for my half-hearted response, my split loyalties and my divided attention.  
Help me to love you with all that I am, and all that I have.  
Amen.

## **Week 4, Day 4: Spirit-filled and fuelled**

**Reading: Galatians 5:16-26**

*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

This week we have been thinking about desires, because only when their fulfilment is in God will we find fulfilment in our own lives. Our desires need liberating or re-ordering. But our natural tendency is to take charge of this process, and try to liberate our desires in our own strength. We might draw up a long list of do's and don'ts. But as we saw in the first reading of this week's devotions, Galatians 5 counsels that a new set of regulations will not bring the change we want, if they're driven by harsh, human restraint alone.

We need outside help. And a spiritual solution. The Holy Spirit is that help and solution, who changes our desires. He changes them from things borne out of our natural, sinful nature, to the things God wants to fill our lives with. He leads us in this (v.18), but the Spirit is not like the leader in a game of Follow the Leader, in which we just mimic the example of the one out front. He is not a leader like the pace car in a car race, behind which all the racers follow using their own fuel. He is a leader like a locomotive on a train. We do not follow in our strength, and we cannot trail him using our own fuel. We are led by his power.

So walking by, living by, being led by the Spirit means we stay hooked up to the divine source of power. He will bring forth the fruit of change within us; fruit which consists of both inward desires and outward actions. He is the fuel that produces the fruit; he is the power who changes our desires.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Do you find yourself struggling against the desires of the sinful nature in your own strength?
2. Have you prayed for the Holy Spirit to reorder your desires so that you live for God? Looking back on your life, can you detect that the Spirit has brought forth change in your life?

### **Prayer for the day**

Spirit of God,

We need your help, we need your power and we need your leading.

Change our desires so that we want to live for God.

Fuel our spirits with your desires and keep us attentive to your guidance, so that you might produce fruit in our lives.

Amen

## **Week 4, Day 5: The song of songs**

### **Reading: Psalm 40**

*Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll.  
I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.*

The title of this psalm, like many around it, shows that it is reserved for “the director of music”. It is so precious that it was entrusted to the most skilled of Israel’s musicians. So perhaps it is not surprising that the opening lines of this psalm were committed to music by some of Ireland’s most skilled musicians, the enduring rock band U2, in their track which is simply titled “40”.

This is a new song (v.3) to be sung together, not for private meditation, and declares the wonder of desires that are firmly satisfied in the salvation and works of God. It suggests that even in the midst of trouble and personal sin (v.12), our desires can be liberated and reoriented towards God. In fact, “desire” is mentioned three times in this song. In v.14 trust in God’s salvation leads him to plead that those who desire his ruin be turned away in shame and disgrace. In v.6 he concedes that burnt offerings were not what God desired most from him, but that the very core of relationship with God is the desire to do his will in the depths of our hearts (v.8).

Verses 6-8 are picked up in Hebrews 10, and applied to our saviour Jesus. Ultimately, he was the one with liberated desires, with longings directed towards God and satisfied in God. Though we can see David, Israel, ourselves, and the church in v.8, in the words of Spurgeon, “we will let the sun shine even though it conceals the stars.” Jesus is the one who trusted the LORD perfectly (v.3-4); he is the subject of the song of songs.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Have you experienced the joy of experiencing fulfilment in God, and having your desires sated in him, even during trouble?
2. In what ways is Jesus the fulfilment of the words of Psalm 40?

### **Prayer for the day**

We praise you Lord Jesus for doing the will of God, even unto death.

We praise you for trusting in God, and for declaring his wonder to us in your life, death and resurrection from the pit.

Incline our hearts to follow you, so that we too can say, “Here I am, I desire to do your will”.

Amen

# contentment

kən'tentm(ə)nt/

*noun*

a state of happiness and satisfaction.

"he found contentment in living a simple life in the country"

*synonyms:* contentedness, content, satisfaction, fulfilment;

## **Week 5, Day 1: Riches cannot save**

### **Reading: Psalm 49**

*Do not be overawed when others grow rich, when the splendour of their houses increases; for they will take nothing with them when they die.*

Things can look pretty slick in this part of the world. Flick through the real-estate pages of the *Manly Daily* and you find impressive houses; check out who has the most followers on twitter or Instagram and you see the rich, the powerful, the famous; take a look at the leaders of the business world—their lives often look very impressive indeed. It is easy to be overawed by these pictures of success. This psalm resets our vision by reminding us that there is one thing money cannot buy, and that is life itself. We all die. The foolish and the wise. Verses 13 to 16 speak of those with foolish confidence in themselves and their wealth, and reminds us that death ultimately takes us all.

As we think about contentment this week it's important to get things into perspective and remember that the one certainty in life is death. Riches can't ransom from death. God alone is able to ransom our souls (v.15). So, do not be overawed when a person becomes rich. Remember where your hope lies. In the words of 1 Peter 1: 18-19 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ."

As we think about what makes us content, we are reminded that trusting in material riches is a foolish path. The wisdom of God challenges the wisdom of the world.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Are you tempted to fear the rich or perhaps be overly impressed by wealth?
2. Are you content right now? How does this psalm challenge you to think differently about what leads to contentment?

### **Prayer for the day**

Almighty God,

Help me not be overawed when others grow rich.

Remind me that all are destined for the grave.

Thank you that you will redeem me from death and take me to yourself.

Help me think rightly about the riches the world offers.

Amen

## **Week 5, Day 2: Trust leads to contentment**

### **Reading: Psalm 62**

*Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him.*

Where do you find your security? Be honest now. Though you know the answer should be in God, where do you turn in times of trouble? How did you respond the last time things were going wrong in your life? Did you work harder, did you spend a lot of time talking to others about the situation, did you see a counsellor, or seek answers on google? Did *you* decide what needed to happen for you to be alright again?

This psalm reminds us where we should always go. Once again, David is surrounded by enemies (v.3, 4) and he reminds himself that God is his rock, his salvation, his fortress. In v.5, he urges his soul to remember this. In v.8, he reminds *us all* to remember this, “Trust in him at all times, you people. Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.”

David describes himself as a tottering fence—someone about to collapse under attack. Where does he turn? Not to people—they are but a breath whether low or high born. Nor does he trust in riches. “Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.”

People will fail us and our circumstances can change in the blink of an eye. But we can find rest where David found rest: in God alone. Just like David, we can preach this to ourselves. Just like David, we will find contentment in our circumstances when we remember that “Power belongs to you, God, and with you, Lord, is unfailing love.”

Trust in God at all times is the ‘sermon’ of this psalm. Continue to preach it to yourself.

### **Questions to ponder?**

1. What might contentment in difficult circumstances look like?
2. How can you increase the contentment you feel in your current circumstance?

### **Prayer for the day**

Oh Lord,  
You are my rock and my salvation.  
Give me a heart that turns to you first.  
Remind me of your great love for your people  
And your sovereignty over all my life.  
Amen

## **Week 5, Day 3: Contentment leads to generosity**

### **Reading: Psalm 112**

*Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands  
...wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever.*

Generosity is the mark of a content person. When people can trust the Lord in times of trouble they are also able to trust in good times. As we saw in the previous reading, trust in hard times looks like dependence on the Lord for everything.

And what does that trust look like in good times? It looks like giving freely, and conducting our affairs with justice. We don't need to hoard what we have or tightly look out for number one in our decisions about life.

When a baby is born people often want to work out who they look like? Are they more like their mother or father? As children get older the question might turn to talents or traits that have been inherited. In a similar way, believers are to be shaped more and more into the image of their Father in heaven. Just as he is generous with his love, we are to be generous with all we have. Just as he is our protector, we are able to protect others, for example by freely scattering our gifts to the poor v.9.

The psalm is realistic about life in this world by acknowledging the blessings we can anticipate and also the trouble. In v.4-6 we are reminded that in darkness light will dawn on those who like their Father are gracious, compassionate and righteous. When we are content with our lot in life as children of a powerful and loving God, not only is there no need to fear trouble, but we are also freed to be generous with all that we have been blessed with.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. What blessings flow to those who are generous, just and compassionate?
2. Does your generosity, or lack thereof, say something about your contentment?

### **Prayer for the day**

Gracious Father,

Thank you for your generosity in all you have done for us.

Thank you for your generosity in all that you have given us.

Please help us, in turn, to be generous to others.

Amen

## **Week 5, Day 4: Whole-hearted generosity**

**Reading: Mark 12: 41-44**

*Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.*

Slow down. Read this story carefully. Mark wants us to notice what is happening. It is not a story, it is history. Jesus was there. Mark recorded what happened that day at the temple.

Jesus watched. What did he see? As the rich threw in their substantial amounts of coins what did he hear?

Jesus watched. What did he notice? As the widow threw in her small coins what did he hear?

What did he want his disciples to know? He said to the disciples, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

Jesus is interested in our hearts. He is interested in who we trust. What did the widow’s giving reveal about her heart and her trust?

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Who do you trust? What does your giving reveal about your heart?
2. Does being wealthy make it harder to see who provides all we need?

### **Prayer for the day**

Lord Jesus,

We hold ourselves back from you.

We hold our riches back from you.

Forgive us and change our hearts to be whole-hearted, with our riches, with our selves.

Help us to be like the widow.

Help us to trust you with all our life.

Amen



## **Week 5, Day 5: The key to finding contentment**

**Reading: 1 Timothy 6:6-19**

*Godliness with contentment is great gain.*

The desire to be rich is a temptation that comes to most of us. How often do we think that more money will solve the problems of our lives? Heed the warning here: the desire for riches can have a devastating effect on our spiritual lives. We are led into temptations that can eventually lead to our ruin. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." The desire for money can replace the desire for God. Like a cancer of the heart, at first we are not even aware of its presence but slowly and surely it spreads to affect all of who we are. We no longer love God with all our heart and soul and mind. We serve money rather than God. Could this be true of you?

Listen to this: "Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith." And what is the antidote to this poison, that whispers trust in me, give yourself to me? It is to flee to God and to pursue righteousness and godliness. Specifically, it is to be generous with the riches with which we find ourselves.

Godliness with contentment is indeed great gain. If you seek contentment, you need to know where to look. There is no longer a place in our lives for desiring to be rich for our own sake. We are to look to God for contentment, and to use all that he has given us for his glory.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. What are we, who are rich, to do with our wealth in the world?
2. What does godliness with contentment look like in your life?

### **Prayer for the day**

All glory, and praise and power belong to you, our Lord.

Help us to take hold of the eternal life to which you have called us.

Our hope is in you, who richly provides us with everything.

Help us to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share.

Amen

# enjoyment

ɪnˈdʒɔɪmənt/

*noun*

the state or process of taking pleasure in something.

"the enjoyment of a good wine"

*synonyms:* pleasure, entertainment, amusement, diversion, recreation, relaxation;

*antonyms:* displeasure

a thing that gives pleasure.

plural noun: **enjoyments**

"one of his particular enjoyments was campfire singing"

the action of possessing and benefiting from something.

*synonyms:* benefit, advantage, use, possession, ownership, blessing,

favour, exercise, endowment, availability

"the enjoyment of one's rights"

*antonyms:* lack

## **Week 6, Day 1: Ruler of the world**

### **Reading: Psalm 9**

*I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.*

It's an interesting time to be alive—national and global politics, rumours of wars, terrorism and natural disasters all contribute to feelings of uncertainty, insecurity and sorrow. It can be tempting to see pictures on the news and hear of countless tragedies and think, “Lord, what on earth is going on?” Even while we praise God and pray to him, there is still suffering and hardship.

Psalm 9 is a great foundation for responding with joy in the face of hardship. David is supplying words for our suffering and our questions, by beginning with words of praise! The context of the psalm is battle and setback, but the focus is the character and activity of God. Throughout these verses, David holds fast to the truth that God is more powerful than his enemies and is concerned for his struggles. He praises God for his power over his enemies (v.1-8) and for his continual presence (v.9-12). Rather than giving into despair or questioning God's love or power, David affirms the destiny of the wicked (v.14-17), and concludes that God provides hope for the downcast (v.18) and petitions God for victory (v.19-20).

By starting with a posture of praise and rejoicing, David puts our struggles and concerns in perspective: our God reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He rules the world in righteousness and judges the people with equity. We can praise and rejoice in this God who has never forsaken those whom he loves, who is sovereign and triumphant, and who is faithful and fair.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. How do the opening two verses set the tone for this psalm? How might they set the tone for our own struggles if we begin with this posture before God?
2. What personal ways can you praise God today for how he rules the world and for his activity amid your struggle?

### **Prayer for the day**

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that your good character and your faithful activity are greater than any circumstance that I may face.

Thank you that you are more powerful than my enemy, and that you are concerned for my struggles.

Forgive me when I fail to turn to you.

Help me to praise you with trust and joy, because your character never changes.

Amen

## **Week 6, Day 2: Joy in my heart forever**

### **Reading: Psalm 100**

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.*

We sing the song “Joy” in our church services often. You know the one; it probably gets stuck in your head every time: “Joy in my heart forever, joy in my heart forever, join in the song of heaven, Christ be our joy forever!”

It’s a simple chorus that captures the essence of Psalm 100, and of what happens when we know God and his love. We find contentment in him and we are filled with his praise; we find that our primary and deepest joy and satisfaction comes from him. This psalm is an invitation to this enjoyment; an invitation to enter God’s presence with songs of joy, an affirmation of who he is, and an exhortation to thankful praise and worship.

In the Psalms, joy is expressed through verbally rejoicing in God, and it is best expressed in community, shared with other members of God’s family. This psalm is a corporate call, for “all the earth” to worship God with joyful gladness. It’s a psalm about thanksgiving and about knowing God, bidding his people to enter his presence and enjoy him together.

Psalm 100 closes with the words “For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” May this good and faithful and enduring love inspire us in our thanks and praise of him, and may we truly experience his joy in our hearts as we worship him forever. (And if the “Joy” song is stuck in your head now, hopefully it fills you with joy in your heart today.) 😊

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Do you worship God with joy and gladness? Is joy a common feeling that you have in your relationship with the Lord?
2. How might you increase your inner experience of gratitude and rejoicing for the spiritual blessings that we have in Christ?

### **Prayer for the day**

Oh Lord our God,

We praise you, for you made us, and we are yours.

Fill our hearts with joy and gladness when we don’t feel those things.

Lift our eyes to see your goodness and your faithfulness, that we might overflow with thankfulness and praise.

Amen

## **Week 6, Day 3: Forget not his benefits**

### **Reading: Psalm 103**

*Praise the Lord, my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits.*

What does it mean to benefit from something? We might receive benefits from our employer like health insurance, superannuation, or a holiday package. We might participate in a benefit to raise money for a specific cause. Or we may benefit from a public service, or someone's kindness, or careful planning or preparation for something.

It might sound odd to apply this terminology to our relationship with God. A benefit is something that is advantageous, and to benefit from something means to derive advantage or profit. But as David begins to list the benefits we derive from being in a relationship with the Lord in v.3-19, we see that these "benefits" really do profit us in the most wonderful ways. In his goodness and love for us, he has shown us great mercy in rescuing us from death (v.3-4) and forgiving our sins (v.9-12); he gives us good gifts (v.5); he is just and compassionate and gracious (v.6, 8, 13). We know the love of God by the goodness he shows to us. The natural result of this should be to fill us with joy and thanksgiving, and make our hearts well up with praise! The experience of the love of God through his benefits is the very foundation of joy in the Psalms.

How often do we forget the truths and benefits of God's goodness and love during our day-to-day pressures? May we be reminded by this psalm of the life-changing, joy-inducing, praise-provoking love of our Father.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Look at the actions of God in v.3-5. How does each of these actions benefit you practically?
2. What claims of God's goodness and his benefits in Psalm 103 do you most need to grasp personally right now?

### **Prayer for the day**

Dear Father,

With all my inmost being I praise you for your goodness and love.

Thank you for your benefits, and forgive me when I forget them.

Remind me through your compassionate grace of your great blessings and good gifts.

May I experience your love afresh today.

Fill me with the joy of your salvation and your presence.

Amen

## **Week 6, Day 4: Sing for joy**

**Reading: Psalms 149 & 150**

*Sing to the Lord a new song,  
his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.*

The book of Psalms closes with a resounding symphony of joyful worship. What a note to leave us on, as we have journeyed through this book comprising every human emotion and experience.

Joy needs words for its expression. But in the Psalms we are not just exhorted to use words, but to sing and make music to God. We are encouraged to use musical instruments to stretch the potential for this expression of joy as far as possible! Not only can we praise him with our voices and instruments, but with our physical gestures: we're exhorted to clap (Psalm 47:1), to lift up our hands (Psalm 134:2), to bow (Psalm 95:6), to kneel (Psalm 95:6), and to dance (Psalm 149:3 & 150:4).

The picture in these two psalms is one of buoyant praise, the pinnacle of a life of enjoyment of God. Psalm 150 is the climax of the climax. We are exhorted 13 times in six verses to praise the Lord. Why should we praise him? Because of what he has done ("his acts of power," v.2) and because of who he is ("his surpassing greatness" v.2). How should we praise him? The sense of this psalm seems to be, "with everything you've got!" Use your breath to blow the trumpet, use your fingers to play the harp and lyre, use your hand to hit the timbrel (tambourine), use your whole body to dance.

There is a festive, joyous air to these verses. Worship is not to be a somber, formal exercise. Yes, we need to be reverent, as is fitting in the presence of our holy God, and there is a place for sober confession of sin. But we also celebrate his goodness, his greatness and majesty, and his love for us. May these final joyful words of the Psalter characterise our position each day before God!

### **Questions to ponder**

1. Do you engage in worship with the joy described by these Psalms? What holds you back?
2. Do you think we should praise God even when we don't feel like it? Is it hypocritical to do so? Why or why not?

### **Prayer for the day**

Great God,

I truly desire to praise you with all that I am and with all that I have.

I praise you for your acts of power, and for your surpassing greatness.

Fill me with this deep joy today that rests confidently in your goodness and your love.

Amen

## **Week 6, Day 5: An incredible scene**

### **Reading: Revelation 4 & 5**

*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honour and glory and power, forever and ever!*

Have you ever stopped to ponder what it will really be like in God's presence in heaven? The description in these chapters is a little mind-blowing. It is other-worldly, to be sure, full of rich symbolism that has provoked thousands of pages of commentary! The imagery in Revelation may leave us with some questions, but the point of the book is clear: victory over evil has been achieved at the cross. The triumph and worship and songs in the book capture this victory—it is already won, only the final manifestation is yet to come.

The scenes of worship in these chapters are incredible—"thousands and millions of angels" and "every living creature" praising God in a mighty chorus of worship. It's a different scene from that which we see in the Psalms, as it includes eschatological (or "end times") details about the end of this age and the final triumph of God. But it is also one that gives a clear vision of the magnificence and sovereignty of God. This is a God worthy of worship at the deepest level, who deserves our praise and gratitude for his sovereignty and for the great victory won at the cross.

It is significant that like the last chapters of the Psalms, the last book of the Bible is also filled with songs and worship—this time to God the Father and the Lord Jesus (the Lamb of God), for they have triumphed and now rule in heaven. May this heavenly vision of the praise of God strengthen our souls as we wait for him to appear.

### **Questions to ponder**

1. When have you experienced a sense of awe about the Lord God as you read a description of him in his word?
2. What part of this passage strikes you most? How does it add to your picture of who God is?

### **Prayer for the day**

Holy God,

Blessing and honour and glory and power belong to you,  
and to the Lamb, forever and ever.

We praise you and lift you high for your victory over sin and death.

We are humbled and so grateful that we will one day join this mighty chorus.

Thank you for this reminder of who you are.

Amen