



PSALMS 73-89
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

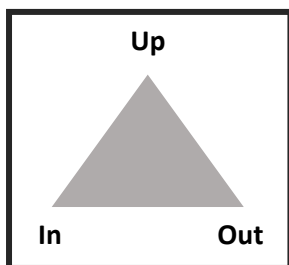
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate 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 3

This third Book of Psalms mostly contains the writings associated with Asaph. The tone definitely darkens in Book 3 with the first chapter questioning the justice of God before seeing any light at all in God's presence. While Book 2 ends with quite a high point, this Book starts low and remains somewhat like that throughout, with chapter 88 being the bleakest of all psalms. There are some rays of hope, however, which occasionally pierce the darkness (found in chapters 75, 85, and 87).

The reason these psalms are so bleak is because their content portrays the historical journey of Israel's decline into sin and exile. The timespan of this national disaster (I think I can call it that) occurs around 930-587 BC. Israel's prostitution and covenant-breaking exploits led God to rebuke, reject and expel the chosen people from the Promised Land.

This section of Psalms is quite daunting reading actually, but it is such a challenge to us today to run hard and follow after God in ALL of His ways. I trust you enjoy and are truly challenged!

Phil

Read

Psalm 73

Live

I can see the psalmist's predicament today. The wicked had plenty of money and it almost seemed as if the blessing of God was on them regardless of their behaviour. This confused Asaph, but the important words are "nearly" and "almost"; God did not let the psalmist fall. Asaph's little assumption is that the wicked do not have trouble like most people. They think that they are important, they are proud, and they oppress people. They say that everything in heaven and earth belongs to them. They question God. This part of the psalm finishes with "*the godless have no trouble and plenty of money*". I love the next bit, though ... he goes to the sanctuary of God (verse 17). What a great place to go. Most likely this was the temple in Jerusalem (we know from 2 Chronicles 5:12 Asaph went there). Here in the sanctuary, Asaph met with God and saw what would happen to the godless. God would surprise them in a moment. He would destroy them. One minute they would be there, the next minute, gone! Boom! It would be like a dream when you wake up ... gone.

Asaph repents of his thoughts and acknowledges he knew nothing. He was stupid, like a wild animal. His heart, thoughts and his stomach had hurt him, but it was entirely his fault. God was with him all the time and that was the most important thing. God would hold his hand and be his guide. God would take him to glory. God would give him everything on earth he needed. God would make him strong. What beautiful revelation! So, he made God his refuge, a place where he (and this includes us too) could find shelter in a storm. In the storms of life, God will keep you safe; this is what the psalmist believed. It is better to be near to God than to have plenty of money and things; in a moment they will all be gone, but God will be with us ... forever!

Pray

Father, when life is hard, You are always good. Where else can I go with the things that confuse and disappoint me but to You? When You discipline me, it's not to send me into the doghouse of Your displeasure, but to secure the outcome of Your good pleasure. It's great to remember that. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 74

Live

Around 600 BC, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and took many of the Israelites into exile to Babylon. This psalm tells us that the people were upset because the temple had been destroyed. The problem was they were not really upset that they had disobeyed God, which was the reason God let Nebuchadnezzar destroy the temple in the first place. If you read verses 12-17 carefully, you will find the little phrase *“it was You”* repeated seven times. The psalmist was saying, ‘It was You, God, who made everything; it was not some false god.’ The spin on today’s psalm goes a bit like this ... ‘God, if You are so strong, why did You let the enemy destroy Your temple? You have done nothing, so, God, do something!’

This is one of those psalms where we see the writer so caught up in the happenings around him he is completely missing God. Let’s not get side-tracked and naïve concerning the battle, forgetful of the war that’s being waged daily against us. Having lost us for eternity, the devil will do anything in his power to tempt us, seduce us, and then condemn us. He will lie about God to us, and lie about us to God. In essence, he will do anything he can to rob God of glory and rob us of our freedom. It is good to remember that the reason Jesus came into the world was to destroy the works of the devil, and He has succeeded by His death on the Cross. He crushed the devil’s head and sealed his fate and there is a Day coming when our already defeated foe will be our fully eradicated foe. Until that Day, may we be wise to the schemes of the devil, knowing he hates the church. He’s the invisible intruder, masquerading as an angel of light, so subtle and capable of convincing us he doesn’t exist, so skilled at convincing us other people are the biggest problem in life, so ruthless in trying to convince us God is neither good, faithful nor enough. Thankfully, the prowling lion of 1 Peter 5:8 is no match for our Lion in Revelation 5:5 – the Lion of the tribe of Judah!

Pray

Father, thank You for Jesus. What an awesome, loving, mighty, and merciful Saviour I have. Jesus, You are my righteousness before my Father and my Peace for this and every day. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Most theologians associate this psalm with the time when Assyria came against Jerusalem. It is a psalm of thanksgiving for God's rule and mercy. There are three pictures: an earthquake, a horn, and a cup of wine. They all seem to be pointing to God as our Judge. He will be fair, as the verses plainly state. With world coverage on social media today, we are all aware of the devastation of an earthquake. When Sennacherib came from Assyria, the people felt as if they were in an earthquake. They were very much afraid. Even though it was not a real earthquake, they were just as frightened. But God is declaring Himself in full control, not just of the earth, but over every power and king as well. The horn speaks of strength and power; animals with horns use them for just this, fighting for control. The horn is used here to identify the strength of Sennacherib and his army. God promises to break the strength of the enemy; some versions of the Bible use the analogy of cutting the horn off completely. The wine is a picture of God punishing the godless, making them endure every last drop of the cup of His fierce wrath.

I align chapters like this with the social injustices of today. When our mission teams tell the stories and statistics of child prostitution in Cambodia, I can pray words from this psalm. I don't do this with a spirit of vengeance, but with a longing for justice to flow like a river through the streets of Cambodia and Craigavon, and every city and town. I pray for God's righteousness to be the never-failing stream which cuts its life-giving way throughout the earth (Amos 5:24). I pray 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"* (Psalm 10:16-18). Because of Jesus' finished work on the Cross, terror is terrified, and, one day, evil will be eradicated.

Pray

Father, because of Your Spirit, I can, and must, find my place in Your story, pushing back the effects of the Fall. Because of Your grace, I will do so with a heart of passion and great anticipation. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 76

Live

This psalm, like the previous one, is about what happened in the war with Sennacherib, king of Assyria. The title 'A song of Zion' was used by the Israelites for this psalm. I love how the psalmist describes how God brings victory in breaking the enemy's weapons, bow, shield and sword (another way of saying that God wiped them out). We think that 'to judge' means to say who is right and who is wrong, but it means more than that in many places in the Bible. This is one of those places. God judged the Assyrians to be wrong, and the result was that they died. God judged the poor people to be right, and the result was that they became free with no more oppression. This means that the enemy did not hurt them, or take their food, money, animals and children.

There is so much comfort to be had in chapters like this. We face troubles every day; this may not be the war with Assyria faced by the Israelites, but we all battle modern society, the devil trying to infiltrate our homes, families and life. But God who is rich in mercy (oh, I love this thought) is the One Who fights for us, just like in days of old. Sometimes we can feel like we are swimming in a pool of baby piranhas; no big sharks like Sennacherib king of Assyria, just small fish nibbling at our spirits. We get surrounded by a lot of little decisions, little needs, small conflicts and projects, a lot of little things and annoying people over which we have no control. The combination of all these is zapping our energy and weighing us down. Let's not get preoccupied with piranha swatting, just look to God and look for God. It's so good to know He is running toward me right now, not with a furrowed brow but with a compassionate heart; not bristling with impatience, but bubbling with everlasting kindness; not rolling His eyes, but opening His arms. What a God we serve and what a Father we have!

Pray

Father, I may have to wait and go through some things, but I still believe that You will give me the victory in Your timing. Please don't allow me to become confused, but just to keep believing, like Jesus told Martha, *"If you keep on believing you will see the Glory of God."* In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 77

Live

One thing I am learning in life is that days of trouble must be days of prayer. When God seems to have withdrawn from us, we must seek Him until we find Him. Today, the psalmist remembered God, but only His divine justice and wrath. His spirit was overwhelmed and sank under the load. Here is the language of a sorrowful, deserted soul walking in darkness, something all too common, even among those who love and fear the Lord. There is nothing that wounds us like the thought of God being angry at us. God's own people, on a grey misty day, may be tempted to make wrong conclusions about their spiritual state and about the state of God's Kingdom in the world, but we must not give way to such fears. Let faith arise and answer such thoughts from the Word, believing that God is always good. Doubts and fears grow when we are weak in our faith, and weariness is all too often the contributor of this. Guilt and shame are massive tools of the enemy that light on us like a tonne of bricks, pressing our souls into despondency.

When unbelief is working in us, we need to bring it under subjection. A great way to turn this around is to do what our writer today did, remember the works of God in past circumstances. This will be a powerful remedy, for He is God and He never changes. If we have harboured doubtful thoughts, we should, without delay, turn our minds to meditate on the God, *"Who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, that with Him, He might freely give us all things"*. (Romans 8:32). What an uplifting thought. When we are going through some of the most difficult trials in life, it is hard to see God's hand in them. We tend to be negative rather than positive. We tend to live life horizontally rather than vertically. Life is full of changes and challenges and only God knows the ones that are around the corner. So let's look up. God is in full and total control, and one day the mist will clear!

Pray

Father, thank You that I'm becoming more and more like Jesus because of His faithful, relentless work. Free me from being too concerned about excesses and weird stuff that might happen. I am thirsty enough to be done with being cool and being in control. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 78

Live

This is a big chapter today full of what some might call 'tough love'. The law of God was given with a charge to teach it diligently to their children. Sin kills the spirit of people and destroys the heart, so those who continue to sin must expect to face trouble. The reason we live with so little comfort and with so little purpose is because we do not live by faith. In Israel's history, we have a picture of our own hearts and lives. God's patience and warnings and mercies seemed to harden their hearts against His Word, and the history of the world is much the same. Judgments and mercies have been little attended to, until the measure of sin comes to a point where God will turn away. The Holy One of Israel will do what is best for His own glory, and what is best for our good. I love this about God. Even in His disciplines we find His love. It's who He is.

Here are some good steps to follow to keep our hearts open to God: Allow God's love and acceptance into your heart daily. Trust God for everything; this is the ability to relax and know God has it all under control. Cast all your care on Him; flee anxiety and stress; the biggest killer is fear as we imagine things that could never happen. Meditate on God's Word; God wants to speak and He speaks through His Word. Take every thought captive; we need to protect our thoughts, folks. Be filled with the Holy Spirit; daily, continually let Him flow into your heart. Keep a positive word of God on your lips, like memorising some Scripture. Preserve unity at all costs; the enemy's biggest tool is diversion; it's usually the little things that deter us and take us away.

David is a type of Christ, the great and good Shepherd who was humbled first, then exalted. It was foretold that He would be filled with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. David's epitaph in the last verse of this psalm is incredible: *"By the uprightness of his heart, and the skilfulness of his hands, he led them."* I love it!

Pray

Father, make me an instrument of Your peace. Help me write stories of reconciliation and beauty for Your honour and glory. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is another psalm penned by Asaph. It concerns the invasion and destruction of Jerusalem. Asaph describes the horror of the destruction that took place when the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem, and it is basically a cry for help. The psalmist calls out to God asking how long the anger of the Lord will burn against Jerusalem because of the sins of the people and their forefathers. Verse 9 is the central theme of the psalm: *“Help us, O God our Saviour, for the glory of Your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name’s sake.”*

I’m not a big fan of posters or bumper stickers as usually they are quite cheesy and silly, but I saw a poster lately, and, with this psalm in my head, it caught my attention. It said something like this: *‘A prayer to be said when the world has gotten you down ... when you feel rotten and you’re wrecked and tired ... when you’re in a big hurry and you’re mad at everybody. When you’re struggling to rise above it all, pray this prayer to heaven: “HELP.”’* What a pretty simple and cool prayer!

In John 15, Jesus declares that He is the true Vine and we are the branches. He says, *“Abide in Me, and I will abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.”* Jesus is teaching how the fruitfulness of Israel can return, and it would not be through their own works or their own righteousness. They needed to abide in Christ if they were going to be restored and revived as the psalmist prayed would happen. How is your abiding today? Notice we cannot do this without Him and if we abide, we can bear much fruit. Oh, I love this passage.

Pray

Father, thank You for the fact that I can abide in You. That is incredible, but far greater is the truth that You come and abide in me. That You chose me first is by far the greatest of all mysteries. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 80

Live

This psalm begins by describing God as the Shepherd of Israel. We know from the description given in verse 1 that the psalmist is speaking about the Lord, *“You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,”* taken from Exodus 25:21-22. We have a sentence which is repeated in verses 3, 7 and 19; this chorus is a call to God for restoration, a prayer on behalf of Israel for deliverance.

We hear the psalmist ask again today how long God will continue to be angry with the people. The Lord’s wrath is described in three ways. First, God’s anger smoulders against the prayers of the people. We are told that when we regard sin in our hearts God will not hear us (Psalm 66:18). God does not want our prayers when our actions have stirred up His anger. Second, the people have been fed with sorrow. Blessings have been replaced with the painful situation of enemy nations attacking Israel, a situation brought about by their own waywardness. The tears are so great that they are made to drink them by the bowlful. Third, Israel is an object of contention for neighbouring nations and a mockery to their enemies. How long will these things continue? The ‘how long’ question is one of the most common questions we have for God during difficult times.

After asking ‘How long?’ the psalmist returns to the chorus, *“Restore us, O God Almighty; make Your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.”* Asaph describes Israel as a vine that was brought out of Egypt and planted. The vine grew so large that it filled the land and covered mountains and mighty cedars with its shade. He is describing Israel as a prosperous nation that God established it to be, most likely during the time of its pinnacle under the reigns of David and Solomon. However, the protection of the vine has been broken, and now the vine is being plucked of its fruit. This image is a picture of nations stripping Israel of its wealth and power. The psalmist calls out to God to see what the nations are doing and to watch over the vine again.

Pray

Father, reading about the rebellion of Your chosen nation, Israel, makes me see my own rebellious heart and spirit. May I turn afresh to You today and no longer stray onto wayward paths. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Psalm 81

Live

Today begins with a call to worship. The first three verses call for Israel to sing aloud to God and shout for joy. These three calls to worship are most likely to three different groups. Firstly, to the whole congregation to sing and shout; secondly, a call perhaps to the Levites, who were appointed in the temple as singers and musicians; and thirdly, a call to the priests who had the responsibility of blowing the trumpets. This is Asaph the worship director's call to all the people to participate in worship.

The fact that the full (or new) moon is mentioned shows that this worship coincided with the Festival of Tabernacles. The purpose of this festival was for the people to remember the mighty works of God, specifically Israel's deliverance from Egypt. This is what Asaph tells the people to recall. In verse 6, the Lord Himself begins to speak, reminding them how He relieved their burdens in Egypt. The people repeatedly forgot the miserable lives they had led in Egypt. At one point in time, Israel's children were being killed by the Egyptians, but here God is saying that He relieved them from that labour.

God then reminds the people of the events at Meribah where Israel complained of thirst and Moses struck the rock to bring forth water. God says that He tested the people in that situation and they failed because they did not maintain their trust in God. The Lord reproves them, calling for them to listen to the words He has to say, but He recognises that His plea for them to listen to Him is an empty request. He reminds them of the covenant that they are to keep with Him. They are not to worship any other gods. What is God supposed to do with a people who refuse to listen to His commands? Read and find out today, and may our hearts be challenged around the area of obedience and worship.

Pray

Father, today I wait upon You for bread from heaven, for living water and comfort. Help me to stay honest about my weariness, stay expectant of Your comfort, and stay thankful for whomever You send across my path. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The courts of heaven; what a powerful subject. Even earthly judges and magistrates are the ministers of God's providence for keeping order and peace, and particularly in punishing evil-doers, thus protecting our homes and families. We must submit to the authority of God in submitting to those in government for He has placed them over us in His providence. It is hard for men to have honour put upon them and not to be proud of it, but all the rulers of the earth will die and all their honour shall be laid in the dust. God governs the world and I am thankful that there is a righteous God to whom we can go, and on whom we can depend. Considering the state of affairs in the world today, we have need to pray that the Lord Jesus would speedily rule over all nations in truth, righteousness, and peace.

My mum used to tell me that we have been given two ears and one mouth, and the ratio is no accident. We could all become much more engaged, attentive listeners, hearing what people are meaning to say, not whatever interpretation we place on their words. We need to listen with our hearts not just with our ears, and no one does this better than God. The longsuffering of our God is beautiful to see. No one is quicker to listen. We never have to snap our fingers to get His attention or to reel Him back into focus. We never catch God looking away as though He is bored, and we never have to repeat ourselves to make sure He heard. He never interrupts or talks over us. When we're trying to tell Him something, He never finishes our sentences for us, even though He could. He is always speaking to us through the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit, and He only ever speaks words of life. How foolish we would be to not hang onto every syllable that He utters. It is good to remember that God is the righteous Judge of all the earth and one day every knee will bow to Him and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

Pray

Father, may I become known more for my good listening than for my frequent speaking. While the government is a power that must be adhered to, You, Lord, are the all-powerful One to Whom I must listen attentively. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is the last time we will meet with Asaph, our music director, poet and psalmist. It sometimes seems as if God is not concerned about the unjust treatment of His people, and so we read psalms like this one today where there is a call upon Him to act on behalf of justice and righteousness. The enemies of God and of His church have always been many; this magnifies the power of the Lord in preserving for Himself a church in the world. For all who oppose the kingdom of Christ, let them read here their doom. God is the unchanging One, still the same as He always was, the same to His people, and the same against their and His enemies. God's triumphs over His enemies clearly proves that He is an almighty Being who has all power and perfection in Himself, according to His name Jehovah. God is to be respected and feared and our job is to yield ourselves to be His willing servants. Let us seek deliverance by the putting away of our fleshly lusts that war against the soul. It is God we must trust in as the Divine Warrior. Whether it's a mere skirmish or an all-out assault, the battle belongs to Him. Fear and discouragement are not the order of the day; faith and peace are. When we are afraid of events in world history, when it seems like evil and terror will triumph, may we hear the laughter of heaven. May we fix our eyes on the installed King, the Lord Jesus, the Ruler of the kings of the earth. When we are under attack by the seducer, accuser, and condemner of the brethren, let us once again see Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is our wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Our only boast is in Jesus, not in anything in us. When we are overwhelmed by the enemy, we can pray verse 13, "*O my God, make them like a wheel*". Rolling out of control, let them have no quiet. May their minds eternally revolve and never come to peace. Blow them away like thistledown. As chaff before the wind, scatter them, chase them, drive them to destruction.

Pray

Father, when my divided heart wages war inside of me, come to me in the storm and make peace. It's Your grip of me and not my weak grasp of You that will win this day and every day. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

There is nothing more powerful for the believer in this evil world than to enjoy the presence of the living God. The true believer's soul cries out for His presence like the deer thirsting for a drink to sustain its life. This is such a special psalm to me as verse 6 was sung over me in March 2006, just after my wife Jill died suddenly at 48 years old. It is a passage I hold dear because as we journey through this life, we may have to pass through many a valley of weeping, and many a thirsty desert. I have proved this Scripture true; those who press forward in their Christian course shall find God add grace upon grace. The autumn rains truly will bring blessing. As a sailor, I know the best way to ride out a storm is not to try and outrun it, but rather to turn and sail straight into it.

One day in God's courts is better than a thousand spent elsewhere. May we see the smallest place in His service preferable to the highest earthly platform. If at the moment you can't seem to see light, I can assure you that if God is our God, He will light up our path to guide us. When we are in danger, He will be to us a shield to secure us from the fiery darts that come our way. Though He has not promised to give riches and dignities, He has promised to give grace and glory to all who seek them in His appointed way. May we take care to walk uprightly, and let us trust God to give us everything that is good for us. If we cannot go to the house of the Lord, we may go by faith to the Lord of the house. Our heart's attention and affection can so easily be seized by something or someone else. It could be bitterness, pettiness or anxiety. It could be guilt, shame or stress. I implore you to choose God's peace as the ruler of your heart, for He is the Prince of Peace! Because of the Cross, peace with God is now a legal right of ours, a done deal and a settled issue.

Pray

Father, because You have forgiven me, I will choose to forgive others and I will choose to ask for forgiveness from others. Because You are at peace with me, I will do everything within my power to live at peace with others. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

When things go wrong and afflict us in the present day, that should not stop us from remembering the former mercies of God. I love verse 2 which says when God forgives sin, He covers it; and when He covers the sin of His people, He covers it all. When God pardons our sin, it is because of His great compassion toward us. When Christ our Intercessor stood before God, He interceded for us, and in turn God's wrath was turned away. As a Father, He checks and chastens those whom He loves so they will return to Him with humble prayer. I love the fact that the divine justice is now satisfied by the great atonement. Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, took our nature upon Him; divine justice looked upon Him and was well pleased and satisfied. For His sake, all good things, especially His Holy Spirit, are given to those who ask Him. It's the assurance of God's unfailing love which enables us to trust Him with transitions we go through in life and uncertainties about the future.

I love verse 10, *"Unfailing love and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace kiss one another."* After watching my mum care for my dad for the last dozen years of his life as he suffered from Alzheimer's, she epitomised this verse for me. She loved and served him with nothing from him in return; in the end, he didn't even know who she was. Change is never easy; it makes us feel vulnerable, fearful, and insecure. We can get tempted, once again, to be our own saviour, which is never good. May God's Word dwell in us richly and His peace rule in us powerfully; and may His glory be our main passion and greatest delight. We have entrusted our lives to Him because He alone is trustworthy; He alone is the Good Shepherd. As believers, we have given Him our sins, wounds, brokenness, and weakness. Now, in fresh surrender, let's give Him our planning for the next season of our lives, whatever and wherever that may be!

Pray

Father, show me the way I should go through the transitions of age, career, calling, health, finances, and relationships. Write stories of redemption beyond my wildest dreams and hopes. It's all about You, Lord Jesus, not me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love how David opens this psalm, *“Bend down, O Lord, and hear my prayer”*. It would seem that this is another life threatening moment when David asks God to guard his life. It’s a great prayer to pray and one that I have personally prayed over my family myriads of times. I love the assurance David has in his God when he says, *“In the day of my trouble I will call out to You and You will answer me.”* When we are weak, it is a powerful time to lean into God because He is always strong. God alone possesses almighty power and infinite love as He alone is the way, the truth, and the life. Our goal should always be to set God before us and to continually live in His presence, seeking His face more than His hand. (Though I often think if you have His hand, then just look up as His face won’t be far from you.)

In considering David's experience, and indeed our own, we must not lose sight of Him who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor that we through His poverty might be rich. When all around us fails, there is no one gentler with us than God. There is no one as welcoming of sinners, as kind to the broken, or as understanding of our struggling as He is. He is gentle, yet persistent; gentle, yet firm; gentle, yet so very powerful. I often think of God like the perfect surgeon, the one who I would want to work on me. He never gets nervous, flustered, agitated, or hurried. Rather, He has a steady hand because of His steady heart. When it comes to our hearts, we could all do with a touch from the Master Surgeon, making us the people He has called us to be, people whose gentleness is evident to *all*, not just to those who are easy to be around. David asks for a sign of God’s favour in verse 17. I think of this when I get my white feather, or when my rainbow appears at just the right moment.

Pray

Father, in light of Your tenderness and gentleness with me, may I be gentler with others today when I face both fair and unfair criticism, and when I think things that are obvious to me ought to be obvious to everybody else. I love You, my gentle God. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is a powerful wee psalm which starts looking at the actual city of Jerusalem, and then moves to speak prophetically of the New Jerusalem, the universal Church, and its glory when all the nations of the world come into it. I love the language of verse 6, the Lord registering the nations as citizens of Jerusalem. The name of every believer is in God's great book known as the 'Lamb's book of life' in which He will not forget any of them. This psalm is written by the descendants of Korah who were famous for being porters of the temple. This meant they understood the presence of the Almighty more than most. The occasion for this psalm is unknown, but some suggest it may have been written following the destruction of the Assyrian army in the days of Hezekiah, when all the nations of the world at that time sent gifts and presents to Hezekiah in honour of the occasion.

I think we can all remember times we spent trying to spiritually wangle our way into God's good books, believing that if we claimed the right verses, prayed the right prayers, did the right things, then maybe God would draw near and love us. We maybe even pushed it as far as to think we'd have an abundant life filled with blessings and marked by a lack of difficulties. We now know, I'm sure, that a lack of difficulty He never promised, but an eternal love He does promise. It is good to know that it is not of works lest anyone should boast, but it is by grace we are saved through faith. It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone that our names are penned in an indelible way in the 'Lamb's book of life'. That, for me, is the greatest assurance of all, to know that I am His and He is mine. Jesus said, *"No one shall pluck them out of My hand. My Father, Who gave them to Me is greater than all, and no one will pluck them out of my Father's hand."* (John 10:28,29). Double security!

Pray

Father, because of Jesus' finished work, I'm not afraid of You as my judge, but I revere and love You as my Father. Because of Jesus' great grace, I no longer despise or dread Your decrees, rather, I now delight in them. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

After my wife, Jill, died in March 2006, I lived in the Psalms for months. I found this psalm the most daunting of all as it doesn't turn to hope in the end as all the others do. I felt like I was living the reality of the final verse and would say it over and over to God. This is by far the darkest psalm of all, written by someone who was ill from he was a child; it may have been Heman himself, or someone he knew. I have often struggled with this psalm as it seems to offer no hope. He prays, but God does not seem to listen, so he feels that he is already in Sheol, which is another word for the grave. Jews believed that people went there when they died, but the worst bit of Sheol was the pit because people who went there never came out.

It's strange because nowhere does the psalm say that the writer had done anything wrong, yet God was attacking him and doing bad things to him. Why? God gives no reason, and yet Heman still says in verse 13, *"every morning I pray to You"*. And that is what the psalm teaches us; if things get bad, pray to God every morning! The psalmist's trouble is like the sea, it is heavy and pours over him, it is all around him like a flood and it makes him feel that he cannot move.

I know it is kind of weird, but I found solace in this psalm more than any other, and it became my favourite. I think the reason was that it doesn't give any answers. I didn't really want an answer to my pain because I knew none would suffice. If God had told me why, I would still have to ask, "But why?" There is good news for us, though; in the New Testament, Jesus delved into Sheol a few times to release people like Lazarus and the son of the widow from Nain. Why, how, and when God chooses to bring a foretaste of perfect health in the present state of our brokenness is up to Him. Remember this as we pray in the 'now' and 'not yet' of the Kingdom.

Pray

Father, when it comes to praying for healing, help me to avoid two extremes: formulas that treat healing like a right waiting to be claimed, and a theology that has little, if any, expectation of Your kingdom breaking in with power and supernatural deliverance. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

Today we finish the third section of the Psalms. Ethan wrote Psalm 89 and called it 'A Maskil', a psalm that teaches us something. Ethan starts off singing a worship song, but it soon turns into a lament about a particular problem. God had promised that there would always be a king in David's family but now there was no Jewish king. Babylon had defeated the Jewish army and had taken the Jewish king into exile. So now the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, had become king of the Jews. How could this happen? How could anyone explain this? Interestingly, Christians have sung this psalm at Christmas for many centuries because Jesus is the rightful King from David's family and He will always be the King whom we commemorate at Christmas. That is how we explain the problem, but Ethan had no way of knowing this!

The most important verse in the whole psalm is verse 37 which shows us that the everlasting throne of David is not an earthly throne at all. All the promises to which people clung were never going to be fulfilled in an earthly dynasty; this was all a type and shadow of a heavenly kingdom which would eclipse any earthly display of power and strength. In verses 2 and 3, Ethan reminds God of His covenant, a covenant that He had made long ago; he reminds God of His faithfulness and unfailing love; he tells us what God promised to David and how He is strong to deliver; and he finishes off with praying that God will do something. The psalm does not answer the problem of Israel having no king, actually, there was no immediate answer until Jesus came to earth as a descendant of David!

God always delivers; He always keeps His promises even though we may not see the full picture. We can all be filled with hope through God's promise of the new creation, a world of beauty and goodness. We greatly long for the day when creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will enjoy the glorious freedom along with us, the children of God.

Pray

Father, grant me a heart to stay present and engaged in Your story of making all things new. There are no accidently made people, meaningless places or insignificant things, for all things matter to You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

