



**PSALMS 42-72
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

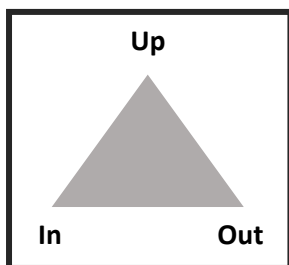
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate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

I don't know when the Psalms were separated into five books, however, we can tell the separation dates back to before the oldest manuscripts that we have.

As I mentioned in the introduction to the first Book of Psalms, the second Book differs from the first in the names of God that are used. I recently came on some writings from a German Anglican theologian by the name of Franz Delitsch who died back in 1890. In his study of the Hebrew text he shows that in Book 1 the name *Jehovah* occurs 272 times and *Elohim* only 15. However, in Book 2, *Elohim* occurs 164 times and *Jehovah* only 30 times.

In the first Book, 37 of the 41 psalms are specifically attributed to David and the remaining four are unattributed. David is the only known psalmist in Book 1. In the second Book, David authored 18 of the 31 psalms, more than half. In this second Book, other psalmists appear: Asaph and Solomon have 1 each, 7 or 8 belong to the sons of Korah, and 3 have no author listed.

I trust you will enjoy as we explore these psalms together!

Phil

Live

The first psalm of Book 2 begins with a striking image of a deer aching with thirst – thirst that comes from drought. While we have worship songs written about this, it is not the delightful little picture of wee Bambi with a dry mouth. This deer longed for, and needed, water in an urgent matter of life or death. In the same way, the psalmist's soul longed for, and needed, God. Drinking and thirst are common pictures in the Bible of man's spiritual need and God's supply. Here, the emphasis is on the sheer desperation of need.

I have often taken a great spiritual lesson from verse 5 where the psalmist asks this question of his own soul, *"Why are you cast down, O my soul?"* The moment he recognises what's going on in his soul, he turns it around. He doesn't surrender to his feelings of spiritual depression and discouragement but rather challenges his own emotions and brings them before God. He speaks to his feelings and reminds himself to ... *"hope in God, for I will praise Him again."* He didn't let it pull him into a pool of self-pity, as so often one can do. I love Spurgeon's definition of hope: *"Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey towards it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us."*

I love the psalms for their raw honesty, like in verse 9, which is a bit of an oxymoron. The psalmist had the confidence to call God his 'Rock', which is obviously his place of security, stability, and strength; at the same time, he brought his feelings to God honestly and asked, *"Why have You forgotten me?"* If you have been a believer for a while, I think you will, like me, not find this a contradiction but rather a truth. The better you know and love someone the more honest and truthful you can be in your relationship. The psalmist finishes as he plans to go on, with hope in God. A great wee exercise today is to visit your hope because, according to Romans 5:5, the hope that God gives does not put us to shame or disappoint.

Pray

Father, help me today as I come before You to tell the complete truth, knowing that before I even speak You know me intimately. Rekindle my hope in You. I love You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

This wee psalm has always been connected with the previous one, some even suggest they were one in the original manuscripts. You can see the same thread running through them, “*Vindicate me, my God.*” The psalmist knew the difficulty of dealing with unjust people; they not only do wrong, but they also know how to sweep it under the carpet with deceit. When times get tough it is important to learn this lesson from the psalmist – cry out to God for help. His trust was in the strength of God and not in his own strength, so he wondered where God was at his critical moment of need. When in a tight spot, have you ever wondered why God did not do things according to your thinking, especially when the answer seems obvious to you?

I love how the psalmist goes to the place where God dwells. I know He lives within our hearts, but there is something about gathering at the house of the Lord, there is something about the altar of the Lord. “*I will go to the altar of God...*” Full of faith, the psalmist anticipated God’s answer to his prayer and declared that he would sacrifice not for sin, but for gratitude and celebration of fellowship with God. One of my favourite moments each week is on Lord’s day morning when I break bread and partake of the cup with my family and friends. To me, it is like going to the altar of God, a painful yet beautiful remembrance of the Cross of Jesus, thinking deeply about His work and victory there. Under the New Covenant we no longer offer animal sacrifices, but we still bring the sacrifice of praise. The psalmist would not only praise God with animal sacrifice, but also with music and song.

There is no doubt the psalmist had hope of God’s redemption, but it obviously hadn’t come yet. I love that in the meantime, he would not surrender to his feelings of depression and discouragement. Instead, he challenged those feelings and brought them to God, finishing off again with hope in the Lord which stirred his heart to praise. Go on, give that a try!

Pray

Father, who on earth have I beside You? There is no one else like You who can restore hope and give life to the full. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

The psalmist today reminds us that the believer will have times of temptation, affliction, and discouragement. The church will have seasons of persecution. When times like this come it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that God has forgotten or forsaken you. What we should do is look above the situation to God, knowing that the worst enemies have no power against us, only what God allows. When afflictions come we must not seek relief by any sinful way but should continually meditate on truth, purity, and knowledge of God. Secret sins are known to God and it is important to realise that God knows all things, even the deep things of the heart.

I have found that while trouble may not drive me from my duty to God, I sometimes allow it to affect my comfort in knowing God is in full control. That needs checked. Also, we really need to take care that when things are going well it does not make us careless and lukewarm. When you read the Bible, you see that men of prayer like Daniel, Jeremiah, the Apostle Paul, and the psalmists were incredibly honest when they prayed. I read this lately and thought it was funny ... *Imagine a child saying to their father, "O father, my father, thou potentate of this household, I come before thee knowing that eschatologically thou art the information of the revelation of the incarnation. Do I have permission to go down to Wendy's tonight to consume some protein and carbohydrates, in order to fuel my existence for the next 24 hours? May I have thy permission please, father?"* If that happened, you'd think they'd lost their marbles but sometimes when we pray that's how we come to God. You don't have to use special words or big words. When you pray, talk to God as your Father, your Lord and your Saviour. I don't mean buddy-buddy, being careless with our Great and Holy God, that's wrong too, but just come to the Father and use your own everyday language.

Pray

Father, in the storms of life and in the calm of rest lead me through the trials I experience by the comfort, power, love and strength of the Holy Spirit. May I hear Your word of encouragement crystal clear, and may I follow the Spirit's leading step by step. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

What a beautiful piece of writing, a love song actually. The psalmist's tongue was guided by the Spirit of God as the pen is guided by the hand of a ready writer. This psalm is all about Jesus, His kingdom and government. There is more in Christ to engage our love than there is in anything or anyone else in the world. This world can lure our hearts away from Christ, so it is important to know how much worthier He is of our love.

I love Isaiah 35:8 which talks about a “Way of Holiness”. This verse actually says, *“the unclean shall not pass over it.”* As long as a person is out of Christ they can never walk this Highway, only those who know Him may walk it. This makes me ask about my own soul. How is it with yours? If the curtain was lifted in the private scenes of our lives, would it reveal holiness? Remember how God compels us, *“Be you holy as I am holy.”*

Paul says, *“If any be in Christ we are become new creatures.”* Have you ever wondered what that means? When we get saved Jesus lifts us out of the mire of life, plants our feet on the Rock, firm, unmovable, and puts a new song in our mouths, even praises unto our God. He lifts us, according to Ephesians 2, to be seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. When seated there, the Spirit enlarges our heart and we walk in His ways. Sin cannot have dominion over us, we become a people who live above their circumstances.

Rejoice because the throne of this almighty King is established forever. While the Holy Spirit leads God’s people to look to the Cross, He teaches them to see the evil of sin and the beauty of holiness so none will feel the need to continue in sin. In this psalm, the church is compared with the queen, who, by an everlasting covenant, the Lord Jesus has betrothed to Himself. We have so much to give thanks for as the chosen bride of Christ. I love this!

Pray

Lord, help me in the church today to always keep up the remembrance of Christ as our only way forward. Help me, Lord, to transmit the remembrance of Christ to succeeding generations that His name may endure forever. In HIS strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

This psalm is one of my hospital psalms. I read it in these situations as it encourages us to hope and trust in God and in His power, presence and love when things go pear shape. The great thing is that we have the encouragement of Christ and with Him we will be conquerors over every trial. He is a Help, and a present one at that. Even though the waters roar and the mountains shake, let us not be alarmed because we are led to the Rock and there we find sure and firm footing.

Here is the funny thing about being a believer in Christ ... even in sorrowful times there can be a joy. The river in this psalm points to the graces and consolations of the Holy Spirit, which flows through all of life for us. I love the effects of God's voice. One has to stand in awe of God, even in His judgements. Let all believers triumph in this, that the Lord of hosts, the God of Jacob, has been, is, and will be with us. He is our Refuge.

When on a long journey, one of the questions that we frequently receive from our kids is, *"Are we there yet?"* made famous by the donkey in Shrek. Ever notice that those kinds of questions never come when the kids are having a great time? It's the same for us as adults. When times are going great, we seldom ask, *"How much longer is this going to last?"* But, when times are rough, we begin to wonder if it will ever end. One of my mum's favourite little phrases in the Scriptures was, *"And it came to pass."* She would often say to me, *"Son, it's mentioned 396 times in the Bible, everything comes and then it passes. Remember eternity, son."*

What a great lesson at the end of the psalm to be still! In the hustle and bustle of life today it is uncommon to have stillness, yet the psalmist knows only too well that this is the place to truly find God – stillness!

Pray

Father, I am reminded again today of Your faithfulness, strength and power over all things. You are the Rock that is higher than I, the One I can cling onto in every season of life. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

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Live

Today the psalmist starts off by reminding us that our God is a God of awesome majesty; the Authorised Version uses the word “*terrible*”. The universal and absolute sovereignty of a holy God would be too terrible for any of us to even think of, let alone look upon, were it not for the astounding and overwhelming grace that has been given to us. Is it any wonder the writer expresses with almost over-the-top enthusiasm (four times in verse 6 to be exact) to sing praise. Praise is both a duty and a joy which ought to be frequent and abundant. There are always things in life to give praise for. Even in barren times we can lift our hearts and voices in praise.

Here, the psalmist gives us seven reasons to praise. We are to praise Him because He is our King, and not just any old king, He is King over all the earth. He reigns over the nations and He sits on the throne of His holiness. The nobles of the nations are gathered as His people and the kings (or, as the original suggests, the ‘strong ones of the earth’) are His. When it comes to power and authority, we tend to think of people in strong roles, but the psalmist leaves us in no doubt as to who is in ultimate control. Is it any wonder the psalmist’s concluding seventh reason to praise Him is that He is greatly exalted!

My little thought today is this, how dangerous a thing it is to no longer deeply crave fellowship with God. It’s a deceptive thing to enjoy Him but no longer actually need Him. It’s a deceitful thing to be satisfied with correct theology about Him without experiencing rich communion with Him. It’s a demonic thing to find our ultimate satisfaction in anyone or anything else but Him. The Lord’s steadfast love is better than life and nothing else can, or will, do. He has created a vacuum in our hearts, a screaming, empty place that is only full when it is occupied by Christ and by Him alone.

Pray

Father, forgive me when I try to cram human love or comforts or family reputation or anything else into that place designed for You. Don’t let me be too easily satisfied. May my heart rest again in You. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

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Live

This is a famous song of praise to God from the sons of Korah. I love how the psalmist constructs it around the idea of Zion as the dwelling place of God. There is little in this psalm to help us locate it to any particular event in history. It gives the sense of pilgrimage and festival, but nothing specific, and the picture of foreign kings trembling before Zion is entirely general throughout Psalms. Also, after the Babylonians destroyed the city in 587BC, the people of God had to come to terms with the fact that their beloved Jerusalem (Zion) was no more; where God dwelt could no longer be thought of merely as a place. The Zion of the Old Testament is the Church of the New Testament and we know that revival has broken out in our midst when God's people again love the Church as God's dwelling place, not just as a place but as a people.

The purpose of this psalm, and the purpose of those who have come to Zion to observe its beauty, is to offer worship to Almighty God. I was struck by how the worship described is meditation within the Temple. It doesn't speak of sacrifices and offerings, but of spending time in the presence of the Almighty. One doesn't really expect this in the Old Testament and I wonder, could it be the influence of the prophets? They declared time and time again that it was clean hands and pure hearts, not sacrifices, that reflected true worship.

Finally, all are called to walk around Zion and see the whole city. Today, the call is for God's people to honour our Lord Jesus by becoming aware of the Lord's body, the Church. When we keep this in mind it gives us fresh eyes and ears in our worship. This is vitally important because the more we see and hear Him, the more we will worship. So, live simply, love generously, care deeply, speak kindly, worship whole-heartedly, and leave the rest to God.

Pray

Father, help me today to worship You and not a tradition or a place. Help me to understand how Your grace has worked throughout past generations. Help me as I work through the joys and trials of the present. And give me confidence in You for the future. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

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Live

The first four verses of Psalm 49 are a call to *“all peoples”* and worshippers to listen to the words of wisdom about to be spoken. I love how this message is for those who are both *“low and high”*. Regardless of status or class, all people can learn from the words of this psalm.

We quickly see that this psalm is different from all the others, actually, it's more like a proverb than a song. The psalmist makes many arguments to show the foolishness of putting our trust in riches. He begins by noting that wealth cannot purchase our lives. Unfortunately, we usually do not realise this until we find ourselves in tough times. It is when terminal illness strikes that we realise money is of no value. There is an old maxim that says there are two things in life we can be certain of – death and taxes.

It is important to say that there is nothing wrong with accumulating wealth, as long as we see it in its proper perspective. Riches do not change the outcome of events as God is the only one who has any say or control in how things will turn out in life. To trust in riches is to trust in ourselves, holding the belief that we have the ability to change the course of this world with a few more quid. Such thinking is foolishness. It is by God's name we are healed of every disease and set free from every bondage. By His name, not our finance, we are made whole and fitted for life in the Kingdom. It's at the name of Jesus that one day we will gladly bow our knees ... along with everyone in heaven and on earth and under the earth, according to Philippians 2:9-11. It's only because Jesus overcame sin and death for us that we can call ourselves overcomers. From beginning to end every good thing we receive in this life, and in the life to come, comes to us by God's grace and by God's grace alone. Now that's a great lesson!

Pray

Father, Your name is the name that is above every name. It's by Your name, and by everything Your name signifies, that I'm forgiven and have been declared righteous in Your sight. Truly magnificent. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is the first psalm written by Asaph and it is one of my favourites; his others are found in Psalms 73-83. Asaph is the chief of the Levitical singers (mentioned in 1 Chronicles 6:39) in charge of worship in the temple at Jerusalem. They were appointed to serve before the ark of the Lord, make petition, give thanks, and praise the Lord. The first six verses describe the convening of the court for judgment. God, the Lord, speaks as He summons all the earth from the east and from the west. Out of Zion comes the Lord, shining forth in splendour, perfect in beauty. We often think of judgment strictly against the wicked, but judgment must be against all peoples, so God comes forth as the righteous judge, summoning the world to the courtroom where He will begin judgment upon His faithful ones as well as the wicked.

Asaph seems to imply that people were worshipping and sacrificing because God was kind of insecure and He somehow needed it. Actually, the opposite is true, God needs nothing from us but rather gave us worship so we would be thankful people who would be encouraged and motivated to remain in fellowship with Him. The gospel is GOOD NEWS and good news is not something that condemns us but draws us in; it loves us the way we are but also doesn't allow us to remain that way. Grace is the most liberating truth in the Bible, yet it is so otherworldly that we misunderstand it.

When our kids were small, we would do the 'count to three' thing and if what was asked was not done, they got reprimanded. I feel sometimes that we view God like 'three strikes and you're out', when all the time His Word says, 'If God is for you who can be against you?' Imagine this, GOD IS FOR YOU, not mad at you, not out to get you, but rather madly in love with you and with every person who walks through our door, regardless of creed, race, sex or standing. They are loved by the Most High God.

Pray

Father, set me free to live in truth of heart and soul. May I worship You in spirit and truth today for who You truly are – King of kings and Lord of lords. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

Today's psalm is about what to do when you've really botched it up; how to get back on the right track with God, with others, and with yourself. David couldn't deny his wrongdoing any longer. He was guilty, and he knew it. He could only confess to God and ask for forgiveness. Let's not judge him too quickly before we take a glance in the mirror. Often we try to justify our sin and pretend that it is not so bad, explaining why it isn't really sin at all. As long as we keep this defiant attitude, we can never get completely right with God. Getting right with God requires a change of mind and a change of heart and these changes mean that we're sorry we did it, regardless of who knows or doesn't know. I know myself well and I can mess things up on my own without anyone's help, but it takes a move of the Holy Spirit to get me back on track. We must depend on Him to cleanse us, wash us, restore, and forgive us.

Getting back on track also requires a change of direction, when we stop going our way and start going His way. We also spend time with God. David said, *"Do not cast me from Your presence,"* because he recognised that spending time with God is what gives our lives direction. He recognised that he needed the Holy Spirit's power in his life to overcome the power of sin.

A change of mind, heart, and direction; do you know what all of this adds up to? Repentance. When we blow it, we need to repent and do so quickly. Of course, when we sin we do feel guilty, that's natural, but if you feel guilty too long, you haven't really repented. Repentance removes guilt and restores the joy of our salvation. God will not reject a broken and a repentant heart. Wow! May we be honest and realise how our lives might reflect truth and integrity in the eyes of others, not so we can claim anything for ourselves, but so we might simply do His will and accomplish what is right. I love this!

Pray

Father, deliver me from guilt and shame and save me from my problems. Lead me to trust in Your guidance and providence. In Jesus' strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

The heading to this psalm tells us the background. It revolves around Doeg the Edomite, who read about in 1 Samuel 21 & 22. Doeg worked for Saul and informed him that David had gone to Ahimelech, the priest at Nob, receiving provisions and Goliath's sword from him. Saul charged Ahimelech with conspiracy and ordered his guards to kill Ahimelech and his whole family. The guards refused, recognising that it was sinful to raise their hands against the anointed servants of the Lord. Saul then ordered Doeg to kill them. Doeg killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, children and infants, cattle, donkeys and sheep. It is a horrific scene which compels David to pen this psalm.

What Doeg did was a desperate act, yet how much worse it was for him to be proud and boast of what he had done. Our tongues are dangerous weapons that either help others or hurt others. We must control our tongues and speak only things that are proper to one another. When we arrive home in heaven there will be no one there who can throw their chest out and say, "I'm here because of me." The only passport that will have landed us on the shores of eternal bliss will be God's marvellous grace. "Saved by grace," is the only testimony that can ring legitimately from any lips. When Abraham Lincoln declared independence in America he said this, *"We are like whalers who have been on the long chase. We have at last got the harpoon in the great monster, but we must now look how we steer, or with one flip of its tail he will send us all into eternity."* His words proved prophetic because the declaration of freedom brought with it much struggle, bloodshed, and even civil war. If you determine to live by the principles of God's grace, you need to be prepared to fight for it.

Pray

Father, astonish and ramp up my wonder of such a magnificent salvation. Let me be a person who lives to the praise of Your glorious grace. What else could I possibly want to do with the rest of my life and throughout eternity? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

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Live

I used to say to my kids, *"Whether you think you can or can't, you are probably right."* David is unmasking what goes on in the heart today and he knew these truths probably even applied to himself at times. Now, before we judge or make comment, let's hit the pause button for a second and be truthful with ourselves. I know for me, there are many times when I catch myself living as if there is no God. A day or two goes by and I realise that I have been running on my own steam instead of relying on God. This psalm reminds me that at those times, I am a fool.

The Scriptures are telling us that we all are fools when we don't live by faith and that it will show up in our lifestyles and behaviours. If we stop speaking to God and stop listening for His voice in our hearts, we will certainly go astray. When faith and prayer exit one's life, they are replaced by fear. Fear is the trademark of doubt while hope is the trademark of faith. I know of people today who are so fearful they won't even leave their home. The road of doubt and fear leads to many evils, even suicide, and this is where the Devil wants to take us. This is where he can control us, with or without our knowledge, and use us in his struggle against God.

In I Thessalonians 5:17 there is a verse that a lot of us learned when we were children, one we could quote on short notice because it is so short, but it is very important, it says, *"Pray without ceasing."* You ask, 'How do I do this?' I'm glad you asked! Pray in the shower, when you eat breakfast, when you're going to school. Pray for God to help you. Pray in your business meeting. Pray while you're driving (only please don't close your eyes!). Pray in your exam. You are in such close fellowship with God that every moment becomes an opportunity to pray, so PRAY CONSTANTLY.

Pray

Father, sometimes reading Your Word is like standing in front of a gushing fire hydrant of Your love and affection for me. It's hard to stand up to the rush of so much glory and grace. It's wonderfully overwhelming. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

One of my favourite little lines comes in verse 4 today: *“Behold, God is my Helper.”* I love this and often use it when fear tries to raise its ugly head. Always remember, if we are for Him, He is for us; and if He is for us, we have nothing to fear. Everything is beautiful in HIS time, according to Ecclesiastes 3:11. He will come through in the end, and in the meantime, He will sustain us and bear us up. David speaks of the completion of his deliverance as though it’s a done deal even though he had some tough stuff before him. Why? Because having God’s promise, he was as sure of it as if it was already done. The Lord would deliver him out of all his troubles.

May the Lord help us to bear our cross without being intimidated or ashamed and let us share His victories and glory, knowing that the victory has already been accomplished at Calvary. Give thanks today that He has already defeated death, hell, and the grave. We should never allow the voice of praise and thanksgiving to cease in our lives. You wonder why God allows this or that to happen to you and sometimes you wonder if He has forgotten your address altogether. The Bible says that *“all things work together for good to those who love the Lord, to those who walk according to His purpose,”* Romans 8:28. We just have to trust Him to work it out and be assured that He will as long as we keep walking in His purpose.

God is crazy about you. He loves you extravagantly. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, He’ll listen. He could live anywhere in the universe and He chose your heart. We used to sing an old hymn about the magnitude of God’s love and His provision for us at Calvary, here’s the chorus: *“If that isn’t love, then the ocean is dry, there’s no stars in the sky and the sparrow can’t fly. If that isn’t love, then Heaven’s a myth, there’s no feeling like this, if that isn’t love.”*

Pray

Father, set me free from fear. I still feel insecure and underequipped in some important areas of life. Be big in my life and free me from the power of rejection and shame. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 55

Live

Today we see David in deep grief, most likely because of Absalom's conspiracy and the betrayal of the people. I find this psalm daunting. Verses 12-14 describe the calamity; the pain came from a source most unexpected. Sound familiar to you? No one has ever been as overwhelmed as Jesus in the Garden. In His agony He prayed and was heard and delivered. Now we can trust in Him and follow Him and be supported and carried through all trials.

There is nothing that distresses us more than to be disappointed by those who profess to be Christians and friends. People will let us down, even those closest to us, and this will be very painful. But, by looking unto Jesus and remembering that He suffered the same, we can be strengthened to bear it. Jesus was betrayed by a companion, a disciple, one who resembled David's friends in this psalm. Both were speedily overtaken by divine vengeance and this prayer is a prophecy of the everlasting ruin of all who oppose and rebel against the Messiah. In every trial, let us call upon the Lord and He will save us. I love that He hears us and doesn't scold us for coming too often. Actually, the more often we come, the more welcome we receive.

David had thought all were against him, but now he sees there were many with him, more than he first thought, and so he gives the glory to God for it is God who raises up friends and makes them faithful to us. When you're in a tough place there are more true Christians and real friends than you reckon. God is on our side, which is more than all the armies of the earth put together. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear and He can turn ashes into beauty. We are reminded at the tail end of this psalm that God will not allow the godly to slip and fall. How amazing is that, to know God is always for us!

Pray

Father, it's comforting to know that this man, David, like us, experienced seasons in which he felt deceived, betrayed, and abandoned. We're all weak and broken. We all need the gospel of Your grace, every single day. Lead me today into green pastures, Father. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is a psalm depicting another of David's tough times, seen in the emphasis upon the phrase "*all day long*". David is experiencing a constant attack from his enemies. He uses the word '*hounded*' a couple of times over. The language depicts a military struggle and in the midst of these conditions David cries out to God. Notice the title given to this psalm: "*When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.*" Things are not going well for David at this moment in time. He is being chased by Saul (see 1 Samuel 21) and is in the hand of Achish the king of Gath. David has to pretend to be a madman to preserve his life.

If God knows my pain, sees my suffering, and will make my enemies retreat, then there is nothing that I have to fear. This explains why David says what he says in verses 12-13. David will make his offerings of thanksgiving because God delivered him from death and his feet from stumbling. What an amazing God! The promise that David relied upon is also the promise given to us. In fact, the writer of Hebrews quoted this very psalm in his desire to help us understand what kind of helper God is for us: "*Therefore, we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*" Hebrews 13:6. Therefore, the message of Psalm 56 is certainly applicable to our lives.

How does trusting in God remove fear? Repeatedly, David states that he will praise the Word of the Lord. When we are attacked, we need to be able to draw on the stable assurance of God's Word rather than the ever-changing perspectives of public opinion. A lack of knowledge of the Scriptures is crippling to the Christian. Today, too many people have too much of their faith based solely on emotions and feelings. But our emotions can rapidly change. When we are under attack, it is our emotions that fail and our feelings become a rollercoaster ride. Get stuck into the Word today!

Pray

Father, despite all that David went through in his life, he returned to this theme: *If God is for us, who can be against us?* Help me to realise that suffering does not equal abandonment from You but a closer trust and walk. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 57

Live

Today is another instance where David continues to write down his songs to God as he runs to preserve himself from death. The title of the psalm states that this psalm was written, *“When he fled before Saul in the cave.”* David doesn’t say that he found refuge in the cave where he was hiding; the cave is not David’s refuge, David’s refuge is in the Lord.

A little detail about verse 3 is that you don’t often find *“Selah”* in the middle of a verse, a word which many scholars believe to be a musical notation depicting a rest, quiet or pause. It’s like David saying it would be good to ponder this verse today. Then we read, *“God sends His unfailing love and faithfulness.”* This seems to be the point where God has intervened with answered prayer. In verse 4 we read that David is now able to lie down, even though enemies surround him. David has seen God come through for him again; his soul is stirred and he will sing praises with instruments and sing God’s praises among the people. He will be sure to inform all the peoples about what God has done in delivering him.

David was experiencing bad things. David did not experience these things because he had made the wrong choice or had done something wrong. Bad things happen to good people and David was being affected by Saul’s evil. God could still use David and show His glory even though he was in dire circumstances in this cave. This is how God fulfils His purpose for us. God can take anything we are doing and use us to be His instrument. When Paul was imprisoned, God accomplished His purpose. When Paul was travelling, God accomplished His purpose. Even when Paul was persecuting the saints, God’s will could be accomplished as those Christians went into the world preaching the good news of Jesus. No matter where you are in life or how bad things have been, God can accomplish His will and fulfil things in your life. We’ve heard it several times now ... God can bring beauty from ashes!

Pray

Father, what a great confidence it brings to my soul to know that Your love for me is faithful and true. Your love is steady and will never depart from me, no matter what I may experience or feel. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

I am reminded today of Tozer's little line that I love, *"We say silence is golden but sometimes silence is yellow."* In this psalm, the rulers and judges are keeping quiet when they ought to be speaking. There is nothing worse than the age-old problem of corrupt leaders and governments. The purpose of the government is to bring about justice by protecting the innocent and exercising judgement against the evildoer.

Let's not be silent when governments and rulers are corrupt and evil. Rather, we need to be making people aware of any corruption so that changes can be made. We must be sure that we do not conform to their character as there is a historical problem of people following the morality of their leaders. This was the great problem for the people of Israel. We need to seek out righteousness and justice and never shut our ears to the cries of the innocent, the helpless, and the needy; when we do, we have become just like these evil workers.

I love the beginning of verse 6: *"God, knock the teeth out of their mouths."* Now, in our language, this sounds like David is saying to smash their face in! Then he says, *"Lord, tear out the young lions' fangs."* He is acknowledging that these rulers and judges have power, but requests to God that their power be shattered. I love David's confidence that God will bring about the justice that has been lacking. The wicked will be judged and the righteous will be rewarded. David seems to recognise that judgment against the wicked may take some time in coming, but it will come and eventually God will sweep the wicked away. Yes, death and taxes are assured in life, but God has also assured us that the righteous will receive a just reward and the wicked will receive their due penalty. David's graphic language displays his anger against injustices and also his absolute passion here with the final result of good against evil being in the hands of the eternal God of heaven.

Pray

Father, may I never stay silent when injustice shouts loudly all around me. Rather, may I always be a voice to those who haven't got one and have a growing heart for the underdog. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

I'm shocked to read how many times Saul attempts to take David's life. In 1 Samuel 19, Saul sends men to David's house to kill him. His wife, Michal, spared David's life and gave him time to get away by pretending that he was sick and sleeping in his bed. That didn't stop the ravings and madness of Saul who didn't care that David was sick and commanded his men to get him up out of the bed so he could kill him. This is the circumstance in which David penned this psalm.

Interesting that David isn't afraid to tell the Lord what outcome he desired. David points out that his enemies are acting like a pack of vicious, snarling dogs. The nature of the attack is threatening not only physically, but also verbally. David says, *"Listen to the filth that comes from their mouths – their words cut like swords."* I'm sure you have been the victim of cruel words and can feel what David must be feeling. There is an old saying, *"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me."* We all know that is not true as our words can comfort and heal, but can also bring great pain.

In verse 9 the psalm takes a shift as David describes his confidence and expectations in the Lord. Notice these confident words, *"I will keep watch for You, my strength, because God is my stronghold."* I really love this little section of verses. David says he will be watching for God. Verse 10, *"My faithful God will come to meet me."* Then, in verse 16, he gives the explanation, *"For You have been a stronghold for me, a refuge in my day of trouble."* And in verse 17 he declares God to be his *"Strength and Refuge"*. God has been there for him before and will continue to be with him.

Here is life's greatest lesson summed up in three words ... God is faithful! Never forget this, especially during every time of trouble and doubt.

Pray

Father, one way I am able to get through hard times is by reminding myself that You, my Father, have always helped in the past and will never leave or forsake me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

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What am I going to do about it?

Live

This psalm has one of the longest titles: *“A Miktam of David; for instruction; when he fought with Aram-Naharaim and with Aram-Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.”* That is some intro right there and points us to the events of 2 Samuel 8:1-14.

The psalm begins by talking about how God had rejected David and the people of Israel. However, 2 Samuel 8 describes the numerous victories of David against the surrounding nations. The only way to reconcile this situation is to assume that while David is away defeating the Philistines and the Syrians, the Edomites make an invasion into Israel. The Valley of Salt seems to be the border area between the nation of Edom and the nation of Israel. Charles Dickens penned, *“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”* That seems to be what’s happening here. While it was good times as David was able to subdue the surrounding nations, the Edomites took this as an opportunity to backdoor Israel while the armies were off fighting.

Now please note, God does not get out of the wrong side of bed, deciding He no longer wants these people and He’d better teach them a lesson. We know when and why God rejects, and that it is due to sin. I don’t think I’m over imagining here that there must have been some unmentioned event in Israel that caused the Edomites to be successful in their invasion. Sin is the great element that interferes with our relationship with God.

If we could only see how sin separates us from God it would help us flee from many of our temptations. How badly we need to see that we close God out of our lives when we choose to go down the roads we want to go down without any consideration for Him. When we become selfish and give no concern for the things of God, we are put into the position of being without God as we go through life and that’s a dangerous place to be in.

Pray

Father, I praise You for crowning me with Your love and compassion. You have taken away all my guilt and You have borne all my shame. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 61

Live

David probably wrote this psalm when he had been in exile following the rebellion of Absalom. David had fled across the Jordan River when Absalom came with an army from Hebron to take Jerusalem. He has been driven out of the Land of Promise, hence the statement, *“from the ends of the earth.”*

I’m sure you have been to a place that has felt you couldn’t be much further away. Many things can drive us to this lonesome place; the loss of a loved one, financial problems, the loss of a job, a bad health report. Every one of us are, sooner or later, driven by circumstances to this ‘end of the road’ type of experience where there is no place else to go. Where we turn at this point is so important. *“When my heart is overwhelmed,”* David said, *“lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”* This high rock becomes a refuge, a shelter and a hiding place under the almighty wings. What an incredible place to be.

David ends the psalm with words of confidence, ‘God, You are going to take care of it. The Rock that is higher than I will see me through. He will bring me back.’ My Mum’s favourite verse was Jude 24, *“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy.”* This one little benediction from Jude is crammed full of sovereign goodness and mercy. I love the fact that all day long God will prove His covenant and His capacity to keep us from falling. Though we may falter in the journey, the grasp of His grace will be steady and secure. When we waver in our adoration of Him, He will remain constant in His affection for us. When we are faithless and disobedient, He will remain committed and fully engaged with us. Even when He must discipline us, it will be in love, never in disgust or regret. He is the perfect Father to His daughters and sons.

Pray

Father, You know the temptations I am facing today, but Your Word promises that I will not be tempted beyond what I can bear. Lead me today to that Rock that is higher than I. Be my Refuge and my Shelter today. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

"I waited patiently for the Lord." This caught me today and made me ask myself a big question that I'd like to pose to you, 'When was the last time you did that?' We know in our hearts we need to do this but our heads struggle to conform. Real rest is found in God alone and today we see David doesn't find rest in his possessions or in his royalty, only in God. He declares that God alone is his rock, his salvation, and his stronghold and because of these three things, *he will never be shaken.*

I love how David emphasises over and over the fact that God alone is his refuge. There is nothing else that David will put his trust in for his life, for his welfare, for his salvation, for his strength or for his hope. Let's face it, we have a tendency to trust God, but only as long as we can trust other things alongside God. We trust God, as long as there is a good amount of money in the bank. We trust God, as long as things are going well. We need life to be going just the way we want and *then* we think we are trusting God.

We must always remember the three powerful lessons described in the final couple of verses. (1) Strength belongs to God and to get through the hard times in life, we need to have God as our number one priority. The trials from the enemy and the hardships of life's circumstance can be crushing and we need the Lord to get us through. (2) Unfailing love belongs to God and it will never fail us. It doesn't matter what may happen to us or how bad our circumstances may be, God still loves us and His covenant with us will never be broken. (3) God is the eternal judge. Romans 2:6-8, *"God will repay each person according to what they have done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."*

Pray

Father, I join King David today in giving You praise for who You are, and for all the good gifts You lavish on me, especially Your total forgiveness. Praise the Lord, O my soul, for perfect and complete forgiveness. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

David wrote this psalm after his son Absalom tried to kill him and he ran away to Edom. Edom is east of Jerusalem, where David lived, and to get to Edom he had to go through a wilderness, a wild place where it was barren and had little water. David was most likely very dry, not just because he was thirsty for water, but thirsty for God too. I am reminded today that just as our bodies need food and drink, our souls need something too, and that something is God.

David remembers those times when he saw God's power and glory in the Temple in Jerusalem and he lifts his hands up to God. I love this posture of worship, which I feel displays giving the whole of ourselves to God. Remember, David is choosing to do this when times are tough and he feels dry. David is saying that God has fed his soul as a feast would feed his body and that is why he will praise God. He talks about lying awake at night thinking about God, and about clinging on to God under the shadow of His wings. I love these beautiful metaphors used time and again by the sweet psalmist of Israel.

As I wrote today I was drawn to pray for many friends who aren't in a good place. As I pray for these situations, I don't fully understand them, but I don't have to understand as God is in full control. Why, how, and when He chooses to bring a foretaste of perfect health in the present state of our brokenness is up to Him. He is the King Who does all things well. He is always at work in all things, for His glory and our good. He doesn't need our permission to do anything or our advice about anything. When it comes to praying for healing, we need to avoid two extremes: faith formulas that treat healing like an on-demand right waiting to be claimed; or a theology that has little, if any, expectation of His kingdom breaking in with power and healing, supernatural deliverance and extraordinary manifestations.

Pray

Father, thank You for this psalm that reminds us of David's faithfulness when things weren't going good in his life. He worshipped You when things were good and when things were bad. So must I. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

We have no real clarity about where this psalm fits in David's story, but it is clear that he is in difficulty yet again and needs protection. Yet again, poor David has been the victim of a conspiracy, but we have to admire his ultimate confidence that he will be able to boast in God. His enemies are cunning, they talk about 'setting a trap', like catching an unsuspecting animal. In their arrogance they encourage one another, spurring one another on. Those who plot evil never suspect that their schemes will be uncovered. I love the 'BUT' in verse 7, *"But God shoots His arrows at them."*

God cannot, and will not, be mocked. As it was in David's day under the Old Covenant, so it is under the New Covenant. Because of Jesus' finished work on the Cross, terror is terrified, and one day, evil will be eradicated forever. Satan knows his time is short, and his demon forces tremble with fear. Because of Jesus' resurrection, His Kingdom has come, and will come even more fully. Because of the promised Holy Spirit, I can and must find my place in His story, pushing back the effects of the Fall, and offering the first fruits of the City whose builder and maker is God. Because of His grace, I will do so with a heart of passion and great anticipation.

G. K. Chesterton, the British poet and theologian, was a brilliant man, however, he was also extremely absent-minded and over the years he became rather notorious for getting lost. On one such occasion, he sent a telegram to his wife which carried these words: "Honey, seems I'm lost again. Presently, I am at Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?" As only a spouse could say it, she telegraphed back a one-word reply, "HOME!" Our passage today is such as brings you HOME to the fact that anything life can offer cannot compare to knowing Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Pray

Father, because the gospel is true, I pray Psalm 10:16-18 with confidence, *"The LORD is King forever and ever; the nations will perish from His land. You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; You encourage them, and You listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror."* In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

Today the psalmist is expressing the sheer might of God through some natural phenomena. I love to climb the mountains and see how God's power and might is displayed through them. To stand on top of any of the mountains of the earth is a majestic experience. The second way God shows His might is in the waves of the ocean, which are absolutely fascinating when you consider their power. The power of a wave is unbelievable. Stand in the ocean and notice how a wave will push you back and then draw you in. The calming yet powerful sound of waves crashing on the shore reminds us of God's power. The psalmist tells us that we are to be in awe of the signs of God and to look at the earth to see what God can do, remembering that this same power is working in and for us.

The final section of this psalm describes the mercy and abundance of God towards His people. David declares that it is God who visits the earth and waters it and that He blesses it abundantly, revealing to us that when He does these things for the earth, He is not stingy, nor will He ever be to you and me. I love this imagery which always reminds me that we never earned our way into a relationship with God, and we don't maintain a relationship with Him by our feeble efforts either. We are secure and loved, all because of His doing.

I'm sure you're like me ... sometimes we lift our hands in awe and gratitude for the way He loves us; sometimes we shake our fists at heaven like a pouting, demanding child; sometimes we wring our hands in anxious unbelief like a helpless orphan. But we live and we will die secure in His eternal palms with our names written upon His eternal heart. My greatest desire is to be called, like King David, a person after God's own heart. I can't think of a higher pedigree and mantle than this.

Pray

Father, I'm thankful that it's Your grasp of me and not my grasp of You that defines my way of life. Help me to be much more taken up with Your beauty and Kingdom. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

From an unknown author today we get the call to the whole earth to shout, sing, and praise the glorious name of God. It's as if all of God's creation must praise God for His awesome works. The reason for the need to shout praise to God is because of God's triumph over the enemies; every person will bow his and her knee to God, whether willingly or unwillingly. I love this writer's enthusiasm ... 'Come on, come and see what God has done!' In our language we'd say, 'Open your eyes for crying out loud!'

We need to jump start our praise to the Lord and make it continual before Him, just as the earth is continually praising Him. We can initiate this by 'coming and seeing' His mighty works. The psalmist offers some reminders concerning these mighty works, like, "*He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot!*" This is an obvious reference to the parting of the Red Sea as the children of Israel left Egypt. I love that God expects us to remember His powerful acts from the past. The life and death of Jesus is the same; we are to know and remember that Jesus came to the earth and died for all people. The parting of the Red Sea would have been more than 500 years past if the psalmist lived during David's day, yet it was the key act that the psalmist wanted the people of Israel to remember. God still rules and continues to watch over the nations. We are told simply to remember. I think that we have become bad at remembering important, historical events that God has done.

Verses 9 and 12 are my all time fav's because, "*He has preserved our lives and does not allow our feet to slip.*" I think this is so beautiful and when I personalise it, it makes me cry. "*Yet You have brought us out into a place of abundance.*" Despite all that we must endure and suffer, we are always brought out into the abundance and blessings of God.

Pray

Father, I have no comprehension how anything good could happen in the trial or how my life could work out. But I am assured as I walk through fire and water that my faith is being refined and You are always with me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 67

Live

The ending of Psalm 66 connects well with the message of Psalm 67, which is a call to the people to praise God because He blesses us and is gracious to us. We glorify God by looking to His awesome deeds; we glorify God because He preserves us and brings us through trials into abundance; and we glorify God because He answers prayers and His steadfast love remains through trials. The three Selahs in Psalm 66 and two in today's psalm call for ponder and reflection.

Saint Augustine in his book 'Confessions' wrote about the struggle with sin and it is one of the greatest books ever written. He was a very immoral man before he met God and he had massive struggles in two areas – food and sex. His way of putting it is, *"I could not get enough of beauty."* Beautiful bodies, beautiful tastes and beautiful smells he loved but he began to realise that because he was so driven by natural beauty, three things were happening to him: he was always empty and unsatisfied; he was always doing things he didn't want to do but couldn't stop; his relationships were always breaking up. In trying to figure this out he came up with a theory and it was that all our problems come from what he calls "DISORDERED LOVE". All disordered love leads to brokenness and all our problems in the world are traced back to disordered love because we make *things* the ultimate goal. Augustine says when this happens, three things occur: (1) It starves you (you miss out on the true love of your heavenly Father). (2) It emotionally enslaves you (thinking, 'this is my right; why wouldn't God allow me to have this?') (3) It divides you (you have no clear parameters to what you really believe).

It is not sinful to want love or power or honour or rest, but the sin in our heart drives us to look for these in creation, in the Father's *things* rather than in the Father Himself. It's true, seek first the kingdom of God and His right ways, then all else will be added on.

Pray

Father, forgive me when I'm tempted to believe there's something I did to earn the love You have lavished on me and the inheritance You have secured for me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 68

Live

The first word of Psalm 68 is the Hebrew word 'Elohim', God in plurality, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I know I say this a lot but here I go again ... I love this! It's kind of weird to have a favourite name for God, but I do and this is it. When the Trinity arises, enemies become just like smoke that is blown away and like wax that melts in front of a fire. These people are rejoicing that their God rides the clouds. Their King is a Father to the fatherless, a Champion and Defender of widows, a Provider of homes for the deserted, and a Leader of prisoners to prosperity.

The earth and heavens are in subjection to their God and He uses creation to bless His people. The showering of abundant rain is not only a figure of God refreshing the people as they walk through the desert, it is also a figure of God abundantly showering blessings upon Israel. This very point is made in verse 10: *"Your people settled in it [the land, their inheritance]; by Your goodness You provided for the poor, God."* God is great in power and majesty and gives power and strength to His people.

A portion of Psalm 68 is quoted by Paul in Ephesians 4:7-8, *"Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the Messiah's gift. For it says: When He ascended on high, He took prisoners into captivity; He gave gifts to people."* Paul is stating that Jesus is the King who now sits on the throne, ruling over the nations. Since Jesus is the Messiah, He is the fulfilment of this psalm. Jesus established the kingdom of God in Zion. Again, we read Paul's words, *"The One who descended is the same as the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things."* Ephesians 4:10. How appropriate the ending of Psalm 68 is in light of the powerful teaching of Paul: *"God, You are awe-inspiring in Your sanctuary. The God of Israel gives power and strength to His people. May God be praised."*

Pray

Father, thank You I can run freely and boldly to the throne of grace any time I want, a place where I always experience Your welcome and joy. I'm free from my pretending, free to own my sin and brokenness, and free to repent with joy and grow with hope. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

This psalm is full of pain and humiliation that seems to go on and on with no let up. David describes his pain as if he were in floodwaters up to his neck, sinking in deep mud, crushed by a flood of waves. He goes on to describe the physical outcome of that pain, declaring that he is just busted from crying, his throat is parched and his eyes swollen from the constant flow of tears.

I admire David's vulnerability as he describes the scorn and shame that he is enduring through this suffering. Instead of finding comfort or help, he finds continued mistreatment. This is symbolised in the thirst David has which is not quenched by water, but by vinegar mixed with gall. This gives us the hint that this is what is known as a 'Messianic' psalm, simply meaning there are prophetic statements pointing forward to Christ's own sufferings.

David calls out to God for judgment to fall upon his enemies. The prayer for judgment is so strong that David even asks, "*Let them be erased from the book of life and not be recorded with the righteous.*" This section is a fervent plea for God's wrath to be vented against the enemies and that they will fall into their own trap.

In a very interesting twist, also quoted by Paul in Romans 11:7-10, the psalm ends with David praising God and giving thanks for His salvation. David continues to be impressive in his ability to keep praising God in the midst of severe suffering. In spite of our suffering and the trials that come in life, we know that we have our home in heaven and we know that God will continue to bless us, continue to love us, and continue to save us as we continue to praise the Lord our God. Our identity and security do not lie in this world's wealth or in its pain. Rather, we bear His name as 'Christ-ones' and so worship Him until He calls us home, for then we will be forever with the Lord.

Pray

Father, You haven't promised me a pain free ride, You have promised something that transcends the chaos and fear of uncertainty. You've promised to give me Your peace in the midst of whatever happens. I treasure the promise of being kept by You and for You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalms 70 & 71

Live

According to the NIV Application Commentary, *“Psalms 70 and 71 are combined in many ancient manuscripts, indicating they were (in some traditions at least) read as a single psalm.”* Psalm 70 is a call to God for deliverance and for help to come quickly. It would seem Psalm 70 is the opening petition for God’s help and then Psalm 71 continues with the petition. David uses three words to describe what he is looking for from God: ‘protection’, ‘rescue’, and ‘save’. His confession is, *“For You are my rock and my fortress.”* With a confidence he has had from he was a boy in his dad’s fields, he uses the picture of God watching over him and protecting him from his birth.

The huge thing about David’s psalms is his ability to praise and continually trust in God as a refuge even though he is in the hand of evil people. I think this is what he is getting at in Psalm 71:7, declaring how he was an example to many. Personally, I have found this to be an important way to deal with trials. You and I have the ability to become an encouragement and an example to many through our trust in God when suffering comes our way. We ought to be able to amaze people by our faith through life’s difficulties.

Psalm 71:9 shows us that this is late in David’s life. One cannot help but be impressed with the determination of David, even in his old age, to not give up on God. He continues to place his hope in God and declares that he will praise Him more and more, and his mouth will continue to tell of God’s righteousness. How could David have this kind of strength all his life through all the tragedies and sufferings he endured? I think there is one thing that he kept in his mind that we often forget: *“O God, who is like You?”* Who is like God? Where else will we turn in times of trouble? Where else will we place our confidence if we will not trust in God? Today think of all HE has done for you.

Pray

Father, I ask You for thick skin and a big heart. I want to love well, to love Your glory when I experience everything from unintended slights to fully intended harm. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 72

Live

This is one of only two psalms written by Solomon (the other is Psalm 127). Solomon records his father David praying that he and his royal descendants would rule over Israel with righteousness and compassion. I love the illustration that is put into this, David prays that Solomon would rule for a long time, like the sun and moon, that he will rule in righteousness, flourishing like rain watering the earth, and prosper abundantly till the moon is no more. It's like reading a poem. I guess all his natural comparisons are why we can relate so well to the psalmist.

David prays that Solomon will rule the kingdom with authority, that he will rescue the poor and defend the oppressed when they have no-one else to help them. I see in this a couple of challenges for us all. Firstly, to pray for our governmental leaders, that they themselves would be governed by God's justice and righteousness, that they would lead the land according to the will and purposes of God, that they would be guided and directed by God. We should pray for our leaders even if we do not agree with them politically. Secondly, it is the prayer of a father for his child. Matthew Henry puts it this way, *"The best thing we can ask of God for our children is that God will give them wisdom and grace to know and do their duty; that is better than gold."*

As the psalm concludes we read, *"May His name endure forever."* Solomon sensed that the Greater Son of David (Jesus) would be more than a great man. He, His fame, and the greatness of His character would endure forever. I love the following quote, *"We see on the shore of time the wrecks of the Caesars, the relics of the Moguls, and the last remnants of the Ottomans. Charlemagne, Maximilian, Napoleon, how they flit like shadows before us! They were and are not; but Jesus for ever is."* (Spurgeon)

Pray

Father, just as this psalm today records a prayer for someone else, so I want to pray for others today. I pray for those who labour for You as missionaries. As these Christians live out Your redeeming story in nations that are destined to one day be covered with the knowledge of Your glory, give them an overwhelming sense of Your presence today. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

