



**PSALMS 107-150
DEVOTIONAL**

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to 'follow' Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

"This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids'** environments, **men's/women's** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

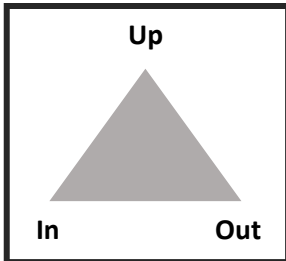
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO PSALMS: BOOK 5

The psalms in Book 5 have less of a common theme or setting than those in the other books. However, amidst this diversity, the theme of work appears more often among these psalms than in the other four books. These psalms seem to have a more practical outworking. Issues of economic creativity, business ethics, entrepreneurship, productivity, the task of raising children and managing a home, proper use of power, and the glory of God in and through the material world all come out in these psalms.

This book gives the general results of the government of God and a moral review of God's ways. It includes the restoration of Israel and ends with full and flat-out praise after the destruction of their enemies. It gives an affecting series of songs and prayers, and finishes with a beautiful ever-swelling chorus of hallelujahs.

The five books of Psalms follow the pattern of the Torah, which itself follows the five-fold pattern of all the biblical covenants. This is what great old Brethren scholars taught.

1. Transcendence (God's authority – who's the boss?)
2. Hierarchy (Delegated authority – who's in charge?)
3. Ethics (What are the rules – what do I do?)
4. Sanctions (What do we get – blessings and curses)
5. Succession (The future – what's next?)

Plenty of good old-fashioned practical stuff in this book to get your teeth into, so, buckle up. Bible, journal, pen, and a wee brew, and off we go...

Love and prayers,
Phil

Live

Psalm 107 is a hymn commemorating the power of God. Despite the transgressions of the Israelites, the Lord forgave them. The psalm elaborates on this theme going on to say that the Lord “*turns a desert into pools of water ... there He lets the hungry dwell.*” This description of miracles performed by the Lord reinforces the imagery of “*wonderful works*” mentioned in verse 8. The works of the Lord are mentioned in many psalms. What makes this psalm unique? It is a hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord for the purpose of making the Lord’s works known to humankind, so that they too can join in the praise of the Lord. David has written a kind of circulatory hymn, thanking the Lord for enabling the Israelites to thank the Lord. The themes of enlightenment and gratitude reinforce each other throughout the psalm, and, indeed, throughout the rest of the fifth book of Psalms, of which this is the opening hymn. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!

This final section of forty-four psalms is beautiful. Fifteen of them are ascribed to David and one to Solomon (127). These psalms praise God for His mighty Word. I love that because I love His Word. As we delve into it, it becomes as necessary to us as our natural food; we need it for survival. God’s Word makes us realise how big He really is and how small we actually are. It makes us look for His return which, if we *really* believed could happen within our lifetime, should make a significant impact on how we live and love. Have you noticed how after a funeral you go away with a sense of your mortality and the fragility of life, at least for a few days? We even hug loved ones a little tighter and linger a little longer in conversations. But then all too quickly it’s back to ‘normal’ and our usual patterns in relationships return.

Pray

Father, forgive me for the times when I’m guilty of not dealing with my own sin and then I become irritated with another’s sin. Rather than welcoming another person without grumbling, I guard my own space with complaining. As I read this final section of worship psalms, help me to lift You back into the esteemed position in my life. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This song is pulled together from two previous psalms: Psalm 57:7-11 and Psalm 60:5-12. It is surely worthy of a repeat. What an amazing song this is to spark courage in us all today. It is the warrior's morning song with which he adores his God, strengthening his heart before entering the conflicts of the day. It is wise to note the order in this psalm. First, we have the spirit of praise (verses 1-5), then his hope and the spirit of believing prayer (up to verse 12), and finally, a word of resolve as the warrior hears the war trumpet summoning him to battle and marches at once with his fellow soldiers to the fray (verse 13).

I love the songs of David. When I was a boy, I used to dream that I would be like him, that I would love, serve, fight and sing for Jesus to the very end. Now I'm a little older I realise that the one thing men like David, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Paul all had in common was their abject brokenness and consuming need of God's grace, which He so freely gave. The only true hero in this great story of redemption and restoration is Jesus. So, today and tomorrow and the day after that, we need to declare that we will get our eyes off ourselves and fix our gaze on our King, the Author and Finisher of our faith. We are now known as saints because God has hidden our lives in Jesus. Our only claim on eternity is through the righteousness of Jesus. We will run and finish the race because it is in Jesus we live, move, and have our very being. We will make it to heaven not because of our efforts but because of His. What wondrous love and eternal inheritance this is indeed!

Let's pray today like the sweet psalmist of Israel who prayed not just for rescue but for victory, who allowed God to use his distress and weakness as an opportunity to display His awesome power.

Pray

Father, I bless You with great joy for the Bible models You have given me, men and women who turned away from unrighteousness and self-righteousness to Christ-righteousness, those dear saints who show me what kingdom living looks like. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

It is important to understand the first five verses as they show us who David is pronouncing judgment on. This is known as an imprecatory psalm or, simply put, a cursing psalm. It's not that David is perfect, that's not what we learn from this passage. What I learn is that I want to keep on God's side. I promised myself years ago that I would always keep short accounts with God.

David was falsely accused by many, as was Jesus in a day that followed. While David hated the accusations and slander, he was a man of prayer and focus. It is fair to say that the tone of these curses is generally in the form of prophecies rather than immediate curses. David predicted the righteous judgment to come rather than pronouncing it (though he certainly wished for this judgment).

The psalmist David prays harsh words in this reading today. He can do this because of his standing in God. He has been wronged and is righteously angry for his God. I find verse 8 interesting, "*May his days be few, may another take his place of leadership.*" This verse is quoted in Acts 1:20 concerning Judas.

Some of us have plenty of reasons for losing heart, and we don't have to pretend otherwise: relational and financial stress; broken health and aching hearts; fresh loneliness and out-of-control busyness; the pain of regret and the power of shame; an uncertain future and a not-so-happy present. These cursing psalms teach not only lessons about ourselves, but also how to deal with evil and injustice. We should not try to suppress our reaction of horror and outrage at evil. Nor should we, like some sort of Rambo, take justice into our own hands. Rather, we should take those feelings, undisguised, to God and allow Him to untangle our hearts and minds.

Pray

Father, may the combined weight of Your great love lavished *on me*, the glory You've prepared *for me*, and the promise of Your presence *with me* far outweigh all the other stuff that is weighing down my heart right now. May Your Word tip the scales in the direction of perspective, peace, encouragement, and hope. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is one of the beautiful Messianic psalms. A psalm of, or concerning, David. However, when you read it with understanding, you will not see David, except as the writer. David is not the subject even in the smallest degree. Christ is all. I'm so amazed at how much was revealed to David. May the Spirit who spoke through the man after God's own heart give us eyes to see the hidden mysteries of this marvellous psalm in which every word has an infinity of meaning. It's all about Jesus and it makes us cry out like the writer, *"Hear me, Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Guard my life, for I am faithful to You; save Your servant who trusts in You."*

In verse 1 there is a conversation between two members of the Godhead. The Lord Yahweh speaks to David's Lord, the Messiah. These verses reveal to us the person, position, and power of the Messiah-King. Verse 4 records the second statement of the Lord Yahweh to David's Lord. When the Lord God says something, it's important. When He swears something, it is doubly important. When Scripture adds, *"and will not change His mind,"* we had better sit up and take notice! What is it that God wants us to see? That He has declared His Messiah to be *"a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek"*. This name in Hebrew means "king of righteousness". Melchizedek was the king of Salem (Jerusalem) and we see him in Genesis. He seems to come out of nowhere, refreshing Abraham with bread and wine after he returns from battle, blessing him, and receiving a tithe of Abraham's spoils. Melchizedek is called a priest of God Most High. He stood between God and Abraham to confer God's blessing on Abraham and to receive the tithes from Abraham to present to God. Hebrews 7 will give you a clearer picture of this man, Melchizedek.

Pray

Father, *"You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord, for I call to You all day long. Bring joy to Your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in You. You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to You. Hear my prayer, Lord; listen to my cry for mercy. When I am in distress, I call to You, because You answer me."* (Psalm 86). In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 111 & 112

Live

Bible students who are much smarter and wiser than me think that Psalm 112 follows Psalm 111 in a special way. Because of this, I thought I'd keep them together. Psalm 111 is about a righteous God and Psalm 112 is about the man whom God makes righteous. 'Righteous' simply means always doing what is right. Only God is really righteous, but the people who love and obey God are also made righteous by Him. They are not righteous because they always do what is right (reality is, sometimes they don't). They are righteous because God gives them the gift of righteousness, meaning that when God looks at them, He sees them as righteous.

Psalm 111 looks at the big picture, the deeds that the Lord has done for His people. Psalm 112 attends primarily to the smaller picture, the conduct of particular people. While these two psalms are quite different, they undoubtedly belong together. Both begin with "*Praise the Lord*". Psalm 111 ends by mentioning the fear of the Lord and Psalm 112 begins with "*the man who fears the Lord*", almost like a 'therefore' following on from the previous psalm. The implication is that the person who fears the Lord and attends to His commandments has the Lord's own moral traits reflected in his character.

I love how the first theme in Psalm 111 is for us to consider who God is. It draws from the realm of royalty, referring to God's deeds as "*glorious and majestic*". The psalmist declares those who fear the Lord are blessed. Fear comes to all of us, to the brave as well as the cowardly. Fear comes to the faithful and the faithless. Fear can be a good thing; it warns us to keep our eyes peeled for danger that might lurk around the corner. Fear reminds us of our finitude. When reverential fear is applied it can be very constructive in our relationship with the Father.

Pray

Father, I thank You for the gift of life, for the breath that sustains life, for the love of family and friends without which there would be no life. I thank You for the mystery of creation, for the beauty the eye can see, for the joy the ear may hear, for the unknown that I cannot behold, filling the universe with wonder. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 113

Live

Psalm 113 is a special psalm for the Jews at Passover. Before the meal, they sing Psalms 113 to 118. The Jews call these six psalms 'The Egyptian hallel'; *hallel* is the Hebrew word for *praise*. They sing these psalms to commemorate their deliverance from Egypt.

A quick reminder of the structure of the book of Psalms. It is a collection of 150 individual psalms, each one organised to take the reader through a journey or a story. The story, at its most basic level, is about kingship. The first three books (Psalms 1-41; 42-72; 72-89) tell the story of King David and the monarchy. For example, Psalm 2 speaks of David's inauguration, and numerous other psalms reference events in David's life, such as his struggle with his son (Psalm 3), his escape from the murderous designs of Saul (Psalm 18), and his acts of adultery and murder (Psalm 51). Book four in Psalms responds to the political and, more importantly, theological crisis brought on by the demise of David's monarchy and the implications of this for God's kingship. We hear a proclamation in this section that God was, is, and will be King, not only over Israel but over all nations and all creation.

In Book five of Psalms, faith that God remains King despite what has happened to the human king, David, motivates the drive to praise. This is why verses 4 and 5 in today's reading exhorts, "*The LORD is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens. Who is like the LORD our God, who is enthroned on high?*" The evidence of this kingship is yet another reason for praise. God's kingship, it turns out, is manifest in a preferential love for the poor. God raises them, lifts them, and gives them a seat among nobles (verses 7 and 8). It's quite a paradox; God looks with special interest on the poor, and yet there will be no poor in God's kingdom.

Pray

Father, I'm so thankful that Your love for me is steadfast and limitless, and that I can count on new mercies every morning, including this morning. Help me to respond gently and not react rigidly to the weaknesses of others. Help me to roll up my sleeves and not roll my eyes when I meet brokenness in others. Help me to love as You love me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 114

Live

The psalmist looks back to the days when God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. Old Testament Israelites looked back to the exodus in much the same way New Testament Christians look back to Calvary. It was the defining moment of their history that proved both God's supreme power and His love for His people. The point of the story was that the Lord chose the Israelites as His people. He had said, *"I will be your God, you will be My people and I will dwell among you."* Having redeemed them and made a covenant with them, the Lord committed to dwell and reign among them. He pledged His presence and power to be with His people.

The point in this psalm is that nature recognises not only the presence of the Lord, but also the power of the Lord. As Yahweh approaches, nature recognises that He is awesome and terrifying. We see this at other moments in the Bible: we have darkness when Jesus died, a star guiding at His birth, and earthquakes at His return. The Bible often portrays man as the last to recognise the true nature of reality; even demons recognise and fear Jesus long before humans do. We can't see the spirit world but that doesn't mean that all the earth shouldn't tremble. His presence, as we see in verse 7, is mighty and powerful, *"Tremble, earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob."*

Just for good measure, the psalmist mentions one more mighty act of God to reinforce our awe: He is the God who can bring water out of rocks, as he did twice in the wilderness. But the point of the psalm is not verse 8, it is verse 7. God's people may be weak and insignificant, but Yahweh's presence is powerful and fearful. Just because we can't see into the spirit realm with our natural eye shouldn't mean we don't tremble in His presence.

Pray

Father, what glory surrounds Your name and Your presence. You are awesome and powerful and I ask You to forgive me for taking You for granted. You are not just a bigger one of us! You are God, ginormous and glorious, the One to whom angels bow. The heavens declare Your handiwork. I bow before Your majesty today. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I absolutely love verse 1 which declares, *“Not to us, Lord, not to us but to Your name be the glory, because of Your love and faithfulness.”* The psalmist encourages the nation in verse 12 with, *“The Lord has been mindful of us; He will bless us.”* Then he again goes through each of the three groups, assuring them, *“He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the Lord,”* adding, *“the small together with the great.”* It all goes to prove that you don’t have to be a spiritual superstar to receive God’s blessings. You may be unknown or insignificant, but God takes note of you and He will bless you as you trust in Him.

The psalmist adds in verse 14, *“May the Lord give you increase, you and your children. May you be blessed of the Lord, maker of heaven and earth.”* Unlike the dead idols, our God made everything that is. He can certainly supply our needs and the needs of our families! The word ‘bless’ occurs five times in four verses. It shows us the importance of seeking and receiving God’s blessing. Some questions ... do you covet His blessing in your life? Do you pray for His abundant grace to be poured out on you and your family? How about on His church? Do you grieve when His kingdom suffers? Do you pray that He would be glorified by blessing and prospering His people spiritually?

God alone is to be glorified. Remember, if we fall into idolatry, we do not glorify Him. We glorify Him by trusting Him as our helper, defender, and source of all blessing. As people of God, we should always keep in mind the words of the psalmist in verse 12, *“The LORD remembers us and will bless us”*. Just as God blessed the children of Israel, so God still blesses us through Jesus Christ. The blessings of God apply to all generations. That why we should give Him glory today.

Pray

Father, I love how verse 14 demonstrates Your glad welcome and great love for children. Free me from childishness but renew my heart in childlike joy, playfulness, gratitude, and simplicity. My body and mind are getting older, but cause my heart to dance again in the utter and matchless delights of being loved by You. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This particular psalm contains words that kept me alive when Jill, my wife of 27 years, died aged 49 in 2006. I learned it by heart and made it part of what became known as my 'but list'. I would say things like, "Lord, I feel like this... BUT Your Word says 'when I was brought low You saved me'." It would be good today to load up some ammunition for when the enemy comes in like a flood, to have a standard to raise up against him.

It seems impossible to ever truly thank God enough for what He has done for us. The abundance of blessings He bestows upon our lives is overwhelming. God loves us, no matter what, despite our sin. He hears our prayers, our praise, and our cries for help. He walks beside us through our sorrow and He celebrates with us in our joy. God delivered us from death so that we may have an eternal life with Him. How could we ever even begin to repay Him for such things? This psalmist asks the same question in verse 12, "*What shall I return to the Lord for all His goodness to me?*" He gives us our answer in the following passages, beginning with "*I will lift the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.*" God wants us to lean on Him, to call upon Him. Showing trust honours the sacrifices He made because it proves we live for and serve Him alone.

To know beyond all doubt that in Christ we can make it through the deep trials of life, oh joy beyond all joy, oh peace beyond all understandings, oh hope beyond all imaginings. We can't add to His love for us and we can't diminish His love for us. We can simply enjoy it, be changed by it, and share it with others. Good news of great joy! We never could have made it through by ourselves. We never could have gained a relationship with Him through penance or promises of trying harder.

Pray

Father, the only purity I have, I have in You. So today it's all about You and I surrender to all the implications of that. Love in me and love through me, teach me how to love deeply from my heart, just as You love me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 117

Live

This is the shortest psalm but don't let that fool you. It is a little psalm with a huge message. Have you ever tried to sing a psalm? I love doing this. It's not a pretty sound but boy does it burst in my heart. This is a good psalm to give singing it a go.

God does nothing without purpose. There must be a purpose for including a psalm of only 17 Hebrew words. It is a messianic psalm quoted by Paul in Romans 15:11 showing that the work of Christ was for all people. It includes a Passover invitation from Israel to the Gentiles to come and join them. It's also a millennial psalm because it looks forward to the day when Jesus will reign.

It was never God's plan that the Hebrew people should exclusively hug their blessings to themselves, snapping and snarling at other nations with a selfish attitude. Even in their punishment and dispersal among the nations, they are a universal reminder that God is sovereign in human affairs. We could say this Jewish story gave wings to the gospel.

The Jews had already spread the concept of the one true God to all nations by the time of Christ. In their law and through their prophets, the world saw evidence of their access to higher truth. When the gospel evangelists went from city to city, they always made straight for the synagogue. It was the God-fearers among the Gentiles orbiting around the outer fringes of Judaism attracted by what they heard who first embraced the gospel among the nations. God loves Gentiles just as much as He loves Jews. That is the missionary message of this psalm. It was because "*God so loved the world*" that He gave His Son. Not just the world of the elect as the extreme Calvinist would say, or the world of the Jew as rabbis of old would have said; He loved the world in its totality.

Pray

Father, when You call me to engage in Your big story of redemption and restoration, when I read of Your commitment to gather Your Bride from the nations and make all things new, help me to sing psalms like this one. I love the way You love me, Father. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 118

Live

We have an interesting psalm today for more than one reason. Firstly, verse 8 is the dead centre of the Bible. This is pretty cool in that the instruction of verse 8 is *“It is better to put your trust in the Lord than to trust in man.”* It's also interesting that this psalm is sandwiched between the shortest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 117, and the longest, Psalm 119. Another pretty cool fact is that Martin Luther was particularly fond of this psalm. He wrote of it, *“This is my Psalm, my chosen Psalm. I love them all; I love all holy Scripture, which is my consolation and my life. But this Psalm is nearest my heart, and I have a peculiar right to call it mine. It has saved me from many a pressing danger, from which neither emperor, nor kings, nor sages, nor saints, could have saved me. It is my friend; dearer to me than all the honours and power of the earth.”*

Even at first read, you can't miss the repeated mention of the enduring love of God. It appears four times in the first four verses and also in the last verse. Actually, this enduring love of God is the bedrock that underlies the story of the whole Bible. It is the background to all God's dealings with His people. The word for enduring love used here is a very important word in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms. It is not just any old word for 'love', but a particular Hebrew word, 'hesed', that doesn't have a simple direct translation into English. What it refers to is God's particular love for His chosen people based on the covenant that He has made. Isaiah explains it like this, *“The mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and My covenant of peace shall not be removed.”* The word 'hesed', 'steadfast love', is seen in this verse.

Pray

Father, I am touched by Your enduring love today. Over and over throughout Scripture this is the underlying theme and yet I can so often take it for granted. Forgive me for this and help me look to the cross today and see Your great love for me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

If you haven't read this psalm due to its length, you are missing out. It is my favourite one to personalise as a prayer. There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and this psalm contains twenty-two units of eight verses. Each unit is given a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each line in that section begins with that letter. The closest parallel to this pattern in Scripture is found in Lamentations 3 which is also divided into twenty-two sections.

There are seven key words which you will find repeatedly used in this psalm: law (25 times), word (43 times), judgments (23 times), testimonies (23 times), commandments (22 times), statutes (21 times), and precepts (21 times). The great length of this wonderful psalm helps us to wonder at the immensity of Scripture. Keeping to one subject, it helps us to adore the unity of Scripture; for it is but one. Yet, from the many turns it gives to the same thought, it helps us to see the variety of Scripture.

Matthew Henry, the great 18th century Bible commentator, was introduced to the Word of God as a child. His father, Philip Henry, told his children to take one verse of Psalm 119 every morning to meditate on, and thereby go through the entire psalm twice in the year. Philip said to his children, "That will bring you to be in love with all the rest of the Scriptures." Perhaps that practice was why Matthew Henry loved the Bible so much that he wrote a commentary on it, one that is still used today.

The overall message of this psalm focuses on the truth of God's Word. It encourages us through every generation to stay close and focused on His Word no matter what swirls around us in this world. Living in the freedom and knowledge of God's ways, obeying His law above all else, and keeping in step with His commandments is the only way to live truly wise, strong lives. God's Word is powerful, living, and active. It never changes.

Pray

Father, I am in awe of You and Your amazing Word. I love how this writer, whoever they were, brings to life the power of Your Word, sharper than any two-edged sword. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 120, 121 & 122

Live

Today begins a little series of ‘Songs of Ascent’. I have purposely set them in groups of three. The three psalms within each group come under the headings, TROUBLE, TRUST, and TRIUMPH.

‘Songs of Ascent’ is the ancient title of a collection of 15 psalms beginning here and ending at Psalm 134. The word ‘ascent’ means a step, or an upwards climb. Bible students do not really know why these songs have this title but here is the most likely explanation... God’s law included a rule that Jewish men should go to Jerusalem for the sacred holidays each year. There were three such occasions – Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (mentioned in Deuteronomy 16:16). These songs were probably for the men to sing as they travelled. Of course, they did not have modern methods of transport, nor did they have our modern worship albums on their iPhone. Rather, they walked. They sang these songs of ascent as they climbed the long path uphill to Jerusalem. The journey of the ancient Israelites might take three or four days, or longer if they were from the north of Israel.

On 7th June 2019, I had the privilege to climb this ascent into Jerusalem. Mind you, I was in a bus with a group of fifty-five people and we sang, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, lift up your gates and sing, Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna to your King.” It was a pretty poignant moment for me.

Think about what these songs of worship mean to you. The One who watches over us neither slumbers nor sleeps. We can lift our eyes and say clearly, “My help comes from the Lord.” He is the Bread of Life, the source of all satisfaction and joy. I love the first verse of Psalm 122. I think I have quoted it more than any other Scripture at the opening of a Sunday gathering, “*I was glad when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord.*”

Pray

Father, I’m a foolish person to neglect the very means by which You feed us and where You meet with us: the Scriptures, prayer, worship, the Lord’s Supper. The nutrients and nurture I need, and the joy and satisfaction I crave can be found nowhere else but in You. Thank You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 123, 124 & 125

Live

Each group of three psalms in the 'Psalms of Ascent' begins with the psalmist in trouble, then moves to trust, then triumph. The pattern is repeated in each group, and each time the psalm of trouble starts a little higher than the one before. All fifteen psalms together represent one big journey to God. Within this larger pilgrimage we find five mini pilgrimages. As you work your way through the 'Psalms of Ascent', you get a realistic view of the Christian's journey in life. It's not upwards all the way but very often three steps forward, one step back.

As we start this second mini-series of psalms, we are back in trouble again. Psalm 123 takes a step backwards but there is still progress overall. It is a brief but powerful psalm. It teaches us that prayers do not have to be long, simply sincere. God does not look at the length of our prayers so much as the sincerity of our hearts. The main thing this psalm teaches us is that we should be looking to the Lord for mercy. I can assure you that God is merciful.

Psalm 124 imagines what would happen if God did not intervene to help. In some ways, it's the opposite of John Lennon's famous song 'Imagine'. John Lennon imagined a world without God or heaven and thought it would be a better place. Psalm 124 imagines what would happen without God and it is a picture of complete devastation. We are reminded that with God there is always a way out. No circumstance is too difficult for our God.

Psalm 125 states three simple but profound truths: those who trust in the Lord are safe and secure; those who trust in the Lord have a secure inheritance; and those who trust in the Lord have a secure future. Our God cannot be shaken by the changes in our society because He endures forever.

Pray

Father, today I confess how so often I make it all about me when it's all about You. Forgive me for living like I'm driving in the Grand Prix, speeding around and forgetting about You. I am convicted and humbled afresh by Your lavish and selfless love. Intensify my love for You, that my love for being first will decrease and die a thousand deaths. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 126, 127 & 128

Live

Remember our headings of Trouble, Trust, and Triumph. In the study of this trio, I want to challenge you to leave a godly legacy by living out the biblical role and responsibility assigned to you by God. If you have children and grandchildren, or if you plan to have them, think about passing the baton of faith on to the next generation.

In Psalm 126 we see God's ability to restore even the worst tragedy, sickness and grief. In Psalm 127 we see a life without God making no sense, whether at home or work. Actually, this psalm shows us that hard work honours God. Psalm 128 declares God as the true Head over our homes. This psalm is called 'The Marriage Prayer' as it was sung at Israelite marriages. Reading and praying it with your children and family is a tremendous place to start.

After reading these chapters today, we realise how much we have to be thankful for. God is on our side. When we lose sight of this and get argumentative with our spouse, friends, kids, or even strangers, may God arrest our proud hearts. When we keep festering on the inside, rather than resting in Him, our lives and relationships suffer. Too often, children are seen as a bother rather than a gift. We live in a world filled with wickedness, stories emerging daily of children abused and trafficked, sold for a price. These things break the heart of the Father and should stir us to act and pray.

Let's give thanks for the children we know and for the ones the Lord has given to us. We are reminded today by our reading that children are a gift from God. The psalmist refers to them as a "reward". Children are our greatest gift; however, as a parent and now a grandparent, I am aware that they can also be our greatest challenge! That's why we need the Lord.

Pray

Father, forgive me when I protest more than I pray, when I launch more than I listen, when I'm more grouchy than grace-full, when I'm more self-righteous than either right or righteous, when I repay nag with nag, petty with petty, immaturity with immaturity. Help me and change me to be more and more like Jesus. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 129, 130 & 131

Live

Another trio of trouble, trust, and triumph. From the early days of becoming a nation, Israel was sorely afflicted. Their oppression in Egypt, for example, was an unforgettable chapter of servitude and suffering. Yet the enemy has never succeeded in exterminating the Jews. God's people were always delivered from captivity, their survival being one of the great miracles of history. We need to remember that God hears and answers. In Psalm 129 we see the people of Israel persecuted from their earliest days. Verse 3 shows us a powerful foreshadowing of Jesus' unjust punishment before He died.

If there is a chapter in Scripture that proves God's covenantal love for us it is Psalm 130. I love this passage so much, *"If You, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve You. I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in His word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning."* Our sin is not only forgiven but forgotten. Oh my word, just let that sink in.

Psalm 131 is the uttermost illustration of triumph with total contentment in our God. One can easily picture the Israelites making their way up to Jerusalem singing and praying these songs of ascent; how beautiful it must have sounded. You've got to love how this Scripture demonstrates God's glad welcome and great love for children. There's no greater gift we can give our children beyond education and inheritance than to keep on bringing them to Him. They don't need religion; they don't need mere moral reform; they need the gospel of God's grace.

Pray

Father, for the children and young people who know You but currently seem to have waning or zero interest in You, hear my cry. Restore to them the joy of Your salvation. Give me patience with their doubts and forbearance in their struggles. Give me grace to welcome prodigals home. Our confidence is in Your promise to bring to completion the good work You've begun in each of us, but we cannot afford to be either presumptuous or passive. Work powerfully and persistently in us all, especially in me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 132, 133 & 134

Live

This is the last trio of psalms today, our fifth set. You will have picked up the journey of three steps forward and sometimes one or two back, but all in all it has been going forward. The beautiful crescendo will come in Psalm 134 as we celebrate the return of the ark of the presence of God to Jerusalem. But our journey today begins in Psalm 132 with King David who began to lose sleep over the fact that he lived in a palace and the ark of the presence of God was in a simple tent. David was disallowed to build the temple because of his bloody hands, being a king of war. Solomon (who is most likely the horn referred to in verse 17) would be a king of peace and he would build the new dwelling place for the presence of Almighty God.

Then we have Psalm 133. Some Bible students believe David wrote this after he united his people. Others believe that Ezra or Nehemiah wrote it because not all Hebrew Bibles have “*of David*” at the beginning. But whoever wrote it, Psalm 133 is all about unity, it is all about trust.

Psalm 134 speaks about an elite and special group of people, the Levites. Imagine all the songs of the last four days. Think of them as if you’ve journeyed with the people to Jerusalem. Now you have literally arrived and what do you see? The house of the Lord and all the servants who minister to the Lord by day and by night. In these beautiful songs God has proven Himself to be a God who is not only *with* His people, but a God who is so very much *for* His people. His love for you isn’t merely unconditional; it’s conditional, for He has met every condition necessary to make you His beloved child and eternal delight. Unlike the nation of Israel, we don’t have the Assyrian army or the Philistines outside our door threatening our existence, but we do have no small number of challenges in front of us this season.

Pray

Father, I trust You for my forgiveness and righteousness. I purpose to rely on You for everything I need to live and love to Your glory. May I boast in my weakness, delight in Jesus, and rely upon You, the God who does the impossible. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 135

Live

This is one of the Hallelujah psalms, a hymn of praise. Some Bible commentators think that the psalmist wrote this for the second temple. King Solomon built the first temple around 950 BC. The king of Babylon destroyed this temple and the Jews built it again in 516 BC.

In singing this psalm, our hearts must be filled as well as our mouths with the high praises of God. In this psalm, we have our obligated duty to praise the Lord, to praise His name. We must not only thank Him for what He has done for us, but also praise Him for what He has done for others and for who He is in Himself. In the day when this psalm was written, the persons called to this praise were the servants of the Lord, the priests and Levites who stood in His house, and all the devout Israelites who stood in the courts of His house to worship there, as verse 2 describes.

Of course, there are many reasons why we should praise God. He is good, He is good to all, and we must give Him the praise for that. His goodness is His glory, and we must make mention of it to His glory. We sing praises to His name for it is right and a pleasure to do so. The temple was all about worshipping God and it begs the question of us today, how's that going for us? I'm reminded of two blind guys healed by Jesus in Matthew 9:31. They went out and talked about Jesus everywhere. That's a pretty cool resumé for any believer and follower of Jesus, making Jesus known everywhere. I love the psalms and how they continually give God the praise and worship He so powerfully deserves. After all is said and done, He alone is worthy of all our praise. His Word even says that if we don't worship Him, the very stones would cry out.

Pray

Father, today I join with the praise of this psalm and declare Your greatness. Today's song focuses us on the reopening of the great temple, and this focuses my heart on You. So, I thank You a thousand times over for loving me and sending Jesus to die for my sin. Whom Your Son sets free is free indeed. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The refrain of this psalm is, *“for His mercy endures forever”*. It is well worth repeating. According to tradition, this psalm is known as ‘The Great Hallel’. ‘Hallel’ is the Hebrew verb for praise and where we get the word hallelujah from, which means ‘praise Yahweh’. There were a number of other ‘Hallel’ psalms but only this one is known as ‘The Great Hallel’, recited more often. Tradition says the Israelites sang this song during Passover and other festivals and celebrations, like Pentecost. The Priests or Levites may have sung the first half of the verse, *“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,”* then the people would have responded with the second half of the verse, *“His love endures forever.”*

The first time this psalm struck me was when I spoke at a church harvest service and the minister engaged in a responsive reading of this psalm. The minister read a phrase and the congregation read the next phrase. We, the congregation, repeatedly read, *“for His mercy endures forever”*. By the time we reached the end of the psalm I was full of emotion, struck by the beauty of it. No matter what was spoken first, we were to reply that God’s mercy and His love lasts forever. This is how we should live our lives.

“O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endures for ever.” This first verse summarises this psalm, and indeed the whole Bible. Though we in our fallen nature may not always be able to see it, God is good, and His plan in the end will come out best. Let’s be ever thankful that God’s love and mercy endures forever. Let’s thank Him for our senses by which we hear the songs of birds, see the splendour of summer fields, taste autumn fruits, and feel the snow. We can smell the breath of the spring and declare at the top of our voices today... His love endures forever!

Pray

Father, thank You so much that Your love endures forever. Help me to remember that You spoke to Moses from a bush, to Balaam from a donkey’s mouth, and to Elijah in a still small voice. Don’t let me miss Your whisper today, Father. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This anonymous writer is writing in exile about the pain and bitterness of captivity. Babylon was 800 miles to the east of Jerusalem. Just to give you a feel of the history, in 586 BC, soldiers from Babylon destroyed Jerusalem taking the people prisoner. In 536 BC, many of the prisoners and their children came back to Jerusalem. In 516 BC, Persia destroyed Babylon.

Psalm 137 is not for the faint of heart. It's a sobering lament, a song of resolve and a song of curse. It's set in the context of perhaps the most traumatic event the Old Testament church experienced. Exile to Babylon simply sucked the air out of the life of the Old Testament people of God as they were utterly unprepared for it. They'd been warned by God's prophets for a century that judgment for their sin was coming, but *when* it came and *how* it came took their breath away.

This psalm is a Hebrew lamenting the exile that the people of God experienced. The place wherein God manifested His special presence and nearness to the people was now taken from them. This psalm rehearses the torments of the captors of Israel. It expresses a resolve to stay faithful to God and to His people, no matter what. And then, in some daunting language which disturbs our hearts and makes us shiver, a curse is called down upon the oppressors of God's people.

Let's give attention to God's Word and let's look to Him in prayer as we read it and ponder it. The cry of this psalm is, how can we sing the Lord a song in a strange land? As I read this, I am convicted about the times we can get into all kinds of strange lands. Some are by wrong or bad decisions; others we have no control over but rather a circumstance or tragedy landed us there. Let's cry out to God for His mercy.

Pray

Father, I love You and I realise that it is so easy to slip into strange lands. It is so hard to sing to You the Lord's song in a strange land. I want to sing my socks off to You, Father. I want to find myself close to You spiritually wherever I may be physically. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

There are times when we desperately need answers. When those times come our way, we need to be reminded that God is there to give us His answers. Have you ever been in a situation where you realise that your will power is just not going to take you out of temptation? Of course, you have. (If you're anything like me, that is.) This is the passage for you and me today. Mull over verse 3 from the ESV, *"On the day I called, You answered me; my strength of soul You increased."*

The psalmist today teaches us one of the greatest lessons in our spiritual lives; rather than using his power, he depended on God for His power. As we read verse 3, we can learn from his struggle how to be faithful to God. There must have been a period of time in the psalmist's life when he tried to make it on his own and was unsuccessful. From his failure came his success because he was willing to turn from will-power to God-power. Notice that he wrote, *"on the day I called..."*

As Christians, we must always be humble and give all glory to God. We must be thankful to God for everything we have, including wealth, job, family and everything else. Matthew 23:12 reminds us, *"whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."* And James 4:6 says, *"God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble."* 1 Peter 5:6 calls us to *"humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you."* All of these scriptures endorse the psalmist's thought today, one that we also find in Zechariah 4:6, *"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."* We all have dreams for the future; make sure they involve your God.

Pray

Father, today I read another prayer song that challenges my total loyalty to You. David says *"I will praise the Lord with my whole heart"*. Here I am yet again being forced to ask my own heart the question, am I all Yours? Help me, Father, as I so want my heart to be all Yours. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This psalm holds a special place in my heart as it was my wife Jill's favourite. We married in 1978 when I was just 19. She died when I was 47. Verse 14 ended up on her headstone as it was her favourite verse from her favourite chapter, *"I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, I know that full well."*

We are reminded in this psalm that God's character goes deep into the creation of every human being. If you feel inadequate, remember that the Spirit of God seeks to indwell, empower, and equip you for every good work. When you felt guilty as a child, did you ever try to hide from God by crawling under the bedcovers or into the wardrobe, thinking that God couldn't see you because people couldn't? There are many grownups who subconsciously still try to do just that. The Hebrew word for 'searched' in verse 1 is the word 'to dig'. This makes the verse read, *'You dig into me and therefore You know me.'* The word 'dig' has come to mean in English, 'to know or to understand'. I love the fact that God digs deep into my heart and soul. I think we should all give Him permission to do that today. He's going to do it anyway, so it's better to lay all our 'I wants' on the altar of His will.

I love how the psalm closes, *"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."* I am so thankful for the revelation of the humanity of these people of old whom God used to pen these immortal words, thankful for how their lives fit our own situations today. How desperately we need to be led through the complexities of the age we live in. May we not settle for simple yet wrong solutions, but be willing to let God work out His own purposes knowing that He has taken all factors into consideration for He knows us intimately.

Pray

Father, You knew me when I was being formed in the womb and You numbered my days even at that point. Is it any wonder the psalmist in verse 6 declares that such knowledge is too wonderful for him, too high for him to reach! What an incredible God we serve. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is a psalm of David. The occasion on which it was composed is not indicated in the title, but the contents leave no room to doubt that it was written at an early period of his life, a time when he was subjected to persecution, most probably in the time of King Saul. Chased through the mountains and caves, David was often pushed to the point of emotional and physical exhaustion. This psalm is full of great lessons for us; as you read it, be on the lookout for them.

Firstly, we learn that faithful believers are often brought into peril by the schemes and words of the wicked. If this has happened to you, you're not alone. It happened to David before you. Secondly, we learn that falsehood and slander and abuse are as old as sin in this world. They have been around a long time. We also notice in this psalm that slander always precedes and accompanies persecution because malice alone is not sufficient to incite hatred against a good man; you have to slander him first and make people think he's a bad man before you can incite hatred against him. How often do we see this played out in our own culture today? The New Testament treats the Psalms as a major witness to human depravity. When Paul wants to sum up how bad human beings can be (for example, in Romans 3:10-18), where does he go? He goes right to the Psalms, giving a collection of examples from that book about how dark the human heart can be.

I love the way the psalmist pours out every emotion to God with no restraints, knowing that God cares. Isn't it great to know that we have the steadfast intercession of Jesus! This is one of the greatest treasures we have. Knowing He is constantly advocating and praying for us not only keeps us sane, it also motivates us to bring our friends before Him today.

Pray

Father, I ask You to bring Your mercy and healing. Whether by the special grace of divine intervention or the common grace of good medicine and health care, it makes no difference; mete out sufficient grace in each situation. Bring great glory to Yourself. Make Your presence clearly felt, even if Your ways cannot be easily discerned. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Some Bible commentators think that David wrote this psalm when his son tried to kill him in an attempt to be king. Absalom was prepared to kill his father to feed his pride. As David left Jerusalem, we have some of his prayers recorded. These verses contain the essence of David's prayer.

I love how David wants purity the most. David earnestly wants to gain control of his speech for he realises the harm that can come from an uncontrolled tongue (James reminds us of this in chapter 3 of his book). The first area of temptation that David mentions is the misuse of the tongue. We might be tempted to place sins of the tongue down the list of priorities, yet David knew that working on everything else will be to no avail if we don't learn to be wise and kind in our speech. Therefore, he says in verse 3, "*Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over my lips*". This sounds a lot like Jesus' statement, "*Do not lead us into temptation*" in Matthew 6:13.

David has seen the damage that is done when the heart is allowed to fantasize about temptation and linger far too long. We only need to read 2 Samuel 11 to figure this out. David knows that evil deeds come from a heart that is callous, careless, and lazy. In order to make this prayer for pure lips a reality, a person must be willing to entrust to God the very first inclinations of their heart and allow His standards to govern their mental and emotional life. All mental temptations must be ruthlessly executed. We must not adjust God's Parental controls and allow certain favourite temptations a stay around a little longer. Complacency and procrastination are our total enemies that take us away from the things of God.

David concludes in verse 8 by declaring, "*My eyes are fixed on You, O sovereign Lord.*" Now, that's great wisdom and a great conclusion.

Pray

Father, pour out Your Spirit. Humble the proud and bring hope to the despairing. Defuse the anger and clarify the issues that can take hold of my life at times. Supply the right counsel and grant ample supplies of forbearance and forgiveness. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I purposely didn't write a prayer of my own today. As you can see from the title, this psalm, like so many others, is a prayer. However, this one is slightly different in my eyes. It is a prayer of desperation and I'd love us to make it our prayer today.

You can see from the title that this was written by David when he was hiding in a cave. There was an army led by a jealous madman called King Saul, who was also David's father-in-law. If David had been found, no mercy would be given. He would be killed on the spot. Hence this desperate prayer. I've had the enormous pleasure to climb up into the Engedi mountain range and view caves like those mentioned in 1 Samuel 22 and 1 Samuel 24. I can imagine that David maybe wrote this psalm when cornered, knowing the only hope left was in his God whom he trusted. I love how he jumps from having no refuge and no-one to care in verse 4 to, *"I cry to You, O Lord, I say You are my refuge, my portion"* in verse 5. Maybe you aren't in a place of desperation today. Maybe you are. Wherever you stand, you will know someone who is feeling desperate. Pray this prayer again with sincerity and feel God move on your behalf. His promise is... *"All who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Pray

"I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out before Him my complaint; before Him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is You who watch over my way. In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me. Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. I cry to You, LORD; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise Your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of Your goodness to me."

Father, these seven verses I cry aloud to You again. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Have you ever been in a place where you felt helpless, and even worse, hopeless? That is where we find our sweet psalmist of Israel today. Yes, that's right, the man after God's own heart is in depression and gripped with paralyzing fear. John 10:10 reminds us that we all have an enemy of our very souls who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy us. Satan will continue to persecute your soul, if you allow it. He will run your life into the ground and make you worthless in your own mind, if you allow him that right.

At this time in David's life, these wicked ones actually chased him into a dark cave where he is having this prayer time with the Father. The cave in our lives today could be the cave of depression. That old thief will put his foot down on you and hold you in that state of depression as long as he can. We need to understand the authority we have as children of God to come to the point of ordering the thief out of our life for good. And don't forget, while we are in that cave of depression, it can be a place of prayer with the Father, just as it was for David.

I love how in verse 10 David says even amidst his anguish of soul, *"Teach me to do Your will for You are my God."* This is such an important lesson, asking God to restructure our thoughts towards Him. As we read this chapter today, it reminds us of someone who is fearful – ourselves! Most of our fears aren't all that noble. We're not really afraid of angelic hosts or even afraid to die. We mightn't be afraid of facing the final judgment, for Jesus has exhausted the judgment against all our sins. So, what fears haunt us? For what fears do we need to obey the command *"Do not be afraid"*? Let's start with the fear of man. There are some people whose opinion have more functional power over our hearts than God has, and that's wrong. There's the fear of disappearing into a cloud of not mattering anymore. Fear of failing, of being insignificant. On and on we could go. Let's bring all those fears to the throne.

Pray

Father, it's not easy to confess such weakness and yet You embrace me again today with all my baggage. You're such an amazing God. I love You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love these psalms that call us to rejoice in God's care whether things are good or bad. David, under attack by an enemy, thinks about God in military terms. There is a lesson here in how we can think about God and make His attributes and abilities relevant to our situation. Of course, to do this we have to know the many different ways in which God relates to His people. David could have thought about God as his shepherd, using that picture to illustrate how God protects him, yet to do so, David would have deprived himself of other aspects of divine comfort. Thinking about the Lord through the eyes of a military leader helped David more in this particular situation. As he thinks about God in this way, he realises that the Lord is One who fights for him and defends him. David would have used his hands and fingers as he fought (hence the mention of these in verse 1). David's words are a reminder that everything he learned about using those weapons was under the overseeing eye of God.

It is to God this devout warrior, David, sings when he extols Him as his strength and stay in verses 1-2. David becomes specific in what he wants the Lord to do in verses 3-8. He wants his enemies routed, he wants personal and complete deliverance. He uses a dramatic image to illustrate what he wants when he asks God to grab him away from the overwhelming situation he was in. He wants physical deliverance from the presence of enemies and ongoing deliverance from their slanderous accusations. This is a reminder that God can defeat our opponents and undo the damage they have done.

David closes with a delightful picture of the Lord's work for His chosen people who are congratulated upon having such a God to be their God. You have got to love this short synopsis of existence. This chapter gives us a sum of life in a few short words and concludes with the fact that we have an incredible God who loves us beyond what we can measure.

Pray

Father, fill me afresh today with Your Holy Spirit. Overshadow me like You did with Mary long ago. Sow a seed in me that will grow in me and bless the world around me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

If you have never told God how wonderful and beautiful He is, why not do it now? His Word tells us that if we don't worship Him even the rocks will cry out. We don't want the rocks to have to do our job! God reveals how great He truly is by the works He does. We can't even search how great His greatness is. His great works come out of His great goodness. God is great because God is good. Our distorted perception produces a god who looks like a schoolteacher tapping his desk waiting for us to get our act together. When this image has infiltrated our minds, it keeps us from trusting Him.

God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, His rule will last forever. His kingdom refers to His reign and power over His people. Some defy His rule but, in the end, everyone will submit to Him. God is not a tyrant. He is not a maniac. He is a great ruler of a great kingdom. No other so-called god has been faithful. God alone has shown how faithful He is to every single person on earth. He clearly shows that He has been faithful to people who choose to make Him their God.

How beautiful it is to worship Him. This psalm does this so well. I love the forthright honesty of the Psalms and the fact that the writer always reverts to God's love and faithfulness. 'Bruised reeds' and 'smouldering wicks' love His appearing, for they know Jesus to be gentle and humble of heart, One who gives rest to the weary. The broken find Jesus beautiful; the sinful find Him grace-full; outcasts find Him a refuge; adulterers find Him a restorer; lepers find Him a healer; the bound find Him a liberator; failures find Him as their righteousness; the demonised find Him to be the harmoniser of their troubled souls. Our Lord Jesus is all this and so much more. Have you truly found Him?

Pray

Father, meeting with You today has arrested my heart, once again. I love the way You love me. You know the worst about me and You love me just the same. Such love leaves me breathless. Lover of my soul, love in me and through me to Your glory. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The last five psalms are known as the ‘Hallelujah Psalms’ because they all start and end with the Hebrew word ‘Hallel’. Let me break down this word Hallelujah for you. ‘Hallel’ means ‘praise’ or telling someone that they are very great. The ‘u’ means ‘you’... all of you! ‘Jah’ is one of God’s names; most Bibles translate it LORD with four capital letters. There you have it, ‘Praise you the Lord’, ‘Hallelujah!’

We do not know who wrote Psalms 146-150 but most commentators believe they were written for the new temple in Jerusalem. These are great psalms to enhance your own personal worship. There is something about the power of praise. It is a weapon of our warfare. I have proved this countless times in my own experience. We are told *“in everything give thanks”*, not *for* everything. That means even when life throws its biggest curve ball, we can lift our hearts in praise. I’ve done this when I struggled to make a noise because the lump in my throat was too big and the tears were flowing like flood waters. Jesus came into our broken world to make all things new and He came for broken people, to make us as beautiful as Himself. Our hope is great, for the outcome of His work is certain. But our hearts are vulnerable, for the process of renewal is necessarily messy.

Like a melody we can’t get out of our minds, may we replay this truth over and over in our hearts: God gives grace to the humble, but He resists the proud. Let’s praise Him for the outpouring of grace that brought us into rich relationship with Him. Because of Jesus, we’ve been chosen, declared to be holy, and we are now God’s dearly loved children. He promises us all the compassion and kindness, humility and gentleness, patience and forbearance, forgiveness and love we’ll ever need. Now, that’s worth jumping out of your seat over and shouting “Hallelujah!”

Pray

Father, forgive me when I don’t like what You’ve picked out for me to wear, when I prefer my old sweatshirt of resentment, the dark glasses of anger, the underwear of self-pity, and the running shoes of fear and pride. Help me today to enjoy You like never before. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Another beautiful worship song of joy today. I think the key is verse 3: *“He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.”* God is like the Good Samaritan bandaging the victim and showing him kindness (Luke 10:30-37). He is a shepherd caring for the needs of His flock (Ezekiel 34:16). He’s the *“God of all comfort”* who enables us to minister healing and comfort to others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Have we, as believers in Jesus, accepted the remedy offered by God, our Great Physician? God cares for every one of us and has offered us the gift of eternal life in His Son. So, let the redeemed of the Lord say so! God’s love has no limits; His strength has no taming; His gifts have no measure. His delight, according to verse 11, *“is in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love.”*

It is important to know that our perseverance in trusting the Lord pleases Him greatly. Sometimes we think it is more beneficial to live in spiritually prosperous times rather than when there are hardships and difficulties. While the former has its own benefits, it is important to remind ourselves that we may well discover on the Great Day that the Lord thought more of His people’s faithfulness in dark times than when the going was easier.

What a piece of writing today, declaring God’s total power and sovereignty. With zeal and grace, He is working all things together after the counsel of His will. After all, Jesus is the Lamb of God, according to John 1:29, who has taken away our sin. He is the Lord of lords, according to Revelation 19:16, who alone is worthy of our adoration, affection, and allegiance. He is the Lamp of the New Jerusalem, according to Revelation 21:23, who has overcome the darkness and whose glory will illuminate the landscape of the new heaven and new earth forever. Need I go on? Bow your knee and worship!

Pray

Father, not a hair can fall from my head or a sparrow from the sky apart from Your sovereign will. Not a day or breath can be taken from my lifespan apart from Your say so. You heal my broken heart and You bind up my every wound. Thank You, a thousand times over. I love You and worship You alone. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 148

Live

When I read this chapter, there is one word that jumps into my mind – noise! It would be good to find somewhere alone with Him today and shout aloud His praise, pledge afresh your allegiance to your King. Remember, as we mentioned before, Scripture tells us to give thanks *in* all things, not *for* all things. So, whatever is going on and wherever you find yourself today, go do it. You will be amazed at the release it will bring you.

This psalm is designed to show us that it is the Creator who is to be worshipped, not the creature. As you know, in both the Old and New Testament, worship of exalted beings, angel worship, and worship of the heavenly host was a feature of pagan worship. It was something that God warned against in the days when Israel came into the land of Canaan. It was also warned against in the New Testament. Paul tells the Colossians not to be deceived by the worship of angels (Colossians 2:18). Stephen, in his great sermon in Acts 7:42 says that the children of God had been brought out of Egypt by God's mighty hand and yet they rejected the worship of God and began to worship the heavenly host. Creation was not made to be worshipped; creation was made to give praise to God.

So, in both Old and New Testament we are warned against the worship of angels and the worship of the created order, even the highest created order, the stars, sun, and moon. Who would have thought that the baby lying in the lowly manger was the One who would one day create a new heaven and new earth from the stuff of our broken world? There would come a new creation world in which Jesus would find great delight and reveal His unabated glory far beyond what we could ever imagine or hope. We can praise Him for His over-the-top generosity and the bottomless ocean of His joy!

Pray

Father, You have promised to redeem a family from every race, tribe, tongue, and people group, a people called to belong to Jesus forever as a beloved Bride, decked out in the wedding garments of His perfect righteousness. I praise You for the unsearchable and inexhaustible riches of Your grace, merciful Father. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

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Live

Psalm 149 picks up where Psalm 148 ends, commanding Israel to praise the Lord. The new song always refers to God's work among His people, such as the exodus or the new heavens and earth. The people are so excited that they dance, sing, and can't even sleep, according to verse 5. Their King is the Lord God, the Creator of the universe, and He delights in them. After reading these psalms, you may feel like singing. Go ahead! What about some of the old choruses you learned in Sunday School? Let your soul rejoice.

Psalm 149 is one of the Hallel, the five songs of praise that conclude the book. Why five? Perhaps to match the five books of the Psalms, which match the five books of Moses. Psalm 149 describes worship as a time of exuberant song and dance with a connection to tribal dance. Israel was a tribal culture, and its worship would have expressed those traditions, including enacting ritualised victories over real and mythic enemies, as we read in the final three verses. Such ritual victory anticipated and celebrated God's ultimate victory over wickedness, and prepared them to recognise and share in the working out of God's justice and righteousness in their lives. This immersion in praise was by no means a retreat from the world; it provided hope, encouragement, motivation, and support for everyone to join with God who was gathering the outcasts, healing the broken-hearted, and lifting up the downtrodden.

Let's praise Him because He is God and He is worthy. Praise Him for the battles He's fought for us and won. Praise Him because He has a plan to give us victory. Praise is an expression of our faith! It declares that we believe God is with us and He is in control of the outcome of all our circumstances. Praise is a 'sacrifice', something we offer to God not just because we feel like it, but because we love Him and believe He is worthy of our praise.

Pray

Father, You are the One I adore, the Author and Perfecter of my faith. Because of the "*It is finished*" of the cross, I wait eagerly and burn inwardly for the realised hope of Jesus' second coming. Until that Day, may the gospel free me to live and love missionally, knowing that my labours in You are never in vain. How can I not worship You? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

There are many times when I love silence. However, every time I read these last few psalms I am reminded of loud worship with physical expressions. Why don't you try this today? Instead of praying silently, which we are apt to do when alone, put on some worship music and get loud. I have a friend who told me a funny story of doing this one night in his bedroom. He was really rocking it, caught away in the moment. When he turned, he realised his mum and dad (who didn't know Jesus at the time) were standing at his bedroom door. It was kind of embarrassing, but a later conversation led to them enquiring what this was all about. So, you never know, a loved one in your sphere of sound might get caught up in your enthusiasm!

This psalm gives us some reasons to praise God. Praise God because of who He is. Praise God because of where He is. Praise God because He acts in history. Praise God because of how He acts. God is powerful and has all kinds of power at His disposal. He uses miracles of nature and miracles of circumstance to show His power. The sky displays His handiwork. Praise God because He made us His instruments of worship.

As we finish the book of Psalms today, let's remind our hearts of God's finished work through Jesus at Calvary. Oh, wonder of wonders! Our hearts can sing and soar as we reflect upon Jesus' humility, kindness, and servant love for us. He didn't come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it on our behalf. What we could *never* do, He has done for us. This psalm of worship is so appropriate for us today. Let's thank Jesus that the judgment we deserved He completely exhausted on the cross. The perfect righteousness the law requires is now freely and fully ours in Him. Jesus' last words from the cross, "*It is finished*" have become our first words of freedom.

Pray

Father, it's not my obedience, but Yours, in which I trust. It's not my righteousness, but Yours, in which I boast and rest. By the same grace You saved me, You are now changing me. Thank You, Father, for the psalms and the psalmists You so beautifully inspired to pen Your Word. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

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