

MONDAY, 1/13

Read Psalm 13

¹ *How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*

² *How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

³ *Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,*

⁴ *and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

⁵ *But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

⁶ *I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.*

How do we pray when we are unsure that God is listening? When we look at the first four verses, we can see the struggle and desperation that plagues the life of the psalmist. The burden being carried here is heavy. The weight of that burden makes the bearer of that weight impatient and even frustrated at God. When we are hurt or sick or trapped, we might ask similar questions of God. How much longer must I face this alone? I feel overwhelmed in my condition. I fear that I am losing this fight, and that I will lose the life I have always known because of it. My enemies are closing in on me. Can't You see that? I've got no more strength to fight. Where are You?

You'll notice that in the last two verses, the psalmist's trust in God returns. It is as if he steps back to see the greater picture and understands what his suffering may prevent him from seeing during his darkest hour. He is not only hopeful, but he is confident that God is with him. He recognizes the power of God's unfailing love and how he knows that God is never far from him.

The best part about this psalm is that it holds our fears, suffering, and frustrations together with our hope, our trust, and our recognition that God is present with us in all things. The psalmist has captured how we deal with our pain and suffering, while at the same time, remembering the grace and mercy of God. The transition between these two things is not easy, and yet we feel the tension between the two all the time, especially if we are the ones suffering.

What does that tension between your own personal suffering and trust in God look like? How does that tension change when you are dealing with a loved one's pain and suffering instead of your own?

Praying the Psalm:

"Lord, I know You are present in my suffering. I know that I can get so caught up in my own pain that I may not call You into it right away. As the weight of my suffering bears down, I can get focused on the "why" questions. Why me? What have I done to deserve this? After the questions comes the search for answers, and that's where I finally find You. Help me to see You in my suffering. When I need strength to carry this burden, may I invite You into it before pain gets worse. Help me transition to hope and the light of Your promises sooner rather than later. I know You await my invitation. Teach me to see the hope and peace of Your light before I begin losing strength in the shadows of my isolation. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

TUESDAY, 1/14

Read Psalm 15

¹ *LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain?*

²The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart; ³ whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor, and casts no slur on others; ⁴ who despises a vile person but honors those who fear the LORD; who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind; ⁵ who lends money to the poor without interest; who does not accept a bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things will never be shaken.

What will it take for us to be considered worthy of being God's people? The psalmist describes the character of those whose lives have been shaped to represent God's character. It requires us to think about who we believe God is. His people are completely oriented toward and dependent upon God. How do we mirror God? We must do what is right, speak the truth, and love our neighbor as we do ourselves. God honors those who fear and can remain faithful to God regardless of what happens.

God's people must treat others with kindness and respect, while bringing no harm to their neighbor. They will act on behalf of the poor and oppressed, so the business practices of those who belong to God will benefit them. God's people also assume responsibility for avoiding bribery in order to exact justice.

Our character is created by the actions and words that come out of a transformed heart, born from the faith and dedication to God's will. How difficult would it be to be an actual reflection of God's character? Do you see yourself or others as a reflection of God's character? Why or why not?

Praying the Psalm:

"O Holy Lord, what does it take to mirror Your character in today's world? How can I become better at reflecting Your character? From this psalm, I see that I must love and honor myself and others, so much so that my words and actions represent Your integrity and Your righteousness. I recognize that I must keep my promises to You. I must remember to do what I can to serve the poor and oppressed at no cost to them. As a reflection of Your character, I am charged to fight for justice for the innocent. If Your character is reflected in me, then I am at Your service, God. In Jesus name, Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 1/15

Read Psalm 19

¹The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

²Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.

³They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.

⁴Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

⁶It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth.

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

⁸The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

⁹The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

¹¹By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

¹³Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

This is a psalm extolling God's glory as revealed in creation and in the Law of the Lord, or *torah*. Without actually saying a word, the universe itself instructs humanity about God's rule. No direction is left unreached. The instruction of the Lord, *torah*, is all encompassing. Dr Clinton McCann explains that "God's instruction is built into the very structure of the universe, and life depends on *torah* as much as it depends on the daily rising of the sun." According to Dr. Patrick Miller, "God's instruction in the law is characterized in terms of its 'perfection, reliability, clarity, righteousness, and truthfulness'. The benefits of *torah* include its enticing and illuminating effects as well as its capacity to give joy and delight."

In the end, even God's personal instruction to humanity is not sufficient to ensure that human behavior will be in harmony with Him and His ordering of the world. Because there are humans involved, there will be errors and hidden faults present.

The psalmist then asks for forgiveness so that he will be blameless. To be blameless is not to be sinless but to live in dependence upon God. The sacrifice God ultimately desires of us is lives lived in humble dependence upon Him. Would you say that you live in dependence upon on God? Why or why not?

Praying the Psalm:

"Lord, I get so caught up in You and me having a personal relationship that I forget how big You are. You existed before creation but saw fit to create all living things, including me. Though there were no words to describe what You have done, Your creation calls out Your name in praise. As the instructions on the law of all things created, the *torah* is perfect and useful to reviving the soul. *Torah* is simple yet certain, clear and enlightening, pure and enduring forever. I depend on You completely, though I am prone to sin. Receive me and my loyalty. Forgive me for all of my sins and allow my heart to be transformed by You, over and over again. Amen."

THURSDAY, 1/16

Read Psalm 22:1-23

¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?

²My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.^[a]

³Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.

⁴In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.

⁵To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

⁷All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

⁸"He trusts in the LORD," they say, "let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

⁹Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.

¹⁰From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.

¹¹Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

¹² Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.

¹⁵ My mouth¹ is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶ Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce^[e] my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.

¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

¹⁹ But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

²⁰ Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.

²¹ Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

²² I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.

²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! ²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

This psalm begins with this desperate cry: "O God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" David is expressing his feeling of being abandoned and forgotten by God. It's not only that his enemies have surrounded him and he is in tremendous pain, but he also feels God does not hear him or care about his suffering. This feeling is not specific to David; many of us have experienced this in times of suffering and adversity. We wonder how our grace-filled, merciful God can stand idly by when we are in such distress.

In the second half of the psalm desperate prayer turns to fervent praise. Even in David's pain, suffering, and distress, he never loses faith or falls into complete hopelessness. His anguish and suffering lead him to prayer. And in his prayer, he continues to declare and remember who God is. He remembers God's faithfulness throughout the Israelites' history and then remembers God's faithfulness in his own life. God's past trustworthiness assures David of His present faithfulness, which gives him hope of the future. David knows God can and will help him, even if he can't see it yet. Our God hears our prayers, fulfills His promises, and fills us with praise.

Praying the Psalm:

"O Lord, hear me in my cry for You. When You seem so far away, help me remember You are close. I call out to You and know You hear me, even in Your silence. You are holy, sitting on the throne of Heaven. You have been faithful to my people who came before me, and You will be faithful now to me. When I feel like I'm at the bottom of a pit, unworthy and mocked by my peers, I trust in You. I believe that You are God, the Holy One, the I Am. Protect me from evil and wrongdoings; save me from the throes of unrighteousness. I will praise You with my brothers and sisters in Christ forever. We hope one day all will return to You and know You are God. Amen."

FRIDAY, 1/17

Read Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 23 is the most well-known and quoted psalm in the Bible. It is one you might be able to recite from memory, or it may bring you a feeling of comfort and warmth. David knew what it meant to be a shepherd. He spent part of his life in the fields, on the trails, or in the pens with his flock. He understood the important role the shepherd played in the well-being of a flock of sheep.

I imagine someone asking David to describe his God. David's response comes from a place of deep knowledge, reverence, tenderness and care. He says, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I have all I need." He was eager to share what he knows to be true--that staying close to the shepherd is always a safe place to be, that God is wise, strong, and kind, that wherever God leads, even into the dark places, he is safe.

We can't read Psalm 23 without seeing Jesus, who fulfills all that has been described in the psalm and more. Psalm 23 highlights Jesus' tenderness and compassion. Jesus is the one who guides us safely. He is the one who prepares a table and serves us His supper. Jesus anoints us with His spirit and fills our cups to overflowing with His grace and mercy. Jesus gives us a permanent dwelling with Him. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, even laying down His life for us.

Praying the Psalm:

"Jesus, You are my shepherd. In You, I have everything I need. I have places of rest and comfort in my life. Knowing You are with me offers peace in all circumstances. When I spend time with You, I am strengthened and it's easier to see the path You have carved for my life. Even when life seems dark, lonely, unsafe, and grief-filled, I am not afraid because I trust You are here. When I am off-course, You gently bring me back to You and comfort me. You are always looking out and prepared for what's to come; this brings comfort even in the worst of times. When others are judging me or cursing me, You remain. When I feel depressed and alone, You remind me of who I am and Your great love for me. My life is filled with goodness and blessing because of You. May I forever be in Your presence, my Good Shepherd. Amen."

SATURDAY, 1/18

Read Psalm 24

¹The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

²for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

³Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?

⁴The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.

⁵They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior.

⁶Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.

⁷Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ⁸Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.

⁹Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ¹⁰Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory.

God is the one true King. This is the central point of Psalm 24. Verses 1-2 tell us that God is the true King because He created and established the world. Everything we know and see belongs to Him.

Verses 3-6 show us what it means to be people of the King. Those who have been made holy are able to approach Him. This work of having pure hands and clean hearts begins with the work of God's grace within us. Jesus' power displayed over sin on the cross and over death in His resurrection empowers us to become a new creation in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Christ, we are given a new nature that is "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:23). This is the work of Christ's justifying grace in every life that seeks the face of the true King, not any idol, or "little king". When we continue to seek after Him, His grace continues to work in our lives, making us holy as He is holy.

Psalm 24 ends with a celebration of God's arrival as King. The "King of Glory" is to be praised. His presence inspires rejoicing. How wonderful it is when the King of Glory comes into our lives! The imagery in these verses calls us to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. He came as a mighty King to display His power over sin and death so that we would have victory through Him.

Read Psalm 24 again. I wonder what images stand out to you. These words or images are often a great place to begin praying. Feel free to pray in your own words, then we'll close in a prayer together.

Psalm 24 invites me to praise Him as King and ask that God's grace would grow me in holiness.

Sending prayer:

"King of Glory, You are the One who brought all creation into being. You established the world and continue to sustain it. You are great indeed, and worthy of our praise. I am thankful that by the work and name of Jesus, You invite me to come into Your holy presence. The fact that I, a broken person, can stand before You is a testament to the power of Your grace. May Your grace continue to work in me. Make my hands clean that they may serve You, and my heart pure so that I may trust You alone. Make known any idols or little kings in my life. Dethrone them so that You alone would be King of my life for I want to seek Your face alone. May You be lifted up. You are the King of Glory who has fought and won my battle against sin and death. You are mighty and good. I praise You with my whole being. Amen."

SUNDAY, 1/19

Read Psalm 27

¹*The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?*

The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

²*When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall.*

³*Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.*

⁴*One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.*

⁵*For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.*

⁶*Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.*

⁷Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.

⁸My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.

⁹Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.

¹⁰Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

¹¹Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.

¹²Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations.

¹³I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

I wonder what you fear. I want you to think of your answer before moving on. The beauty of this psalm is that it invites us to hold our fears up to an all-powerful God.

As king of Israel, David feared those who rose up against him. He had enemies all around him. This is not our story, but at the same time, we all have enemies in our lives. Sometimes our enemies look like illness, grief, a broken relationship, a season of hardship, anger, or resentment. An enemy can be anything that keeps us from abundant life in Christ. I wonder what enemies are in your life right now. I also wonder where, or in whom, you can find refuge and help.

This psalm is a declaration of confidence in God's care as we face our foes. It reminds us of what is so easy to forget in the midst of the chaos: that we do not have to fear because "God is our helper," and that even in the turmoil, we will see His goodness as we seek His face.

I invite you to hold your fears before the Lord in prayer. Name them. Look back to the words of Psalm 24 as you pray to be reminded of God's presence and power in your life. Ask God for confidence and assurance.

Sending prayer:

"Lord, in the midst of life, there is trouble. Enemies surround us throughout life. Sometimes they come as people who oppose us, but often they are physical, mental, or financial hardships. They show up as grief or depression, yet whichever enemies we face, You are our salvation. You are our stronghold. We do not have to fear. We can be confident because You will never leave us or forsake us. You invite us to enjoy Your presence and to find refuge under Your wings. May our eyes be fixed on Your beauty and not our troubles. Fill us with confidence in Your care. Give us wisdom and courage as we seek Your face. Open our eyes to the ways Your goodness is alive and well in our lives this very day. We will wait for You because we trust You and we love You. Amen."