

A man once wrote:
"While the Bible speaks *to* us,
the Psalms speak *for* us."

This devotional study on all 150 Psalms
is the outgrowth of a heart crying out to
God—because that's exactly what the
Psalms are.

POURING OUT YOUR HEART TO GOD
A Devotional Study of the Psalms

CHOWNING

POURING OUT YOUR HEART TO GOD

A Devotional Study of the Psalms

JOHN CHOWNING

POURING OUT YOUR HEART TO GOD

A Devotional Study of the Psalms

John Chowning

2020

Pouring Out Your Heart to God: A Devotional Study of the Psalms is copyright 2020 © John Chowning. All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced or duplicated in any way (whether photocopy, digital, electronic, audio, or any other possible method) without the written permission of the author.

Read more from the author at:
www.ReadTheWordToday.com

Published in the United States of America

ISBN:

Foreword

I have known John Chowning for over 30 years. We have labored together in gospel meetings, lectureships and Bible camp. Most of those 30 years, we enjoyed sweet and profitable fellowship at Camp Indogan in northeast Indiana. His Bible classes were a great source of encouragement to all who attended them. My three sons always considered his classes a highlight of camp. His classes were rich in textual studies. Not only did he bring out the meaning of passages, but he made applications to the lives of all who heard him. John has a booming voice with a big heart and a love of truth. On occasions when I have been privileged to be with him, we discussed precepts, not people. I love him for the truth's sake.

The book of Psalms touches upon the heartstrings of every human emotion. The author of these devotional lessons brings out in melodic melodies the highs and lows experienced by the authors of this wonderful Old Testament book. These devotional lessons taken from the psalms have practical application in our lives. The lessons are Biblical, instructive, edifying and practical for everyday living. The Sweet Singer of Israel wrote, "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day." (Psalm 119:97.) These wonderful thoughts expressed by my brother and friend demonstrate his meditations upon the precious word of God. All will surely benefit from his labors.

When I was growing up, my family sat around the breakfast table following our meal and had a devotional, usually using *Power For Today*, a small daily devotional book, put out by the 20th Century Christian Publications, (Now 21st Century). It was a good way to start the day as a family, meditating upon God's word. The work of brother John Chowning on the book of Psalms would be a wonderful way for a family to begin or end the day.

Ben F. Vick, Jr.

Introduction

Throughout my years of daily Bible reading, I must confess that I've not found reading the Psalms to be nearly as meaningful as others have. Until recently. In a Bible class presented by Jason Jackson (of fortifyyourfaith.org) titled "Five Things I've Learned About Prayer" from the Book of Psalms, he has this quote of Athanasius: "While the Bible speaks to us, the psalms speak for us." Since hearing that quote and listening to Jason's masterful lesson and facing a personal trial the Book of Psalms has never been the same to me.

Of the first ten psalms alone, six were written in the context of grievous times. See if any of these sounds familiar: an increased number of toxic people in your life—troublemakers, opponents, and naysayers (3:1); distressing circumstances (4:1); others trying to turn your glory into shame because of their lack of character and love of falsehood (4:2); a time of groaning, tears, and grief caused by enemies (6:6-7); persecution brought by people who want to destroy you completely (7:1-2); enemies (9:3); trouble caused by people who hate you (9:13); trouble and persecution by the wicked (10:1). These psalms were written during times in which the flames of the crucible of trials burned hotly. I've been there; done that. How about you?

This has prompted me to write this book. Its purpose is to provide some devotional material, especially from the psalms. I trust you will find *God Speaking To Us and For Us* to be beneficial to you; I know it has been for me.

John Chowning
February, 2020

Characteristics of a Righteous Person

One of the salvific purposes of God's grace is to instruct and motivate righteous living (Titus 2:11-12). Psalm 1:1-3 gives an inspired portrait of a righteous person. Here it is written: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." From this, please note the following characteristics of a righteous person:

He is balanced. Because the righteous puts off the sins of the old man while putting on the virtues of the new man (Colossians 3:8-14), there are certain things, places, and people he does not associate with (v. 1) and there are things, places, and people he does (v. 2). A righteous person is one who balances the abhorrence of evil with the cleaving to that which is good (Romans 12:9).

He is stable. Like a house's foundation, the most essential part of any tree is its roots, and the roots of a righteous person are the exact size and depth of his faith's convictions. Unshakable conviction that God is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6), that the Bible is the perfect, inspired word of God, and that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God, will eliminate one being tossed about by every wind of doctrine that blows in our world today.

He is spiritually healthy, fruitful, and prosperous. Who plants a fruit tree to see beautiful leaves and branches but never harvest any fruit? If the apostle John's wish—"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 2)—were granted upon you today, would you be a billionaire, a pauper, or somewhere in between?

A righteous person's life produces an abundant thriving, healthy spiritual harvest; how prosperous is your soul?

There's Only Two

There are a number of things in life in which there genuinely is only two options. Political correctness and postmodernism notwithstanding, there are in fact only two sexes. Like the wild and domesticated animals that populate the earth, the fish and other creatures that fill the sea, and the birds, bats, and insects that orbit in earth's atmosphere, when God created humanity He created two sexes—male and female.

In addition, humans only have a right hand and a left one. There is a distinct difference between day and night. And, as Jesus makes so abundantly clear in Matthew 7:13-14, there are only two gates, two ways, two destinations to choose from in life. When all of the dust in life has settled and humanity is called before the glorious throne of the glorious Son of Man and He separates all people like a shepherd dividing his sheep from the goats, there are only two possible verdicts: “Come” or “Depart” (Matthew 25:31ff.).

The first Psalm clearly declares the same thing—a person is either righteous or ungodly. Your life is either like a tree firmly planted by rivers of water (verse 3) or like chaff which the wind blows whichever way it wants to (verse 4).

Your life is not a dream; it is a time of decision. Don't be chaff; be a tree.

Blessed vs. Lucky

One of the insidious effects of evolution is that it inherently spawns an immense and false faith in luck and blind chance. If it is true that in the beginning nothing did nothing to nothing and everything resulted therefrom, then luck and chance are the sovereign gods of this universe. The number of people today who

sacrificially worship at the idol of luck called “the Lottery” is staggering. The number of people today who believe their situation in life is because of the disfavor of the idol called “Fate” is equally staggering.

Obviously, the Bible presents a completely different picture. Because it is true that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), how you live your life matters; your daily decisions and individual choices matter. If you want to be blessed by God, you will need to not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1). “Luck” has nothing to do with it; it is a matter of choices that you make.

If you want to be blessed, you will need to delight in, meditate upon, and submit to the authoritative law of God (Psalm 1:2). God is and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Quit pining for your “lucky day.” Sow to the Spirit and you will be blessed with the abundant life (John 10:10) and everlasting life (Galatians 6:8). Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatever you sow you will also reap (Galatians 6:7). Have a blessed day!

A Great Conversation Worth Having

If I never have to overhear another inane cell phone conversation while standing in a checkout line, I will consider myself an abundantly blessed man. I cannot begin to count the number of times I have wanted to lovingly yet firmly say: “Friend, just because you have a cell phone does not mean you have to constantly use it, especially when you, as you have so publicly demonstrated over the past few minutes, have NOTHING to say.”

I fear that the fine art of conversation, especially when there is a genuine balance of active listening and interesting speaking by each participant, will soon be added to the list of Gravely Endangered Species in North America. Already on that list is the spir-

itual conversation that one has with himself that the Scriptures call “meditation.”

For a person to be abundantly blessed of God, Psalm 1:2 declares that two things must be found within his life. First, he must delight in submitting to God’s authority to legislate what he thinks, feels, and does; he must savor the succulent milk and the nutrient-rich meat of God’s Word. Second, God’s authoritative Word is to be his continuous meditation. One source describes meditation as “pondering by talking to one’s self.”

In the hustle and bustle of life (plus the ever-present allure of using one’s cell phone, tablet, iPad, or other electronic devices to converse much about nothing), how often do you ponder upon some portion of God’s Word by talking to yourself about it? That, dear friend, is a great conversation worth having!

Harvester or Storm Watcher?

Who of us enjoys instability? Who gets a thrill over the prospect of a ladder, a bridge, a foundation, a home, a marriage, a job, a stock market, or a national government that is unstable? Why bother to take the risk?

Every heart yearns for security. What an invaluable treasure a husband has in a wife to whom he can safely entrust his heart (Proverbs 31:11). What a blessing it is to know that “I am that I am” (the Unchanging One—the same yesterday, today, and forever) is the character, and thus the name, of God (Exodus 3:14).

The simile used in Psalm 1:4 to describe the ungodly is chilling: “The ungodly...are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.” What a terrible, miserable, fickle, and horrific way to life. What an exhausting and pointless existence to be “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness” (Ephesians 4:14). For the ungodly, life is not a purposeful pilgrimage from earth to the heavenly city (Hebrews 11:13-16); it is a series of tornadoes (i.e. crises) that devastates and desolates.

Then, when the final storm of life–death–has passed, the ungodly are judged to be unacceptable to God and are thus excluded from the company of the righteous (Psalm 1:5) forever. What a horrific way to live and an even worse way to die.

When Jesus saw the multitudes it moved Him to compassion because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). What about you?

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37).

Are you a harvester or a storm watcher?

Why is the God Who so Loved the World so Hated?

Long before the loving and innocent Son of God was taken by the hands of lawless men and brutally crucified, David (according to Acts 4:25) asked the same question in Psalm 2:1—“Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?” Like most state, national, and international civil rulers today, the kings of the earth and rulers of David’s day were forming and fomenting plans against the Lord and His Anointed, saying, “Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us” (Psalm 2:2-3). Why is the God Who so loved the world so hated?

Why do the media thrill at the opportunity to rail against Christ and Biblical instruction while showing reverent deference and immense respect for the vicious, blood-thirsty teachings and actions of those who follow the Quran? Why are America’s deceased Founding Fathers routinely vilified for owning slaves while the widespread subjugation of multitudes of people today by Muslims is ignored? Why the hypocrisy of defending the vilest pornographers and their freedom of speech while denying a public statement of the most tender of invitations found in the gospel? Why call the Bible a book of fables and label Jehovah as an imaginary being and then demand that both be thoroughly eradicated from all public property? (Grimms’ Fairy Tales and

Peter Pan are not treated like that!) Why is a bakery sued for refusing to make a cake for a homosexual couple, but lunches in public school cafeterias have to be respectful of the dietary laws mandated by the faith of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists? Why is the God who so loved the world so hated?

Psalm 2:3 answers this question: Satan has convinced multitudes that it is possible to have absolute freedom from the sovereignty and authority of God.

Friend, that ain't gonna happen. Ever.

God's Response to His Unpopularity

Unlike frail humanity, Jehovah is not fazed by white-hot hatred. While civil rulers and multitudes of their citizens chafe at Jehovah's sovereignty and resent Christ's universal authority (Matthew 28:18), their plotting and scheming to break away from the immutable chains of the moral and spiritual laws that govern our existences is pointless. Its utter foolishness and futility can be easily seen in God's response to His unpopularity with millions of people.

First, God laughs (Psalm 2:4). Humanity's petulant animosity and the temper tantrums of spiritual snowflakes do not cause Him any alarm. Such behavior does not intimidate Him; it does not have Him worried; and, there is no possibility of some future compromise on His part in an attempt to appease His haters. As a matter of fact, He eternally purposed to use humanity's vicious rejection of His Son to play an integral role in the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Jehovah's focus is redemption, not popularity.

Second, God does not change (Psalm 2:5). The ungodly will never frighten Him into a compromise of His holiness. (The truth of the matter—which makes such hostility so utterly foolish—is that He cannot even be tempted to compromise His holiness [James 1:13]). The revelation of His unchanging righteous wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man began with

the first sin in human history, and it will culminate with the complete elimination of every form of it in the lake of fire called Gehenna (Revelation 19:20, 20:10-15). Jehovah's passion is holiness, not popularity.

God has unmistakably and irrevocably demonstrated His sovereignty in human history. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus which resulted in His ascension and coronation (Psalm 2:6) and the establishment of His eternal kingdom which shall never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44) is a fact of human history that cannot be erased or revised. Unlike recently destroyed statues in the United States, the church is an immovable monument to God's sovereignty, providence, wisdom, and authority. How wise is the one who chooses to "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Psalm 2:11).

Divine Advice

One of the heinous and arrogant absurdities of postmodernism is its insane postulate that truth and reality are whatever one chooses to believe them to be. What philosophical and metaphysical nonsense! Much like the name of God (Exodus 3:14), reality is what it is. All the vocal protests, organized marches, symbolic ribbons, and pink hats in the world will not affect in any way the fact that Jehovah has set His King upon His holy hill of Zion. All the anger and angst in the universe will not change the fact that Jesus of Nazareth who was born of the seed of David was declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:3-4). Like any other fact of history, no one living today can change the events of yesterday.

And, the events of history are pretty straightforward: Jesus, the Son of God, has been given all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). Every creature of every nation is accountable to Him because the ends of the earth are His possession; His sovereignty is absolute and cannot be overthrown or averted (Psalm 2:8).

In light of these “ungetoverable” facts, God has lovingly and tenderly given humanity some wise, practical divine advice in Psalm 2:11-12; it is:

- Serve the Lord with fear of displeasing Him, instead of opposing Him with vain and foolish wrath.
- Rejoice with trembling in the protection of God’s sovereignty, instead of raging against it.
- Love, adore, and venerate the sovereign Son, instead of rebelling against Him.
- Understand the immensity of the folly of opposing God, and repent.
- Put your wholehearted trust in Him, instead of wholehearted rebellion.

If you carefully follow this divine advice, you will be blessed. You have God’s word on it (Psalm 2:12).

How to Read a Superscription

Many of the great hymns in history have a back story. Such beloved songs as “Let the Lower Lights be Burning” and “It is Well” arose from tragic circumstances.

This is true also for the inspired psalms. In between the heading of Psalm 3 and the first verse, in the Bible that I have used for several years for my daily Bible reading, there is the following: “A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son.” The fancy name for this category of background information is “superscription.” Because it is quite unlikely that David himself wrote this information when he penned any of his masterpieces, it does challenge the reader to make sure he understands the limitations and value of each superscription.

The limitations of a superscription are that it is probably uninspired. This is why superscriptions are placed in the Scriptures how and where they are. They were probably written by someone other than the inspired author of the psalm and were probably

added when the book of Psalms was arranged into one collection. Because of these “probablys,” one should not view them in the same way as the word of God, for “the testimony of the Lord is sure” (Psalm 19:7), not “probably sure.” (However, when an inspired writer in the Old or New Testament declares, for example, that Psalm 2 was written by David (Acts 4:25-26), it is certain that David was the inspired penman of that psalm—even if it should contradict a superscription.)

The value of a superscription is seen in its age. Because of how old they are, there is no good reason to entertain extensive doubts concerning their accuracy. Though their author’s exact identity is unknown, the scribe(s) who made them lived a whole lot closer to the date of each psalm’s composition than you or I do. Therefore, a superscription can be quite helpful in better understanding a psalm’s probable back story.

Because there are many “Study Bibles” on the market today, it is imperative that the wise Bible reader understand the difference between the information of a superscription written hundreds of years ago and a “Study Help” written recently. Because both are written by uninspired writers, it is imperative that the wise Bible reader understand that the information in a “Study Bible” can be inaccurate. For example, the Scofield Study Bible teaches the false doctrine (and ultimately, the false hermeneutics) of premillennialism in its notes; many unsuspecting readers have perused these notes, believed them, and have thus believed a lie.

Since the Garden of Eden, Satan’s mission has been to get people to believe a lie instead of God’s Word. I know of no superscription in the Psalms that does that; I know of several “Study Bibles” whose notes do.

This is important to know because believing a lie never ends in eternal life (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

David in the Midst of a (Spiritual) Terrorist Attack

Like the giant Goliath, Satan loves to defy the soldiers of God's army through fear on a daily basis (1 Samuel 17:3-11). How often he pounds on the door of your heart with fear and threatens to kick it down. What a nasty spiritual terrorist!

The third Psalm was apparently written while David (yes, David!) was in the midst of a spiritual terrorist attack. As described in 2nd Samuel 15:13-17:22, David was running for his life. Those who troubled him had increased; many had joined the forces of insurrection and chaos; a chorus of "expert" doomsday forecasters was loudly declaring that "there is no help for him in God" (Psalm 3:1-2). What uncertainty! What burdensome questions haunted him: Was this the beginning of the end? Would he still be alive and breathing at the next sunrise? What happened to those left behind in Jerusalem? How is this going to play out?

What gruesome circumstances he faced! His own son, Absalom, had put a bounty on his head and sent an army out to seek and destroy him. He was a fugitive. All sense of sanity, safety, and personal well-being had been obliterated. Long-hidden hatred and animosity erupted all around him. From his trusted advisor, now turncoat, Ahithophel (2 Samuel 15:31) to his vicious enemy Shimei (2 Samuel 16:5-8), David was under siege. The tsunami of grief and sorrow which overwhelmed his soul flooded his eyes with tears (2 Samuel 15:30).

David's only hope was all he needed. It always is.

His prayer of "Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God" was unmistakably heard and answered, even when in the midst of a spiritual terrorist attack.

Why?

Because "salvation belongs to the Lord" (Psalm 3:8).

Deliverance is Jehovah's specialty.

It still is.

How to Get a Good Night's Sleep— The First Essential

Satan was, is, and will ever continue to be warring against God and His people. He relentlessly seeks to terrorize God's people. He loves the weapon of fear. Like us, David was not immune to such carefully planned and precisely implemented acts of spiritual terrorism. The setting of Psalm 3 indicates that David was facing an uncertain future, feeling immense distress and emotional strain, and enduring vicious and false personal attacks. He was a marked man with a bounty on his head and an army of many searching for one royal officer—him!

Yet, when nightfall came, David himself states: "I lay down and slept" (Psalm 3:5). How often have God's people not gotten a good night's sleep under far less distressing and threatening circumstances? So, how did David do it? Psalm 3 explains.

First, David acknowledged his circumstances (v. 1). David was not afraid of telling God in prayer things that God already knew. Hopefully this is not a news flash, but the truth about confession is that you are not imparting new information to the omniscient God. The Greek word literally means "to say the same thing." Have you ever stopped to ask **who** you are "saying the same thing" as? A confession of Christ or a confession of sin is a statement in which you are saying the same thing about the matter as God has already! Confession is not to inform God about something He does not know; it is designed to be a statement of the fact that you finally recognize the profound truth that God has already stated. In other words, confession indicates that you are finally on the same page that God has always been on! This is the first step to all spiritual health and the first thing needed to ensure a good night's sleep.

How to Get a Good Night's Sleep— The Rest of the Story

According to Natana Raj, an analyst with BCC Research in Wellesley, Massachusetts, Americans spent an estimated \$41,000,000,000 on sleep aids in 2015, and the amount is projected to increase to \$52,000,000,000 in 2020! Instead of turning to drugs, supplements, or gadgets, David got a good night's sleep while on the run as a fugitive after a most stressful and distressing day. Psalm 3 explains free of charge his "sleep routine."

First, David acknowledges his circumstances: "Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me" (v. 1). (Please see the previous post "How to Get a Good Night's Sleep—The First Essential" for the specific of this "alternative medicine" to insomnia.)

Second, David carefully examines his situation and fears: "Many are they who say of me, There is no help for him in God. Selah" (v. 2). How often Satan uses popular, fake spiritual news to create fear and insomnia! Exodus 23:2's counsel of not following a multitude is still applicable when the "expert" advice of "conventional wisdom" contradicts Biblical revelation. Just because "many" people believe it and/or say it, does not make it true.

Third, David focuses upon God: "But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head. I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill. Selah" (vv. 3-4). It is imperative that the careful reader note that verses 3 and 4 are within a "Selah sandwich." This word ("rest" or "pause") indicates the fact that David mediated upon the contents of this sandwich; it is one of the most significant words in the entire psalm. It is akin to an admonition I heard often from my mother while growing up: "Stop and think about that for a while." On the one hand, David had the counsel of a multitude of fear-filled, panicked people; on the other hand, there was Jehovah—"a shield...the One who lifts up my head." David chose Je-

hovah over panic; faith over fear. Therefore, he cried out to the Lord and was heard.

Fourth, David acts upon his faith, not his fears: “I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah” (vv. 5-8). On this occasion, acting by faith meant that David trusted in God’s promised sustenance (and therefore, got a good night’s sleep); He trusted God’s promised protection (and thus was unafraid); and he trusted God’s promised deliverance (and was delivered). And, it all began with a good night’s sleep.

If your faith is of no value or help to you in the tough times of life, your faith is of no value.

Get rid of the counterfeit. Live by an active, genuine faith that enables you to be spiritually victorious by day and get a good night’s sleep by night.

One of God’s “Nicknames”

There is no Bible book that has any more frequent and more picturesque descriptions of God than does the book of Psalms. Such metaphors as shield, rock, refuge, shelter, fortress, stronghold, shepherd, light, defense, and hiding place lavishly nourish a hungry, meditative soul. Because the psalms are so replete with these profound descriptors, many wonderful others can be easily missed. Consider, for example, a couple thrilling facets of David’s brilliant declaration: “But Thou, O Lord, art...the One who lifts up my head” (Psalm 3:3).

Jehovah is the One who lifts up my head when it is burdened down with troubles. David was a wanted and hunted man who was on the run. Many had risen up against him; many were saying that he was such a lost cause that even God had forsaken him

(Psalm 3:1-2). What troubles had erupted suddenly and unexpectedly! David felt like he was all alone in the midst of an endless spiritual minefield. However, when David cried out to the “One who lifts up my head,” he was heard (v. 4) and deliverance came (v. 8).

Jehovah is the One who lifts up my head when it is weighed down by the grinding burden of sin, shame, and guilt. At the beginning of John 8, a woman was intentionally, viciously, and publicly humiliated by the scribes and Pharisees. She had succumbed to the enticing trap of adultery. She had been caught in the very act and was then escorted to the temple where her sin was announced in front of a crowd of people. Except for Jesus’ crucifixion, it strains the imagination to try to conceive of a more humiliating, ghastly experience. Like His offer of salvation to all humanity, Jesus silenced and ultimately dismissed this woman’s accusers. When she finally raised her head and looked around, they were all gone (vv. 9-11). Though personally qualified to cast the first stone, Jesus did not. Instead He commanded her to “go and sin nor more” (v. 11). Jesus, the Light of the World, is the One who lifts up my head when I repent of the deeds of darkness I have done.

The testimony of a host of Bible characters is exactly like David’s: “Jehovah is the One who lifts up my head.”

What a nickname!

What Living by Faith Looks Like

One of Edgar Guest’s more famous poems begins with the lines “I’d rather see a sermon.” Like sheep, humans need a leader to follow; like young students in school, humans need a pattern to imitate. When Jesus was asked “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29), He did not give a definition; instead, He wisely gave an unmistakable and memorable description: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho...” (Luke 10:30-35); then He

asked: “Which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” (Luke 10:36).

Embedded in Psalm 4 is a vivid description of living by faith while wrestling against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and a spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places. It deserves careful, thoughtful, and thorough consideration. In Psalm 4, living by faith is demonstrated by:

Prayerfulness in the face of widespread opposition—vv. 1-2: “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer. How long, O you sons of men, will you turn my glory to shame? How long will you love worthlessness and seek falsehood?”

Confidence in God’s holiness and His attentive ear—v. 3: “But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly; the LORD will hear when I call to Him.”

Reverence for God that results in self-control—v. 4: “Be angry, and do not sin.”

Meditation and communion with God that results in peace—v. 4: “Meditate within your heart on your bed and be still.”

Deliberate obedience and determined trust in Jehovah—v. 5: “Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and put your trust in the LORD.”

Unyielding refusal to doubt God—v. 6: “There are many who say, “Who will show us any good?” LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.”

Unspeakable joy and confident optimism—v. 7: “You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased.”

A good night’s sleep—v. 8: “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”

With this nuts-and-bolts description of faith, a simple question remains: Are you actually living by faith?

God's View of the Righteous and the Wicked

One of the most practical definitions I have ever heard in my life is: "Wisdom is learning to look at life the same way God does and then living accordingly." This definition itself is wise because when all the grains of sand in the hour glass of your life have fallen, the only opinion about your life that will matter will be God's. Regardless of what the preacher says at your funeral, or what your family thinks, or even what your friends and enemies believe, the only thing that will matter is: When you are weighed in God's balances, were you found wanting or not? To live wisely, therefore, necessitates that we learn to look at life the exact same way that God does, and then live accordingly.

One of the first things that must be understood and incorporated into the foundation of one's thinking (so as to be wise) is the fact that when God looks upon humanity He only sees two categories of people—the righteous and the unrighteous. He does not see nationality, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status; He only views humanity through the prism of righteous and unrighteous. Once this perspective is understood and cemented in your heart, it is then time to attentively meditate on David's contemplative prayer that is Psalm 5.

Contrasted in this psalm are God's diametrical attitudes and actions toward the righteous and the wicked. David explains this as follows: Jehovah listens to and heeds the prayer of the righteous (vv. 1-3), but He abominates the wicked (vv. 4-6). Jehovah accepts the reverential worship of the righteous and leads them in righteousness (vv. 7-8), but He rejects and destroys the rebellious wicked (vv. 9-10).

In light of these somber truths, David concludes that the righteous ought to rejoice because they are richly blessed (vv. 11-12).

The wicked must repent, or they will perish (Luke 13:3, 5).

(See Psalm 6 for David's description of the blessings of repentance.)

The Holiness of the Holy, Holy, Holy God

A fundamental difference between the true and living God and the false gods of human imagination is that of Jehovah's utter, uncompromising, pristine holiness. As pointed out by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist in their 2005 book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, there is a distinct faith among Americans today which has come to be described as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."

This false religion believes in a deity who wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, if possible. It teaches that the central goal in life is not to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13); rather, it is to be happy and feel good about yourself. Its deity does not demand repentance or obedience and he does not seek to build character through suffering; rather, its god is "something like a combination of a Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he's always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process" (p. 165). In short, holiness is of little, if any, concern.

In Psalm 5:4-6, David paints a portrait of Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, that is far different from this popular idol. He unmistakably and specifically describes ways in which the holy, holy, holy God expresses His uncompromised purity. In these three verses, one learns that:

- Jehovah takes no pleasure in wickedness.
- Jehovah is completely free from evil.
- Jehovah gives no standing to the boastful.
- Jehovah hates all workers of iniquity.
- Jehovah destroys those who speak falsehood.
- Jehovah abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.

Any false conception of God—regardless of whether it is a mental image or a metal one—is an idol. Any religious belief that minimizes the genuine holiness of Jehovah is a false one.

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).
Avoid the popular idol of “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”

The Blessings of Repentance

Like childbirth, the spiritual travail of repentance and its fruits are not pleasant. The bitter heartache of godly sorrow that issues forth in a sincere change of heart and mind toward sin which results in a changed life is necessary if one does not desire to perish eternally (Luke 13:3, 5). Why obey God’s universal command to repent (Acts 17:30)? Consider carefully David’s enumeration of the blessings of repentance in Psalm 6:

—Repentance delivers the sinner from God’s anger and hot displeasure (v. 1).

—Repentance allows God to be merciful to the weak and heal the vexed (v. 2).

—Repentance brings peace to the soul that is greatly troubled (v. 3).

—Repentance returns the prodigal to his father and saves the lost soul prior to his death, the point of no return (vv. 4-5).

—Repentance brings relief from the groanings, tears, grief, and heaviness of heart inflicted by sin (vv. 6-7).

—Repentance provides the spiritual strength and motivation to resist sin (v. 8).

—Repentance restores one’s fellowship with God and re-opens the gate of prayer with all of its blessings and power (v. 9).

—Repentance restores one’s courage in the face of opposition and enables spiritual victory (v. 10).

Why carry about the guilt, burden, debt, stain, and stench of sin when spiritual deliverance, healing, peace, relief, strength, and victory await all who repent?

What to Do when the Inevitable Happens

Like the vast majority of Scripture, you will need help to misunderstand Paul's simple declaration: "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus Himself said "when," not "if," when He stated, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you..." (Matthew 5:11).

What, then, is the godly to do when their own "Cush the Benjamite" (see the superscription of Psalm 7) reviles, persecutes, and says all kinds of evil against them falsely? Psalm 7 records David's meditation and prayer while in the painful fires of persecution.

First, **David declares His unwavering faith in Jehovah and His confident trust in God's deliverance.** In verse one, he states: "O LORD my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me and deliver me."

Next, **David confesses his fear.** In verse 2, one reads of his fear: "lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver." Courage is not the absence of fear. It is confident faith that is greater than one's fear. Little faith is overwhelmed by fear (Matthew 8:26); great faith is victorious over fear (1 John 5:4).

Then, **David entrusts himself to God's righteous judgment** (vv. 3-8). He lays everything on the line. If he is guilty of evil doing, he petitions God for justice (i.e. divine punishment) upon him via his persecutors (vv. 3-6); if he is innocent, he asks for divine protection from his enemies (vv. 6-8). In other words, if Cush's accusations of iniquity (v. 3) and evil treatment of others (v. 4) are true, then David's request is: "let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it; yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honor in the dust" (v. 5). If, however, these accusations are false, then David's petition is: "Arise, O LORD, in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies: and awake for me to the judgment that thou hast commanded" (v. 6). David's ultimate petition is: "judge me, O LORD, according to

my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me” (v. 8).

What faith in God’s righteousness and His ability to deliver the godly out of temptations and reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment (2 Peter 2:9)!

In the largest portion of this psalm, David **expresses his unshakable faith in God and His immutable righteousness** (vv. 9-16). Here it is written: “Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just; for the righteous God tests the hearts and minds. My defense is of God who saves the upright in heart. God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts. Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. He made a pit and dug it out and has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown.”

The final thing David does during this inevitable occasion in the life of the godly is **he praises Jehovah and His righteousness**. Verse 17 reads: “I will praise the LORD according to His righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High.”

What a refuge for the persecuted is God and His righteousness!

Cush Who?

In Second Peter 2, the inspired penman seeks to drive home the point that “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment (v. 9). To prove this eternal truth, Peter uses the following examples of history—the angels that sinned (v. 4), the deliverance of eight persons from the destruction of the wicked in

the flood (v. 5), the rescue of righteous Lot from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 6-8). Another example from history that Peter could have included would be David's deliverance from Cush the Benjamite. He persecuted David by slanderously accusing him of the sin of repaying evil for good (Psalm 7:3-4).

Should the careful Bible student desire to learn more about this "Cush the Benjamite" that is mentioned in the superscription of Psalm 7, he will find nothing in the pages of Scripture. Therefore, though rather short and terse, the Bible's answer to the question of "Cush Who?" is quite sobering and powerful.

He is the Benjamite Cush who called evil good and good evil when he falsely accused a righteous man of iniquity, and thus he placed himself under God's anathema (Isaiah 5:20).

He is the Benjamite Cush who experienced God's righteous judgment and was so thoroughly dealt with that he (like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah) has only left his infamous name in the pages of history.

He is the Benjamite Cush who proves that Jehovah hears and answers the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man (James 5:16).

He is the Benjamite Cush who is an immovable historical memorial to why Romans 12:19's command is to be carefully obeyed when you or I am persecuted today. "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

The Excellency of God

A fundamental challenge of every human being is to strive to develop a healthy and accurate understanding of the Being described in Scripture whose name is Jehovah. When David twice exclaims "How excellent in Thy name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:1, 9), he was not engaging in hyperbole or flattery. Therefore,

his praise-filled declaration (Psalm 8) ought to be probed and pondered carefully and often.

The Hebrew word translated “excellent” connotes the idea of superiority. Given the meaty facts about Jehovah that are sandwiched in between the psalm’s first and last verses, what other conclusion about Jehovah is there to draw?

Jehovah is superior to humanity in power as the star maker is to the star gazer (Psalm 8:3). In driving home this point to Job (and to us), Jehovah’s questions were: “Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loose the belt of Orion? Can you bring out Mazzaroth in its season? Or can you guide the Great Bear with its cubs? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you set their dominion over the earth?” (Job 38:31-33). No earth-bound creature can do anything more than gaze in wonder at the heavenly work performed by the fingers of God. How puny is the power of any human in comparison to the Almighty!

Jehovah is superior to humanity in rank as the king is to the footman. Jehovah, to whom the angelic beings express utter reverence (Isaiah 6:1-3) and pristine obedience (Matthew 6:10), has made humanity a little lower than the angels (v. 5). Jehovah who rules the entire universe—heaven and earth—as king has set His glory above the heavens (v. 1); humanity has been assigned dominion over his footstool—one planet in the universe, earth (Isaiah 66:1). Whatever glory a human attains comes and goes like a blossoming flower (James 1:11); Jehovah’s endures forever (Revelation 1:6).

Jehovah’s superiority in power and rank is neither transitory nor insignificant. How excellent it is! How imperative it is that every human in all the earth recognize it and rejoice therein!

What is Man?

Anthropology is a field of study that seeks to better understand the human race and what it means to be human. Its purpose is to

answer the same question that David asked about 3,000 years ago. *What is man?*

Unlike many anthropologists today, David's question about the origin, value, and purpose of the human race did not come as the result of archaeology (digging into the earth) but astronomy (looking up from the earth to the heavens). He writes: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?" (Psalm 8:3-4). Consider the inspired answers to this age-old question:

Humanity is the result of special creation, and not evolutionary luck. Humanity has not clawed its way up the evolutionary food chain over billions of years of time. From the beginning of creation, humanity was made a little lower than the angels and has been crowned with glory and honor (Psalm 8:5). Neither evolution nor its ugly step-sister theistic evolution is true.

Humanity is the creation of God that is intended to have dominion over all the rest of God's creation, and not live in service to any created thing. Jehovah Himself made humanity to have dominion over the works of His hands and put all things under his feet—all sheep and oxen, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas (Psalm 8:6-8). Thus, all idolatry in any form—metal or mental—is wrong.

Humanity is the creation of God that has the intelligence and the ability to recognize the worthiness of God and joyfully praise Him for it (Psalm 8:9). Therefore, the whole duty of man is summed up with these simple words: "Fear God and keep His commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Do you?

The Majesty of God

Atheism is foolish (Psalm 14:1) and inexcusable (Romans 1:20). The fingerprints of divine design cover every particle of

the land, air, and sea. There is no creature in existence, no star in its course, no path in the sea that does not radiate Jehovah's majesty. In Psalm 8, David carefully describes three immutable truths about the majestic excellence of the great I AM.

First, the majesty of Jehovah is **universal**. His excellence is in all the earth; His glory is set above the heavens (v. 1). There is nowhere anyone can go to get away from His regal, authoritative majesty.

Second, the majesty of Jehovah is **comprehensive**. From the absolute innocence of gurgling babies and nursing infants to the complete defeat and eternal punishment of His every foe (v. 2), Jehovah's sovereignty reigns. He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, and He is a just judge of these who do not. From cradle to grave and beyond, Jehovah's majesty is.

Third, the majesty of Jehovah is **visible**. To claim that it is unrecognizable or incomprehensible is utter folly. His majestic glory can be seen in the heavens (v. 3), in His astonishing providence for all His creatures and His special providence for His redeemed family (v. 4), in His unique creation of the human race in His image (v. 5), and in His placement of humanity in dominion over creatures so much stronger, bigger, and faster (vv. 6-8).

"O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!" (v. 9).

Praise Befitting Jehovah

Lip service to Jehovah is far easier than the genuine praise, adoration, and service that He rightly and constantly deserves. Calling Jesus "Lord, Lord" without obedience is like a foolish man who builds a house without a foundation (Luke 6:46-49).

Jehovah is a great King (Malachi 1:14); therefore, it behooves us to remember that He deserves an elite quality of praise and adoration. In Psalm 9:1-2, David erupts in unique and befitting praise of the Great I Am. Here it is written: "I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all Thy marvelous

works. I will be glad and rejoice in Thee: I will sing praise to Thy name, O Thou Most High.”

These words encapsulate four specific characteristics of the unique praise befitting Jehovah.

First, **praise befitting Jehovah is wholehearted**. Halfhearted worship profanes His high and wondrous name; it besmirches His holiness; it is an abominable noise (Malachi 1:12-13).

Second, **praise befitting Jehovah is specific**. The God of the Bible is not a philosophical postulate, or a theological theory, or a distant deistic hypothesis. He is One who knows, sees, hears, loves, and acts. It was His creative fingers which ordained the heavens with its planets, stars, and galaxies. It is His hands of providence that work all things together for the good of those who love Him and are the called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28).

Third, **praise befitting Jehovah is heartwarming**. Unlike the worship of a false god like Allah, which produces fear, hatred, ill-will, and terror, the praise of Jehovah creates gladness and joy (Psalm 122:1).

Fourth, **praise befitting Jehovah is focused**. The fundamental difference between holy worship and profane entertainment pretending to be worship is revealed in the arena of focus. Entertainment is focused upon human opinion and approval; worship’s focus is upon God and His glory. Jehovah’s name—“I Am”—reflects His holy character, His incredible glory, His unquestionable authority, His utter uniqueness, His incomprehensible nature. He is Most High.

Our worship and praise should seek to ambitiously rise to the level of the Most High. Anything less is beneath His dignity.

The Praiseworthiness of Jehovah

Like a beautiful diamond the praiseworthiness of Jehovah has many wondrous facets. Each radiant facet is glorious in its own

unique and special way. When David penned Psalm 9, he focused on three of the manifold reasons for Jehovah's praiseworthiness.

First, David's praises sounded forth because of **Jehovah's personal deliverance from the unrighteous**. "When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence. For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou sat in the throne judging right. Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever. O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them" (verses 3-6). The triumph of good over evil is not a fairy tale or the hypothesis of spiritual speculation. It is the vibrant recurring theme in human history, because the great I AM repeatedly demonstrates the truth that His ability to deliver the righteous out of the hands of the unrighteous never diminishes.

Second, David's praises sounded forth because of **Jehovah's sovereign righteousness and judgment of evil and wickedness**. "But the LORD shall endure forever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness; he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness" (verses 7-8). The triumph of good over evil is more than a recurring theme in human history; it will be the final act and fact of history. The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels and every cause and effect of evil shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Third, David's praises sounded forth because of **Jehovah's impregnable protection of and continuous faithfulness to those who diligently seek Him**. "The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, hast not forsaken them that seek thee" (verses 9-10).

God is, and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). God said it; that settles it; let's believe it.

God's Righteous Judgment

Since the introduction of sin into human history the wrath of God has been and is being revealed from heaven against all human ungodliness and unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). Because Jehovah has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11), He is longsuffering and executes His righteous judgment with the goal of all coming to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Like the execution of His judgment on Pharaoh (as recorded in Exodus 7:14-12:30) and His judgment upon Israel (as detailed in Amos 4:6-12), Jehovah's righteous judgment is best summed up in Psalm 9:5. Here it is written, "You have rebuked the nations; You have destroyed the wicked; You have blotted out their name forever."

First, **Jehovah rebukes**. God is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11). His opposition to every unclean thing is unchanging and settled. His holy wrath is first expressed in correction. He rebukes and corrects because of his profuse love (Proverbs 3:12). Should this expression of His righteous judgment be resisted, He then lovingly increases the severity of His response.

Next, **Jehovah destroys**. When Saul of Tarsus continued to kick against the goads, he lost his sight for three days (Acts 9:5ff.). When Jehovah began to avenge the blood of the souls under the altar (Revelation 6:9-10), the first four of the seven trumpets brought the destruction of a third of the trees, sea, sea creatures, ships, rivers, springs of water, sun, moon, and stars (Revelation 8:7-12). When the unrighteous do not repent, Jehovah continues to be longsuffering, but not forever.

Finally, **Jehovah blots out**. The divine eraser has eliminated the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Nineveh, and Babylon off the earth's map. Not one stone of Jerusalem's temple was left standing upon another by the winter of A. D. 70. Anyone who appears before Jehovah with his name blotted out of the book of life will be forever banished to obscurity in the eternal lake of fire, the second death.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

Staying Focused on Jehovah’s Praiseworthiness

The expectation cannot be stated more clearly: “Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:15). Like the light of a lamp (Matthew 5:15), the praise of God is not to be hidden under a basket. The child of God is to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4). Developing the mind of Christ, choosing to focus on the joy set before him while enduring the hostility of sinners against himself (Hebrews 12:2-3), requires instruction and diligent application. Counsel from David’s inspired quill provides needed guidance to stay focused upon Jehovah’s praiseworthiness. It is written: “Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion! Declare His deeds among the people. When He avenges blood, He remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the humble. Have mercy on me, O LORD! Consider my trouble from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death, that I may tell of all Your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion. I will rejoice in Your salvation” (Psalm 9:11-14).

To stay focused on Jehovah’s praiseworthiness, declare His deeds of deliverance from your enemies. Every child of God has been delivered from humanity’s greatest enemy and relentless adversary. The Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). The empty tomb guarantees the complete overthrow of the god of this world. No wonder, Jesus’ first command after His resurrection was “Rejoice!” (Matthew 28:9). To stay focused on Jehovah’s praiseworthiness, one must stay focused on His deeds of deliverance.

To stay focused on Jehovah’s praiseworthiness, remember His answers to prayer. Since David was a man whose prayers were fervent, frequent, and brutally honest, it was not difficult for

him to call to mind the many occasions—great and small—in which Jehovah had heard his passionate and humble cry. This help to staying focused upon God’s praiseworthiness is only benefits one whose closet of earnest, transparent prayer is used frequently.

To stay focused on Jehovah’s praiseworthiness, petition Him for mercy and marvel how often your petition is lovingly granted. How often have our worst fears never occurred! How often Jehovah lifts His children from the gates of death! How often, sadly, our response is one of forgetfulness—like the nine healed lepers, instead of like the Samaritan who focused upon the mercy shown him and thus went back to sing God’s praises (Luke 17:12-18).

When one stays focused on Jehovah’s praiseworthiness, he will rejoice in His salvation.

Praise God for His Holiness

Every person has an innate moral capacity that compels him to think in terms of right and wrong. If educated thoroughly by God’s Word, one will abhor that which is evil and cling to that which is good. If educated incorrectly, one will call evil “good” and good “evil.” As described in David’s psalm of praise (Psalm 9), right thinking people ought to ever praise the Lord with their whole heart because of God’s pristine holiness. Consider the contents of David’s meditation on this matter: “The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made; in the net which they hid, their own foot is caught. The LORD is known by the judgment He executes; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Selah. The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever” (Psalm 9:15-18).

God is to be praised for His holy law of reaping what is sown (vv. 15-16). Since the second day of creation—four days prior to humanity’s arrival—the law of sowing and reaping has

governed this planet with an iron fist (Genesis 1:11-12). Because of this immutable physical and spiritual law, nations fall because of their own devices and the wicked are snared by the consequences of their own actions. The harvest of eternal corruption or everlasting life is the unchangeable result of what each person has sown (Galatians 6:8).

God is to be praised for His holy punishment of the wicked (v. 17). Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Every nation, all people are amenable to God’s holy expectations. Every person—great or small—who chooses wickedness over righteousness shall be turned into hell. The holiness of Jehovah means that He is no respecter of persons.

God is to be praised for His holy concern and care for the needy (v. 18). Unlike the false god Allah, Jehovah’s holiness is tempered by a heart bursting with love, compassion, and tenderness, especially for the exploited and abused. The ultimate proof of this came with the One prophesied of in Isaiah 61:1-2: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD” (Luke 4:18-19).

How fitting is David’s concluding petition: “Arise, O LORD, do not let man prevail; let the nations be judged in Your sight. Put them in fear, O LORD, that the nations may know themselves to be but men” (vv.19-20).

Amen.

Selah

For God’s word to exercise its transforming impact, one’s mind must be renewed—renovated or remodeled to think differently (Romans 12:2). This does not “just happen” when one reads the Scriptures. It occurs when a Bible student reads and intentionally digests the sweeter-than-honey Word of God.

Some of the strongest words of rebuke that ever came from the lips of the Lord were occasioned by the failure of those who knew the facts of history or the text of Scripture but did not get the message (Matthew 16:5-11, 22:29ff.). In the book of Psalms, we have divine help in this area. In several psalms, the Holy Spirit has placed stop signs (see Psalms 3, 4, 7, 9, and others). In the Hebrew language, the word for “stop” is spelled S-e-l-a-h. These are places where God explicitly tells us: “Let that soak in.”

One writer has suggested the following acronym for helping the diligent Bible reader when he comes to the word “Selah” in the Scriptures: S-stop E-exalt L-listen A-and H-heed. The next time you come to a stop sign in Scripture, do not just slow down a little by Stomping Twice On Pedal; instead, Stop Exalt Listen And Heed.

There is much to absorb whenever God’s speaking to us has a pregnant pause.

How to Turn a Sigh into a Song

If you have ever wondered why it seems that God is distant when you feel overwhelmed by troubles? Take comfort in the fact that you are not alone. The psalmist expressed this very feeling when he asked: “Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do you hide in times of trouble?” This deep sigh (v. 1) that begins Psalm 10 is transformed into a song by the conclusion (verses 10-14). What did the psalmist do to go from a sigh to a song in times of trouble?

First, **he was honest**. He does not pretend; he does not lie to himself about his situation or his nagging questions. He had two gut wrenching inquiries of Jehovah (v. 1). Then, he honestly assessed the wicked’s mistreatment of the poor and expressed his holy desire for justice upon these workers of iniquity (v. 2).

Next, **he beheld the wicked** (vv. 3-14). Their mouths are perverse—they boast selfishly and bless the wicked (v. 3). They are proud and completely devoid of God (v. 4). Their ways are

grievous (v. 5). They are deceived by a false sense of security (v. 6). Their mouths are wicked (v. 7); their motives are evil (v. 8); their actions are perverse (vv. 9-10). Their hearts are blasphemous (vv. 11, 13).

Finally, **he beheld Jehovah**. God does arise; He does lift up His hand of deliverance of the good and destruction of the evil; He does not forget the humble (v. 12). Jehovah sees (v. 14); Jehovah rules (v. 16); Jehovah hears (v. 17). Jehovah is just. He will “do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may oppress no more” (v. 18).

God is not deceived by the pretensions of the wicked nor is He mocked by the shameless presumption of those who trouble the righteous. They who have sown the wind of sin and evil will reap the whirlwind of God’s wrath and destruction.

Every time.

Faith in the Face of Wickedness

The hardest questions of life are hurled at the righteous when his faith is under an all-out assault by Satan. In the day of Psalm 10’s composition, the wicked in their haughtiness were successfully mistreating and oppressing the poor (v. 2). How brazen was the wickedness of the wicked! Their tongues boasted with wicked words and blessed those who Jehovah abhors (v. 3). Their haughty minds banished God from all consideration (v. 4). Their wicked ways prospered (v. 5). Their wicked hearts imagined that they were invincible (v. 6). Their wicked mouths were full of cursing, deceit, and fraud (v. 7). Their wicked actions were covert, vicious, and deadly (vv. 8-10). Their wicked hearts believed God to be senile and blind (v. 11).

It is in this cauldron of evil circumstances that Satan blasts away at one’s faith: “Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide in times of trouble?” (v. 1). It was in this cauldron of evil circumstances that a prayer of faith arose to God: “Arise, O LORD! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble” (v.

12). It was in this cauldron of evil circumstances that “the Lord is King forever and ever” (v. 16). It was in this cauldron of evil circumstances that He heard the desire of the humble (v. 17) to “do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may oppress no more” (v. 18).

God is faithful. Cling to faith in Him, especially when the wickedness of the wicked proliferates.

Stinking Thinking

The lie that “it does not matter what you believe” always bears the most noxious fruit. Ideas have consequences. Every belief produces actions which logically correspond to it. There is a universe of difference between “Thou shalt surely die” and “Thou shalt not surely die.”

The wicked man described in Psalm 10 is one whose mind is polluted with a cesspool of stinking thinking. Consider these three falsehoods that the wicked believes:

He is insulated from the calamities of life. He has said in his heart, “I shall not be moved; I shall never be in adversity.” (v. 6). However, Jesus says that the rain, floods, and winds of life come upon all (Matthew 7:24-27).

God is forgetful. The wicked has said in his heart, “God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see.” (v. 11). However, Jesus says, “that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36), “for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known” (Luke 12:2).

God is unjust. The wicked says in his heart, “You will not require an account” (v. 13). However, it is written that even though Jehovah sends rain upon the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6) and that “it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble” Christians (2 Thessalonians 1:6).

Stinking thinking is lethal. Thinking on things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Philippians 4:8) is essential.

The Truth about Fear

According to Jesus, a fear-filled disciple is a disciple of little faith (Matthew 8:26). The fearful are doomed (Revelation 21:8).

In Psalm 11, an introspective psalm of David, the question of why fear is so unbecoming of one whose faith is in Jehovah is confronted with brutal honesty. Verse one reads, “In the LORD I put my trust; how can you say to my soul, ‘Flee as a bird to your mountain’?”

In response to this searching question, David considers the “reasons” for fear and the reasons for faith. As demonstrated by God’s people when Goliath intimidated them (1 Samuel 17), fear seems reasonable because the wicked threaten to destroy those who are upright in heart (v. 2). Such threats are intentionally designed to create despair and hopelessness (v. 3).

Although it appears otherwise, such fear is unreasonable and sinful, because it is a failure to walk by faith. David states three reasons why such fear is unnecessary and wrong.

First, **it fails to trust Jehovah’s holy sovereignty**. “The LORD is in His holy temple, the LORD’s throne is in heaven” (v. 4)

Second, **it ignores God’s omniscience**. “His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men” (v. 4).

Finally, **it expresses disbelief in God’s righteousness**. “The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright” (vv. 5-7).

Satan ever seeks to choke out faith in God by increasing our fears. When one of the devil’s Goliaths threatens you, do you see a giant, or do you see God? When the great storms of life arise

and their waves threaten to cover your boat in the midst of life's sea do you live by faith or by sight?

The truth about fear is that it is unnecessary, unreasonable, and inexcusable for those whose trust is in the Lord.

Reasons for Hope in Dark Days

Dark and difficult days are a fact of life. Paul spoke to Timothy of “perilous days” (2 Timothy 3:1). About a thousand years prior, David cried: “Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men” (Psalm 12:1). As he surveyed the scene, David observed a nauseating abundance of ungodliness—idle speaking, flattery, duplicity (v. 2); arrogance (v. 3); the complete absence of self-control (v. 4).

Yet, David did not despair (vv. 5-7). He knew that Jehovah was never indifferent to such evil nor passive toward those oppressed by evildoers (v. 5). Because the words of the Lord are pure (v. 6) and sure (v. 7), David could live securely, though “the wicked prowl on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men” (v. 8).

Jehovah remains unchanged. Though dark days come when the wicked strut and prowl, and many exalt vile and vain things, Jehovah provides shelter and perpetual preservation from this perverse generation.

There are valid, unchanging reasons for hope in dark days. There are valid, unchanging reasons for hope today.

An Ungodly Tongue

In David's portrait of the ungodly in Psalm 12, he does not describe egregious sins of the flesh like homosexuality, adultery, or murder. Instead, he focuses upon the sins of the mouth, for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks; “a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things,

and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things” (Matthew 12:34-35).

The mouth of the ungodly speaks idle words (Psalm 12:2). Vain and profane speech is sinful precisely because it uses profound and weighty words in trivial and meaningless ways. Idle words are weighty in the eyes of God (Matthew 12:36) because they arise from an ungodly heart.

The mouth of the ungodly speaks insincere words (Psalm 12:2). Flattery is a telltale sign of a divided heart. It is the perfume that a hypocrite uses to hide the stench of his evil heart and wicked motives. No amount of the lipstick of flattery can hide the pig of an insincere heart.

The mouth of the ungodly speaks arrogant words. They say, “With our tongues we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?” (Psalm 12:4). No one, especially God, is going to have authority over their mouth. They will say what they want to say, whenever they want to say it, and how they wish to say it.

“If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” (James 1:26).

Good News in the Midst of Fake News

The old advice of “Believe nothing that you hear and only half of what you see” seems quite wise in an age that is saturated with fake news. On several occasions in His earthly ministry, Jesus warned of the possibility of a discrepancy between what *appears* to be true with what is *actually* true (see Matthew 7:21-23, 15:8-9, 23:3 for examples).

In a world that is engulfed in fake news, is it not refreshing to know that there is a resource that never has to be taken with the proverbial “grain of salt”? What a blessing is the oasis located in Psalm 12:6-7! How it slakes the parched and thirsty soul! “The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of

earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever.”

The word of God is pure. It is as pure as silver that has been through the furnace of refinement seven times! It is completely free from the alloys of error, impurity, and inaccuracy. It does not need to be “de-mythologized” as Rudolf Bultmann advocated; it has no chaff of error that needs to be separated from the wheat of truth. The holy God via His Holy Spirit’s revelation and inspiration used holy men to write the Holy Scriptures. It is the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25).

The word of God is enduring. Because of its purity, God’s word will ever endure. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God’s word will by no means pass away (Matthew 24:35). Like Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:8), the Scriptures are the same yesterday, today, and forever.

What good news in the midst of fake news!

The God of Hope

The setting of Psalm 12 is David’s observation of the cessation of godliness in his fellow citizens; the faithful have disappeared from David’s view (v. 1). Rather than despairing in such bleak circumstances, David focuses upon Jehovah, the God of hope. Because of his focus, David has the light of confident expectation, not the darkness of gloomy helplessness.

Jehovah is the God of hope, because:

- He sees. He is omniscient (v. 5). He knows when the poor are being oppressed. He knows when the needy sigh.
- He rewards. He is just (v. 5). He arises to reward the good and to punish the evildoer.
- He delivers. He is salvation (v. 5). He sets the oppressed and sighing in the safety for which they yearn.

- He communicates. He is trustworthy (v. 6). His words are pure words; they are free from any impurity. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). He cannot even be tempted to lie (James 1:13).
- He keeps. He is faithful (v. 7). He protects and preserves His word and His people.

Optimistic confidence in God is not wishful thinking; it is hopeful thinking. When the evildoers around you increase, don't be wishful; be hopeful.

Transforming “How Long?” Into “Hold on!”

Because He is eternal, God does not have the same perception of time as humanity does. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8); therefore, there were occasions which arose in David's life in which he felt like he was hanging on to God by his fingernails—and even they were beginning to cramp. Spiritual desperation was on the verge of kicking down the door of his heart. “How long?” pounded in his head like a vicious, relentless, spiritual migraine. “How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?” (Psalm 13:1-2). What can one do during such unpleasant times?

Do what David did.

First, he prayed unpretentiously. “Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, ‘I have prevailed against him’; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved” (Psalm 13:3-4). No fancy words; just raw, unfiltered expression of his heartfelt fears, needs, and anxieties. He cast all of his care upon the broad shoulders of Him who ever cares. He prayed fervently.

Then, he reaffirmed his commitment to trust God and His mercy. “But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice

in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me” (Psalm 13:5-6). Jehovah’s vast and bountiful mercy in the past coupled with the fact of His unchanging nature renewed David’s determination to trust and praise the Lord as the future came in daily doses.

David transformed his “How long?” into “Hold on!” You can too.

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12).

When Dark Days Come

Even though David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), he experienced spiritual peaks and valleys in his life. The valley of Psalm 13 was especially dark and deep.

The resounding, haunting question of “How long?” reverberated in his sorrow-filled heart (v. 2). David felt forgotten by God, like God had hidden His face from him (v. 1). David’s lonely soul ached with a poignant sense of loss and grief; his enemy rejoiced vigorously over his distress (v. 2).

Second after second, minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day such agony of soul continued. How long could this last? How long would this last? How long could David last?

How did David get out of this dark spiritual valley? Psalm 13:3-5 records the divine remedy:

- He prayed to God earnestly, expectantly, and reverently. “Consider and hear me, O LORD my God” (v. 3).
- He sought God’s wisdom. “Enlighten my eyes” (v. 3).
- He stated his fears honestly and precisely. “lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, ‘I have prevailed against him’; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved” (vv. 3-4).

- He reflected upon God’s past blessings and renewed His determination to trust Him for future deliverance. “But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation” (v. 5).

David’s conclusion—“I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me” (v. 6)—indicates that Jehovah had yet again transformed another night of darkness into a day of light! What a metamorphosis!

The Truth about Atheism

Like TNT, the Biblical word “fool” is a powerful word that must be used with extreme care and caution. Jesus solemnly warns against its misuse in Matthew 5:22. In the eyes of God, a fool (Greek word—*moros*) is a spiritual moron. Only a moron thinks that God will cease to exist and no longer be a rewarder of human behavior should he decide that he does not want to believe in Him.

The truth about atheism is that it is the result of a corrupt heart that desires to do abominable works (Psalm 14:1). Atheism is not the logical outcome that inevitably results when valid reasoning is applied to irrefutable evidence. Rather, it is the whitewash that is used to cover the god of self. It is the camo used to veil the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life that rages within the atheist’s heart. Humanist Aldous Huxley stated it most succinctly and accurately: “We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.”

Being “one nation under God” has been, is, and always will be repulsive to everyone who wants to do what is right in his own eyes.

The Truth about Spiritual Fools

In an ever-changing world that is destined to be annihilated when Jesus returns, the unchanging Jehovah is the only constant. It is the pinnacle of spiritual folly to reject the truth that God is and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. As depicted in Psalm 14, such foolishness has several alarming characteristics and consequences. Consider the hideous portrait of a fool that David paints on the canvas of Scripture:

A spiritual fool is morally corrupt in his character. He is abominable at heart. “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have done abominable works; there is none who does good” (v. 1).

A spiritual fool is misguided in his pursuits. He is carnal in his desires. “The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek God” (v. 2).

A spiritual fool is rotten in his soul. He is an evil doer. “They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one” (v. 3).

A spiritual fool is bankrupt in his head. He has no genuine knowledge. “Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call on the LORD?” (v. 4).

A Rewarder of Those Who Diligently Seek Him

There is no verdict worse than the one God pronounced on the rich man in Luke 12—“Thou fool” (v. 20). Those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

Jehovah’s judgment was previewed in Psalm 14:5-7 when David described Jehovah’s judgment as being:

Trepidation for the wicked. “There they are in great fear, for God is with the generation of the righteous” (v. 5).

Vindication for the righteous. “You shame the counsel of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge” (v. 6).

Salvation for the redeemed. “Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD brings back the captivity of His people; let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad” (v. 7).

Vindication or Terror. “You good and faithful servant” or “You wicked and lazy servant.” “Come, you blessed of My Father” or “Depart from Me, you cursed.” Rest or vengeance.

Jehovah is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Heaven’s House Rules

“If momma ain’t happy, there ain’t nobody happy” is not a myth. Every family has a written and/or unwritten code of conduct. Every home has one or more house rules.

Heaven does too. In response to the questions: “LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?” (Psalm 15:1), David enumerates heaven’s house rules (Psalm 15:2-5). He concludes with the promise that “he who does these things shall never be moved” (v. 5). You will never be asked to leave His fellowship if you adhere to the following divine expectations:

- **Live with integrity.** (“walk uprightly,” v. 2).
- **Do the right thing.** (“works righteousness,” v. 2).
- **Be honest, especially with yourself.** (“speaks the truth in his heart,” v. 2).
- **Do not misuse your tongue.** (“does not backbite with his tongue...nor does he take up a reproach against his friend,” v. 3).
- **Do good to others.** (“nor does evil to his neighbor,” v. 3).
- **Abhor evil.** (“in whose eyes a vile person is despised,” v. 4).

- **Honor those who love and serve God.** (“honor those who fear the Lord,” v. 4).
- **Keep your word.** (“he swears to his own hurt and does not change,” v. 4).
- **Do not profit at other’s expense.** (“he does not put out his money at usury nor does he take a bribe against the innocent,” v. 5).

Anyone who wants to dwell permanently with God must follow heaven’s house rules while living on this earth.

What a Fellowship!

Jehovah is not a snob; He prejudices no one. “Whosoever” must be one of His favorite persons; the New Testament makes almost 100 references to him/her.

But, Jehovah is holy. Without the riches of His manifold, amazing grace and the atoning power of Christ’s cleansing blood, fellowship with Him would be impossible. His standards are high and uncompromising. They demand our best and will transform us into the best version of ourselves.

When David asks, “LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?” (Psalm 15:1), the answer (Psalm 15:2-5) clearly illustrates the loftiness of God’s holy and wondrous fellowship. Consider the following truths about fellowship with God:

- It is conditioned upon the direction of one’s feet, the deeds of one’s hands, and the devotion of one’s heart (v. 2).
- It is dependent upon the righteous use of one’s tongue, the proper use of one’s influence, and the integrity of one’s word (vv. 3-4).
- It is contingent upon the appropriate stewardship of one’s wealth (v. 5).

What a fellowship!

“He who does these things shall never be moved” (Psalm 15:5).

What a promise!

The Enduring, Essential Requirements of Fellowship

Although the religious world seems determined to minimize the essentiality of a Christian living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age (Titus 2:12), God’s word remains unchanged. Genuine fellowship with the Holy God requires the following virtues:

- **Righteousness.** “He who walks uprightly and works righteousness” (Psalm 15:2).
- **Truthfulness.** “He who...speaks the truth in his heart” (Psalm 15:2).
- **Purity of speech.** “He who does not backbite with his tongue nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend” (Psalm 15:3).
- **Abhorrence of evil.** “In whose eyes a vile person is despised” (Psalm 15:4).
- **Delight in good.** “he honors those who fear the LORD” (Psalm 15:4).
- **Integrity.** “He who swears to his own hurt and does not change...nor does he take a bribe against the innocent” (Psalm 15:4-5).
- **Fidelity to God’s commands.** “He who does not put out his money at usury” (Psalm 15:5).

The person who does these things shall abide in the Lord’s presence and dwell with Him in unbroken, immovable fellowship.

David's Faith

Though never called a friend of God (like Abraham was), David was called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). His passion for God, especially before his adultery with Bathsheba and its devastating impact on his life (2 Samuel 11ff.), has been written for our learning and admonition. Psalm 16 details the recipe for David's vibrant and passionate faith. It should come as no surprise that this Michtam is a Messianic psalm.

The Psalm begins with a simple request: "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust" (v. 1). The remainder of its verses describes the reasons David had such a fearless faith in God's loving response, especially as the hour of his death approached. An examination of David's faith reveals the following facts about it:

- **He had a singular authority in his life.** "O my soul, you have said to the LORD, 'You are my Lord, my goodness is nothing apart from You'" (v. 2).
- **He had a fervent love of brethren.** "As for the saints who are on the earth, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight" (v. 3).
- **He had a steadfast abhorrence of idolatry and false worship.** "Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god; their drink offerings of blood I will not offer nor take up their names on my lips" (v. 4).
- **He had a joyous trust in God.** "O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot. The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance" (vv. 5-6).
- **He had a tenacious passion for God's Word.** "I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons" (v. 7).
- **He had a continuous pursuit of God and His fellowship.** "I have set the LORD always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (v. 8).

- **He had a confident and joyous hope in death.** “Therefore, my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (vv. 9-11).

David’s faith ever sought to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He truly was a man after God’s own heart.

The Hope of the Gospel

One of the many distinguishing, non-replicable, infallible truths about the gospel is its fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. According to the Scriptures, Christ died for our sins and was raised the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The gospel of God was promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures (Romans 1:1-2). At the very heart of Peter’s sermon on the first Pentecost after Jesus’ death was the fulfillment of Psalm 16:8-11’s prediction of Jesus’ resurrection. “Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:30-31).

The gospel is not a collection of cunningly devised myths (2 Peter 1:16). It is the confirmation and fulfillment of God’s prophetic word “according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith” (Romans 16:25-26). Its hope is not wishful thinking about some “pie in the sky” in the sweet by and by; rather, it is a lifeline—

sure and steadfast—which anchors the soul through the storms of life and provides strong consolation (Hebrews 6:18-19).

Like David and the Messiah of which He prophesied, I too can rest in hope when my earthly tabernacle is taken down and placed in its final resting place (Psalm 16:9), “for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Timothy 1:12). How imperative it is to continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel (Colossians 1:23).

The Prayer of the Righteous

There are some prayers that God does not attend to, because “the LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous” (Proverbs 15:29). There are some prayers that Jehovah attends to with great care and interest, because “the prayer of the upright is His delight” (Proverbs 15:8). What James describes in the New Testament, using Elijah as an example (James 5:16-18), David demonstrates in Psalm 17—“the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

In fact, Psalm 17 is a divine commentary on James 5:16. Verses 1-5 describe the characteristics of a righteous man, “a just cause” (v. 1) of one whose steps are obediently in Jehovah’s paths (vv. 4-5). Verses 6-12 describe the effective prayer of a righteous man, one who has called upon Jehovah and has been heard (v. 6) and who seeks to be kept as the apple of Jehovah’s eye, hidden under the protective shadow of His wing (v. 8). Verses 13-15 describe the fervent prayer of a righteous man, one who desires to see Jehovah’s face in righteousness and be satisfied when he awakes in His likeness (v. 15).

Regardless of which testament one studies, the distinct message is “the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Therefore, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

Characteristics of a Righteous Man

The Lord blesses the righteous (Psalm 5:12). His eyes are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry (Psalm 34:15). The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears (Psalm 34:17). The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16).

In light of these wonderful promises, knowing the characteristics of a righteous man is of extreme importance. In Psalm 17:1-5, David paints on the eternal canvas of Scripture the following portrait of a righteous person.

- **A righteous person prays in faith, expecting God's response.** "Hear a just cause, O LORD, attend to my cry" (v. 1).
- **A righteous person is truthful with his mouth, expressing nothing false or crafty.** "Give ear to my prayer which is not from deceitful lips" (v. 1).
- **A righteous person seeks vindication from God.** "Let my vindication come from Your presence; let Your eyes look on the things that are upright" (v. 2).
- **A righteous person remains faithful to God during trials.** "You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress" (v. 3).
- **A righteous person heeds God's inspired warnings.** "Concerning the works of men, by the word of Your lips, I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer" (v. 4).
- **A righteous person trusts the certainty of God's care and protection.** "Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip" (v. 5).

Like God's abundant blessings of the righteous, being righteous before God does not happen by accident.

Why Fervent Prayer of the Righteous is Effective

Confident trust in God is essential to effective prayer (James 1:6). Because Jehovah's hand is not shortened and His ear is not heavy so that He cannot hear (Isaiah 59:1), David was confident that when he called upon Jehovah, He would incline His ear and hear his speech, "for You will hear me, O God" (Psalm 17:6). What blessed assurance!

According to Psalm 17:7-12, the fervent prayer of the righteous is effective because:

- **Jehovah's marvelous lovingkindness delivers those who trust in Him.** "Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand, O You who save those who trust in You from those who rise up against them" (v. 7).
- **Jehovah's intense concern protects from genuine hostility.** "Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of Your wings, from the wicked who oppress me, from my deadly enemies who surround me. They have closed up their fat hearts; with their mouths they speak proudly. They have now surrounded us in our steps; they have set their eyes, crouching down to the earth, as a lion is eager to tear his prey and like a young lion lurking in secret places" (vv. 8-12).

"The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears" (Psalm 34:17). This is why the fervent prayer of a righteous man is effective. It's that simple.

The Characteristics of Fervent Prayer

"Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1) was one of the wisest requests ever made by a disciple of Jesus. Learning from the examples of the fervent prayers recorded in Scripture is an excellent way for a Christian to use the Old Testament to be made wise

unto salvation. In Psalm 17:13-15, David's fervent prayer is: "Arise, O LORD, confront him, cast him down; deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword, with Your hand from men, O LORD, from men of the world who have their portion in this life and whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure. They are satisfied with children and leave the rest of their possession for their babes. As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness."

Consider carefully the following characteristics of David's fervent prayer:

It is specific. The action verbs are vibrant—"arise...confront...cast down...deliver." David is not generalizing; he is specifying.

It is plain. The words in verse 13 burst forth like rounds of ammunition from a machine gun. There is no flowery language; no pretense; no vain repetition. David is completely unconcerned with being eloquent; his focus is upon being heard.

It is trusting. David is confident that Jehovah will deliver him with His hand from the hands of those who are worldly and threatening him. He will see Jehovah's face.

It throbs with passion for greater intimacy with God. David joyously anticipates that day when he shall awake in Jehovah's likeness.

It was answered. Though David faced numerous enemies on various occasions who desired to kill him, he died of old age (1 Kings 1:1, 2:10). His enemies never succeeded in carrying out their murderous plots against him.

"The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

A Portrait of God

God is spirit (John 4:24); thus, He has no body (Luke 23:39). Since humanity was made in God's image (Genesis 1:27), we are the creature which is most akin to the great I AM. Therefore, to help humanity better understand Jehovah, the Scriptures often use

anthropomorphic language—i.e. language which uses human (anthropos) terms or forms (morphos) to describe God. If a parable can be described as an earthly story that teaches heavenly truths, then anthropomorphic language can be thought of as human characteristics used to describe humanity’s Creator.

Using anthropomorphic language, Psalm 17 contains a beautiful portrait of God. Deftly woven into the text, David portrays Jehovah as One who has:

- An attentive ear (vv. 1, 6)
- Watchful eyes (v. 2)
- Wise lips (v. 4)
- Safe paths (v. 5)
- A protective shadow (v. 8)
- A mighty hand (vv. 13-14)
- A righteous face (v. 15)

Oh, the beauty of Jehovah’s holiness and loving concern!

“Oh My!”

Psalm 18 was written in David’s later years (see 2 Samuel 22). It was written after David had reaped the whirlwind sown by his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). What a tsunami of consequences came from his affair:

- The rape of his daughter Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-20);
- The honor-killing of his son Amnon by another son, Absalom (2 Samuel 13:23-30);
- A coup lead by Absalom (2 Samuel 15-18) which brought the treachery of a close advisor—Ahithophel (2 Samuel 15:31), the nasty words and actions of Shimei, a descendant of Saul (2 Samuel 16:5-13), the public violation and humiliation of his concubines (2 Samuel 16:21-22), the blatant disobedience by his highest ranking officer in his military of his explicit orders (2 Samuel 18:5, 14), and the

violent, heartbreaking death of his son Absalom (2 Samuel 18:33);

- Civil unrest (2 Samuel 19:40-42);
- Another coup attempt, led by a rebel named Sheba (2 Samuel 20:1-22);
- A three-year famine which came because of a treaty violation by Saul, resulting in the execution of seven of Saul's descendants—five of whom were possibly raised by David's first wife, Michal (2 Samuel 21:1-9);
- Four battles with the emboldened Philistines (2 Samuel 21:15-22);
- A near death experience in battle (2 Samuel 21:16);

So, where was God in all of this? Note the following “my’s” and the answer is crystal clear: “I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, so shall I be saved from my enemies” (Psalm 18:1-3).

To David, the man after God's own heart, Jehovah was not a theory or a philosophy; He was not an impersonal force or an intellectual idea. Jehovah was David's **strength** when he was weak; David's **rock** when his life was shattered into a thousand pieces; David's **fortress** when attacked; David's **deliverer** when he was imperiled; David's **shield** when he was assailed; the horn of David's **salvation** when he had nothing else to hang on to; David's **stronghold** when he was being hunted by his enemies. In short, Jehovah was David's **God!**

Oh My!

How Soon We Forget!

Humanity is forgetful.

Most civilizations have special days set aside to remind them of significant things which should not be forgotten. In America, for example, there is Memorial Day, Flag Day, Mother's Day, Armed Services Day, Father's Day, Independence Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving Day, et. al. Under the Law of Moses, the Jews observed the Sabbath Day to remind them of the creation week and their redemption from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:13-15). They also had the Day of Atonement, the Passover Day, the Day of Pentecost, and added the days of Purim (Esther 9:17-22). In the New Testament, the Lord's Day—the first day of the week—has been designated by God as the day on which His Son's death is to be remembered (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

How often we humans quickly and easily lose our focus on what is most important! How easily the urgent suffocates the essential! How quickly spiritual thorns—the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life—can grow in the soil of one's heart, choke the word, and produce spiritual unfruitfulness! How soon we forget the debt of ten thousand talents that we have been forgiven when someone owes us a hundred denarii (cf. Matthew 18:21ff)!

In Psalm 18:4-6 and 2 Samuel 22:5-7, David describes his near-death experience (2 Samuel 21:15-17) with the following words: "The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears." Yet, sandwiched between David's near-death experience and its resulting praise of Jehovah (2 Samuel 21-22) and his actual death (1 Kings 2), his biography is scarred by an episode of sinful amnesia (2 Samuel 24).

How quickly David forgot the One he called "my rock...my fortress...my deliverer...my strength...my shield...the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:1-2).

Spiritual amnesia is serious.

Sowing and Reaping

The law of sowing and reaping has governed the worlds of horticulture and agriculture since the third day of the earth's existence. Three days prior to the creation of humanity, God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth," and it was so. (Genesis 1:11).

The law of sowing and reaping has also governed the spiritual world from the beginning. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:7-8).

The law of sowing also governs the socio-spiritual world. "With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; with a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless; with the pure You will show Yourself pure; and with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd" (Psalm 18:25-26). Everyone reaps from God what they have sown to their fellow humans. Jehovah will save the humble and bring down the haughty (Psalm 18:27). Those who are truly heavenly minded will be of much earthly good to those who are hungry, thirsty, needy, naked, sick, and in prison (Matthew 25:34-36).

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

It Matters

We live in a world that denigrates, demeans, and despises righteousness. To say that it is not highly esteemed in pop culture today is to state the obvious. This is nothing new. Jesus was not crucified for doing wrong but for saying and doing right. In the

final beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of those who are persecuted for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:10).

Because of this constant animosity and opposition, the question easily arises: Does it really matter? Is it really worth the struggle to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Is the high calling of denying ungodliness and worldly lusts and living soberly, righteously and godly in the present age really worth the blood, sweat, and tears?

David's answer is a resounding "YES!" He declares: "The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His judgments were before me, and I did not put away His statutes from me. I was also blameless before Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. Therefore, the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His sight" (Psalm 18:20-24).

It matters.

The Glorious Word of God

With the revelation of the New Testament, Jehovah has given to humanity all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Like the resurrection of Jesus, there are many infallible proofs that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, all-sufficient, authoritative word of God. David's glowing words of praise in Psalm 19:7-11 declare several eternal truths about the glorious word of God.

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul. Conversion is a spiritual U-turn. Because the Bible tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, anyone who hears and heeds its instruction can turn his/her life off the broad path to destruction and on to the narrow way to life. Because of the glorious word of God, spiritual health, wealth, and prosperity is within the grasp of anyone who desires it.

The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. Because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), His word is absolutely trustworthy. Anyone who hears and heeds His written instructions can build His life upon an unshakable foundation (Matthew 7:24-27). The Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). Because of the glorious word of God, wisdom is within the grasp of anyone who desires it.

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. Joy is the abundant and delicious fruit that grows exclusively on the tree of obedient faith. When someone knows what is the right thing to do and thus be pleasing to God, and then chooses to do it, his/her life is blessed with abundant joy, even when reviled, persecuted, and falsely slandered (Matthew 5:11-12). What is right is not determined by opinion polls, it is forever etched into God's word. Because of the glorious word of God, joy is within the grasp of anyone who desires it.

The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The Scriptures are brutally honest about its heroes. Noah got drunk; Abraham lied twice; Sarah laughed; Isaac lied; Jacob was deceitful; Judah was a fornicator; Moses murdered a man; David was an adulterer who plotted the death of a loyal servant. Sin is always sin, regardless of who commits it. Therefore, a wise man uses the perfect law of liberty as a spiritual mirror to see his flaws, weaknesses, and sins and changes his life accordingly. Because of the glorious word of God, spiritual insight is within the grasp of anyone who desires it.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever. God's word clearly distinguishes between those things which are perishable and only of benefit in this life, and those things which are imperishable and of benefit in this life and beyond. Unlike the fear of man, the fear of God is good for both one's body and soul (Luke 12:4-5). Unlike bodily exercise, godliness is profitable in this life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8). Fearing God and keeping His commandments are spiritual imperatives (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). Because of the glorious word of God, a firm foun-

dation for constructing one's earthly life and building for eternity is available to anyone who desires it.

The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward. The verdict that God will pronounce upon your life will be accurate and just. If He says: "Well done," it will be because you have lived your life as His good and faithful servant (Matthew 25:21). If He says: "Depart from Me" (25:41), it will be because you have lived your life wickedly with spiritual laziness (25:26). There is no greater, higher, or wiser course in life than to live so that God is pleased with you. Because of the glorious word of God, you have all things necessary to fight the good fight victoriously, to finish the race of faith triumphantly, and to keep the faith acceptably, and thus receive the wondrous crown of righteousness.

I commend you to God and to the word of His grace!

Understanding My Errors

Human frailty and fallenness manifests itself in a variety of ways. There are sins of weakness, sins of folly, sins committed because of ignorance. There are occasions when "the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Romans 7:19). David had a most insightful query when he asked: "Who can understand his errors?" (Psalm 19:12).

His petition in response to his question (Psalm 19:12-13) indicates a clear understanding of the diverse ways in which spiritual imperfection manifests itself in one's life. He writes: "Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression." To accurately understand my errors I need to know that:

Sin can occur in secret. Within the deep recesses of my heart, the notorious gang of worldliness—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—hide out. Things spoken in the dark to only myself, things spoken in the inner room of the soul can be hidden from my fellow man, but not from my God (Luke 12:3). Intense, honest, painful, and frequent self-examination is necessary to cleanse my soul of these hidden spiritual reefs which shipwreck my love of the Father (1 John 2:15-16).

Sin can occur overtly. Presumptuous sin is the rabid spiritual mindset that knowingly and intentionally ignores God’s will, so I can do what I stubbornly want to do. It is the mindset that high-handedly demands my practice of will-worship; it results in the way of Cain. Without a doubt, prevention of this sin is the wisest and best course of action.

Sin ever seeks to enslave. Sin is spiritual cancer that will metastasize. Sin is spiritual gangrene that will destroy my spiritual health. Sin is spiritual leprosy that will deaden all sensitivity of my heart and conscience.

God’s infallible antidote for the plague of sin remains revealed in the perfect law, the sure testimony, the right statutes, the pure commandments, the clean fear, and the altogether true and righteous judgments of the Lord. When they are engrafted into my heart as God intended them to be, my prayer can be: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).

The Power of God’s Word

Because the fear of the LORD endures forever and the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous in every way (Psalm 19:9), the Scriptures are powerful. In Psalm 19:7-8, David identifies four unique ways that God’s dynamic written word can powerfully impact your life.

The perfect word of God has the power to convert. “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (v. 7). The spiritual U-turn which delivers from the power of darkness and translates into the kingdom of the Son occurs when your soul is purified in obeying the truth, “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23). When such a conversion occurs, a soul has been saved from death and a multitude of sins have been properly covered by the blood of God’s Lamb (James 5:19-20).

The sure word of God has the power to impart wisdom. “The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (v.7). Though evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived, a continual adherence to the Holy Scriptures will make one wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:13-15). The fear of the LORD—the essential cornerstone of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10)—is explicitly and continuously taught in God’s word.

The righteous word of God has the power to rejoice the heart. “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart” (v. 8). The Ethiopian eunuch resumed his chariot ride home with a rejoicing heart (Acts 8:39) after he had obeyed God’s word from the heart. The Philippian jailer and all his household rejoiced because they had promptly obeyed what Paul and Silas had told them to do when he asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30-34). Joy erupts and percolates within your heart when God is obeyed; His righteous word always gives the correct instruction on what you must do to please Him and thus savor the delicious fruit of joy.

The pure word of God has the power of enlightenment. “The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (v. 8). The Scriptures were written for our learning (Romans 15:4) and admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11). They expose the thoughts and intents of the human heart, thus enlightening the careful reader to an accurate insight into God and His perfect

character, Satan and his devious devices, and the foibles of human nature. Armed with this enlightenment, you know that no temptation you encounter is unique and that God is faithful in times of temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). “Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8).

“My heart stands in awe of Thy word” (Psalm 119:161).

How to Pray for Others

As taught in the New Testament, Christianity is a “one another” religion. Christians are to prefer, love, receive, admonish, wait for, care for, greet, serve, forbear, be kind to, forgive, consider, comfort, and exhort one another. They are also to “pray for one another” (James 5:16). Intercessory prayer for all men is to ascend from a Christian’s lips (1 Timothy 2:1).

Psalm 20 contains one of David’s earnest intercessory entreaties before God’s throne of grace. In it we see an exemplar on how to pray for others.

Pray for Jehovah’s answer to their prayers. “May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble...May the LORD fulfill all your petitions” (vv. 1, 5).

Pray for God’s deliverance in the day of trouble. “May the name of the God of Jacob defend you” (v. 1).

Pray for God’s help and strength in their difficult times. “May He send you help from the sanctuary and strengthen you out of Zion” (v. 2).

Pray for God’s acceptance of their worship. “May He remember all your offerings and accept your burnt sacrifice” (v. 3).

Pray for God’s fulfillment of their unique purpose in life. “May He grant you according to your heart’s desire and fulfill all your purpose” (v. 4).

Pray with absolute confidence in God’s desire and ability to answer your intercessory prayer. “Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy

heaven with the saving strength of His right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They have bowed down and fallen; but we have risen and stand upright. Save, LORD! May the King answer us when we call” (vv. 6-9).

The King does indeed answer us when we call upon Him in prayer for one another!

Answered Prayers

The skeptic scoffs at prayer as nothing more than autosuggestion. Those promoting a health, wealth, and prosperity gospel abuse prayer with their presumptuous “name it and claim it” doctrine. The double-minded find prayer futile because they feed their doubts to the point that they lack sufficient faith to receive anything from the Lord (James 1:6-8).

Prayer is of great blessing to anyone whose passion is for the will of God and who trusts that God is a loving Father who desires to give liberally to His children (James 1:5). In Psalm 20:6-7, David expresses two essential components of prayers offered in faith that God delights in answering.

First, **God delights in answering prayers that have an accurate knowledge and stout confidence in Him.** “Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand” (v. 6).

Second, **God delights in answering prayers that trust in His powerful name** (i.e. His holy character and sovereign authority). “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (v. 7).

Because God delights in answering prayer, His children always ought to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1).

Spiritual Hedonism

Hedonism is the belief that pleasure ought to be the goal of one's life. Spiritual hedonism is the belief that one's life ought to be one continuous joyride in communion with God. Neither belief is taught in God's word.

When David wrote Psalm 21, he was on the mountaintop experience of his coronation (v. 3). His years of fleeing from his neurotic father-in-law, King Saul, were finally over. The days of being but a step away from death (1 Samuel 20:3) were gone. His profuse praise of Jehovah climaxes in "Be exalted, O LORD, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power" (Psalm 21:13).

What a contrast to how Psalm 22 begins—"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season and am not silent" (vv. 1-2).

Life has its ups and downs. Every mountain has a valley on each side of it. Everyone's life—both the wise and the foolish—has rains that descend, floods that come, and winds that blow and beat on it (Matthew 7:24-27). Regardless of how bright the sun may shine or how fierce the storm may be today, Jehovah is faithful.

Spiritual hedonism, unbiblical.

More importantly, it is unnecessary.

The Riches of God's Goodness

He who thinks, thanks.

When David had completed his meditation on the riches of God's goodness in his life (Psalm 21:1-12), he burst forth in thankful praise: "Be exalted, O LORD, in Your own strength! We will sing and praise Your power" (v. 13). Such is easy to do when one reflects upon:

God’s track record of answered prayers. “The king shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! You have given him his heart’s desire and have not withheld the request of his lips” (vv. 1-2).

God’s faithfulness to His promises. “For You meet him with the blessings of goodness; You set a crown of pure gold upon his head” (v. 3).

God’s generous, abundant blessings. “He asked life from You, and You gave it to him—length of days forever and ever. His glory is great in Your salvation; honor and majesty You have placed upon him. For You have made him most blessed forever; You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence. For the king trusts in the LORD, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved” (vv. 4-7).

God’s immutable holiness. “Your hand will find all Your enemies; Your right hand will find those who hate You. You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger; The LORD shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them. Their offspring You shall destroy from the earth, and their descendants from among the sons of men. For they intended evil against You; they devised a plot which they are not able to perform. Therefore, You will make them turn their back; You will make ready Your arrows on Your string toward their faces” (vv. 8-12).

When was the last time you reflected upon the myriad of blessings you have enjoyed because of the riches of God’s goodness?

He who thinks, thanks.

The Shepherd Par Excellence

Humans—wearied and scattered by sin—are like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). Jesus, whose birth was first announced to “shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch

over their flocks” (Luke 2:8), is the Shepherd Par Excellence. Psalm 22-24 depicts why this is so.

Psalm 22 portrays Jesus as **the Good Shepherd** who gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11). He is the valuable, virtuous Shepherd because of His valor in the face of abuse from Satan’s minions and the anguish of God’s righteous wrath.

Psalm 23 illuminates Jesus as **the Great Shepherd** who makes His sheep “complete in every good work to do His will” (Hebrews 13:20-21). He is the exceedingly great Shepherd because He has provided for His sheep every possible spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). Because of His greatness, every one of His sheep can confidently proclaim, “I shall not want.”

Psalm 24 describes Jesus as **the Chief Shepherd** whose authority exceeds all others (1 Peter 5:4). He is the King of glory—strong, mighty, and victorious in battle—who is seated at God’s “right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:20-21). He has had all things put under His feet and been given to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:22-23).

Jesus is the Shepherd par excellence!

David at the Foot of the Cross

Though separated in history by about a thousand years, David wrote in stunning, graphic detail of Jesus’ crucifixion. Like Isaiah 53, Psalm 22 is a crown jewel in the Scriptures’ treasure trove of predictive prophecy. In this psalm of David, set to “The Deer of the Dawn,” David details:

Jesus’ anguish of spirit on the cross. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me and from the words of My groaning?” (v. 1).

Jesus’ anguish of soul on the cross. “But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those

who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, ‘He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!’” (vv. 6-8).

Jesus anguish of body on the cross. “I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them and for My clothing they cast lots” (vv. 14-18).

The firm foundation of predictive prophecy immovably stands as infallible proof of the Bible’s divine authorship. It declares the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). It announces new things before they spring forth into human history (42:9). It predicts from ancient times things that had not yet been done (46:10). It proves that Jehovah is God and there is no other; He is God and there is none like Him (46:9).

Divine revelation and inspiration are the only plausible explanations of how David could write as though he were standing at the foot of Jesus’ cross.

Why?

It is a question that has haunted humanity since the Garden of Eden. Job and his three friends wrestled vigorously with it before admitting utter defeat. Parents who have lost young children have heard its seemingly endless echo. Children who have had to watch helplessly as a parent suffered the ravages of a terminal disease have heard its persistent, merciless chorus. It is the refuge of atheists, a treacherous reef that shipwrecks faith in God.

To become humanity’s merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God and to make propitiation for the sins of the people, Hebrews 2:17 states that in all things Jesus had to be

made like His brethren. For the Son of God to have completely identified with the offspring of Adam—in all things—He surely would have needed to wrestle with this heartbreaking, nagging question.

He did.

With His back lacerated by many stripes, a crown of thorns mockingly driven into His head, spittle upon His face, His hands and feet pierced with nails driven into the rough timber of a cross, His garments being divided as compensation for His executioners, publicly humiliated outside the city of Jerusalem, His heart melted like wax, His strength dried up like a potsherd, His tongue clinging to His jaws in thirst, He cried out with a loud voice, saying “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani.”

“My God, My God, why...?”

“In that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).

Praise God for such a Savior!

The Messiah’s Sigh Turned into a Song

The gospel of health, wealth, and prosperity is spiritual snake oil. Life is what it is, and sometimes it ain’t real pretty. Faith in God does not eliminate the occurrence of heartache, pain, persecution, or trials in your life. If anything, it increases them (Mark 10:30; 2 Timothy 3:12). The path to Oz is yellow brick; the path to heaven is blood red.

In Psalm 22, David describes beforehand the intense sufferings of Christ (vv. 1-21) and the glorious song of praise it was transformed into (vv. 22-31). It also documents Jesus’ stubborn, passionate, unflinching, unconquerable faith during history’s six darkest hours. The Messiah tenaciously refused to allow His circumstances to eclipse His faith.

- Though He asked, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and

from the words of My groaning?” (v. 1), He also praised Jehovah for His perfect track record of faithfulness: “Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed” (vv. 4-5).

- Though He was the reproach of men, despised by the people, ridiculed, mocked, and taunted (vv. 6-8), He tenaciously clung to His God: “But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s womb You have been My God. Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help” (vv. 9-11).
- Though His enemies were like strong bulls (v. 12), raging and roaring lions (v. 13), and unclean dogs (v. 16) and His bones out of joint, His heart like wax, His strength as dry as fired pottery, His tongue parched, His hands and feet pierced, His bones exposed, and His garments divided by lots (vv. 14-18), He asks in faith for Jehovah’s deliverance (vv. 19-21).

Like the empty tomb it brought, “You have answered Me” (v. 21) stands as a massive, immovable monument to God’s enduring ability to take the faithful’s sighs and transform them into unending praise. “I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard. My praise shall be of You in the great assembly” (vv. 22-25).

This is not spiritual snake oil. This is the Savior and the salvation that the prophets of old inquired and searched carefully for.

“You Have Answered Me”

From Genesis to Revelation, the unanimous and abundant testimony of Scripture is that Jehovah hears and answers prayer. Humanity’s entreaties, offered by faith and in accordance to God’s will, arise as a sweet-smelling aroma to the One who sits in utter sovereignty upon the throne of the universe. Humbly casting all your care upon Him who cares for you is the expectation of the great “I AM” (1 Peter 5:6-7). To be heard, prayer does not need a cacophony of vain repetitions, just a secret place where a simple expression of one’s reverence, submission, consecration, trust, and needs can be made (Matthew 6:7-13).

When the Messiah exclaimed “You have answered Me” (Psalm 22:21), it meant that His agonizing and excruciating baptism of suffering had been completed. He had fought His final spiritual conflict of His earthly ministry with the adversary of God and humanity. His atoning work on earth as the Lamb of God was accomplished. The debt of sin had been paid in full. “It is finished” (John 19:30) was His victorious proclamation.

The good news of His spiritual triumph and its power to save everyone who believes its historical facts, which fulfilled predictive prophecies, and obeys its simple commands, must be sounded out into all the earth, in every nation, to every creature, to the ends of the world, until the end of the age. All authority in heaven and earth has been given unto Christ (Matthew 28:18). He is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and to Whom belongs honor and everlasting power (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

Because of His victory, there is now one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). Because He is our Advocate when we sin (1 John 2:1) and our High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15), let us “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16) so that we

can join our joyous voice to His in declaring the wondrous truth “You have answered me.”

Worthy is the Lamb

Not only does the 22nd Psalm detail Jesus’ crucifixion in precise ways (vv. 1-21), it also foretells the worthiness of the risen Lamb (vv. 22-31). He is worthy of receiving power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing (Revelation 5:12) because:

His atoning sacrifice for humanity’s sin was accepted. “I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard” (vv. 22-24).

His sovereign authority upon His throne is universal. “My praise shall be of You in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let Your heart live forever! All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD’s, and He rules over the nations” (vv. 25-28).

His gospel of salvation and reconciliation is available to all generations until the end of the age. “All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive. A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation; they will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this” (vv. 29-31).

“Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13).

AMEN!

The Lord is my Shepherd

Few, if any, pieces of literature have been more beloved than Psalm 23. Over the past 3,000 years, innumerable hosts of people around the globe have found comfort and peace from it. David begins the psalm with a simple, yet profound declaration: “The LORD is my shepherd.”

No animal provides such an accurate, yet unflattering, representation of the spiritual characteristics of humanity than does a sheep. Like humanity, it is a creature that easily gets lost, frequently wanders off, is virtually defenseless against all predators, is quickly frightened, is incapable of finding food or water for itself, and can be quite stubborn. In short, it needs constant care and around-the-clock watchfulness.

For David, Jehovah is the shepherd Who provides constant care and watchfulness. So vigilant is that care, so diligent is that watchfulness that David can accurately say: “I shall not want.” And, as he explains so eloquently in verses 2-5, he shall not want for rest when weary, nourishment when hungry, refreshment when thirsty, restoration when erring, guidance when confused, companionship when frightened, comfort when weak, protection when endangered, peace when threatened, or healing when hurt.

Because of the wondrous shepherd, David’s confident expectation is goodness and mercy all the days of this life and an eternal home in the house of the LORD when this life is done.

What a Shepherd Jehovah is!

“I Shall Not Want”

The providence of God is a most reassuring, yet mysterious, doctrine of Scripture. It requires faith in God’s foresight, goodness, and tender love. It recognizes that green pastures, still waters, paths of righteousness, dark valleys, and the presence of en-

emies are all within the sphere of His providence. Faith in God's watchful, personal care derives comfort from God's protective rod and corrective staff. Faith in divine providence eradicates fear of evil and engenders confidence in Jehovah's goodness and mercy. Trusting the good Shepherd and His providential care enables one to experience the abundant life while upon this earth and eternal life in the house of the Lord forever.

What a Shepherd!

Thy Rod and Staff

When living by joyful, obedient faith, David found his Shepherd's rod and staff to be of comfort (Psalm 23:4). Each piece of the Shepherd's equipment was a source of security and strength.

A shepherd's rod was a club that measured about two feet in length. Its primary function was to protect. When a predator such as a lion or wolf attacked a sheep, the shepherd would swing the club in its defense. If the predator was some distance off, the rod could be hurled like a missile. This implement might also be used to chasten a wayward sheep. In this, David found comfort.

A shepherd's staff, or crook, was a walking stick that had a hook on one end. It had several significant uses. It could pry a sheep loose when it had gotten itself stuck in a tight spot. It could be used to push branches and brush away from a narrow path. Its hook could be used to rescue a sheep that had wandered off the path into a crevice or had fallen into a pit. In this, David found comfort.

These implements of correction, protection, and direction gave David peace of mind in a world in which the Devil prowls like a roaring lion. Does the Good Shepherd's rod and staff bring comfort to you?

The King of Glory

After His victory over sin, death, and Hades, Jesus ascended to heaven and was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14). Being exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33), He sits on the throne of David (Acts 2:30). With all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18), He is the Blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15). In Psalm 24, David describes three significant truths about the King of glory:

The completeness of His sovereignty. “The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters” (vv. 1-2).

The conditions of His audience. “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place. He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face” (vv. 3-6).

The case for His coronation. “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory” (vv. 7-10).

It is before the great white throne of this King (Revelation 20:11) that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess (Philippians 2:10-11), and the King shall decree whether you will have an eternal audience in His presence.

The Blessed of the LORD

No greater questions about fellowship with God can be asked than the ones found in Psalm 24:3—“Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in His holy place?”

Thankfully, there is no guesswork needed to answer these questions correctly. David provides the inspired answer in verse 4—“He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” To be blessed of the LORD a person needs:

- **Clean hands.** He lives his life so that he is blameless, innocent of guilt. Because all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23), this would mean that when he has sinned, he has repented of his misdeeds promptly and brought forth the appropriate fruits of repentance.
- **A pure heart.** The motives for his actions are free from evil and wickedness. His love for God and his fellow man (including his enemies) is genuine and sincere.
- **No false worship.** Idolatry is abhorrent to him. False worship of the true God is an abomination. Worshipping Jehovah in spirit and in truth is imperative to him. It is both his desire and his practice.
- **No deceitful swearing.** Like Jesus (1 Peter 2:22), his mouth is free from guile and deceit. He is a man of integrity whose word is his bond. His yeas are yea and his nays are nay (Matthew 5:37; James 5:12). He keeps his given word even if it results in another’s advantage (Psalm 15:4).

This is the one who “shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation” (Psalm 24:5).

Foes Without, Fears Within

When David wrote Psalm 25, he was being threatened by mighty enemies externally (v. 2) and great iniquity internally (v.

11); therefore, his passionate plea was “Unto thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me. Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause. Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day. Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness’ sake, O LORD...For thy name’s sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great” (vv. 1-7, 11).

David’s reassurance came as he reflected upon his perfect God. “Good and upright is the LORD: therefore, will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies...What man is he that feareth the LORD? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant. Mine eyes are ever toward the LORD; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net” (vv. 8-10, 12-15).

Because of his great need of God and God’s great power, David’s fervent petitions pour out before the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: “Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses. Look upon mine affliction and my pain and forgive all my sins. Consider mine enemies; for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred. O keep my soul and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in thee. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee” (vv. 16-21).

Defeated were David's might foes without; forgiven was David's great iniquity within. The God of Israel redeemed him out of all his troubles.

He still does.

The Blessings of Integrity

Integrity is that intense spiritual loyalty to God that compels a person to do the right thing, even when nobody is watching. Genuine righteousness requires it.

The patriarch Job clung to his integrity throughout all his misery, suffering, and heartache. He defiantly declared, "Till I die, I will not put my integrity from me" (Job 27:5). He kept his word.

In Psalm 26, David examines three blessings of integrity.

Integrity vindicates one's past. David's prayer to God is: "Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity. I have also trusted in the Lord; I shall not slip. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my mind and my heart" (vv. 1-2). Like Job, David's integrity spawned great confidence. "For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth. I have not sat with idolatrous mortals, nor will I go in with hypocrites. I have hated the assembly of evildoers and will not sit with the wicked" (vv. 3-5). Because of their integrity, "the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1).

Integrity generates joyous worship. "I will wash my hands in innocence; so, I will go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving and tell of all Your wondrous works. Lord, I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells" (vv. 6-8). Integrity ensures innocence before God, produces thankful praise of God, and increases one's love for God.

Integrity produces expectant hope. "Do not gather my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands is a sinister scheme, and whose right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in my integrity; redeem me and be merciful to

me. My foot stands in an even place; in the congregations I will bless the Lord” (vv. 9-12).

Integrity impacts one’s past, one’s present, and one’s future!
“The righteous walks in his integrity” (Proverbs 20:7).

Waiting On the LORD

The concluding exhortation of Psalm 27 is to “Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!” (v. 14). This is the climactic conclusion to David’s consideration of the reasons for exercising a heroic, patient faith. Consider thoughtfully David’s rationale for a faith that is confident enough to wait upon the Lord.

Because of the nature and character of God, wait confidently. “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (v. 1).

Because of Jehovah’s spotless track record, wait confidently (vv. 2-3). “When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident.”

Because of the singular focus of your life, wait confidently (vv. 4-6). “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; therefore, I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord.”

Because of God’s promises to answer the prayer of the obedient, wait confidently (vv. 7-10). “Hear, O LORD, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me and answer me. When You said, ‘Seek My face,’ my heart said to You, ‘Your face,

LORD, I will seek.’ Do not hide Your face from me; do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me.”

The fact that He Himself has said, “I will never leave nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5) ought to result in a faith that confidently waits. They “who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

“Wait, I say, on the Lord!”

Jehovah: My Rock

Few things are as strong and durable as rock. Granite, limestone, and marble anchor many a sturdy structure. To illustrate the indestructibility of the church, Jesus told Peter that He would build His church upon the bedrock of His deity (Matthew 16:16-18). To contrast the difference between those who hear His word and do it with those who hear and do not do it, Jesus said that the wise man builds his house upon the rock, unlike the foolish man who builds on sand (Matthew 7:24-27).

When David was facing the onslaught of the wicked—those who speak peace with their lips while evil was in their hearts—He cried out to Jehovah, his rock. His passionate plea was: “To You I will cry, O LORD my Rock: Do not be silent to me, lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary. Do not take me away with the wicked and with the workers of iniquity who speak peace to their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts. Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors; give them according to the work of their hands; render to them what they deserve. Because they do not regard the works

of the LORD, nor the operation of His hands, He shall destroy them and not build them up” (Psalm 28:1-5).

The wisdom of David’s decision to make Jehovah his rock is seen immediately after his petition: “Blessed be the LORD, because He has heard the voice of my supplications! The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore, my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him” (Psalm 28:6-7).

When Jehovah is your rock, He is a saving refuge who shepherds you and bears you up forever (Psalm 28:8-9).

What a firm foundation for one’s life!

The Three R’s of a Thunder Storm

Thunderstorms display immense power. Scientists have reported that in one flash of lightning there is more energy released than all the energy of an atomic bomb.

In Psalm 23:3-9 David describes the coming of a thunderstorm from the Mediterranean Sea (v. 3) as it travels from northern Palestine (vv. 5-7) to southern Palestine (vv. 8-9). He writes:

*The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
The God of glory thunders;
The Lord is over many waters.
The voice of the Lord is powerful;
The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.
The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars,
Yes, the Lord splinters the cedars of Lebanon.
He makes them also skip like a calf,
Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox.
The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire.
The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;
The Lord shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh.
The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth,
And strips the forests bare;
And in His temple everyone says, “Glory!”*

The immense power of this storm splintered the cedars of Lebanon. These 150-foot tall trees—8 to 10 feet in circumference and used in the construction of the temple—were like toothpicks in this glorious light and power show. The mountains—Lebanon and Sirion—shook and trembled.

From this intense storm, David learned the three R's of spiritual life. They are:

Reverence for the authority of Jehovah. “Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (vv. 1-2).

Respect for the voice of Jehovah. “The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare; and in His temple everyone says, ‘Glory!’” (v. 9).

Reasons for the worship of Jehovah. “The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood, and the LORD sits as King forever” (v. 10).

How well do you know the three R's of spiritual life?

The Blessings of Acceptable Worship

Jehovah—the Almighty, Holy One—is deserving of passionate, sincere worship from every heart and tongue. Therefore, David writes: “Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:1-2).

When one genuinely reveres Jehovah's authority and respects His word, the joyful and solemn expression of His worship and omnipotent sovereignty pours forth. Jehovah deserves, desires, and demands worship that is in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

In Psalm 29:11, David identifies two blessings that are the results of acceptable worship of the true and living God. He writes, “The LORD will give strength to His people; the LORD will bless His people with peace.”

Acceptable worship results in spiritual strength. The inner man is strengthened. Gathering together to worship is to result in one's spiritual improvement (1 Corinthians 11:17); it does when done in harmony with God's written will.

Acceptable worship results in peace. Reflecting upon the great I AM's omnipotence, mercy, love, holiness, grace, and wisdom brings peace to one whose heart is vexed with sorrow, guilt, despair, fear, and anxiety. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). God Himself said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So, we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

How sweet and wondrous are the blessings of acceptable worship!

Lessons Learned from a Near-Death Experience

The record of David's life in First and Second Samuel clearly records several near-death experiences. At one point, he tells his beloved friend Jonathon, "there is but a step between me and death" (1 Samuel 20:3).

Psalm 30 was written by David shortly after an escape from his enemies (v. 1) and sickness (v. 2); he writes, "O LORD, You brought my soul up from the grave; You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit" (v. 3). God's chastisement was over (v. 5). David's mourning had turned into dancing; his sackcloth had been replaced with gladness (v. 11).

From this ordeal, David learned several invaluable lessons. Consider the ones he enumerates:

- **God is to be extolled** (v. 1), **praised, and thanked** (v. 4) **because of His favor** (v. 5). God does gracious things because of Who He is, not because of who or how great I am.
- **Self-sufficiency is to be abhorred.** At some point in his life, David had said, "I shall never be moved" (v. 6). He was dead

wrong. As David discovered, self-sufficiency is a boldfaced lie. “Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain stand strong; You hid Your face, and I was troubled” (v. 7).

- **Humble penitence is essential to Jehovah’s deliverance.** “I cried out to You, O Lord; and to the Lord I made supplication: What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your truth? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me; Lord, be my helper!” (vv. 8-10). Genuine repentance contains an intense sense of desperation; hence, David cried out and made supplications to the Lord.
- **A heartfelt debt of ceaseless praise and gratitude ought to arise from the ashes of one’s penitence.** “You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, to the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever” (vv. 11-12).

Spiritually speaking, all of us have had more than a near-death experience with sin (Ephesians 2:1-3). How much more, then, ought these four lessons be woven into the fabric of the daily lives of all those who have been made alive together with Christ (Ephesians 2:5).

What to Do When You Feel like Quitting

Discouragement and difficult times are facts of life. Trusting God can get downright brutal. Ask Job. Ask Job’s wife.

The fundamental difference between the rocky soil and the good soil in Jesus’ parable of the sower is what happened when the scorching sunshine of tribulation and persecution for the word’s sake (Mark 4:6, 17) came upon the seedling in their soil.

Theoretically, we all know that trials build character because God’s word tells us that the testing of our faith produces patience, and patience will produce spiritual maturity and completeness

(James 1:3-4). Wisely, we should also know that when intense trials do come, Satan will show up and seductively suggest that the solution to our problems is to just quit.

In Psalm 31, David has hit a spiritual pothole. Like you and me, David must decide if he is going to continue in the straight and narrow way that leads to life or join the many traveling on the broad way that leads to destruction. David's response when he faced the tantalizing temptation to quit is most instructive.

Seek God in prayer. Abandon all the fancy sounding platitudes that are far too often substituted for genuine communion with the Almighty. The God of truth can handle your earnest and honest expression of your faith and your fear. So, David prayed: "In You, O LORD, I put my trust; let me never be ashamed; deliver me in Your righteousness. Bow down Your ear to me, deliver me speedily; be my rock of refuge, a fortress of defense to save me. For You are my rock and my fortress; therefore, for Your name's sake, lead me and guide me. Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, for You are my strength. Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth" (vv. 1-5).

Remember and state God's past deliverance. Jehovah does have a track record. It is impressive and pristine. So, instead of lingering to listen to Satan's hissing suggestion to quit, David wisely focused his attention upon all that God has already done. "I have hated those who regard useless idols, but I trust in the LORD. I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities and have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a wide place" (vv. 6-8).

Describe your present distress. Biblical faith does not require rose-colored glasses or a spiritual lobotomy. Jesus' cry from the cross of "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34) demonstrates this. Consider David's description of his present distress: "Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble; my eye wastes away with grief, yes, my soul and

my body! For my life is spent with grief and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away. I am a reproach among all my enemies but especially among my neighbor and am repulsive to my acquaintances; those who see me outside flee from me. I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel. For I hear the slander of many; fear is on every side; while they take counsel together against me, they scheme to take away my life” (vv. 9-13). How stressful and toxic would you find your life to be if your circumstances were like David’s?

Abandoning your faith when life gets difficult is a surefire way to lose your soul. Quitting is the easiest way to go. It requires no effort, no thought, no intelligence, no character, and no ability. All you need to do is succumb meekly to the cancer of self-pity. Satan, the doctor of death, will happily do the rest.

When Fear Besieges

The conflict between fear and faith can become extremely intense. Mark 9 records a father with a son having a mute spirit. Its ongoing torment of his son from childhood had driven this loving father to his wit’s end. Often his son had been thrown into the fire and into the water in the evil spirit’s attempts to destroy his beloved child. They came to Jesus’ apostles for help while He with Peter, James, and John were on the Mount of Transfiguration, but, alas, no help was received.

As this beleaguered father and son approached Jesus, the spirit convulsed the son and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. Jesus told the father, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:14-24).

When David wrote the 31st Psalm, he felt himself to be in a similar state. Fear was besieging him on every side (v. 13). The conflict between fear and faith was raging white-hot. Like the

father in Mark 9, David had a huge decision to make: Either stubbornly and courageously cling to his faith or surrender defeatedly to his fears. It is a spiritual fork in the road that all of us come to in life.

Because of his passion for God, David's decisive choice was: "But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me. Make Your face shine upon Your servant; save me for Your mercies' sake. Do not let me be ashamed, O LORD, for I have called upon You; let the wicked be ashamed; let them be silent in the grave. Let the lying lips be put to silence which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous" (Psalm 31:14-18).

These things "were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

Reasons for Not Quitting

Nowhere in Scripture does God say that walking by faith is easy. Luke 9:57-62 records Jesus' encounters with three potential disciples. His responses to their individual interests are weighty. To the final would-be follower, He stated, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Like marriage itself, when I decide to become a member of the bride of Christ, the option of quitting needs to be thoroughly eliminated from my thinking.

But, that does not mean that Satan will not seek to entice us with the temptation to quit. When Satan has baited the hook of temptation with the lure of abdicating our faith, David's words of Psalm 31:19-23 are crucial. Here, David writes: "Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men! You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep

them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. Blessed be the LORD, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city! For I said in my haste, ‘I am cut off from before Your eyes’; nevertheless, You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You. Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful and fully repays the proud person.”

Embedded in these verses are three powerful antidotes to the poison of Satan’s fiery dart called quitting. Note them carefully.

Because of God’s goodness, quitting is a foolish idea (vv. 19-20). Jehovah, a fortress of defense (v. 2), protects those who trust in Him. Be steadfast. Do not quit.

Because of God’s kindness, quitting is a foolish idea (vv. 21-22). Jehovah, my rock and fortress (v. 3), hears and answers prayer. Be instant in prayer. Do not quit.

Because of God’s faithfulness, quitting is a foolish idea (v. 23). Jehovah, my rock of refuge and strength (v. 2), preserves the faithful and punishes the unfaithful. Be faithful unto death. Do not quit.

David’s final words of advice to those who are faint in heart say it best: “Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD” (Psalm 31:24).

Contemplating Sin (Part 1)

The superscription to Psalm 32 states that this sacred composition was written by David and was intended to be thoughtfully absorbed by contemplation. In the Hebrew language it is identified as a “Maschil.” The New King James Version translates this noun as “contemplation.” The psalm has three Selahs (vv. 4, 5, and 7); this indicates that David intended for each section of the psalm to be ingested into one’s heart and soul through thoughtful meditation and reflection.

In the verses prior to the first spiritual rest stop, David reflects upon the blessedness of forgiven sins (vv. 1-2) in light of sin’s

inherent bitterness (vv. 3-4). Here he writes: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer.”

Sin has its passing pleasures. These are deliberately designed to distract its targeted prey from the reality of its certain, bitter, and barren harvest. Sin destroys its slaves, then puts them to death. David felt the bitter taste and knew the horrific stain of sin’s guilt in his body, mind, and spirit. His bones grew old; his heart groaned all day long; his soul was parched and desolate. He was not like a flourishing tree firmly planted by streams of water (Psalm 1:1-3); he was like a deserted ghost town, a home haunted by spiritual tumbleweeds. Oh, the bitterness of unforgiven sin!

What blessedness, then, is the one who has been forgiven! His willful wrongdoing, his missing of the mark, his guilt before the just God of heaven, his spiritual two-facedness has been taken off and away from him, hidden so as to be never seen again, no longer counted against him. Oh, the blessedness of forgiven sin!

Carefully think about that for the next few minutes.

“Meditate upon these things.”

Contemplating Sin (Part 2)

The superscription to Psalm 32 states that this sacred composition was written by David and was intended to be thoughtfully absorbed by contemplation. In the Hebrew language it is identified as a “Maschil.” The New King James Version translates this noun as “contemplation.” The psalm has three Selahs (vv. 4, 5, and 7); this indicates that David intended for each section of the psalm to be ingested into one’s heart and soul through a pregnant pause for thoughtful meditation and reflection.

In the verses prior to the first spiritual rest stop, David reflects upon the blessedness of forgiven sins (vv. 1-2) in light of sin's inherent bitterness (vv. 3-4). Next, David focuses upon the immense necessity of confessing sin (v. 5). He writes: "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."

The fundamental concept of confession is that of saying the same thing about a matter that God does. When David was confronted by the prophet Nathan in 2 Samuel 12, Nathan illustrated the heinousness of David's wickedness (vv. 1-4, 7-9), then enumerated the horrific consequences that will scar his life (vv. 10-12). David's confession was: "I have sinned against the LORD" (v. 13).

This six-word declaration is a huge spiritual mouthful. David's heartfelt declaration about sin is in perfect harmony with the mind and word of God. David's confession expressed personal responsibility ("I"), moral and spiritual clarity ("have sinned"), and divine offense by his actions ("against the LORD").

Because of this alignment of David's mind with God's, we should not be surprised to read of David's thoroughness in confessing His wrongdoing. He describes it as "my sin...my iniquity...my transgression...and...the iniquity of my sin." David has broken God's heart, offended God's holiness, violated God's law, grieved God's spirit, trespassed God's spiritual boundaries, and severed his fellowship with God. Though a powerful king, he has become a bankrupt spiritual pauper. That is what God says sin does. That was what David felt and confessed (i.e. said the same thing as God).

Like a bite from an extremely venomous snake, it is imperative to get the poison of sin out of one's heart and life ASAP. Confession is the only antidote to this deadly, fast-acting spiritual poison.

Trusting the Amazing Grace of God

One of the most effective hindrances to spiritual prodigals leaving the pigpen of sin and returning to their watchful father is Satan's suggestion that God is uninterested and His grace is ill-equipped to receive and to forgive them. In Psalm 32:6-7, David declares that such falsehood is emphatically wrong: "For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him. You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance." When sin's devastation has come into your life, trust the amazing grace of God to restore your fellowship with Him.

The laser-like focus and purpose of God's grace is deliverance from sin. Its pre-eminently practical approach is two-fold. First, to prevent sin in our lives by teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly (Titus 2:12). Second, to seek Jehovah's forgiveness when we do sin. First John 2:1-2 clearly teaches both ideas. "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."

The grace of God is never understood accurately when it is viewed as an excuse to sin. It is always understood properly when it is viewed as an eliminator of sin. This is why we read in Romans 6:1-2—"Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

When sin has been committed and its bitter guilt and deadly poison have overwhelmed us, trust the amazing grace of "the One who lifts up my head" (Psalm 3:3). Confess the sin that you have repented of and enjoy the blessedness of grace's forgiveness of your guilt, and grace's comfort as you face the future consequences of your sinful actions.

This is the glory and riches of God's amazing grace.

David's Counsel on Sin

Few Bible characters have more extensive inspired documentation of the devastating consequences of personal sin than David. Just as God's prophet had promised (2 Samuel 12:10-11), the final chapters of David's life (2 Samuel 13-24) bear solemn witness to the fact that the way of the transgressor is hard.

Psalms 32:8-11 contains David's earnest admonition to all those who are wise enough to read and heed it. He writes, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (v. 8). Though he has been dead for about 3,000 years, David seeks to give, to all who will listen, the following counsel on sin:

- Do not be stubborn and foolish in dealing with your sin. "Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you" (v. 9). Being mule-headed, instead of penitent, about your sinful actions is foolish. Ignoring your sin while your spirit groans and your vitality and zest for life is turned into the drought of summer is not wise.
- Prevent sin in your life and quickly seek God's forgiveness when you have failed. "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him" (v. 10). As is true in so many other facets of life, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure in the spiritual realm also. God's grace is completely adequate in removing sin's guilt, so trust it when you have sinned. But, do not forget that when the teaching of God's grace is heeded, ungodliness and worldly lusts will be denied. Prevention is better.
- Rejoice in righteousness. Boredom makes us spiritually vulnerable. Satan seeks to convince all that obedience to God leaves one lacking the necessary spice of life. Do not fall for

that lie. The joy of the Lord is worthy of passionate priority in our lives. Be glad, rejoice, shout for joy (not bored) in your hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The Beauty of God's Praise

Anthropomorphic language is a fancy name for the use of human traits to describe truths about God. Since God is spirit, He has no physical body; therefore, He does not literally have eyes, ears, and hands. But, He does see, hear, and do. To help a feeble mind like mine better understand Him, “human form” (the literal meaning of anthropomorphic) language is used in the Scriptures.

Psalm 33 begins with the exhortation “Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous!” Its rationale is “for praise from the upright is beautiful.” From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures employ anthropomorphic language to help our human minds understand the beauty of our praise and worship of God when we are living upright lives.

In Genesis, acceptable worship of God by the patriarchs is described as a “soothing aroma” to the LORD (Genesis 8:20-21). To many humans there are few smells that are as wondrous as the aroma of a barbecue. That profound sense of pleasure that humans feel is possible in the presence of God when the upright praise Him.

In Revelation 5:8, the prayers of the saints are described as golden bowls full of incense. As a bowl of incense gives off a pleasing aroma when it is lit, so are the prayers of the upright in the courts of heaven. Here is another picturesque portrayal of the pleasing nature of the upright's praise of Jehovah.

How vigorously and frequently we need to heed the earnest exhortation to “Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous!”

The Pristine Praiseworthiness of Jehovah

Anyone addicted to selfies has failed to understand the genuine praiseworthiness of Jehovah. Unlike the person in the selfie, “the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth. He loves righteousness and justice” (Psalm 33:4-5).

What a tribute the inanimate universe pays to Jehovah’s praiseworthiness! “The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses” (Psalm 33:5-7).

Because of His creative genius and power, the psalmist exhorts: “Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:8-9).

According to Romans 1, the first step on the road to abject spiritual ruin is a failure to recognize the distinct uniqueness and utter praiseworthiness of Jehovah. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful” (vv. 20-21).

Take heed and beware of failing to properly recognize the praiseworthiness of Jehovah.

The Comforting Shield of Jehovah’s Sovereignty

Like the existence of God, the sovereignty of Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting. We live in a universe ruled by Jehovah’s natural, moral, and spiritual laws. No creature in heaven or earth is exempt from the authority of His sovereign scepter.

Jehovah's might is described in Psalm 33:10-17. Here it is written: "The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations...The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works. No king is saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain hope for safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great strength."

Because of His sovereignty, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance" (Psalm 33:12).

What comfort to know: "Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine" (Psalm 33:18-19).

Because of His sovereignty, Jehovah deserves trust, praise, and continual faithfulness. "Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name. Let Your mercy, O LORD, be upon us, just as we hope in You" (Psalm 33:20-22).

The Habit of Praise

Praising God is a practice that needs to take root and bloom into a mindset and habit. If you desire to do so, it is not hard to find ample reasons today to praise and thank God. In Psalm 34, David's grateful soul erupts in praise: "I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; the humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together" (vv. 1-3). David found this mindset possible by focusing upon God's deliverance and providence.

In answer to David's prayer, Jehovah delivered him from his fears. "I sought the LORD, and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them" (vv. 4-7).

In keeping with His promises and goodness, Jehovah has provided every good thing. "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing" (vv. 8-10).

When was the last time your soul erupted in praise of God for His benevolent answers to your prayers?

When was the last time you profusely thanked the great I AM for His continual providence?

How well cultivated in the soil of your heart is the mindset of praising God at all times?

How to Fear the Lord

The essentiality and importance of fearing the LORD is emphatic in Scripture. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7) and wisdom (Psalm 111:10). It is a fountain of life (Proverbs 14:27) and a universal requirement (Psalm 33:8-9). It is clean and endures forever (Psalm 19:9). Moses (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13:4, and 31:12), Joshua (Joshua 24:14), Samuel (1 Samuel 12:24), and Solomon (Ecclesiastes 12:13) each earnestly exhorted his contemporaries in four different generations to fervently fear God and serve Him obediently. One of Isaiah's prophecies of Jesus declared that He would have a "spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" because His delight is the fear of the LORD (Isaiah 11:2-3).

Because of its paramount importance, how sweet are the words of Psalm 34:11-12: “Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Who is the man who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good?” How intently ought our focus to be as David answers this supreme question with these inspired, practical instructions: “Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:13-14).

How do you fear the LORD?

You control your tongue. Your obedience to God’s will so thoroughly permeates your mind and your mouth that you bridle your unruly tongue (James 3:8), because an unbridled tongue makes your religion useless (James 1:26). Every idle word will be accounted for in the day of judgment (Matthew 12:36); your words will either justify or condemn you (Matthew 12:37).

You depart from evil and do good. Your desire to please God is so keen that you abhor what is evil and cling to what is good (Romans 12:9). Because the fear of Lord is to hate evil (Proverbs 8:13), you hate every false way (Psalm 119:104). Being holy in all your conduct is your passionate pursuit (1 Peter 1:15-16).

You seek peace and pursue it. The peace of God surpasses all understanding and will guard your heart and mind (Philippians 4:7). Maintaining peace with God is your highest priority. Peace does not happen accidentally. It is offered to you by the Prince of peace through the gospel of peace. Once you have been justified by obedient faith, you have peace with God (Romans 5:1). Walking obediently in the light and confessing your sins when you stray from the path of obedience (1 John 1:7, 9) are essential to remaining at peace with God. Being a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9) and living peaceably with all men, if possible (Romans 12:18), are also part and parcel with seeking and pursuing peace.

Learning how to fear the LORD is essential.

Living by the fear of the LORD is essential too.

The Falsehood of Deism

A couple of centuries ago, deism was a popular philosophy. It taught that God created the universe, set the laws of nature in motion, and then settled back on His throne in heaven and let “nature take its course.” He remained sovereign over our world but aloof from human affairs. Deism is false.

In the concluding portion of Psalm 34, David describes the interest and activity of Jehovah in the lives of the righteous. Clearly, He is not the apathetic and pathetic Sovereign espoused by deism. While the false gods have eyes but cannot see and ears but cannot hear, “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the LORD is against those who do evil to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit” (Psalm 34:15-18).

In clear contradiction to the false tenets of deism, Jehovah is not ambivalent toward good or evil. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned” (Psalm 34:19-22).

God is and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Scared to Death

One glaring proof of the Bible’s inspiration is its complete honesty. Noah, the builder of a massive ark which saved his family and himself, got drunk. Lot, a preacher of righteousness, fathered two sons through incest. Abraham, the father of the faithful, lied about his wife...twice. David—the fearless giant slayer—lied to the high priest, violated the sanctity of the taber-

nacle's shewbread, and became so scared of the king of Gath that he pretended to be crazy (1 Samuel 21).

The superscription of Psalm 34 indicates that this composition was probably written in or near the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1). After David had the opportunity to reflect upon the cause and irrationality of his fear, he wrote of his resolution and its rationale.

His resolution was: "I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; the humble shall hear of it and be glad" (vv. 1-2).

His rationale for this resolution was that fear was irrational and sinful in the life of one who intends to walk by faith, because:

Jehovah is the God of deliverance. "I sought the LORD, and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them" (vv. 4-7).

Jehovah is the God of goodness. "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing" (vv. 8-10).

Jehovah is the God of righteousness. "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the LORD is against those who do evil to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned" (vv. 15-21).

Jehovah is the God of redemption. “The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned” (v. 22).

Since Jehovah Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” David was determined to boldly declare, “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” and to resolutely live accordingly.

What a worthy example!

Hope When Life’s Storms Come—Part 1

No psalm better illustrates the observation that “God has not promised us smooth sailing, just safe passage” than does Psalm 35. David is in stormy waters up to his eyes. His ship of faith is sailing among those who: strive with him (v. 1), fight against him (v. 1), pursue him (v. 3), seek his life (v. 4), plot his hurt (v. 4), hide a net for him in a pit for no good reason (v. 7), are fierce witnesses against him (v. 11), reward evil for good (v. 12), rejoice in his adversity (v. 15), attack him (v. 15), tear at him without ceasing (v. 15), gnash their teeth at him (v. 16), hate him without a cause (v. 19), and open their mouths wide against him as false witnesses (v. 21).

David’s response is to pray for Jehovah’s deliverance (vv. 1-8) and to anticipate his joyous response to God’s forthcoming answer to his prayer (vv. 9-10). What beautiful trust is expressed in: “Plead my cause, O LORD, with those who strive with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler and stand up for my help. Also draw out the spear and stop those who pursue me. Say to my soul, ‘I am your salvation. Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonor who seek after my life; let those be turned back and brought to confusion who plot my hurt. Let them be like chaff before the wind and let the angel of the LORD chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery, and let the angel of the LORD pursue them. For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit, which they have dug with-

out cause for my life. Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly and let his net that he has hidden catch himself; into that very destruction let him fall. And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD; it shall rejoice in His salvation. All my bones shall say, 'LORD, who is like You, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him, yes, the poor and the needy from him who plunders him?'"

Pseudo-hope is wishful thinking of pie-in-the-sky that gets eclipsed behind the first dark cloud of an approaching storm; genuine hope is an anchor of the soul that is sure and steadfast during the worst of life's troublesome storms. Which do you have?

Hope When Life's Storms Come—Part 2

The fact "God has not promised us smooth sailing, just safe passage" is clearly demonstrated in Psalm 35. David is engulfed in stormy waters. His initial response is to pray for Jehovah's deliverance (vv. 1-8) and to anticipate his joyous response to God's forthcoming answer to his prayer (vv. 9-10).

As David anticipates another wave of this ferocious storm (vv. 11-16), he again petitions his Deliverer and anticipates his grateful response (vv. 17-18). It is written: "Fierce witnesses rise up; they ask me things that I do not know. They reward me evil for good to the sorrow of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart. I paced about as though he were my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns for his mother. But in my adversity they rejoiced and gathered together; attackers gathered against me, and I did not know it; they tore at me and did not cease; with ungodly mockers at feasts they gnashed at me with their teeth. Lord, how long will You look on? Rescue me from their destructions, my precious life from the lions. I will give You thanks in the great assembly; I will praise You among many people."

His besieged and aching heart unburdens itself as he casts all his cares upon Jehovah. How plain and pointed are his petitions in verses 19-26: “Let them not rejoice over me who are wrongfully my enemies, nor let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause. For they do not speak peace, but they devise deceitful matters against the quiet ones in the land. They also opened their mouth wide against me and said, ‘Aha, aha! Our eyes have seen it.’ This You have seen, O LORD; do not keep silence. O, Lord, do not be far from me. Stir up Yourself, and awake to my vindication, to my cause, my God and my Lord. Vindicate me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness; and let them not rejoice over me. Let them not say in their hearts, ‘Ah, so we would have it!’ Let them not say, ‘We have swallowed him up.’ Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who rejoice at my hurt; let them be clothed with shame and dishonor who exalt themselves against me.”

The joyful confidence that this storm of life will pass permeates David’s triumphal conclusion. Hope is not wishful thinking that vanishes like the mist; it is a massive anchor for the soul during life’s troublesome storms. Therefore, “Let them shout for joy and be glad, who favor my righteous cause; and let them say continually, ‘Let the LORD be magnified, Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant.’ And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness and of Your praise all the day long” (vv. 27-28).

The Transgression of the Wicked

When painting a portrait of sin, no Bible writer uses white-wash or pastel colors. David’s somber words in Psalm 36:1-4 highlight three gruesome truths about the wicked as they defiantly transgress God’s holy and loving boundaries.

First, he identifies **the source of the wicked’s transgression**. “There is no fear of God before his eyes” (v. 1).

Next, he describes **the extremity of the wicked's arrogance**. "For he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates" (v. 2).

Finally, he specifies **the perversity of his moral corruption**. It corrupts his mouth, his mind, his imagination, his will, and his soul. "The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. He devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil" (vv. 3-4).

The exceeding sinfulness of sin/the transgression of the wicked cannot be overestimated.

The Grandeur of God's Glory

Though they are polar opposites, the exceeding sinfulness of the wicked's transgression (Psalm 36:1-4) and the grandeur of God's glory (Psalm 36:5-9) are both underestimated. David's thoughtful meditation on the splendor of Jehovah's majesty is worthy of deliberate scrutiny and reflective consideration.

The grandeur of God's glory is seen in:

- **The vastness of His mercy.** "Your mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens."
- **The greatness of His faithfulness.** "Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds."
- **The immutability of His righteousness.** "Your righteousness is like the great mountains"
- **The profundity of His judgments.** "Your judgments are a great deep."
- **The extensiveness of His providence.** "O LORD, You preserve man and beast."
- **The preciousness of His lovingkindness.** "How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!"

Because of the wondrous splendor of God's grace and glory, how then ought we to live? "Therefore, the children of men put

their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light (vv. 7-9).

No Middle Ground

Things that are polar opposites eliminate the possibilities of compromise and neutrality. There is no legitimate middle ground, especially when it is the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the grandeur of God's glory that are being considered.

After reflecting upon each of these spiritual realities in Psalm 36:1-9, David knew which alternative he wanted for himself. He sought God's fellowship (v. 10) and protection (vv. 11-12). He writes, "Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright in heart. Let not the foot of pride come against me and let not the hand of the wicked drive me away. There the workers of iniquity have fallen; they have been cast down and are not able to rise."

There is no middle ground between heaven and hell, sin and holiness, good and evil. He who is not with Jesus is against Him (Matthew 12:30).

The Essentiality of Godly Fear

According to Psalm 36:1-4 pride, hatred, wickedness, deceit, folly, evil deeds, and a lack of abhorrence of evil are the bitter tares that grow when the fear of God is missing in the soil of your heart. A healthy fear of God is an essential foundation to your life and to a healthy society. People who are not afraid to sin have no proper regard for God; however, as Joseph demonstrates, a proper view of God's holiness, views sin as the worst thing that can possibly happen and, therefore, abhors it (Genesis 39:9).

When Jehovah is not highly regarded and appropriately feared, human rights are aborted. A society which thinks lowly of God

cannot think highly of humanity. The slippery slope (Romans 1:21-27) that leads to the chasm of personal destruction and societal disintegration (Romans 1:28-32) begins with “although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God” (Romans 1:21).

When you do not tremble at the holiness of God and the guilt of sin, your perverse view of grace is that of a license to sin.

In your life, is the fear of God the chief cornerstone or a stone of stumbling and rock of offense?

Seven Rules for Wise Living

There is no substitute for experience. The wisdom of a righteous person with the hoary frost of time upon his head is invaluable. Psalm 37 was written by David as an old man (v. 25). It is possible that this was the last psalm he wrote. From his deep well of experience—fed by the springs of the sheepfold, the battlefield, and the palace—he summarizes into seven pithy statements his inspired rules for wise living. They are:

- **“Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.** For they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb” (vv. 1-2).
- **“Trust in the LORD, and do good;** dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness” (v. 3).
- **“Delight yourself also in the LORD,** and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (v. 4).
- **“Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him,** and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noonday” (vv. 5-6).
- **“Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him;** do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass” (v. 7).
- **“Cease from anger and forsake wrath;** do not fret—it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little

while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more” (vv. 8-10).

- “**Wait on the LORD and keep His way**, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it” (v. 34).

Are you living wisely?

The Facts of Life

The expression “the birds and the bees” can be applied to more things in life than the talk a parent has with his child about his/her sexual maturity into adulthood and the capacity for procreation. Psalm 37 was written by David in the wisdom and insightfulness of old age. He has been young and now he is old (v. 25), and from the vantage point of experience and seasoned perception, he writes about the spiritual facts of life. He lists these nine immutable truths:

- Evildoers are cut off; those who wait upon the LORD thrive (vv. 9-11).
- The wicked ones plot against the just and self-destruct (vv. 12-15).
- A righteous man with little is better off than a wicked rich man (vv. 16-17).
- The LORD knows the days of the upright and preserves them; the wicked perish (vv. 18-20).
- The wicked borrow and do not repay; the righteous show mercy and give (vv. 21-22).
- The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD and are blessed (vv. 23-26).
- The LORD loves justice and is faithful; He cuts off the wicked (vv. 27-29).
- The mouth of the righteous is trustworthy (vv. 30-31).
- The wicked ever opposes the righteous (vv. 32-33).

In light of these immutable facts of life, David's wise counsel is: "Wait on the LORD, And He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it. I have seen the wicked in great power and spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; indeed, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the blameless man and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; the future of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked and save them, because they trust in Him" (vv. 34-40).

The Way of the Transgressor

David is a Bible character of extreme contrasts. On the one hand, he was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14); he enjoyed extraordinary, blissful, and sweet fellowship with Jehovah. On the other hand, he was also a man who experienced up close and personally the ghastly horrors of sin; with many bitter tears, horrific regret, and an abundance of intense heartache, he suffered through the rugged, unflinching hardness of sin's guilt and transgression's consequences.

Psalm 38's superscription declares that this composition of David was intended to be a perpetual, haunting reminder of the horrors and hardness of transgression. In the first half of the psalm, David describes his woes (vv. 1-10) and his foes (vv. 11-14).

He writes: "O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! For Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down. There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are

foul and festering because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart pants, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me. My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my relatives stand afar off. Those also who seek my life lay snares for me; those who seek my hurt speak of destruction and plan deception all the day long. But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; and I am like a mute who does not open his mouth. Thus, I am like a man who does not hear and in whose mouth is no response.”

How dark is the night of sin!

The Sinner’s Only Hope

Because of our folly and stubbornness, there are times in which the only way God can get us to look to Him is when we are lying flat on our back after being run over by the guilt and consequences of sin. It is not until we feel like we are drowning in an ocean of iniquity with an impossibly heavy burden lashed to our body, broken beyond repair, covered with wounds that are infected—foul and festering—that we realize we have only one hope.

As Psalm 38 attests, that was David’s experience. In his dark night of sin, there was only one star of hope. “For in You, O LORD, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God” (v. 15). Buoyed by this lone refuge, David determined to confess penitently his transgression. “For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin” (v. 18). His fears were extreme and his foes were intense. “For I said, ‘Hear me, lest they rejoice over me, lest, when my foot slips, they exalt themselves against me.’ For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me...But my enemies are vigorous, and they are strong; and those who hate me

wrongfully have multiplied. Those also who render evil for good, they are my adversaries, because I follow what is good” (vv. 16-17, 19-20). Yet David’s God—Jehovah—was greater. His earnest plea—“Do not forsake me, O LORD; O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!” (vv. 21-22)—was heard.

Only Jehovah can handle the leviathan of sin.

He is the sinner’s only hope.

David’s Counsel to Jeduthun

A problem which is not worth praying about is not worth discussing with others. This is at the heart of David’s counsel to Jeduthun in Psalm 39 as he tackles the question of “How do you handle yourself with wisdom when your heart burns with sorrow, pain, and hurt?”

When faced with such a circumstance, David’s immediate course of action was to resist the urge to talk to others about those things which burdened his burning heart. This was a matter that had to be addressed first in his trysting place with God. Therefore, “I said, ‘I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle while the wicked are before me.’ I was mute with silence, I held my peace even from good, and my sorrow was stirred up. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned” (vv. 1-3).

Once he has an audience of one—the great I AM—David pours out his heart in a most unusual way.

First, he seeks God’s help in clearly understanding his transient nature (and thus the transient nature of all his affliction). “Then I spoke with my tongue: ‘LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor” (vv. 4-5).

Next, he beseeches God's assistance in remembering the certain folly of vain living (v. 6) and his desire to avoid such a path for his life (vv. 7-11). "Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; He heaps up riches and does not know who will gather them. And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You. Deliver me from all my transgressions; do not make me the reproach of the foolish. I was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did it. Remove Your plague from me; I am consumed by the blow of Your hand. When with rebukes You correct man for iniquity, You make his beauty melt away like a moth; surely every man is vapor."

Finally, David petitions Jehovah for attendance to his prayer so that he can continue his sojourn with the Lord through life and can depart this world in fellowship with Him. "Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears; for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were. Remove Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength before I go away and am no more" (vv. 12-13).

David's counsel to Jeduthun is that Jehovah never intended for prayer to be a perfunctory formality; its purpose is to be the precious lifeblood that nourishes one's heart, soul, and faith, especially in difficult times.

The Dash of Life

One Saturday night a preacher took a very long rope and laid it around the outside walls of the mammoth church auditorium. Near where he would stand the next morning, he took some bright colored yellow tape and wrapped it around three inches at one end of the rope. When Sunday came the congregation was puzzled as each member crossed the rope to enter the auditorium and be seated. When he arose to preach, he made the following observation: "In a cemetery you will find on nearly every headstone two numbers separated by a dash. The first number is the

date of the person's birth; the second number is the date of the person's death; the dash represents the person's life on this earth." Holding up the three inches of yellow-taped rope, he continued, "This rope represents your existence. The yellow tape on it is the dash that will be on your tombstone. As you look beyond the dash and around the rest of the auditorium you will quickly see how little of your existence is spent on this earth."

In Psalm 39:4-6, David's fervent prayer was: "LORD, make me to know my end and what is the measure of my days that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as hand-breadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches and does not know who will gather them." Life upon this earth is fragile, unpredictable, and limited in duration. Life beyond this earth is irreversible, settled, and unlimited in duration. Everyone's final earthly appointment is with death (Hebrews 9:27). After that, there is the judgment.

What are you doing with your dash called life?

The Brevity of Life

Time waits for no one. The cadence of its march never increases or decreases; it is relentlessly, ruthlessly steady. It was created prior to the formation of Adam and Eve; its genesis is declared in the first three words of Scripture.

On the long timeline of history, every person's life (even Methuselah's 969 years) is but a small parenthesis. David's thoughtful and thought-provoking observations in Psalm 39 were: "certainly every man at his best is but a vapor...surely every man is vapor" (vv. 5, 11). Both declarations are intended to be absorbed into the depths of one's soul in a Selah-imposed meditation.

The brevity of life is a theme which echoes throughout God's Word. The patriarch Job exclaimed, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle and are spent without hope. Oh, remember that

my life is a breath...Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue” (Job 7:6-7, 14:1-2). The psalmist David wrote, “As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more” (Psalm 103:15-16). The New Testament penman James asked and answered the penetrating question: “For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14).

After considering the brevity of life (Psalm 90:10), Moses’ wise request was “so teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). David’s request was “LORD, make me to know my end and what is the measure of my days that I may know how frail I am” (Psalm 39:4).

What’s yours?

A Man After God’s Own Heart—Part 1

As the apostle Paul was tracing God’s scarlet thread of redemption from the Jewish patriarchs to Jesus while preaching in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14ff), he quotes God’s description of David: “a man after My own heart who will do My will” (v. 22). What an astonishing description! What extraordinary praise, especially in a book devoid of flattery and hyperbole. As detailed in the books of First and Second Samuel, David was not sinlessly perfect; he was, however, sincerely passionate.

From Psalm 40 we learn that the man after God’s own heart is:

Patient in his trials. “I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God; many will see it and fear and will trust in the LORD” (vv. 1-3). David looked to God with prayerful trust and

confident expectation. The adverse circumstances of life—the horrible pit and the miry clay—began with a cry and ended with a song.

Wholehearted in his faith. “Blessed is that man who makes the LORD his trust and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered” (vv. 4-5). Faith in Jehovah was not *one of* David’s strategies for life; it *was* his strategy for life.

Prompt in his obedience. “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart’” (vv. 6-8). Unlike his predecessor, King Saul, who thought sacrifice was better than obedience (1 Samuel 15:22), David’s mindset was completely opposite.

If an inspired writer were to describe your life, could the phrases “patient in trials,” “wholehearted in faith,” and “prompt in obedience” be used with accuracy?

A Man After God’s Own Heart—Part Two

The Bible’s objectivity eliminates the possibility of flattery or undeserved praise. Therefore, when David is described by an inspired penman as being a man after God’s own heart, a wise Bible student diligently seeks to identify and then imitate the godly characteristics he discovers. A careful study of Psalm 40 unearths five notable characteristics about this man after God’s own heart. He was, as we saw in the previous study:

- Patient in his trials (vv. 1-3).
- Wholehearted in his faith (vv. 4-5).
- Prompt in his obedience (vv. 6-8).

He was also:

Bold in his proclamation to others. “I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness in the great assembly; indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O LORD, You Yourself know. I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly” (vv. 9-10). David’s exuberance for God was not a private matter; it was not hidden under a bushel.

Confident in his God. “Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head. Therefore, my heart fails me. Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me. Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me; O LORD, make haste to help me! Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who seek to destroy my life; let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor who wish me evil. Let them be confounded because of their shame, who say to me, ‘Aha, aha!’ Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, ‘The LORD be magnified!’ But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God” (vv. 11-17). Like the apostle Paul’s joyful epistle while under arrest in Rome (Philippians), David’s confidence in God was unshaken by his circumstances. Innumerable evils, personal failure, and vicious enemies could not eclipse or erode his confidence in his help and deliverer.

Are you a person after God’s own heart?

Opened Ears

The most frequently recorded exhortation of Jesus involves using one’s ears to hear. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” is

found eight times and “He who has an ear, let him hear” is found seven times in the New Testament. As demonstrated in the Old and New Testaments (Isaiah 6:9-10; Ezekiel 12:2; Zechariah 7:11; Matthew 13:14-15), it is possible—spiritually speaking—to have ears which do not hear or heed what is said.

As stated by David (Psalm 40:6) and perfectly exemplified by Christ (Hebrews 10:5), an essential prerequisite for obedience is ears that are constantly used to listen to God’s word. They are to be prized above great sacrifices and offerings. Consider the words of Psalm 40:6—“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.”

There is some disagreement over how exactly “My ears You have opened” is to be understood in the context of David’s day. The Hebrew word rendered “opened” can also be accurately translated “bored” or “dug.” Which shade of meaning was intended here is open to discussion. Thoughtfully considering both shades of meaning is beneficial.

If the intended meaning here is “bored,” then David’s reference is to the piercing of one’s ear when a slave voluntarily chose to remain a slave. It is described as follows: “If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever” (Exodus 21:2-6).

If the intended meaning here is “dug,” then David’s reference is to the idea of having all spiritual earwax removed from his ears so that the word of God has complete and unhindered reception

in his heart. Consider how this idea permeates this prophecy of Jesus—“The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away. I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting” (Isaiah 50:5-6).

These two shades of meaning are far more similar than they may first appear. Listening to God’s word without any spiritual earwax to hinder it, then prizing it so that it alone is authoritative in my life are both essential if, like David, “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8).

Are your ears open?

In the Scroll of the Book

The transmission—or copying—of the books of the Bible is a most amazing study. Prior to the creation of papyrus (the ancient equivalent of paper), and thus the ability to put all the books of Scripture into one volume, each Bible book was contained in its own scroll of specially prepared animal skin. Thus, for David’s prophesy of Jesus in Psalm 40:7—“Behold I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of Me”—is precisely true.

As found in the pages of the New Testament, the Christian religion is genuinely different from any other in human history. A Christian does not follow cunningly devised fables. The brilliantly distinct proof of this is the truth that the events upon which it is built are historically accurate, verified by the abundant testimony of reliable eyewitnesses in fulfillment of centuries-old prophecies. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He was buried, and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) is the very heart and soul of the gospel.

In the scroll of the book of Genesis, it is written of Jesus’ virgin birth (3:15) and lineage through Abraham (22:18), Isaac (26:4), Jacob (28:14), and Judah (49:8-10) hundreds of years prior to His birth in Bethlehem.

In the scroll of the book of Deuteronomy, it is written of Jesus' unique prophetic role as Jehovah's Messiah (18:15-19) about fourteen centuries prior to His fulfillment.

In the scroll of the book of Psalms, it is written of Jesus' crucifixion (22), resurrection (16:10), and unique priesthood/kingship (110:4) a thousand years before Christ.

In the scroll of the book of Isaiah, it is written of Jesus' virgin birth (7:14), preaching ministry (61:1-2), rejection and crucifixion (52:13-53:8), burial arrangements (53:9), and resurrection (53:10-12) seven hundred years ahead of His incarnation.

In the scroll of the book of Daniel, it is written of Jesus' triumphant coronation in heaven (7:13-14) over five hundred years before its occurrence.

Christ has built His church upon the massive, rock-solid foundation of historical facts, trustworthy eyewitnesses, and fulfilled prophecies. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Look it up.

In the scroll of the book, it is written.

Reasons for Trusting Jehovah

The Bible is full of beatitudes. The book of Revelation alone has seven in it. The greatest sermon in human history begins with an entire octave of beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10). The very first word in the book of Psalms is "blessed." Psalm 40:4 pronounces a blessing on "that man who makes the LORD his trust." In the next verse, David affirms two reasons why such faith is blessed.

God's wonderful works. "Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done." Salvation, reconciliation, redemption, propitiation, justification, sanctification, glorification, providence—all these grand and glorious words of Scripture are permanent testaments to God's initiative and diligence.

God's innumerable thoughts. "And Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." Not a single

blessing received in life is accidental; each is the result of God's purposeful providence and thoughtful care. Not only are God's thoughts higher than our thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:9), His thoughts of tender love and concern are as countless as the stars.

No one is more trustworthy and worthy of trust than is Jehovah. Because of His wonderful works and innumerable thoughts, unbelief is inexcusable.

Confident Hope

The law of sowing and reaping is universal—you reap what you sow, you reap later than you sow, and you should reap more than you sow. Though there may be occasions in your life when it appears that this law has been violated, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

In Psalm 41, David is up to his neck in difficult circumstances—poor health (v. 3) a sin-sick soul (v. 4), evil-speaking enemies (v. 5), whisperers (v. 7), and a betrayal by a trusted friend (v. 9). Yet, his faith in God's universal law of sowing and reaping remains tenacious and unshaken. “Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed” (vv. 1-3).

God's mercy and faithfulness (vv. 10-12) sustained David in such a difficult time. He knew better days were ahead.

What a confident hope!

What an anchor for life's boisterous storms!

“Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen” (v. 13).

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Because He was made like His brethren in all things, Jesus experienced the vile and vicious treatment described in Psalm 41:7-9. Here it is written: “All who hate me whisper together against me; against me they devise my hurt. ‘An evil disease,’ they say, ‘clings to him. And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more.’ Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” Because of His suffering, we have a merciful and faithful High Priest who can sympathize with us when:

People whisper together against us. Jesus knew the painful sting of gossip and behind-the-back hate speech. He was the object of deliberate plans intended to hurt and humiliate Him. “When will he die, and his name perish?” (Psalm 41:5) was a conversation topic of David’s enemies and Christ’s. Even before Jesus had chosen the apostles (Mark 3:14), His enemies had plotted together on how they could destroy Him (Mark 3:6). Ultimately, their vicious plotting resulted in the public shame and humiliation of Jesus’ crucifixion.

Betrayed by a trusted, close friend. Few emotional wounds in life cut deeper, hurt greater, or scar more than the treachery of an adulterous spouse or the betrayal of one who was a close friend. Not only was Judas one of the twelve, he was the treasurer (John 12:26) entrusted with the generous, sacrificial support personally given by many (Luke 8:2-3). Like the apostle John, Judas heard, saw with his own eyes, handled with his own hands, and looked upon the incarnate Son of God (cf. 1 John 1:1). They had traveled together, eaten together, worshipped together. The betrayal of Judas was not a superficial wound; the long blade of his betrayal cut deep and went in all the way to the hilt.

What a friend and High Priest—merciful, faithful, and sympathetic—we have in Jesus!

The Deep, Dark Pit of Depression

In Psalms 42 and 43 we find David in the deep, dark pit of depression. Because of all the superficial, always-be-positive cheap imitations of faith in our world today, the thought of a godly man having to deal with depression is unthinkable. Yet, there it is—three times the question of David reverberates: “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?” (Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5).

Hills and valleys, mountaintops and deep ravines are facts of geography upon this earth. They are also facts of the spiritual geography of one’s pilgrimage through life. Sometimes, Satan seeks to bombard and overwhelm us with an abundance of trials like he did Job.

David felt spiritually barren—like the thirst of an exhausted deer which had been chased ruthlessly by hunters (Psalm 42:1).

David’s “salt water diet” had taken its toll—his tears had been his food day and night (v. 3).

David’s enemies had bombarded him with vigorous attacks of doubt—they continually said to him, all day long, “Where is your God?” (Psalm 42:3, 10).

David’s memories of better days haunted him. He ached when he remembered when he used to go with the multitudes to worship in the house of God (Psalm 42:4).

David’s questions oppressed him—Why has God forgotten him? Why does he live in continuous mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? (Psalm 42:9).

Life is not all peaches and cream. Spiritual victory does not come by strolling in a park of soft grass and clear blue skies. Sometimes it necessitates a strenuous, dogged, steep climb out of the deep, dark pit of depression.

Three times David describes how to do it: “Hope in God. For I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God” (Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5).

Getting out of the Deep, Dark Pit of Depression

Few people have fought their way out of the deep, dark pit of depression better than David and Job did. Each did it without a medical doctor's prescription!

As you compare the book of Job with Psalms 42 and 43, three valuable tools for victory over depression shine forth brilliantly. They are:

A tenacious hope in God. Three times David explicitly tells himself: "Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him" (Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5).

Brutal honesty in prayer. "Oh my God, my soul is cast down within me... Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" As with a breaking of my bones, my enemies reproach me, while they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:9-10).

A relentless, stubborn faith. "I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God" (Psalm 42:5). Like Job, David was going to die trusting God (Job 14:14).

Depression is a vicious, mighty, relentless foe. Halfway measures will not defeat it. Inadequate equipment will not overcome it. Without all three of these essential tools for victory, many people—like King Saul and the apostle Judas—never escape the deep, dark pit of depression.

Battling Depression

Some difficulties in life may go away without a fight. Depression, however, is not one of them. Psalms 42 and 43 indicate that the dark foe called depression attacked David and sought to overwhelm and destroy him and his faith using three tidal waves of attack. To be victorious, David had to tenaciously battle depression in intense hand-to-hand combat.

Like a war of wills with a two-year old, David had to fight this ugly spiritual monster whenever it decided it wanted to rumble. He did not get to decide when or how often, he simply had to gitter-dun.

David's questions of "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?" never were really answered. Like Job, David received very little divine response when he repeatedly asked "WHY?!"

Depression is a dogged foe. It viciously attacks immortal beings living in a finite and fallen world. It is one of the battle fronts of this spiritual war we call life. Wishful thinking and self-pity do not make it go away.

When Life Does Not Make Sense

Someone has wryly noted that "it is hard to see the big picture when you're inside the frame." Because of our extremely limited perspective, life does not always make sense to us. This was the case for the penman of Psalm 44.

As the writer reviews the past, he sees victory. "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us the deeds You did in their days, in days of old: You drove out the nations with Your hand, but them You planted; You afflicted the peoples, and cast them out. For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword, nor did their own arm save them; but it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance, because You favored them. You are my King, O God; command victories for Jacob. Through You we will push down our enemies; through Your name we will trample those who rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, nor shall my sword save me. But You have saved us from our enemies and have put to shame those who hated us" (vv. 1-7). Therefore, "in God we boast all day long and praise Your name forever" (v. 8).

As the writer views the present, he sees defeat and despair. "But You have cast us off and put us to shame, and You do not

go out with our armies. You make us turn back from the enemy, and those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. You have given us up like sheep intended for food and have scattered us among the nations. You sell Your people for next to nothing and are not enriched by selling them. You make us a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and a derision to those all around us. You make us a byword among the nations, a shaking of the head among the peoples. My dishonor is continually before me, and the shame of my face has covered me, because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, because of the enemy and the avenger. All this has come upon us” (vv. 9-17).

But, this is where the wheels fall off. “All this has come upon us; but we have not forgotten You, nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from Your way; but You have severely broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death. If we had forgotten the name of our God or stretched out our hands to a foreign god, would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart. Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (vv. 17-22).

There may be times in life when it seems that Jehovah is asleep or that He has cast off His people, or He is playing a dispiriting game of cosmic hide-and-seek, or He has had amnesia (vv. 23-24). It feels like your soul is bowed down to the dust and your body clings to the ground (v. 25).

What do you do?

Persevere in your faith; continue to entreat Jehovah to arise for your help and your redemption (v. 26). And, as Winston Churchill once famously said, “Never give in. Never, never, never—in nothing great or small, large or petty—never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense.”

When life does not make sense is the wrong time to abandon your faith in Jehovah.

A Royal Wedding—Part 1

Through the centuries, the pomp and pageantry of royal weddings have been of keen interest to many people. Nothing within the superscription or the text of Psalm 45 indicates the specific persons involved in the wedding that is the occasion of its writing. Because verses six and seven are quoted and applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1:8-9, we can easily see that this contemplation of the sons of Korah spoke of things more profound than the historical circumstances which generated it.

When marriage is held in honor among all and the marriage bed has been kept undefiled by the bridegroom and bride prior to their wedding, there are few things in human affairs that have greater beauty. This fact is recognized in verse one, for the penman declares, “My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.”

The virtue of sexual purity, especially exercising self-control to keep one’s virginity until marriage, has been under vicious assault throughout human history. It is not a quaint relic of bygone, unenlightened generations; it is not a divine suggestion; it is Jehovah’s universal expectation. All fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Hebrews 13:4).

“This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from fornication; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).

A Royal Wedding—Part 2

When God’s word concerning marriage is understood and obeyed, few things in life are more anticipated than the day of one’s wedding. In Psalm 45, the pen of its ready writer portrays the groom’s splendor in verses 2 to 9. Unlike any earthly king in

history, this groom is described in the following way: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions” (vv. 6-7). This is no ordinary king; this is no ordinary groom. This is none other than the Son of God (Hebrews 1:8-9).

This royal wedding is an Old Testament foreshadowing of the glorious truth fully revealed in the New Testament—the Son of God Himself has been betrothed to a bride, the church. He loved her and gave Himself for her. Like Adam (Genesis 2:21-22), His side was pierced to make her existence possible. He has washed her with water by the word so that He can sanctify and cleanse her and then present her holy, without blemish or any such thing on their wedding day (Ephesians 5:25-27).

From John’s portrayal in Revelation 19, we see that when the Son of God’s marriage and supper finally occur, it will be incomparably superior to any royal wedding in human history. Greater than the splendor described in Psalm 45:10-15, the beauty and glory of the bride will be “fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (Revelation 19:8).

Few people in human history are participants in a royal wedding. Every person can be a participant in the final and ultimate royal wedding.

The Blessings of Refuge

A refuge is a place of safety, a place of protection, a place of security. When “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1), three wondrous blessings are enjoyed:

Freedom from fear. “Therefore, we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling” (Psalm 46:2-

3). Biblically-speaking, peace is not the absence of conflict, it is calm while in it. It is knowing that “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4), because Jesus triumphantly declared, “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Boldness in conflict. “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High, God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psalm 46:4-7). “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4).

Divine deliverance. “Come, behold the works of the LORD Who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire” (Psalm 46:8-9).

To enjoy these blessings, we must “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psalm 46:10-11).

Are you a spiritual refugee?

Be Still

If you have ever engaged in a titanic wrestling match with an extremely active toddler during a public occasion, you know how constantly you have wanted that independent young soul to just be still! Because of this, it would be easy to assume that this is the idea behind the exhortation of Psalm 46:10—“Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” However, this is not the exact shade of meaning intended by the Hebrew word (*raphah*) that is translated

“be still.” The idea is not “stand still” or “be quiet”; rather, it is “let go” or “become weak.”

Because of the declarations in the first and last verses of the psalm, this expectation makes a lot of sense. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble...The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (vv. 1, 11). A refuge is a place of safety, protection, and security. When God is truly your refuge, your actions must correspond. Worry, anxiety, fretfulness, and being “in control” are wholly inappropriate for anyone within such a place of divine safety.

In 2 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul relates an occasion in his life in which the divine response was “Be Still.” He had a thorn in the flesh which to him was an obvious weakness and deficiency. He pleaded with God three times to remove this vulnerability from him. The response he received was “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9).

Paul’s response was “most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (vv. 9-10). Within the refuge of Jehovah and His grace, Paul was safe and needed to let go. He gladly did.

Have you?

God’s Unchanging Worthiness

The spirit with which you worship God matters. Jesus declared to the Samaritan woman that “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). “Must worship in spirit...” is not a mere suggestion.

In Malachi’s day, the worship of Jehovah was not in spirit or in truth. God found it reprehensible (Malachi 1:4-14).

Since He is ever worthy to receive glory, honor, and power (Revelation 4:11, 5:13), failure to worship the LORD Most High with the proper spirit arises when you or I lose focus on God’s

unchanging worthiness. Psalm 47 gives three eternal truths that highlight Jehovah's perpetual praiseworthiness:

Jehovah is sovereign. "For the LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth...For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with understanding. God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne. The princes of the people have gathered together, the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted" (vv. 2, 7-9).

Jehovah is victorious. "He will subdue the peoples under us and the nations under our feet...God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet" (vv. 3, 5).

Jehovah is gracious. "He will choose our inheritance for us, the excellence of Jacob whom He loves" (v. 4).

Therefore, "Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!" (v. 6).

Great is the Lord and His Praiseworthiness

The tendency of human nature is to slip into worship that is lethargic, half-hearted, and simply "going through the motions." It must be resisted vigorously and constantly. The LORD of hosts is a great King (Malachi 1:14) who receives passionate glory, honor, and thanks from the living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and the innumerable host of angels in heaven (Revelation 4:9-11, 5:11-14). He desires and deserves the same from all humans living on earth.

Psalm 48 begins with a call to worship—"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain" (v. 1). After this declaration of truth, this song of the sons of Korah gives four reasons for Jehovah's continual praiseworthiness.

Because of His protective presence. "Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is in her palaces; He is

known as her refuge. For behold, the kings assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marveled; they were troubled, they hastened away. Fear took hold of them there and pain, as of a woman in birth pangs, as when You break the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it forever” (vv. 2-8).

Because of His steadfast lovingkindness. “We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness in the midst of Your temple” (v. 9).

Because of His sovereign righteousness. “According to Your name, O God, so is Your praise to the ends of the earth; Your right hand is full of righteousness. Let Mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of Your judgments” (vv. 10-11).

Because of His unchanging character and guidance. “Walk about Zion and go all around her. Count her towers; mark well her bulwarks; consider her palaces; that you may tell it to the generation following. For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death” (vv. 12-14).

Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised is He.

The Message of Psalm 49

The message of Psalm 49 is **universal**. It is for all people, all the inhabitants of the world (v. 1). It is for all classes of people—both low and high, rich and poor (v. 2). Those who incline their ear to listen attentively and act accordingly will be wise (vv. 3-4) and fearless in the days when evil and death come (v. 5).

The message of Psalm 49 is **simple**: Do not believe the lie. Nothing overstates its value like wealth does. It promises houses that will last forever and immortality that will never perish (v. 11). “Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish” (v. 12).

The message of Psalm 49 is **clear**: Trust in God, not worldly riches. “This is the way of those who are foolish and of their posterity who approve their sayings. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me. Do not be afraid when one becomes rich when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lives he blesses himself (for men will praise you when you do well for yourself), he shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. A man who is in honor yet does not understand is like the beasts that perish” (vv. 13-20).

The message of Psalm 49 **reverberates** in the New Testament: “But God said to him, ‘Thou Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:20-21).

Things Money Cannot Buy

The ability of money is slight when compared to its weighty inability. Money can buy a house, but it cannot purchase a home. Money can obtain medicine, but it cannot secure health. Money can pay for entertainment, but it cannot buy happiness. Money can amass wealth, but it cannot procure peace of mind. Money can acquire pleasures, but it cannot purchase character. Money can access power, but it cannot acquire self-control.

In Psalm 49:6-12, two more deficiencies of earthly wealth are stated:

Money cannot purchase redemption from sin. “Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls is cost-

ly, and it shall cease forever—that he should continue to live eternally and not see the Pit” (vv. 6-9).

Money cannot buy immortality. “For he sees wise men die; likewise, the fool and the senseless person perish and leave their wealth to others. Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish” (vv. 10-12).

The deceitfulness of riches is that they exaggerate their actual value. They promise much and deliver little.

“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

Living by Faith

A continuous challenge of faith is to view God as He has actually revealed Himself in Scripture. Since He is a person—not a philosophy or a fantasy—a Biblically-based belief in Him necessitates an accurate faith that expresses itself in practical ways in our daily lives. Psalms 46-49 are clustered together because of a common author. Each superscription states that it is “a Psalm of the sons of Korah.” Each psalm has a distinct theological theme and specific instructions on how such should impact our lives. The challenge of faith is to fervently embrace each distinct teaching about Jehovah and live accordingly.

Psalm 46 declares that **God is our Refuge**; therefore, fearfulness is unacceptable in our lives. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, even though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling” (vv. 1-3).

Psalm 47 declares that **God is our Ruler**; therefore, our praise of Him is to be passionate and perpetual. “For the LORD Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth...Sing

praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!” (vv. 2, 6).

Psalm 48 declares that **God is our Resource**; therefore, His providential provisions are to be joyfully and thankfully received with contentment. “We have thought, O God, on Your loving-kindness in the midst of Your temple... Walk about Zion and go all around her. Count her towers; mark well her bulwarks; consider her palaces; that you may tell it to the generation following. For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death” (vv. 9, 12-14).

Psalm 49 declares that **God is our Redeemer**; therefore, living wisely requires that we trust Him in the days of evil and difficulty. “Why should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity at my heels surrounds me? ... But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me” (vv. 5, 15).

Refuge. Ruler. Resource. Redeemer.

Living by genuine faith in God is intensely challenging, immensely practical, and infinitely rewarding.

When God Speaks

From the third verse of the Bible (Genesis 1:3) to its penultimate one (Revelation 22:20), the God of heaven speaks. From “Let there be light” to “Surely I am coming quickly,” the Mighty One, God the LORD has spoken.

The book of Hebrews begins with “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (1:1-2); its climactic command is “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks.” (12:25).

In Psalm 50, God calls His people to come and assemble before Him (vv. 1-6) and “hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; I am God, your God!” (v. 7). His message is two-fold:

To those who are living obediently, His exhortation is to continue their faithful worship (v. 8), “offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (vv. 14-15).

“But to the wicked God says: ‘What right have you to declare My statutes or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son. These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you and set them in order before your eyes’” (vv. 16-21).

Jehovah is, and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Therefore, “consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver: whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God” (vv. 22-23).

You determine which part of the message of Psalm 50 is for you.

God’s Utter Independence

The perfection of God places stringent demands upon the limits of human imagination. Though not impossible, adequately and accurately conceiving of a Being who is self-sufficient and independent in every way is a great challenge.

To aid us in this task, Asaph recorded the following pronouncement from Jehovah: “I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness” (Psalm 50:9-12).

What sovereignty! What independence! What a difference between the Most High God and those who populate His footstool!

“Offer to God thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High” (Psalm 50:14).

Beware of Idolatry

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols” is how the apostle John concludes his first epistle (1 John 5:21). Idolatry occurs when God is made into man’s image. Fundamentally, idolatry is a mental creation; it may or may not involve metal or wood. This is why one’s adequate and accurate conception of God is of such supreme importance!

A grave mistake made by the wicked is “you thought that I was altogether like you” (Psalm 50:16-21). Because humanity is made in God’s image, we share many common characteristics. This is what makes the human race superior to all other creatures. However, similarity of traits does not mean equality; we are not identical twins, for God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20).

The fatal error of thinking falsely—idolatrously—about Jehovah is it makes God in man’s image.

How to Deal with Sin Properly

The way of the transgressor is hard. Sin is deadly in this life and in the life to come. There are many ways to foolishly and inadequately deal with your sin. There is only one wise and adequate way to deal with your sin. Psalm 51 describes the three essential ingredients to dealing properly with the toxic spiritual waste called sin.

Confess it. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my

transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom” (vv. 1-6).

Repent of it. “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (vv. 7-17).

Trust God to forgive it. “Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar” (vv. 18-19).

Only the Great Physician knows how to properly remedy the cancer of sin. Are you following His prescription?

David’s Example of Repentance

Psalm 51 is one of the fruits of repentance which flows from godly sorrow. It was written by David because Nathan the proph-

et went to David after he had gone in to Bathsheba, and rebuked him (2 Samuel 12). It illustrates the diligence, the clearing, the indignation, the fear, the vehement desire, the zeal, the vindication (2 Corinthians 7:11) that grows out of the soil of a penitent heart.

The psalm is addressed to “the Chief Musician.” This indicates that this penitential psalm was intended to be used in a public setting. Instead of a royal cover-up, David is making a public confession of his sin.

David had sinned against God, thus despising Him personally (2 Samuel 12:10). David had done evil in Jehovah’s sight by despising His commandment (2 Samuel 12:9). David’s deeds had given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme (2 Samuel 12:14). Therefore, the focus of his penitence was upon clearing and vindicating Jehovah’s holy name, not his own besmirched one. His zealous concern was that “You may be found just when You speak and blameless when You judge” (Psalm 51:4).

In this psalm, David seeks:

- To diligently, vehemently, and zealously defend and vindicate God’s holy nature and the just punishment he has received for his sin and wickedness.
- To vigorously express his indignation for his wicked and evil deeds.
- To beseech God’s mercy and forgiveness by blotting out his transgressions (v. 1), washing him thoroughly from his iniquity (v. 2), cleansing him from his sin (v. 2), purging him (v. 7), hiding His face from his sins (v. 9), restoring the joy of his salvation (v. 12), and delivering him from the guilt of bloodshed (v. 14).
- To offer the sacrifices of a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart (v. 17).

David’s example of repentance was written for our learning and our imitation.

The Exceedingly Sinfulness of Sin

One of the important purposes of the Law of Moses is to expose the exceedingly sinfulness of sin (Romans 7:13). True spiritual wisdom is attained when you have a firm and growing grasp of the enormity of sin. In the words of Psalm 51:1-2, David describes his painfully clear understanding of the exceedingly sinfulness of sin with these words: “Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”

The exceedingly sinfulness of sin is seen in the nouns David used to describe the evil that he had done.

Transgression recognizes the rebellious nature of his actions. He has crossed a spiritual boundary line that should have been honored. He did something that was prohibited, and he was guilty in the first degree.

Iniquity emphasizes the perversity of his actions. He has polluted his soul with a deadly spiritual poison. He failed to walk in the proper course of conduct that was right.

Sin focuses upon the spiritual failure of his actions. He has missed the mark. He has wrecked his relationship with God. With his own hands, he has ruined the sweet fellowship he had had with his God.

Transgression. Iniquity. Sin.

Only fools mock at sin (Proverbs 14:9).

“I was Brought Forth in Iniquity”

The Scriptures record the death of two of David’s sons. One—the result of his adultery with Uriah’s wife—died in infancy at the age of one week (2 Samuel 12:15-23); the other—Absalom—died as a young man in a coup attempt against the King, Jehovah’s Anointed (2 Samuel 15:1-18:15). The infant’s death was preceded by seven days of fasting and intense prayer, then fol-

lowed immediately by worship and eating. Absalom's death was preceded by David's fleeing from Jerusalem and giving orders that Absalom's life be spared, then followed immediately by intense grief—weeping and loud mourning (2 Samuel 18:33-19:6).

David's response to each death was a puzzlement to others. With the death of the infant, his servants were confused by his actions (1 Samuel 12:21). With the death of Absalom, "the people stole back into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle," because of David's reaction (2 Samuel 19:1-3). The reason for such different responses is clear—David's infant died in innocence; Absalom died in sin. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23) was said about David's dead infant; he had no such sentiments when Absalom died.

Unlike several popular (mis)translations, David did not believe in total hereditary depravity. He did not believe that his infant son "was sinful at birth" or "sinful from the time" of his conception (see Psalm 51:5 in NIV, et. al.). He did not believe that his infant son was destined for hell when he died seven days after Bathsheba gave birth to him.

David did believe that he was born into a world inflicted with the consequences of sin and into a family that had not escaped the ravages of sexual sin; therefore, he wrote, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5).

From cover to cover the Scriptures teach that "the soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (Ezekiel 18:20).

The Bad and Good News about Betrayal

From the time of his youthful conquest of Goliath until his death as king about fifty years later, David's life was associated

in some way with the highest levels of Israel's government. His initial association was in serving in King Saul's court as a teen. Next, he married into the royal family. Finally, he was anointed king. Because of this, it really should not surprise us to learn that David wrote several psalms in the aftermath of being betrayed.

Few wounds cut as deep as the knife of betrayal. Few injuries hurt more intensely than the emotional devastation caused by a turncoat. Few pains take longer to heal than the sorrow and heartache you feel when you are betrayed.

Psalms 52, 54, and 55 were written in the context of a recent betrayal experienced by David. They bear a subtle testimony to the enduring bad news about betrayal: It is a universal human experience. Regardless of whether the treachery comes in the form of gossip, apostasy, financial malfeasance, adultery, political maneuvering, or a multitude of other gut-wrenching ways, getting stabbed in the back is a fact of life. In being made like unto His brethren in all things, it was something that Jesus Himself had to experience.

The superscription of Psalms 52, 54, and 55 identify these compositions as Maschils (King James Version) or Contemplations (New King James Version). It is believed that the Hebrew root word denotes the idea of wisdom or insight. It appears that David's purpose for these psalms is more than simply expressing the legitimate grief and anguish felt when one is betrayed; each is designed to be profitable for teaching and instruction which will make us wiser.

You can turn to God when the wound, injury, and pain of betrayal are viciously inflicted in your heart and soul. Though others may be faithless, Jehovah remains faithful. He cannot deny Himself. "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5) is the good news when you have been betrayed.

How David Dealt with Betrayal

Death and life are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). Because of Doeg's malicious and false insinuation to a paranoid king, the entire city of Nob—"both men and women, children and nursing infants, oxen and donkeys and sheep"—was so completely destroyed that only one man, Abiathar, survived (1 Samuel 22:19-20). Doeg's treacherous tongue resulted in David telling Abiathar, "I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house" (1 Samuel 22:22). What a massive load of guilt and heartache came crashing down upon David as a result of Doeg's betrayal.

Psalms 52 details David's reflection on this holocaust; it also provides insightful wisdom into how to deal with the aftermath of another's treachery.

Identify the evil that has been done. "Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually. Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. You love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking righteousness. You love all devouring words, you deceitful tongue" (vv. 1-4).

Reflect upon the judgment that will occur. "God shall likewise destroy you forever; He shall take you away and pluck you out of your dwelling place and uproot you from the land of the living" (v. 5).

Remember the folly that wickedness always has. "The righteous also shall see and fear and shall laugh at him, saying, 'Here is the man who did not make God his strength but trusted in the abundance of his riches and strengthened himself in his wickedness'" (vv. 6-7).

Determine to remain faithful to God. "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever. I will praise You forever, because You have done it; and in the presence of Your saints I will wait on Your name, for it is good" (vv. 8-9).

Overcoming evil with good is not easy, but it is possible.

When God Repeats Himself

The key to learning is repetition. The key to learning is repetition. The key to learning is repetition.

A multitude of explanations has been given as to how and why Psalms 14 and 53 are almost identical in content. Whether my explanation—the key to learning is repetition—is one of the actual reasons God had for repeating Himself cannot be definitively proven or disproven.

From numerous examples in Scripture (Lot's wife being one of them), Jehovah only has to say something one time before humanity is expected to respond obediently. The God of heaven is not a nagger, and He never fails to keep His word, even if He only says it one time. So, if God says something once, it needs to be diligently heeded and carefully, precisely obeyed.

Just as many modern song books have the same lyrics set to different tunes, it appears that the Hebrew psalm book may have had the same thing in Psalms 14 and 53. Psalm 14's superscription identifies it as a "psalm of David"; Psalm 53's superscription states it to be "a contemplation (Maschil) of David." The latter superscription also identifies the tune it is set to ("Mahalath").

There are times and places in Scriptures in which God repeats himself. Jesus' exhortation "he who has ears, let him hear" is found over a dozen times in the New Testament. It must be something quite important, an essential to spiritual success.

The key to learning is repetition: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" (Psalm 14:1). "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" (Psalm 53:1).

Learn it and live accordingly.

Atheism's Dirty Little Secret

A number of years ago I read a fascinating book by R. C. Sproul titled *If There is a God, Why are there Atheists?: A Surprising Look at the Psychology of Atheism*. The thesis of the book is that people have chosen atheism for reasons other than the scientific, factual evidence it supposedly has. At its heart, atheism is an emotion-based, not a logic-based, belief. Many of the famous atheists of the 20th century have had a common trait—a powerfully strong desire for lustful pleasure.

In a moment of extreme candor atheist Aldous Huxley stated in his book *Ends and Means*: “I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; and consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do. For myself, as no doubt for most of my friends, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom. The supporters of this system claimed that it embodied the meaning – the Christian meaning, they insisted – of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and justifying ourselves in our erotic revolt: we would deny that the world had any meaning whatever.”

David's inspired pen declares the same truth. It is written, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt and have done abominable iniquity; there is none who does good” (Psalm 53:1). Atheism's dirty little secret is that it is rooted in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Professing itself to be wise, scientific- and logic-based, it exalts itself against the knowledge of God. Like the world, it

passes away, but everyone who does the will of God abides forever.

The Folly of Atheism

A fundamental and egregious intellectual flaw of atheism is that unless an atheist is omniscient (all-knowing), he cannot legitimately say, “I know that there is no God.” Only an omniscient being would have the necessary and adequate body of knowledge to know whether God exists. Any being who is less than omniscient is not qualified to state, “I know that there is no God,” because the distinct possibility exists that in the body of his ignorance is the existence of God. This is the reason why “the fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 53:1).

In contrast to the fool, “God looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek God” (Psalm 53:2). There is, in fact, one omniscient Being—God. There is nothing covered or hidden from Him. He is ignorant of nothing. The lone omniscient Being in our universe says that there is a God and that He is a rewarder of all those who diligently seek Him.

So, who do you believe: The fool who is not omniscient who asserts that there is no God, or the God who is omniscient who declares that there is?

David’s Action Plan for Betrayal

One of the more unpleasant facts of life is the truth that each of us will face betrayal. Every person will have his/her own Judas.

Psalm 54 provides David’s actions in response to the betrayal of the Ziphites in 1 Samuel 23. This occurred shortly after the betrayal of Doeg in 1 Samuel 22. This Maschil of David serves as an excellent template for anyone who desires to have a plan of action prepared and in place for this unpleasant fact of life.

David's response to betrayal was three-fold:

He prayed honestly to God. "Save me, O God, by Your name and vindicate me by Your strength. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen up against me, and oppressors have sought after my life; they have not set God before them" (vv. 1-3).

He trusted explicitly in God. "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is with those who uphold my life. He will repay my enemies for their evil. Cut them off in Your truth" (vv. 4-5).

He focused intently on God. "I will freely sacrifice to You; I will praise Your name, O LORD, for it is good. For He has delivered me out of all trouble; and my eye has seen its desire upon my enemies" (vv. 6-7).

One of Satan's fiery darts is the devastating, below-the-belt blow of betrayal. It is a spiritual sucker punch. The arch-enemy of God and man has no qualms against using it as often as possible. In Psalm 54, David invites you to contemplate his action plan for betrayal.

Ponder it.

Absorb it.

Use it when the inevitable happens.

Dealing with the Wound of Betrayal

Unlike Psalms 52 and 54, there is nothing in the superscription of Psalm 55 that hints of the exact historical context of this Maschil. That David has been recently betrayed is unmistakable: "my heart is severely pained within me...horror has overwhelmed me...it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together and walked to the house of God in the throng...He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; he has broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than

butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords” (vv. 4, 5, 12-14, 20-21).

Like a wise doctor, David thoroughly cleanses the wound of betrayal, then carefully dresses it so that this fiery dart of the devil does not leave any lingering poison of deadly bitterness in his heart and soul. Because the stated purpose of this psalm is for it to be ingested with deliberate contemplation, David has given us the protocol for performing spiritual triage when we have been wounded by the harsh and potentially fatal blow of betrayal.

Step # 1: Thoroughly cleanse the wound. “Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved” (v. 22). Honestly state your pain. “Give ear to my prayer, O God and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Attend to me and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily, because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked; for they bring down trouble upon me, and in wrath they hate me. My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me. So I said, ‘Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest’” (vv. 1-8). Then, honestly express your desire for their just punishment. “Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues, for I have seen violence and strife in the city...Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell, for wickedness is in their dwellings and among them” (vv. 9, 15).

Step # 2: Carefully dress the wound. Explicitly state how you are determined to live, regardless of how others have treated you. “As for me, I will call upon God, and the LORD shall save me. Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice. He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me, for there were many against me. God will hear, and afflict them, even He who abides from of

old. Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God” (vv. 16-19).

Step # 3: Exercise your faith. Live confidently in God. “But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in You” (v. 23).

Betrayal is extremely painful. But, as demonstrated by David, when it is treated promptly and properly, it does not have to be deadly.

David’s Michtams

The Hebrew word “michtam” comes from a root that means “to carve or engrave.” It is used in the superscription of six psalms—16, 56, 57, 58, 59, and 60—to identify the genre of these compositions. Given the fact that the five psalms clustered together between 55 and 61 were written under adverse circumstances in David’s life—being hunted by King Saul (57, 59), captured by the Philistines (56), and military reversals (60:1-3)—it appears that the purpose of these psalms is to record some of the valuable lessons that David had engraved on his heart during some of his most difficult and trying circumstances.

What life lessons did David have indelibly etched into his heart and soul during the storms of life he faced? Here are a few that can be easily identified:

Your faith must be stubborn when your enemies hound you all day, twisting your words, and marking your steps (Psalm 56:2, 5-6).

Your faith must be steadfast when your soul is bowed down (Psalm 57:6-7).

Your faith must be certain that God will deliver His righteous people (Psalms 56:4, 11; 58:10-11).

Your faith must be patient when your enemies rise up (Psalm 59:1-3, 9).

Your faith must be penitent when your spiritual defeat has come because of personal failings (Psalm 60:1-3, 11-12).

When used as God has designed it to be, the shield of faith is able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:16). According to David, that is not a theory; it is a fact that has been etched into history and was engraved in his heart.

David's Stubborn Faith

Few things in life would be more terrifying than to become a prisoner of war. How especially frightening it would be if you were the soldier who had defeated your arch-enemy's military superhero named Goliath.

According to the superscription of Psalm 56, this Michtam was written by David "when the Philistines captured him in Gath." It records the intense battle between fear and faith that raged in David's heart. It teaches us the importance of using one's shield of faith to extinguish the fiery darts of fear. It teaches us the spiritual necessity of a stubborn faith.

David's stubborn faith beseeched God for His mercy while in extremely trying and difficult circumstances. "Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up; fighting all day he oppresses me. My enemies would hound me all day, for there are many who fight against me, O Most High" (vv. 1-2).

David's stubborn faith refused to surrender to fear. "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? (vv. 3-4).

David's stubborn faith weighed the ferocity of his enemies against the loving faithfulness of his God and deliberately chose to remain faithful to Jehovah. "All day they twist my words; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather together, they hide, they mark my steps when they lie in wait for my life. Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God! You number my wanderings, put my tears into Your bottle; are

they not in Your book? When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me. In God (I will praise His word), in the LORD (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (vv. 5-11).

David's stubborn faith recalled the solemn commitment he had made to God and determined to keep his word. "Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises to You, for You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not kept my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" (vv. 12-13).

Being faithful unto death does not happen by accident; it only occurs when you deliberately, intentionally, and purposefully exercise a stubborn faith. Anything less and fear wins the battle.

David's Steadfast Heart

David had no contingency plan for his life; he had no "Plan B." He determined to trust God when he was a young man and no subsequent circumstance was going to divert him from that course of action. Even when he was a fugitive with a royal APB out for him. Even when he was desperately trying to stay a step ahead of King Saul and his bounty hunters. Even when he was hiding in a cave to avoid Saul's capture and certain execution. David's faith remained resolute.

From the depths of that cave, David wrote Psalm 57. This instructional composition is saturated with trust. David is not double-minded. He does not jettison his faith in God under adverse circumstances. He doubles down on his God, not his fears. "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge until these calamities have passed by. I will cry out to God Most High, to God who performs all things for me. He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. God shall send forth His mercy and His truth" (vv. 1-3).

He is in real danger; his foes are real, not imagined. His foes are fierce and determined. “My soul is among lions; I lie among the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be above all the earth. They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down; they have dug a pit before me; into the midst of it they themselves have fallen” (vv. 4-6).

The reason for such a tenacious faith is plainly stated in verses 7-10. David’s heart is steadfast; fixed upon Jehovah. In the storm of persecution, David’s heart remains erect, immovable. “My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise. Awake, my glory! Awake, lute and harp! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations. For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens and Your truth unto the clouds.”

David’s trustworthy God merits such steadfast loyalty. “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be above all the earth” (v. 11).

He still does.

The Nature of God and Daily Living

“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the rooftops” (Luke 12:2-3). The omniscience, sovereignty, and righteousness of God ought to be the source of tremendous fear to the unrighteous and of great comfort to the righteous. Jehovah knows all, rules over all, and justly recompenses all. David’s faith in these three essential facts is reflected in the words of Psalm 58.

Because of Jehovah’s omniscience, David knew that the truth about the wicked was not being successfully camouflaged by their righteous pretensions. “Do you indeed speak righteousness,

you silent ones? Do you judge uprightly, you sons of men? No, in heart you work wickedness; you weigh out the violence of your hands in the earth. The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf cobra that stops its ear, which will not heed the voice of charmers, charming ever so skillfully” (vv. 1-5).

Because of Jehovah’s sovereignty, David knew that the wicked face divine opposition and just retribution. “Break their teeth in their mouth, O God! Break out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD! Let them flow away as waters which run continually; when he bends his bow, let his arrows be as if cut in pieces. Let them be like a snail which melts away as it goes, like a stillborn child of a woman, that they may not see the sun. Before your pots can feel the burning thorns, He shall take them away as with a whirlwind, as in His living and burning wrath” (vv. 6-9).

Because of Jehovah’s righteousness, David knew God would vindicate the righteous. “The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked, so that men will say, ‘Surely there is a reward for the righteous; Surely, He is God who judges in the earth’” (vv. 10-11).

The immutable nature of God is not a theory to be held intellectually; it is a truth that ought to impact your daily life in profound and practical ways. “My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” (Luke 12:4-5).

Joy in the Midst of Persecution

God hides some of His sweetest blessings in the most unusual places. Psalm 59 illustrates this truth most eloquently.

This instructive composition begins with David’s request for divine deliverance. “Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;

defend me from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity and save me from bloodthirsty men. For look, they lie in wait for my life; the mighty gather against me, not for my transgression nor for my sin, O LORD. They run and prepare themselves through no fault of mine” (vv. 1-4).

The psalm ends with David’s rejoicing because of divine defense. “But I will sing of Your power; yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning; for You have been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble. To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises; for God is my defense, my God of mercy” (vv. 16-17).

Joy while being persecuted for righteousness’ sake is a most unexpected blessing. David experienced it while being hunted by King Saul’s men. Paul and Silas experienced it when imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16). Jesus experienced it while enduring the hostility of sinners against Himself (Hebrews 12:2-3).

God’s ways are not our ways.

My Defense and Refuge

Peace in the midst of the chaotic storm of persecution is not a wild, superstitious theory. Countless Bible characters have demonstrated that it is possible. David is one of them.

Even though bloodthirsty men (v. 2) lie in wait for this life (v. 3), and the mighty gather against him (v. 3) growling like dogs (vv. 6, 14), Psalm 59 clearly demonstrates that David has peace. Because “God is my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble,” David sang praises to his Strength’s power (vv. 16-17). “My God of mercy shall come to meet me” (v. 10) repelled the fear that Satan sought to lethally inject into his heart.

“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:6) is not a wild unproven spiritual speculation, it is an impregnable defense for the righteous in the midst of persecution.

What is your defense and refuge in the storms of life?

The Proper Function of Hope

In the Christian's armor, hope is the helmet (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Its purpose, therefore, is to protect your mind. Whether or not your helmet is on your head is determined by you. A helmet does not automatically or magically crown a soldier's head; it must be intentionally and purposefully placed there. For hope to function in your life as God intends for it to, you must intentionally and purposefully incorporate hope into your thinking and outlook on life.

In Scripture, hope is not wishful thinking. It does not embrace the utopic foolishness of universal social justice on this earth; it looks at life realistically. Its enduring optimism about the future, which will anchor your soul during the tsunamis of life, springs from God's promises and His immutable character, not personal presumption.

In Psalms 60, 61, and 62, David demonstrates the value and blessing of a lively hope in the midst of life's trials. When facing defeat (Psalm 60:1), when feeling overwhelmed (Psalm 61:2), when under attack by evildoers (Psalm 62:3), David's helmet of hope protected him from stinking thinking. By girding up the loins of his mind and resting his hope fully upon God's grace, he triumphantly persevered through the darkest hours of his life.

This spiritual helmet still does the same thing today (1 Peter 1:13).

A Living Hope

Just as there was evening and morning in the days of creation, there are periods in one's life where there is joyous sunshine followed by difficult darkness. Psalm 60 was written during some of David's dark days. "O God, You have cast us off; You have broken us down; You have been displeased; oh, restore us again! You have made the earth tremble; You have broken it; heal its

breaches, for it is shaking. You have shown Your people hard things; You have made us drink the wine of confusion. You have given a banner to those who fear You that it may be displayed because of the truth” (vv. 1-4).

According to the superscription, David intended for this psalm to be a Michtam—a composition of instruction. He was not simply baring his soul to God because of the pain he felt, he was also seeking to instruct those who read it. There is much to learn from this psalm about how a proper functioning—i.e. a living—hope operates in your life, especially during days of difficulty, darkness, and defeat.

Consider the following features found in this psalm about a living hope:

A living hope does not deny reality. Hope is not some stick-your-head-in-the-sand, pretend that nothing is wrong, keep a stiff upper lip form of Stoicism. David was hurting. He was discouraged. God had cast him and his army off (v. 1); they had seen hard things and had drunk the wine of confusion (v. 3). Morale was low; discouragement was high. Hope does not paint rose-colored lipstick on a pig.

A living hope repels doubt in God’s ability to deliver, to save with His right hand; it tenaciously trusts God’s ability to hear and answer prayer. “That Your beloved may be delivered, save with Your right hand, and hear me” (v. 5).

A living hope insists upon an enduring faith in God’s Word, especially His promises. “God has spoken in His holiness...” (v. 6). David had to choose between walking by sight and putting his confidence in his circumstances or walking by faith and putting his confidence in God’s Word. No one can walk by sight and by faith at the same time. He can wallow in self-pity and despair or tighten up his helmet of hope and persevere.

A living hope does not allow one’s circumstances to eclipse his faith in God. “Who will bring me to the strong city? Who will lead me to Edom? Is it not You, O God, who cast us off? And You, O God, who did not go out with our armies? Give us

help from trouble for the help of man is useless. Through God we will do valiantly, for it is He who shall tread down our enemies” (vv. 9-12).

Biblical hope is not a spiritual good luck charm that you tuck in the front of your Bible; it is a living—or lively—thing that is actively, deliberately, purposefully, vigorously used to protect your mind when Satan’s ambushes descend and his landmines erupt. Psalm 60 teaches how a living hope functions when the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age and the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places invade your life and seek to destroy your faith.

The Anchor of Hope

Feeling overwhelmed? King David had those days too (Psalm 61:2). In those dark hours, his hope anchored his soul through the perilous storm threatening to shipwreck his faith.

Psalm 61 begins with David’s petition. “Hear my cry, O God; attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (vv. 1-2).

David’s reflection upon God’s past actions (v. 3) buoyed his hope—his confident expectation of God’s future faithfulness and care (v. 4). “For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings” (vv. 3-4).

God’s past deliverances (v. 5) strengthened David’s confidence, fueling greater optimism about the future (vv. 6-7). “For You, O God, have heard my vows; You have given me the heritage of those who fear Your name. You will prolong the king’s life, his years as many generations. He shall abide before God forever. Oh, prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him!” (vv. 5-7).

David's hope renewed his determination to faithfully serve God. "So, I will sing praise to Your name forever, that I may daily perform my vows" (v. 8).

Tired of getting blown about and overwhelmed by life's difficulties? It is not necessary. Like David, you can have a hope that is an anchor to your soul, sure and steadfast (Hebrews 6:19). When this anchor is in use, your spirit is buoyed, your confidence is fueled, and your determination is renewed.

What Hope Provides

A hopeless end or an endless hope. That is the fundamental difference between the ungodly and the godly.

In Psalm 62, David describes three wonderful provisions of his hope. These are:

Peace in the midst of attack. "Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved. How long will you attack a man? You shall be slain, all of you, like a leaning wall and a tottering fence. They only consult to cast him down from his high position; they delight in lies; they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly" (vv. 1-4).

Shelter in the midst of storm. "My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength and my refuge, is in God. Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (vv. 5-8).

Discernment in the midst of chaos. "Surely men of low degree are a vapor, men of high degree are a lie; if they are weighed on the scales, they are altogether lighter than vapor. Do not trust in oppression, nor vainly hope in robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them. God has spoken once, twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God. Also to You, O Lord, be-

longs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work” (vv. 9-12).

What a blessing “the God of hope” (Romans 15:13) has given His people who can live “rejoicing in hope” (Romans 12:12).

Draw Near to God

Psalm 63 could easily be titled “The Philippians of the Old Testament.” Though under house arrest, having spent over two years in the custody of the Roman government and (more recently) survived a harrowing trip from Palestine to Rome, Paul writes to the Philippians a joyous epistle. Psalm 63 was written in the wilderness of Judah after King David (v. 11) had just survived a coup attempt (v. 9).

Like Paul, David is not wallowing in self-pity. Instead, David is joyously anticipating a return to Jerusalem and normalcy in which he can passionately pursue his relationship with God. “O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So, I have looked for You in the sanctuary to see Your power and Your glory” (vv. 1-2).

In the remainder of the psalm, David explains the sublime reasons he desires to draw ever nearer to God. He states three:

The blessedness of divine lovingkindness. “Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus, I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips” (vv. 3-5).

The joy of divine fellowship. “When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me” (vv. 6-8).

The safety of divine protection. “But those who seek my life, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall

fall by the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; everyone who swears by Him shall glory; but the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped” (vv. 9-11).

What rich fellowship is enjoyed when God draws near to you!

Beloved, “draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).

David’s Relationship with God

A distinct difference between the one true and living God and all His false imitators is the fact that it is possible to enter into and maintain a relationship with Him. Abraham was a friend of God (2 Chronicles 20:7). Moses spoke with God face to face (Exodus 33:11). David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). Jesus was One who was heard, seen, looked upon, and handled by the apostle John and others (1 John 1:1). Knowing God—i.e. establishing and cultivating a relationship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ—is imperative to eternal life (John 17:3).

In Psalm 63:1-2, David writes: “O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So, I have looked for You in the sanctuary to see Your power and Your glory.” These words give great insight into how David cultivated his intimate relationship with his Maker. David’s relationship with God had the following characteristics:

Personal. “O God, You are my God.” Jehovah was not an indistinct theory, idea, or philosophy that David had locked intellectually on to. He was not simply a cosmic Overseer. He was David’s Sovereign, a Person who David knew personally.

Prioritized. “Early will I seek You.” Just as every life has its priorities, every day has its priorities. Each day, David prioritized Jehovah over his domestic, personal, and kingdom responsibili-

ties. What we seek first matters. A vibrant, intimate relationship with God is the result of daily prioritization, not happenstance.

Persistent. “My soul thirsts for You.” The body’s need for water is persistent. It is an ongoing, continuous need for a healthy life upon this earth. Drinking enough fluids yesterday does not eliminate the need to do the same thing today, tomorrow, next week, or next month. Drawing near to God today is a persistent spiritual need.

Passionate. “My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.” David’s pursuit of Jehovah and His fellowship was not casual or ho-hum. It was intense; it was pursued with a life-or-death passion—like a man dying of thirst seeking an oasis in a desert.

Purposeful. “So, I have looked for You in the sanctuary to see Your power and Your glory.” David searched for God where God could be found. If you want to draw near to God, you need to go where God is—His word and your prayer closet.

David’s personal, prioritized, persistent, passionate, and purposeful relationship with God was abundantly blessed. “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips” (Psalm 63:5).

The Great Exception

One of the most powerful word combinations in human history has only three letters in each word in the English language—**But God**. Psalm 64 encapsulates the profound impact these two simple words have on human existence.

David’s psalm begins with his earnest request for divine deliverance. “Hear my voice, O God, in my meditation; preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the rebellion of the workers of iniquity” (vv. 1-2).

To demonstrate the seriousness of the peril he was in, David describes these vicious foes as those “who sharpen their tongue like a sword and bend their bows to shoot their arrows—bitter

words that they may shoot in secret at the blameless; suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear. They encourage themselves in an evil matter; they talk of laying snares secretly; they say, ‘Who will see them?’ They devise iniquities: ‘We have perfected a shrewd scheme.’ Both the inward thought and the heart of man are deep” (vv. 3-6). How bleak and desperate things appear.

But God turns the entire situation on its head.

“But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly they shall be wounded. So, He will make them stumble over their own tongue; all who see them shall flee away. All men shall fear and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider His doing” (vv. 7-9).

The lesson to be learned and implanted into our lives is clear: “The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and trust in Him. And, all the upright in heart shall glory” (v. 10).

The Great “I AM” is the Great Exception.

“The Great Exception in Psalms”

The Great I AM is the Great Exception. He is the ultimate Game Changer. As David so beautifully describes in Psalm 64, his enemies “bend their bows to shoot their arrows—bitter words that they may shoot in secret at the blameless” (vv. 3-4), “**But God** shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly they shall be wounded. So, He will make them stumble over their own tongue” (vv. 7-8).

In other passages in Psalms, David describes other ways that the Great Exception impacts human existence.

In death the Great I AM is the Great Exception. “My flesh and my heart fail; **but God** is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:26). “**But God** will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me” (Psalm 49:15).

In judgment the Great I AM is the Great Exception. “Our God is the God of salvation; and to GOD the Lord belong escapes

from death. **But God** will wound the head of His enemies, the hairy scalp of the one who still goes on in his trespasses” (Psalm 68:20-21). “**But God** is the Judge: He puts down one and exalts another” (Psalm 75:7).

The reason why the Great I AM is the Great Exception is beautifully explained in Psalm 115:3—“**But our God** is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3). Unlike an idol, Jehovah is not the figment of anyone’s imagination (Psalm 115:4). He is the help and shield of those who trust in Him (Psalm 115:9-11).

He is either for you because you trust in Him or against you because of your lack of faith.

The Great Exception’s Track Record

The Great I AM is the Great Exception. Not only was Jehovah the difference maker in David’s life (cf. Psalm 64:3-4, 7), the Scriptures declare that He was a game changer in the lives of:

Abraham. Childless, with no inheritance in the land in which he lived, this man became the father of a multitude for one simple reason: “**But God** spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. ‘And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place” (Acts 7:6-7), and it happened.

Joseph. Envied by his brothers and sold into Egypt as a slave, this man had no realistic way of seeing the fulfillment of the dreams that he had had in his youth (Genesis 37:5-11). “**But God** was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house” (Acts 7:9-10).

Jesus. Innocent before Pilate, delivered to be crucified, He died and was buried in a borrowed tomb. “**But God** raised Him from the dead” (Acts 13:30).

Epaphroditus. This brother in Christ, a fellow worker and fellow soldier of the apostle Paul “was sick almost unto death; **but God** had mercy on him” (Philippians 2:27).

These four examples are but the tip of the proverbial iceberg. What an impressive, enduring track record the Great I AM has!

“The Hero of Human History”

Over twenty times in the New Testament is the dynamic phrase “**but God**” used. Consider how this Great Exception has impacted human history.

By revelation. The wisdom of God is indiscernible by human effort—eye has not seen; ear has not heard; no human can imagine or discover God’s eternal purpose for human salvation, the things that He has prepared for those who love Him. “**But God** has revealed them to us through His Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:10).

By redemption. Few is the number of times someone has been willing to die for a righteous man; perhaps for a good man someone would dare to die. “**But God** demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

By regeneration. Sin kills. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. The prince of the power of the air has conquered and utterly damaged us. “**But God**, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

By spiritual victory. Every person is tempted. However, there is no temptation that you face that is unique in human history. Satan has been wildly successful in this business of temptation and sin since the dawn of time. “**But God** is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with

the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Revelation. Redemption. Regeneration. Spiritual Victory.

The Great I AM is the Great Exception.

Truly, He is the hero of human history.

God’s Worthship

The English word “worship” was originally spelled “worthship.” This etymological fact clearly exposes the fundamental purpose of worship—to acknowledge the worthiness of God in reverent joy and grateful praise. Several psalms were written to acknowledge Jehovah’s utter praiseworthiness. Psalm 65 is one of them.

The psalm begins with a recognition of the solemn responsibility of praise and worship due God. “Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion; and to You the vow shall be performed” (v. 1). This flows into a consideration of two primary reasons for God’s worthship—His goodness as manifested in the spiritual blessings He bestows (vv. 1-8) and His goodness as seen in the physical blessings He graces our lives with (vv. 9-13). In each section of the psalm, specific blessings are identified.

When enumerating the spiritual blessings that God’s goodness bestows, David writes of:

Jehovah’s listening ear. “O You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come” (v. 2).

Jehovah’s gracious provision of atonement. “Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them” (v. 3).

Jehovah’s enriching fellowship. “Blessed is the man You choose and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple” (v. 4).

Jehovah’s great power. “By awesome deeds in righteousness You will answer us, O God of our salvation, You who are the

confidence of all the ends of the earth and of the far-off seas; who established the mountains by His strength, being clothed with power; You who still the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples. They also who dwell in the farthest parts are afraid of Your signs; You make the outgoings of the morning and evening rejoice” (vv. 5-8).

When enumerating the physical blessings that God’s goodness bestows, David writes of:

God’s provision of a fertile earth. “You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, for so You have prepared it. You water its ridges abundantly, You settle its furrows; You make it soft with showers, You bless its growth” (vv. 9-10).

God’s generous blessing of an abundant harvest. “You crown the year with Your goodness, and Your paths drip with abundance. They drop on the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered with grain; they shout for joy, they also sing” (vv. 11-13).

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!

Three Reasons for Jehovah’s Praiseworthiness

As expected of any hymnal, the book of Psalms has many compositions of praise. Psalm 66 definitely fits the mold. It bursts forth with this vigorous pronouncement: “Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious. Say to God, ‘How awesome are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power Your enemies shall submit themselves to You. All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You; they shall sing praises to Your name’” (vv. 1-4).

Detailed in the remainder of the psalm are three reasons for the utter praiseworthiness of Jehovah. His sovereignty makes Him utterly praiseworthy (vv. 5-7). His providence makes Him utterly

praiseworthy (vv. 8-15). His merciful answer to prayer makes Him utterly praiseworthy (vv. 16-19). They still do.

How accurate is the conclusion: “Blessed be God Who has not turned away my prayer nor His mercy from me!” (v. 20).

Thanksgiving for the Past and the Present

Psalm 66 throbs with praise and thanksgiving like voltage from a huge electric generator. From its initial burst of “Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!” (v. 1) to its conclusion of “Blessed be God Who has not turned away my prayer nor His mercy from me!” (v. 20), this psalm pulsates with praise.

In verses 5 and 6, the writer reflects upon the past and the joyous gratitude God thus deserves. Here it is written, “Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men. He turned the sea into dry land; they went through the river on foot. There we will rejoice in Him.”

In verses 7 through 9, the psalmist ponders upon the ever-present sovereignty and omniscience of the Almighty and the joyous gratitude God thus deserves. Here it is written, “He rules by His power forever; His eyes observe the nations; do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard, Who keeps our soul among the living and does not allow our feet to be moved.”

In the lives of God’s children, thanksgiving is to be an ongoing current. “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18) is God’s explicit expectation. God’s past actions of deliverance and His present sovereignty and omniscience provide an endless source for the flow of thanksgiving from our hearts and lips.

Thanksgiving ought not flow like a feeble current from our hearts and lips; it ought to pour forth like a mighty river at flood level.

The Praiseworthy Providence of God

God's providence is usually thought of in terms of His general providence in which "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45); thus, He gives "fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). In Psalm 66, the composer considers God's providence—how He "keeps our soul among the living and does not allow our feet to be moved" (v. 9)—in a different, and often overlooked, context. He writes: "For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but You brought us out to rich fulfillment" (vv. 10-12).

"Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And, make the voice of His praise to be heard" (v. 8) is just as appropriate in times of difficulty and testing as it is in times of prosperity and blessing.

God is good, all the time; therefore, His providence is praiseworthy every day, even days of testing and trial.

Prayer and God's Praise

Few of God's blessings are more praiseworthy than the blessing of prayer. Even though he lived under the old covenant without all the blessings found in Jesus being his mediator, the composer of Psalm 66 still experienced rich blessings in answer to his prayers. He writes of this in verses 16 to 19: "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul. I cried to Him with my mouth, and He was extolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. But certainly, God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer."

The clear Biblical teaching that God so loves and cares for His people that He is ever attentive to their prayers is distinctive. The

clear Biblical teaching that fallen humans can address the Holy One and He will mercifully attend to their prayer is incredible. The clear Biblical teaching that God answers prayer with mercy and kindness makes the great I AM most deserving of exuberant praise.

“Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer nor His mercy from me!” (v. 20) ought to be the joyous praise that reverberates throughout our lifetimes.

A Noteworthy Reason for God’s Praise

The request of Psalm 67:1 is a familiar one—“God be merciful to us and bless us and cause His face to shine upon us.”

The stated rationale for this request is worthy of closer consideration. Instead of seeking God’s mercy, grace, and salvation simply for personal reasons, the composer sought these wonderful blessings so “that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously and govern the nations on earth” (vv. 2-4).

God’s goodness needs to be known around the globe, so that He receives the proper praise, adoration, and reverence He so deserves. “Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him” (vv. 5-7).

Seeking God’s grace and favor for the rich personal benefits you receive is not sinful. Failing to be profuse in your praise and thanksgiving for them (so that others know of them) is.

Rejoice in the Lord Always

This command of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:4 easily serves as the vibrant theme of Psalm 68. David’s joyous confi-

dence in God's victory over his enemies begins this exuberant song: "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let those also who hate Him flee before Him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God" (vv. 1-2). How easily Jehovah vanquishes the chaff of the wicked, "but let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God; yes, let them rejoice exceedingly" (v. 3).

David's joyful anthem crescendos into "Sing to God, sing praises to His name; extol Him who rides on the clouds, by His name YAH and rejoice before Him. A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity, but the rebellious dwell in a dry land" (vv. 4-6).

The remainder of the psalm describes Jehovah's praiseworthiness:

His past is praiseworthy (vv. 7-18). He delivered His people (vv. 7-10), provided the conquest of Canaan (vv. 11-14), and selected Zion in Jerusalem to be His dwelling place (vv. 15-18).

His present is praiseworthy (vv. 19-23). He daily loads His children with blessings (v. 19) and protects His people from the murderous designs of His enemies (vv. 20-23).

His universal sovereignty is praiseworthy (vv. 24-35). Israel (vv. 24-30), Egypt and Ethiopia (v. 31), and all the kingdoms of the earth (vv. 32-33) ought to ascribe strength to God, the God of Israel who gives strength and power to His people (vv. 34-35).

"Blessed be God!" Therefore, "rejoice in the Lord always!"

From Despair to Hope

As is true with several of the psalms, Psalm 69 begins with despair and desperation and ends with hope and praise. "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters where the floods overflow me. I am weary with my crying; my

throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God. Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully; though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it” (vv. 1-4). Then he concludes with “let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them. For God will save Zion and build the cities of Judah that they may dwell there and possess it. Also, the descendants of His servants shall inherit it and those who love His name shall dwell in it” (vv. 34-36).

David’s experience of suffering and woe are akin to the Messiah’s. He is hated without cause (v. 4), alienated from his earthly family because of his zeal for God’s house (vv. 8-9), reproached (v. 9), and given gall and vinegar for a diet (v. 21).

Like Paul (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10), David is sure that God’s righteous judgment will repay with tribulation those who trouble him. Their table will become a snare before them; their well-being will be a trap (v. 22). Their eyes will be darkened so they cannot see; their loins will shake continually (v. 23). Jehovah’s indignation will be poured out on them; His wrathful anger will take hold of them (v. 24). Their dwelling place will be desolate; no one will live in their tents (v. 25). They will be blotted out of the book of the living; their names will not be found in the book of life with the righteous (v. 28). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Though poor and sorrowful, David is confident that better days are ahead (v. 29). Therefore, he decides: “I will praise the name of God with a song and will magnify Him with thanksgiving...For the LORD hears the poor and does not despise His prisoners” (vv. 30, 33).

The certainty of God’s just punishment of the wicked and His merciful blessing of the righteous transforms despair into hope. It did in David’s day.

It still does today.

Real Zeal

According to John’s gospel, Jesus made an unmistakable first appearance in Jerusalem during the initial Passover of His ministry. Because “He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business,” He made a whip of cords and “drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, ‘Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!’” (John 2:14-16).

Because of His intense, passionate, and jealous love for His heavenly Father, it was predicted of the Christ: “I have become a stranger to my brothers and an alien to my mother’s children; because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me” (Psalm 69:8-9). Like David, Jesus received reproaches and persecution from His enemies and His earthly family because of His intense zeal for God.

Like their Lord, Christians are to be “fervent in spirit” (Romans 12:11); therefore, “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). You cannot fake real zeal.

Reproach for Righteousness

The suffering and agony of Christ while suspended between heaven and earth at Calvary is unfathomable. It simply is beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend.

The focus of the gospel writers was primarily historical in nature—what occurred, when it happened, who was there, where it transpired. The crucifixion of the Son of God is clearly a well-documented fact of human history.

Because Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3), the prophets testified beforehand of His sufferings (1 Peter 1:11). Therefore, there are occasional bursts in the

psalms and prophets which clearly record and faintly unveil the emotional pain and affliction experienced within the heart and soul of Immanuel, “God with us.” Psalm 69:19-21 is one such burst; here it is written: “You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; my adversaries are all before You. Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”

In the heart and soul of every human there is a distinct fear of rejection and utter loneliness. It is profuse and powerful. The fear of public humiliation and shame is equally potent. The emotional spear of open reproach and reviling pierces to the deepest parts of the soul.

Esteeming our salvation greater than the reproaches He received, Jesus “Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). He endured reproach for being righteous so that you and I could live for righteousness.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33).

God’s Timing

David was in desperate need of immediate help! God had chosen to wait until the last possible moment before He delivered David. And, it was now the very last possible moment.

Based upon the similarities between Psalm 70 and Psalm 40:13-17, it appears that this was not the only time in David’s life that he felt himself to be in such desperate circumstances. Clearly now was the time to cry out: “Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O LORD! Let them be ashamed and confounded who seek my life; let them be turned back and confused who desire my hurt. Let them be turned back because of their shame, who say, ‘Aha, aha!’ Let all those who seek You rejoice

and be glad in You; and let those who love Your salvation say continually, ‘Let God be magnified!’ But I am poor and needy; make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay” (Psalm 70).

How often the battle between fear and faith can rage! How extreme and fierce the battle can become! David’s faith in God’s ability and desire to deliver was great. David’s fear that God’s deliverance would not arrive in time was also great.

The superscription of Psalm 70 indicates that David wrote this composition to the Chief Musician as a spiritual post-it note to remind him and us—“to bring to remembrance”—the lesson that he learned on the day in which his faith and his fears engaged in intense hand-to-hand combat: God’s never late.

A “Sunset” Psalm

The author of Psalm 71 was “old and gray headed” (v. 18). Even though storm clouds were on the western horizon, this psalm of his sunset years is full of beautiful hope.

The author declares that his “enemies speak against me; and those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together, saying, ‘God has forsaken him; pursue and take him, for there is none to deliver him’” (vv. 10-11). Because of this, he writes of his continued determination to trust in Jehovah and His deliverance. “In You, O LORD, I put my trust; let me never be put to shame. Deliver me in Your righteousness and cause me to escape; incline Your ear to me and save me. Be my strong refuge to which I may resort continually; You have given the commandment to save me, for You are my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For You are my hope, O Lord GOD; You are my trust from my youth. By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother’s womb. My praise shall be continually of You. I have become as a wonder to many, but You

are my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with Your praise and with Your glory all the day” (vv. 1-8).

His petitions are few, and his confidence is firm. “O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me! Let them be confounded and consumed who are adversaries of my life; let them be covered with reproach and dishonor who seek my hurt. But I will hope continually and will praise You yet more and more. My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day, for I do not know their limits. I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only...Also Your righteousness, O God, is very high, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again and bring me up again from the depths of the earth. You shall increase my greatness and comfort me on every side. Also with the lute I will praise You—and Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I will sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You and my soul, which You have redeemed. My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long; for they are confounded, for they are brought to shame who seek my hurt” (vv. 12-16, 19-24).

Faith in God does not eliminate the rain, flood, and winds of life; rather, it does provide an anchor for the soul that is “both sure and steadfast” (Hebrews 6:19), even in the sunset years of life.

The Ideal King

Every endeavor has its gold standard—coaches, presidents, teachers, athletes, soldiers, doctors. Each profession has someone who is considered the best of the best, the elite, the G.O.A.T. (Greatest of all time).

Psalm 72 describes the ideal king. Regardless of whether the psalm was written by David for Solomon (see the King James’ superscription) or by Solomon for himself and his successors to

the throne (see the New King James' superscription), this composition sets the gold standard for royalty. The ideal king has the following characteristics:

A firm, unshakable love for righteousness which promotes righteousness. "Give the king Your judgments, O God and Your righteousness to the king's Son. He will judge Your people with righteousness and Your poor with justice. The mountains will bring peace to the people and the little hills, by righteousness. He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy and will break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear You as long as the sun and moon endure throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, like showers that water the earth. In His days the righteous shall flourish and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more" (vv. 1-7).

A universal reign which promotes quiet and peaceable living. "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him" (vv. 8-11).

A benevolent compassion which delivers the needy from oppression. "For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy and will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in His sight" (vv. 12-14).

An enduring reign which produces praise, peace and prosperity. "And He shall live; and the gold of Sheba will be given to Him; prayer also will be made for Him continually, and daily He shall be praised. There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun.

And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed” (vv. 15-17).

In each testament, such an ideal king can be found. In the Old Testament, Jehovah Himself was such a king over Israel. As long as God’s people sanctified and served Him as they ought, righteousness, peace, deliverance, and prosperity abounded. In the New Testament, the Son of God Himself is such a king over His spiritual kingdom.

“Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And, blessed be His glorious name forever! And, let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen” (vv. 18-19).

Two Lessons Asaph Learned about Envy

Envy is a vicious and dangerous spiritual disease. Wise is the person who heeds the Scriptures’ plain counsel: “Do not let your heart envy sinners...Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them...Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the wicked” (Proverbs 23:17; 24:1, 19). The judgment of God is upon this work of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) which is rottenness to the bones (Proverbs 14:30).

As described in Psalm 73, Asaph almost slipped into the abyss of envy (vv. 2-14). It was not until he went into the sanctuary of God and understood the end of the wicked (v. 17) that he purged his heart of his envy of the wicked. “Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image” (Psalm 73:18-20).

In the final portion of Psalm 73, Asaph declares two lessons that he learned from his conflict with the green-eyed monster named envy. They are:

Envy is foolish, because God is pre-eminently superior to mammon. “Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my

mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless, I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You. And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (vv. 21-26).

Envy is a choice, a terribly wrong choice, to make. “For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD that I may declare all Your works” (vv. 27-28).

The Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). This only occurs when we incorporate its divine counsel into our minds and lives.

Have you?

Wrestling with “Why?”

Psalms 74 and 75 have been placed consecutively in the Hebrew song book because the haunting questions of the former are answered in the latter. In Psalm 74, Asaph is vigorously wrestling with the question of “Why?”—“O God, why have You cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture...Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?” (vv. 1, 11). “O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?” (v. 10) hauntingly reverberates in his head, and there is no immediate answer, because “there is no longer any prophet; nor is there any among us who knows how long” (v. 9).

There is an answer; there always is. When God chooses—at the proper time—He will judge uprightly (Psalm 75:2).

The source of Asaph’s questions was not some minor spiritual hangnail; the enemy had damaged everything in the temple, God’s sanctuary (74:3). How profuse the devastation had been:

“Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place; they set up their banners for signs. They seem like men who lift up axes among the thick trees. And now they break down its carved work, all at once, with axes and hammers. They have set fire to Your sanctuary; they have defiled the dwelling place of Your name to the ground. They said in their hearts, ‘Let us destroy them altogether.’ They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land” (74:4-8).

When wrestling with “Why,” Asaph did the following noteworthy things:

He reflected upon God’s impressive past, of His “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (74:12-17).

He drew near to God in prayer, requesting God to remember that the enemy had reproached, a foolish people had blasphemed His name (74:18-21). His petition was: “Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily. Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; the tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually” (74:22-23).

His patient waiting upon the Lord was rewarded; Psalm 75 begins with this joyous burst of gratitude—“We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near.” Divine retribution did come (75:2-3).

The truth that must always be remembered when wrestling with “Why?” is that God will cut off all the horns of the wicked, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted (75:10). Every time.

The Sure Testimony of the Lord

Though scoffers arise and cast aspersions towards God and His promise to reward the righteous and punish the wicked, God is not slack in keeping His word. When He chooses the proper time, He will judge uprightly; the earth and all its inhabitants will be powerless to resist (Psalm 75:2-3).

Because of this immutable fact, Psalm 75:4-8 offers the following counsel: “I said to the boastful, ‘Do not deal boastfully,’ and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up the horn. Do not lift up your horn on high; do not speak with a stiff neck.’ For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one and exalts another. For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down.”

The Lord is not slack concerning His promises. Because He is longsuffering toward all, not willing that any should perish, all the wicked need to repent while they can and all the righteous need to persevere.

God’s final word—His sure testimony—on the matter is “All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted” (Psalm 75:10).

Peaks and Valleys

A good writer writes about what he knows. In light of this maxim, the content of Psalm 74 suggests that Asaph lived through some very dark and difficult days of defeat—days haunted by the questions of “Why?” (vv. 1, 11) and “How long?” (v. 10). Psalm 76 indicates that Asaph experienced the pinnacle of divine deliverance and protection also. In this composition, Asaph declares God’s defense of His people (vv. 1-3), then describes God’s victory over the enemy (vv. 4-9), and, finally, exhorts all to obey the Lord God (vv. 10-12).

Peaks and valleys are a fact of geography. They are also a fact of one’s spiritual pilgrimage. The just lives by faith, regardless of their current terrain.

The Wrath of Man

Even though the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:20), it has been repeatedly overruled by God and His providence to bring about His praise. Jehovah's government of this universe is so perfect that He is able to use evil to serve His purposes. Thus, Asaph writes, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you" (Psalm 76:10).

The Scriptures contain several vivid examples of the wrath of man bringing about God's praise. Consider:

- The hatred, envy, and wrath of Joseph's brothers, when mixed with the alchemy of Jehovah's sovereignty and providence, brought about the salvation of Jacob's entire family in Egypt (Genesis 50:19-20).
- The hatred, envy, and wrath of Haman, when mixed with the alchemy of Queen Esther's bravery and Jehovah's sovereignty and providence, turned sorrow to joy and mourning into a good day (Esther 9:22) as the Jews soundly defeated their enemies (Esther 9:5).
- The hatred, envy, and wrath of the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, when mixed with the alchemy of Jehovah's sovereignty and providence, brought about God's eternally purposed plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Clearly, the wrath of man is no match for the sovereignty and providence of God!

The Way of Escape from Despair

Despair is a spiritual abyss. It is a black hole of the soul. It is treacherous quicksand.

In Psalm 77, Asaph is overwhelmed by despair. He had cried out to God and He had given ear to him (v. 1); yet, Asaph despaired! "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; my hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing"; yet, "my soul refused

to be comforted” (v. 2). “I remembered God and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed...I am so troubled that I cannot speak” (vv. 3-4). Asaph’s despair was fueled by tenacious doubts and fears—“Will the Lord cast off forever? And, will He be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?” What a wretched state of despair!

As incredible as it may sound, Asaph rescued himself from this melancholic nightmare of trust issues! He took deliberate, purposeful, and determined action to escape the horrific clutches of despair. “And I said, ‘This is my anguish; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the LORD; surely, I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work and talk of Your deeds. Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; who is so great a God as our God? You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples. You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph” (vv. 10-15).

Asaph’s trip down memory lane was not for nostalgic purposes. It reminded him that even though his forefathers were afflicted, oppressed, forced to serve with rigor, afflicted with legalized infanticide, groaning under the weight of their onerous bonds of slavery, God provided a way of escape. “The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You, they were afraid; the depths also trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies sent out a sound; Your arrows also flashed about. The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; the lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was in the sea; Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (vv. 16-20).

Could anyone’s future look more bleak and foreboding, more desperate and depressing, more hopeless than the children of Israel when enslaved to the Egyptians? Yet, God delivered them.

He still leads His people like a flock.

By the hand of the Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

The Value of Biblical History

“Those who fail to study history are destined to repeat it” is a maxim that has been around for many years. It is true.

In both testaments, God repeatedly used human penmen to review Israel’s history so to admonish the readers through the examples embedded therein. A psalm written for the purpose of making you wise unto salvation is called a Maschil.

Psalms 78 is such a contemplation of lessons to be learned from Israel’s history. Its composer, Asaph, writes: “Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel which He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God and not forget the works of God but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God. The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. They did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in His law and forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them” (vv. 1-11).

When reading and studying any Old Testament historical account, your study will be greatly enriched if you ask the text these five questions:

What do I learn about God?

What do I learn about Satan and sin?

What do I learn about human nature?

What do I learn about righteousness?

What wisdom can I glean from this text?

Meditating upon God's word with purposeful focus yields plenteous admonitions. If these admonitions are heeded, the history of spiritual defeat and failure will not be repeated in your life.

The Immense Need for Vigilance and Steadfastness in the Faith

Psalm 78 is the second longest psalm in the Hebrew songbook. Its summation of Israel's history as a nation clearly demonstrates the immense need for vigilance and steadfastness in the faith.

Israel's checkered history is one of divine deliverance being repaid by human sin and rebellion (vv. 12-19); Jehovah's provisions being despised through unbelief and more sin (vv. 20-32); apostasy following closely on the heels of repentance (vv. 33-37); and, spiritual amnesia being the chosen response to God's compassion and mercy (vv. 38-58).

How challenging it is for God's people to maintain the vigilance they need for spiritual victory! How easy it is to fall from the steadfastness that spiritual victory requires!

How immensely needed are the words of 1 Peter 5:8-9—"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith."

God's Purposeful Longsuffering

As recorded in Numbers and recounted by Asaph in Psalm 78, the forty-year period of Israel's wilderness wandering with Moses was not filled with many spiritual high points. "How often they provoked Him in the wilderness and grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God and limited the Holy

One of Israel. They did not remember His power: the day when He redeemed them from the enemy” (vv. 40-42). Israel’s survival in the wilderness can only be explained in one way—“But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again” (vv. 38-39).

Israel’s history of unfaithfulness repeated itself during the period of the judges. The sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob faced God’s fury and abhorrence when “they tested and provoked the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies, but turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers; they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked Him to anger with their high places and moved Him to jealousy with their carved images...He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh...delivered His strength into captivity and His glory into the enemy’s hand...gave His people over to the sword, and was furious with His inheritance...Fire consumed their young men, and their maidens were not given in marriage. Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentations” (vv. 56-64).

Yet, Jehovah remained faithful to His promises made to Abraham (Genesis 12:3, 22:18), Isaac (26:4), and Jacob (28:14). All nations of the earth would be blessed in them and their seed. Though Jehovah rejected the tent of Joseph and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim (Psalm 78:67), He did choose Judah (v. 68) and David (v. 70) for special purposes in His eternally purposed plan of redemption. It is, therefore, of great significance to read on the very first page of the New Testament that the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ records that He is the son of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David (Matthew 1:1-6).

Because of Jehovah’s immense desire that none perish, He was longsuffering with Israel and her many transgressions. He was not slack concerning the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David. Their seed—Jesus—came, and

the blessings of the gospel are available to all nations, to anyone who will live by obedient faith.

Behold Jehovah's eternal purpose!

Behold God's purposeful longsuffering!

Asaph's Tenacious Faith

Psalms 79 and 80 appear to be companion psalms. In Psalm 79, Asaph focuses upon a recent calamity in Jerusalem; in Psalm 80, he petitions God to restore His people. Psalm 79 concludes with a reference to God's people as "sheep of Your pasture"; Psalm 80 begins with "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock." Both psalms throb with the agony of the gnawing questions of "How long, LORD? Will You be angry forever? ... O LORD God of hosts, how long will You be angry against the prayer of Your people?" (79:5; 80:4).

Like most thoughtful people of faith, Asaph wrestled mightily with unexpected, unanticipated circumstances. Clearly, "O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance; Your holy temple they have defiled; they have laid Jerusalem in heaps. The dead bodies of Your servants they have given as food for the birds of the heavens, the flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth. Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them. We have become a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and derision to those who are around us" (79:1-4) was not on Asaph's radar.

Each psalm is dedicated to petitioning Jehovah. In Psalm 79, Asaph beseeches God to "pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You and on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name" (v. 6), to "not remember former iniquities against us" (v. 8), to "help us, O God of our salvation...and deliver us and provide atonement for our sins for your name's sake" (v. 9), to preserve the groaning prisoners who are appointed to die (v. 11), and to recompense "sevenfold into their bosom" those who have reproached Jehovah (v. 12).

Psalm 80's petitions are easily identified: "Restore us, O God; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved...Restore us, O God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved! ... Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts...Revive us, and we will call upon Your name. Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!" (vv. 3, 7, 14, 18, 19).

Sometimes life's unexpected, unanticipated circumstances require an extended amount of vigorous wrestling with stout questions like "How long?" and "Why?" Faith in God is not a magic wand that instantaneously turns "Why?" into "happily ever after."

To fight the good fight and finish the course, you must have a tenacious faith.

As a Hen Gathers Her Chicks Under Her Wings

Asaph's frequent battles with the question of "Why?" are easily documented. "O God, why have You cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?" (Psalm 74:1). "Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?" (Psalm 74:11). "How long, LORD? Will You be angry forever?" (Psalm 79:5). "Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit?" (Psalm 80:12).

It is encouraging to know that Psalm 81 is written in a different key. It begins with the following exhortation: "Sing aloud to God our strength; make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob. Raise a song..." This composition gives God's three-fold response to Asaph's questions and leaves its thoughtful reader with a new "Why?" to wrestle with.

First, Jehovah recounts Israel's deliverance from Egypt which He had accomplished. "I removed his shoulder from the burden; His hands were freed from the baskets. You called in trouble, and

I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah” (vv. 6-7).

Next, He reminded Asaph and all his fellow Israelites of the fundamental terms of their covenant. “Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me! There shall be no foreign god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god” (vv. 8-9).

Finally, Jehovah pinpoints the precise reason for their present calamity. “But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So, I gave them over to their own stubborn heart to walk in their own counsels” (vv. 11-12).

Israel’s history clearly proves that the Lord’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is His ear heavy that it cannot hear. It is Israel’s sins which have separated her from God.

The final words of the psalm are saturated with the heartbroken tears of God over His people’s present state. “Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I would soon subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their adversaries; the haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him, but their fate would endure forever. He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; and with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you” (vv. 13-16).

How often has God wanted to gather His children together and protect them from the calamity of their disobedience—as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings—but they were not willing!

WHY?

The Judge of All the Earth

God’s punishment of wickedness and wicked nations is never arbitrary or capricious.

In the immediate devastation of Jerusalem, Asaph was unable to discern why God’s anger had burned against the sheep of His pasture (Psalm 74:1). As Asaph continued wrestling with the

question of “Why,” he began to discern the substantial reasons for Jehovah’s wrath.

In Psalm 81, he notes that God’s people had violated their covenant of exclusivity. There was to be no foreign god among them; there was to be exclusive worship of Jehovah. But, such was not the case (vv. 9-11).

In Psalm 82, Asaph records a second reason for Israel’s devastation—injustice in the land. Judges were judging unjustly and showing partiality to the wicked (v. 2). Society’s most vulnerable citizens—the poor, fatherless, afflicted, and needy—were not being protected from the wicked (vv. 3-4) as prescribed in the holy and just law given by God to Moses.

Because “God stands in the congregation of the mighty,” He knows the corruption of the judges and punishes them accordingly (v. 1). Injustice in a nation makes its very foundations unstable (v. 5). This is not a slight or superficial thing; it is a wicked and deadly blight. Eventually, the only remedy for this insidious societal cancer is for the sovereign God to arise and judge it (v. 8).

In Asaph’s day, He did exactly that.

You are gods

When used in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word Elohim almost always refers to deity. It is plural in number; thus, it subtly and accurately represents the divine nature as having more than one person.

In Psalm 82, Elohim is used in three distinct ways. First, as per its customary usage, it identifies Jehovah: “God stands in the congregation of the mighty...Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations (vv. 1, 8). Next, it is used in reference to those mighty ones entrusted with divine authority to be judges upon the earth—God’s ministers/deacons (Romans 13:4): “He judges among the gods. How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?” (vv. 1-2). Based upon Jesus’ explanation in John 10, Elohim is also used to refer to human be-

ings “to whom the word of God came” (John 10:35): “I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men and fall like one of the princes’” (vv. 6-7).

When the Jews were seeking to stone Jesus for the blasphemy of affirming that He is, in fact, the Son of God (John 10:33, 36), our Lord’s response was to quote Psalm 82:6 in His defense. He “answered them, ‘Is it not written in your law, “I said, ‘You are gods’”? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?” (John 10:34-36).

Though it is not something we are comfortable or accustomed to do, it is Biblical to say that “You are gods” in the following senses:

By creation. Each of us is made in God’s image (or icon). If an omnipotent, omniscient being were to take all the traits and characteristics of the divine nature and put them into one earthly expression, it would result in the human race. (There is a multitude of implications to this truth; two of the most obvious are the absolute sanctity of human life and the horrific folly of pagan idolatry).

By revelation. Each of us has received all things that pertain to life and godliness (god-like-ness). According to Jesus, those to whom the word of God came were called “gods” by the One who gave them His word (John 10:35). In addition to Jehovah’s divine power creating us in His image, it has also “given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). Profound reverence for, diligent study of, and careful, thorough obedience to the word of God is most appropriate for those who are sons of God. Our citizenship is in heaven and we will one day experience the fulfillment of our hope—the metamorphosis of our lowly body into conformity with Christ’s glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21).

“You are gods” ought not puff up our egos; it ought to sober our mind and invigorate our zeal to purify ourselves (1 John 3:2-3) and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age.

Living by Faith

Psalm 83 is the last psalm of Asaph in the Hebrew songbook. Verse two seems to indicate that this composition was written right before the temple’s defilement and Jerusalem’s unexpected overthrow by her enemies as described in Psalm 79:1-4. This psalm and its setting may explain why Asaph wrestled so frequently and feverishly with the question of “Why?” (Psalm 74:1, 11; 77:7-9; 79:5; 80:4; 82:2).

Sometimes, like Asaph, we are confident that God will deliver us from evil and its unpleasant circumstances, and it does not happen. A loved one still dies. Chronic pain increases instead of subsiding. Corrupt and ungodly politicians get re-elected and are emboldened. Ruthless dictators win the power struggle. Societal and moral decay continues unabated.

Sometimes, we pray: “Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold Your peace and do not be still, O God!” (Psalm 83:1), but God is silent, He does hold His peace, and He is still.

Sometimes, our “enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head” (v. 2), and God permits them to succeed.

Sometimes, the foe has “taken crafty counsel against Your people and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, ‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.’ For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You” (vv. 3-5), and their plans have been achieved.

Sometimes, our prayer that God “Deal with them as with Midian, as with Sisera, as with Jabin at the Brook Kishon” (v. 9), is not answered as we envisioned that it should be.

Sometimes, our desire that God “make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind! As the fire burns the woods and as the flame sets the mountains on fire, so pursue them with Your tempest and frighten them with Your storm. Fill their faces with shame that they may seek Your name, O LORD. Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; yes, let them be put to shame and perish that they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD are the Most High over all the earth” (vv. 13-18) is not granted.

To Asaph’s everlasting credit, he appears to have persevered in his faith. Like his victorious struggle with envy (Psalm 73) in which he almost stumbled and fell (vv. 2-3), there is reason to believe that Asaph’s faith persevered when wrestling with the question of “Why?” (see Psalms 81 and 82).

If Asaph can continue to walk by faith when assaulted by difficult, unanswered questions, so can you and I. We must, because “the just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).

The Blessings of Faith

Although it appears as the concluding summary, the theme of Psalm 84 is “O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!” (v. 12). In the first eleven verses, one of the sons of Korah elaborates on three supreme blessings of faith. They are:

The blessing of Praise. “How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young—even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You” (vv. 1-4). No greater, higher, or nobler privilege exists than the opportunity of worship. Meditating upon the great I AM and His worthiness (i.e. His holiness, goodness, kindness, righteousness, mercy, justice, grace,

providence, wisdom...) elevates the mind to the loftiest possible heights.

The blessing of Prayer. “Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion. O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!” (vv. 5-8). No greater, higher, or nobler challenge exists than the epic pilgrimage of faith. Communing with the great I AM in prayer elevates one’s soul to the loftiest possible heights.

The blessing of Providence. “O God, behold our shield and look upon the face of Your anointed. For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (vv. 9-11). No greater, higher, or nobler blessing exists than the watchful care of God’s providence. Trusting the great I AM’s love and wisdom elevates one’s heart to the loftiest possible heights.

“O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!”

A Sun and Shield

A soldier is most vulnerable when he is unprotected and cannot see an approaching, armed enemy. In the great battlefield called life, those who live without God are like soldiers facing a ruthless, armed foe in darkness and without any form of protection. Is there any more certainty of death and defeat in the battle against the principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this age, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places?

How blessed is the man whose strength is in Jehovah, “for the LORD God is a sun and shield.” He is light to dispel the darkness. He is a shield to protect from danger. “The LORD will give grace

and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!” (Psalm 84:11-12).

The Pilgrim’s Companion

The walk of faith in God is a pilgrimage. For Abraham, the father of the faithful, his pilgrimage began the day he “obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8). It is said of he and Sarah that they “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

Psalm 84 pronounces a beatitude on anyone who decides to live the pilgrim life of faith. It is written, “Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage” (v. 5). In addition, this composition of one of Korah’s sons gives several descriptors of the Extraordinary Person in your company when walking by faith. These are:

The LORD of hosts (vv. 1, 3, 8, 12). The word “hosts” denotes an innumerable army of angelic soldiers. “The LORD God is a sun and shield” to those who walk uprightly with Him (v. 11), because of His immense power. If just two angels could protect Lot and his household from a mob of Sodomites who wanted to do violence to them (Genesis 19:9-11), imagine what an innumerable army of angels could do in protecting a pilgrim.

The God of Jacob (v. 8). This phrase speaks of Jehovah’s faithfulness to His word and His people. God’s promise to Abraham (Genesis 22:18) was repeated to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) which was repeated to Jacob (Genesis 28:14). God gave His word to Jacob, “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you” (Genesis 28:15); God kept His word. The thunderous echo throughout Scripture is:

God is faithful; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Pilgrims believe this truth and act accordingly.

The living God (v. 2). Unlike the gods of the heathen who have mouths but cannot speak, eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear, noses but cannot smell, hands but cannot touch, feet but cannot walk, our God is in heaven and He does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:2-7). He cannot be put in a box; He does not need to be transported by His followers; He does not grow old or decay. From everlasting to everlasting, He lives.

My king and my God (v. 3). The sweetest blessings of Jehovah are reserved for those who sanctify Him in their hearts. Their wills bow submissively and joyfully unto His. Their longing is for what He desires and wills. He is sovereign in their lives—by choice, not force. Their pilgrimage will end when they arrive in the city “which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

“O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!”

Better

Priorities are discerned and values are exhibited by the choices you make. When confronted with two possibilities and only one can be chosen, your priorities and your values determine which option is, in your heart, better than the other. When facing the exact same situation, Martha and Mary had differing values and thus made different choices; Mary’s priorities were superior to Martha’s (Luke 10:38-42).

A righteous person’s highest priority is the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Therefore, being in genuine fellowship with God is better than being seen by men, and having heavenly treasures is better than earthly ones (Matthew 6:1-21).

The composer of Psalm 84 expresses his godly values by declaring “...a day in Your courts is better than a thousand, I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the

tents of wickedness” (v. 10). Righteousness must be hungered and thirsted for (Matthew 5:6). It must be prioritized properly and valued correctly.

True wealth, rest, and joy in life are found in service to God. It does not happen by accident; it must be prioritized and valued.

Praying in Three Tenses

Humans speak of life in three tenses—past, present, and future. In Psalm 85, as a son of Korah recounts the past, addresses the present, and looks to the future, he ever looks in faith to the timeless One—the great I AM.

As he reviews the past, he offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving with his lips. “LORD, You have been favorable to Your land; You have brought back the captivity of Jacob. You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin. You have taken away all Your wrath; You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger” (vv. 1-3).

As he ponders the present, he petitions Jehovah for rich spiritual blessings—reconciliation, joy, mercy, and salvation. “Restore us, O God of our salvation and cause Your anger toward us to cease. Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations? Will You not revive us again that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us Your mercy, LORD, and grant us Your salvation” (vv. 4-7).

As he faces the possibilities of the future, he affirms his confidence in God’s goodness upon those who remain faithful to Him. “I will hear what God the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly. Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yes, the LORD will give what is good; and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness will go before Him and shall make His footsteps our pathway” (vv. 8-13).

There is no better day than today for us to imitate this template for prayer—review your past and thank God for His many blessings; reflect upon your present and beseech Him for improved spiritual health; ponder upon your future and express your absolute confidence in God’s unfailing goodness.

Pray in all three tenses.

Oh, What a Kiss!

One of the reasons for Jesus’ incarnation was to bring abundant life (John 10:10). To do this, humanity had to be reconciled to God so that there could be peace—the full satisfaction of God’s wrath toward humanity’s transgressions and lawlessness and the cessation of human enmity toward God. For there to be genuine peace, it had to be done the right way. Any plan which compromised God’s righteousness and thus resulted in pseudo-peace had to be rejected. Only a flawless plan was acceptable.

God eternally purposed, and in the fullness of time, implemented such a plan. It enabled Him to be just, uncompromisingly holy and righteous, while also wooing the hostile hearts of His enemies. This plan is beautifully summed up in Psalm 85:10: “Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.”

Integral in this plan of God is the rightful placement of Jesus Christ as the one mediator between God and men. Like Melchisedek the king of Salem, Jesus is the king-priest of God. Like Melchisedek, Jesus is “king of righteousness” and “king of peace” (Hebrews 7:2).

In the gospel of Christ, mercy and truth have met; righteousness and peace have kissed.

Oh, what a kiss!

A United Heart

The enduring challenge of faith is to unite what is intellectually learned about God with how you decide to live. In Psalm 86, David sums up this truth in one verse—“Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name” (v. 11).

The first requirement of faith is accurate instruction about God. David’s initial request is “Teach me Your way, O LORD.” Because “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17), we must take heed to what we hear (Mark 4:24).

Because faith without works is dead, a second essential of faith is obedience: “I will walk in Your truth.” What is learned about God must completely impact our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The children of Israel witnessed God’s deliverance from Egypt, but they shrank back in unbelief at the possibility of conquering Canaan. The apostles aided and abetted Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000 (Matthew 14:13-20, 15:29-39), but they fretted on one occasion that they had no bread (Mark 8:13ff). According to Jesus Himself, the fact that God feeds the birds of the air and clothes the grass of the field ought to profoundly transform our thinking (Matthew 6:25-34).

“Unite my heart to fear Your name” ought to be a continuous petition in our lives. Living in harmony with the revealed truths about God—uniting what we know about God with how we think, act, and speak—is the epic challenge of faith.

Blessed is the person who recognizes the importance of this challenge and who, like David, desires to unite his heart to fear Jehovah’s name.

Importunity

As Jesus was praying in a certain place, His disciples came to Him when He had ceased and asked that He teach them to pray

(Luke 11:1). Our Lord then proceeded to instruct His disciples on the verbal (vv. 2-4) and spiritual (vv. 5-13) components of prayer. In the parable of Luke 11:5-9, Jesus teaches that prayer is communicating with God because of a desperate sense of need that results in reverent importunity (KJV; literally the word means “shamelessness”) and extreme boldness.

Psalms 86 is an excellent illustration of importunity. David’s prayer begins with “Bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me; for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; save Your servant who trusts in You! Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I cry to You all day long. Rejoice the soul of Your servant for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul” (vv. 1-4).

No pretense. No concern with trying to impress God or anyone else. No concern for flowery language or impressive diction. Just an intense sense of urgent desperation.

Importunity is the key that unlocks the closet of prayer.

Practical Reasons to Pray

David’s prayer in Psalm 86 is an interesting patchwork of petition and affirmation. Sandwiched between each of the four petitions (vv. 1-4, 6-7, 11-14, and 16-17) is an affirmation of God and His character. When each of these affirmations is an integral part of your faith, prayer becomes a practical outworking of it. Ruminating thoughtfully on these three highly pragmatic reasons to pray:

God is good. “For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (v. 5). Jehovah is not a cantankerous curmudgeon who is easily irritated or inconvenienced by your prayers.

God is great. “Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord; nor are there any works like Your works. All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord and shall glorify Your name. For You are great and do wondrous

things; You alone are God” (vv. 8-10). Jehovah is not comparable to any of His fraudulent rivals. He is wondrously unique.

God is gracious. “But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth” (v. 15). Like any loving parent, Jehovah wants every one of His children to succeed.

Desire to pray to God increases when His goodness, greatness, and graciousness are genuine components of your faith.

Zion

Like the patriarchs of old, we who walk by faith confess that we are strangers and pilgrims on this earth (Hebrews 11:13). Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), where Christ is—sitting at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1). We are citizens of a city that God has prepared (Hebrews 11:16). We are headed for Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22).

Unlike its earthly counterpart in Palestine, this eternal city of God is glorious beyond description. “Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!” (Psalm 87:3). Unlike the Jewish capitol, the heavenly Zion is open to inhabitants of all nations (v. 4). All whose citizenship is in the heavenly Jerusalem have their names recorded and registered in her (vv. 5-6). Joyous worship resounds in Zion (v. 7), because its fountain of salvation continuously springs forth to all who thirst. Whoever desires may drink freely of the water of life (Revelation 22:17).

The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings and things of this world (Psalm 87:2). Do you?

Dark Days

Psalm 88 has been described as “the saddest psalm in the Psalter.” From beginning to end, Heman the Ezrahite’s words throb

with immense pain in the midst of great darkness. Read slowly his words pregnant with anguish:

*O LORD, God of my salvation,
I have cried out day and night before You.
Let my prayer come before You;
Incline Your ear to my cry.
For my soul is full of troubles,
And my life draws near to the grave.
I am counted with those who go down to the pit;
I am like a man who has no strength,
Adrift among the dead,
Like the slain who lie in the grave,
Whom You remember no more,
And who are cut off from Your hand.
You have laid me in the lowest pit,
In darkness, in the depths.
Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
And You have afflicted me with all Your waves. Selah
You have put away my acquaintances far from me;
You have made me an abomination to them;
I am shut up, and I cannot get out;
My eye wastes away because of affliction.
LORD, I have called daily upon You;
I have stretched out my hands to You.
Will You work wonders for the dead?
Shall the dead arise and praise You? Selah
Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave?
Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?
Shall Your wonders be known in the dark?
And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?
But to You I have cried out, O LORD,
And in the morning my prayer comes before You.
LORD, why do You cast off my soul?
Why do You hide Your face from me?
I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth;*

*I suffer Your terrors;
I am distraught.
Your fierce wrath has gone over me;
Your terrors have cut me off.
They came around me all day long like water;
They engulfed me altogether.
Loved ones and friends You have put far from me,
And my acquaintances into darkness.*

Faith in God is not all rainbows and unicorns. For the roots of our faith to grow deep with conviction, dark days must come. For our trust to grow we have to fall into various trials that test our faith and produce the precious fruit of spiritual grit and stick-to-it-iveness called “patience” (James 1:2-4).

Job, David, Asaph, Heman, Jesus, and many more testify that descending rain, rising floods, and violent winds (Matthew 7:24-25) are a fact of life for the wise man building his house upon the rock of obedience.

Trials are not proof of a lack of faith. They are not proof that God has been unfaithful to His promises. They are proof that you are human. They prove that you are not the exception to God’s refining process.

God chastises His children because He loves them. Therefore, “do not despise the chastening of the LORD nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” (Hebrews 12:5-7). Though Jesus was His only begotten Son—a perfect Son—He learned obedience by the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

God’s process of shaping His sons into His image and for His glory has no exceptions.

Faithful Unto Death

Hebrews 11:33-38 discusses two sharply different facts about faith: There are occasions when people of faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens, and received their dead raised to life again (vv. 33-35). There are also occasions when people of faith are tortured, not accepting deliverance, have a trial of mockings, scourgings, and chains of imprisonment, are stoned, sawn in two, slain with the sword, and wander about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, and tormented (vv. 35-38).

Even among Jesus' apostles we can see these two facts. James was arrested by Herod and killed with the sword (Acts 12:1-2); Peter was arrested by Herod, then delivered from death by an angel (Acts 12:3-10). One apostle died; one was delivered. Both men lived by faith.

Psalms 88 is an incredibly melancholic contemplation of Heman the Ezrahite. It contains no hopeful ray of deliverance. Maybe this is true, because in Heman's case, no deliverance from physical peril came. Maybe it was Heman's lot in life to be faithful unto death. "Unto" is an expression of degree, not duration. Of course, God expects you to be faithful to Him until the day of their death; He also expects you to be faithful to Him even if it costs you your life. Maybe in Heman's case, he died in the "lowest pit" (v. 6), in affliction (v. 9), separated from loved ones and friends (v. 18).

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Jehovah's Mercy and Faithfulness

According to its superscription, Psalm 89 is intended to be instructive. Ethan's Maschil focuses on Jehovah's mercy and faithfulness; this is introduced at the outset: "I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, 'Mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever and build up your throne to all generations'" (vv. 1-4). This theme of mercy and faithfulness echoes throughout the rest of the composition (vv. 5, 8, 14, 24, 28, 33).

Jehovah's **uniqueness** is praised in verses 5 to 18. "For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD? ... O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty like You, O LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You...Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance. In Your name they rejoice all day long, and in Your righteousness they are exalted. For You are the glory of their strength, and in Your favor our horn is exalted. For our shield belongs to the LORD and our king to the Holy One of Israel" (vv. 6, 8, 15-18).

Jehovah's **mercy** is demonstrated in His selection of David (vv. 19-37). He made a covenant with him and promised to seat one of his descendants (i.e. Jesus) on his throne to all generations. He shall be made Jehovah's firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth (v. 27). This seed of David "shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky" (vv. 36-37).

Jehovah's **faithfulness** is demonstrated by the fact that He kept His promise of "If they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes" (vv. 31-32). Ethan laments: "But You have cast off and abhorred, You have been furi-

ous with Your anointed. You have renounced the covenant of Your servant; You have profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. You have broken down all his hedges; You have brought his strongholds to ruin. All who pass by the way plunder him; he is a reproach to his neighbors. You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries; You have made all his enemies rejoice. You have also turned back the edge of his sword and have not sustained him in the battle. You have made his glory cease and cast his throne down to the ground. The days of his youth You have shortened; You have covered him with shame” (vv. 38-45).

Behold the mercy and faithfulness of God! Because of the riches of His mercy, He makes covenants with imperfect mortals like Abraham and David. Because of His faithfulness, He keeps His promises of blessing and cursing.

“Blessed be the LORD forevermore! Amen and Amen” (v. 52).

How long, LORD?

Echoing through the history of the righteous is this plaintive cry.

It haunted the patriarch Job (7:19); it tormented the psalmists David (13:1-2), Asaph (79:5), and Ethan (89:46); it vexed the prophet Habakkuk (1:2); it arose as a loud voice from those Christians who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held (Revelation 6:9-10).

A significant thing we ought to learn from the things which were written before for our learning is that God’s wheels of justice and deliverance often move at a different speed than we humans think they should. How easily we can feel like Ethan: “How long, LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire? Remember how short my time is; for what futility have You created all the children of men? What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? Lord, where are Your former lovingkindnesses which You swore to David in Your truth? Remember, Lord, the reproach of

Your servants—How I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples with which Your enemies have reproached, O LORD, with which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed” (Psalm 89:46-51).

The consistent testimony of the righteous from generations past is that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures can have hope (Romans 15:4).

Even during life’s darkest hours.

Especially during life’s darkest hours.

Therefore, “let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Galatians 6:9).

Moses’ Meditation and Prayer

According to its superscription, Psalm 90 is “a prayer of Moses the man of God.” It is probably better described as a meditation (vv. 1-11) followed by a prayer (vv. 12-17).

The psalm begins with a contemplation of three unchanging truths about Jehovah:

- **He is a refuge for His people.** “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations” (v. 1).
- **He is unchanging.** “Before the mountains were brought forth or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (v. 2).
- **He prefers to save, not destroy.** “You turn man to destruction and say, ‘Return, O children of men.’ For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night. You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up: in the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers” (vv. 3-6).

Next, Moses ponders upon three unchanging truths about humanity:

- **Human sin is deadly.** “For we have been consumed by Your anger and by Your wrath we are terrified. You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance” (vv. 7-8).
- **Human life passes quickly.** “For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh. The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (vv. 9-10).
- **Human imagination cannot fathom God’s wrath.** “Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath” (v. 11).

Moses’ meditation culminates in three petitions/priorities for his life:

- **To live wisely/make every day count.** “So, teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (v. 12).
- **To seek God vigorously.** “Return, O LORD! How long? And have compassion on Your servants. Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our days! Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil” (vv. 13-15).
- **To serve God urgently.** “Let Your work appear to Your servants and Your glory to their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands” (vv. 16-17).

Though written over 3,000 years ago, Moses’ meditation and prayer provide timeless spiritual counsel.

The Everlasting to Everlasting God

As a creature whose existence is predicated on time, it is a strenuous challenge to thoroughly ponder upon the timelessness of God. Moses writes: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Psalm 90:2). Prior to the creation of time, space, and matter in Genesis 1:1 there was the everlasting, eternal God. When Jesus returns and eliminates time, space, and matter, there will be the everlasting, eternal God.

For creatures whose existence is predicated on time, decades, centuries, and millennia are vast swatches of human existence. For the One who is from everlasting to everlasting, a thousand years “are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night” (i.e. three hours) (Psalm 90:4).

For creatures whose “days of our lives are seventy years, and if by reason of strength they are eighty years” (Psalm 90:10), it is the epitome of wisdom to “number our days (i.e. make every day count) that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

Like His incorruptible word which lives and abides forever (1 Peter 1:23), Jehovah isn’t going anywhere. Ever.

He is the Everlasting to Everlasting God.

The Brevity of Life

Numerous comparisons are used in Scripture to impress upon our minds the brevity of life—the movement of a weaver’s shuttle (Job 7:6), the duration of morning fog (James 4:14), the appearance and then disappearance of one’s shadow (Job 14:2). In Psalm 90: 4-5, Moses uses three additional, vivid analogies:

A flood. “You carry them away like a flood.” Unlike Noah’s cataclysmic deluge, most floods come and go over a short period of time. Because of God’s covenant with humanity—sealed with a rainbow promise, all floods today are local in nature, not universal. However, even though a flood may only last for several

days, its destruction can last for years. You may live for a few decades—70 or 80 years (v. 10)—but the choices you make during that time will impact your immortal existence forever.

A night's sleep. “They are like a sleep.” Regardless of whether you get a few hours or an abundant amount of sleep, healthy people do not spend weeks or months “lying in the bed.” Productive people rarely spend more than a third of the day sleeping. Such is life on this earth. We will live far more of our existence in our immortal realm than here on earth.

Grass. “In the morning they are like grass which grows up: in the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers.” A field of clover is grown by a farmer for the purpose of harvesting hay every six weeks or so. Quoting Isaiah, Peter reminds his readers that “all flesh is as grass and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away” (1 Peter 1:24). In contrast to the frailty and brevity of humanity, Peter continues “but the word of the LORD endures forever” (v. 25).

In light of life's brevity, learning to “number our days” (Psalm 90:12) is of paramount importance.

The Certainty of God's Righteous Judgment

The Old Testament was written for the spiritual education of Christians (1 Corinthians 10:11). One of its important purposes is to reveal that God's wrath is against all human ungodliness and unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). Every transgression of and disobedience to the Law given to Moses received a just recompense of reward (Hebrews 2:2).

Moses witnessed the wrath of God up close. Real close.

- He observed Jehovah's devastation of Egypt because of Pharaoh's impenitent, stubborn heart.

- His ears heard God personally say to him on Mount Sinai: “Let Me alone that My wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them” (Exodus 32:10).
- His eyes saw the transformation of his sister Miriam into a leper because of the Lord’s anger toward her (Numbers 12:9-10).
- He was listening when God stated that He wanted to strike the Israelites with pestilence and disinherit them because of their refusal to enter and conquer the land of promise (Numbers 14:12).
- He was in the heat of battle with Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and others when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households and all their goods, and then fire came out from the Lord and consumed 250 men (Numbers 16).
- He heard the grumblers complain about God’s provisions in the wilderness and saw the fiery serpents that bit and killed many (Numbers 21).

He knew what it was to be exceedingly afraid and trembling (Hebrews 12:21). He knew the horrific accuracy of the statement that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

So, when Moses writes: “For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified. You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance. For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh. The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath” (Psalm 90:7-11), we should pay very close attention to the counsel he gives concerning how we ought then to live.

His counsel is “teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

Numbering Our Days

“So, teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12) is the climactic conclusion to Moses’ thoughtful and sobering contemplation of Jehovah’s eternal nature, the brevity of life, and the certainty of God’s righteous judgment (Psalm 90:1-11).

- Jehovah is life’s ultimate and inescapable reality. He is from everlasting to everlasting; therefore, He is called “I am that I am” (Exodus 3:6).
- The average person’s tenure of 70 to 80 years on earth is brief. Like a flood. Like a night’s sleep. Like grass in the field.
- The righteous judgment of the One who is no respecter of persons is certain. His track record is spotless: Jehovah rewards those who diligently seek Him and punishes those who don’t.

In light of these three immutable facts, anyone desiring to possess a heart of wisdom must number his days. One commentary on this verse has: “Teach us to use wisely all the time we have.” This concept is echoed in the New Testament when the apostle Paul wrote, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time...” To walk circumspectly is to live with careful, accurate obedience to God’s will. To redeem the time is to buy up, take advantage of every opportunity today offers. Why?

Because God is.

Because there is no guarantee of tomorrow.

Because Jesus is the author of salvation to everyone who obeys Him (Hebrews 5:9), and today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

The Legacy of the Righteous

Your legacy is not determined by what the preacher says at your eulogy. It is etched into history by the choices you make during the days that comprise your lifetime. Moses' counsel in Psalm 90 is to seek God's compassion and mercy (vv. 13-14) to build your life (and thus your legacy) upon.

With these two building blocks, the divine blessings of joy and gladness will permeate your days (vv. 14-15) and allow you to focus upon the Lord's work for your life (v. 16). Such a focus is blessed with the beauty of the Lord our God and the blessing of abiding permanence to your labors, a legacy that endures long after your death (v. 17).

This is the blessed legacy of the righteous.

Our Dwelling Place

The beginning declarations of Psalms 90 and 91 are striking. "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations" (Psalm 90:1); "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust'" (Psalm 91:1-2).

Faith in God requires more than a theoretical knowledge of the truth. As Psalm 91 illustrates, it requires the personal action necessary to make your life correspond to truth of Psalm 90. Jehovah offers a refuge, a dwelling place to every generation. That offer must be personally accepted and acted upon.

I must choose to dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I must draw near to God and make Him my refuge and my fortress. I must make Him my God and my trust.

Great spiritual blessings abound to everyone who chooses to make Jehovah their dwelling place. "Surely He shall deliver you

from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot” (vv. 3-13).

When you draw near to God, He will draw near to you (James 4:8). Psalm 91 concludes with God’s response to everyone who makes Him his dwelling place. “Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him My salvation” (vv. 14-16).

What a dwelling place!

Wresting Scripture

“Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’” (Matthew 4:5-7).

Satan's use of Psalm 91 when tempting our Lord is a great illustration of why the statement "You can prove anything by the Bible" is one of the devil's many lies. When the apostle Peter declares that "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11), he is not intimating that a person should wrest or twist the Scriptures when seeking to demonstrate the divine authority for one's actions.

There are three glaring flaws in Satan's (mis)handling of Psalm 91. Let's consider them carefully:

Satan ignored the context. The promises of Psalm 91:11-12 that he cites were conditional in nature, not unconditional. As verses 2 and 9 clearly state, these promises were made to a specific type of person—the one who says to the Lord, you are my refuge, my fortress, and my trust (v. 2), the one who has made the Lord his refuge and dwelling place (v. 9). The promises of this psalm are made exclusively to those who are striving to obey God, not tempt Him.

Satan misapplied the promises. Because he ignored the context, he sought to convince our Lord that God's blessings were applicable to the presumptuous as well as the obedient. They were not.

Satan's interpretation and application of God's word contradicted another plain passage of Scripture. Since God's word is perfect (James 1:25), it contains no contradictions. Therefore, any interpretation that creates a contradiction of another passage or principle of Scripture is incorrect. Jesus deftly points this out in His reply when He uses the word "again." God's word must be handled accurately (2 Timothy 2:15). Any interpretation and application of one passage that clearly contradicts another is false.

Satan's quotation of Psalm 91 clearly illustrates what not to do when studying and applying God's word.

The Eye of the Storm

Although Satan sought to get Jesus to act presumptuously instead of obediently based upon his wresting of Psalm 91, this composition is most illustrative of our Lord's life. He lived in great peace while in the midst of titanic spiritual conflict and grave spiritual danger. When reading this psalm, it is easy to focus upon the peace and protection enjoyed and miss the violent storm that swirled around it.

Consider the extreme danger of the storm—snares (v. 3), perilous pestilence (v. 3), terror by night (v. 5), arrows (v. 5) destruction (v. 6), death (v. 7), evil (v. 10), plague (v. 10), lions (v. 13), cobras (v. 13), and trouble (v. 15).

The promise of deliverance (v. 3), protection (v. 4), refuge (v. 4), fearlessness (v. 5), and salvation (v. 16) was not for those outside the storm; it was for those inside it, at the very heart of the hurricane.

Dangerous spiritual storms are a fact of life, especially for those who desire to live godly lives. The best place to be when one of those storms rages is in the eye of it—in the secret place of the Most High (v. 1), under the shadow of the Almighty (v. 1).

“I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust’” (v. 2) Are you living in the eye of the storm?

Thanksgiving

According to its superscription, Psalm 92 was written for the Sabbath day. As it was originally given, the focus of the Sabbath was upon resting from the physical demands of a week full of labor and imitating the pattern given by God in the creation of the universe (Exodus 20:8-11). When restated by Moses forty years later, it also included the aspect of remembering God's deliverance from slavery (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Therefore, the Sab-

bath day rightly developed into a day of physical rest and spiritual reflection/worship for the Jews.

Psalm 92 begins with the declaration that “It is good to give thanks to the LORD and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning and Your faithfulness every night...for You, LORD, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands” (vv. 1-2, 4).

For a child of God, thanksgiving is not an annual day in November. It is something that permeates every day’s morning and night (v. 2). Thanksgiving is good. Thanksgiving gladdens the heart. Thanksgiving glorifies God.

“Be thankful...In everything give thanks” (Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

“In Everything Give Thanks”

“It is good to give thanks to the LORD and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High” (Psalm 92:1).

This declaration is buttressed by three immutable reasons in Psalm 92. They are:

The vastness of Jehovah’s works. “O LORD, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep. A senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this. When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever” (vv. 5-7).

The victory Jehovah provides. “But You, LORD, are on high forevermore. For behold, Your enemies, O LORD, for behold, Your enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered. But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil. My eye also has seen my desire on my enemies; My ears hear my desire on the wicked who rise up against me” (vv. 8-11).

The vitality of Jehovah’s righteousness. “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (vv. 12-15).

Life has its ups and downs, but Jehovah—the Great I AM—remains unchanging. A rock of consistency in an ever-volatile world. A genuine oasis in a land of mirages.

“It is good to give thanks to the LORD and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High” (Psalm 92:1).

Palm Trees

The first Psalm compares a tree planted by rivers of water and the chaff driven by the wind (vv. 3-4). In similar fashion, Psalm 92 compares the wicked to grass that is destroyed (v. 7) and the righteous to a flourishing palm tree (v. 12). The psalmist writes: “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (vv. 12-15). Consider how befitting this inspired simile is.

Palm trees are distinctive. All the branches and fruit of palms are at the top of the tree. This makes them quite distinct from other trees. In a crooked and perverse generation, the righteous ought to be equally unique and distinct in their manner of life (Philippians 2:14-16)

Palm trees are hearty. They can grow and flourish where no other tree can survive. The only tree that grows in a desert oasis is a palm. Righteous people can live anywhere in the world. Lot lived righteously in Sodom. Jeremiah lived righteously in idol-filled Jerusalem. Jesus grew up pleasing before God (Luke 2:52) while living in notorious Nazareth (John 1:46).

Palm trees are abundantly fruitful. The average tree produces 300 to 400 pounds of fruit per year. Their deep roots and unique internal design for transporting water and nutrients through the heart of their trunks enable them to be bountifully fruitful. The righteous watch over their heart with all diligence (Proverbs 4:23) and hide God’s word in their heart (Psalm 119:11); therefore, they produce an abundant harvest of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). These godly virtues ensure that they are neither barren nor unfruitful in their knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:8).

Palm trees mature graciously. According to one Bible dictionary, the palm tree “bears its best fruit in old age.” The older the palm grows the better and sweeter its fruit. Unlike the Christians addressed in Hebrews 5:12—who ought to have matured in their knowledge and faith to become teachers of God’s word but needed milk, not meat—the palm tree improves with age. The righteous do likewise.

Palm trees are quite useful. The Syrians have over 300 different uses for the palm tree. Its fruit, its sap, its leaf fibers, and its leaves can be employed in many beneficial and practical ways. The righteous are helpful in like manner. The hungry, thirsty, needy, naked, sick, and imprisoned receive from the righteous more than empty platitudes (Matthew 25:34-36; James 2:15-17), because every new creature of God has been “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Palm trees are immovable. Because its roots are quite deep, rarely does a palm tree get uprooted. When hurricane winds blow, a palm tree may be leaning over and almost parallel to the ground, but, rarely is any of these trees uprooted. The wise man—rooted and grounded in obedience to God’s truth (Colossians 2:7)—can withstand the rain, floods, and fierce storms of life (Matthew 7:24-25); he can be steadfast and immovable (1 Corinthians 15:58) like a palm tree.

How much do you and a palm tree have in common?

Jehovah's Sovereignty

Psalms 93 is the first of three psalms that begins with the emphatic declaration: "The LORD reigns!" Because Calvinists base their false doctrine of unconditional election and its denial of the free moral agency of humanity on their misunderstanding of God's sovereignty, a study of what the Scriptures do teach on this profound truth is imperative. Though our puny human minds may never be able to fully wrap themselves around the facts that God is sovereign and each human's will is exercised freely, both truths are clearly taught in God's word.

In Psalm 93, the composer seeks to emphasize three truths about the sovereignty of God. These are:

Creation reflects Jehovah's sovereignty. "The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The LORD is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength. Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved. Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting" (vv. 1-2). Immutable laws of nature like gravity, biogenesis, thermodynamics are enduring witnesses to the majestic, universal, superior strength and power of the great I AM.

Opposition demonstrates Jehovah's sovereignty. "The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea" (vv. 3-4). Since the fall of Satan, there has been rebellion in God's creation. A deluge of evil has flooded our world, but nothing has overthrown God's throne. The first century coup attempt in which "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us'" (Psalm 2:2-3) resulted in Jehovah's king being enthroned in Zion with all authority in heaven and earth (Psalm 2:6; Matthew 28:19).

Wisdom acknowledges Jehovah's sovereignty. "Your testimonies are very sure; holiness adorns Your house, O LORD, forever" (v. 5). A wise person trusts and obeys God's word, because its testimonies will endure beyond this world's heaven and earth (Matthew 24:35). A wise person reverences the beauty of the holy, holy, holy Lord of hosts (Isaiah 6:3). A wise person recognizes the continuous, unending, unlimited praise the sovereign God deserves.

Jehovah's Sovereign Judgment

The cross of Christ is the most glorious demonstration of the sovereignty of God. Jesus' death on Friday—evil's most glorious victory in history—became Satan's most devastating defeat on Sunday. Just as predicted in Genesis 3:15, the seed of woman was bruised upon His heel and the serpent was bruised upon his head. It is a wonderful microcosm of Jehovah's sovereign judgment.

The theme of Psalm 94 is the sovereign judgment of Jehovah. It begins with a petition for divine action. "O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongs—O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth! Rise up, O Judge of the earth; render punishment to the proud. LORD, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph?" (vv. 1-3).

Next, there is a description of the wickedness of those who are evil. "They utter speech and speak insolent things; all the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. They break in pieces Your people, O LORD, and afflict Your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, 'The LORD does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand'" (vv. 4-7).

Then, the psalmist rebukes the wicked for their folly. "Understand, you senseless among the people; and you fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations,

shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge? The LORD knows the thoughts of man that they are futile” (vv. 8-11).

The psalmist’s unshakable faith in Jehovah’s sovereign judgment permeates the final verses of this composition. Here he writes: “Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O LORD, and teach out of Your law, that You may give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit is dug for the wicked. For the LORD will not cast off His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance. But judgment will return to righteousness and all the upright in heart will follow it. Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence. If I say, ‘My foot slips,’ Your mercy, O LORD, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul. Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with You? They gather together against the life of the righteous and condemn innocent blood. But the LORD has been my defense and my God the rock of my refuge. He has brought on them their own iniquity and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; the LORD our God shall cut them off” (vv. 12-23).

Unshakable faith in Jehovah’s sovereign judgment makes an impregnable defense when the wicked triumph and the workers of iniquity boast in themselves.

The LORD reigns!

The Fundamental, Fatal Flaw of the Wicked

Your theology determines your behavior.

Contrary to the popular tenet of many—that it does not matter what you believe, the Scriptures emphatically contradict this lie of Satan. What you believe about God (i.e. your theology) determines your behavior. Psalm 94 clearly demonstrates this with the following description of first the behavior and then the theology of the wicked: “They utter speech and speak insolent things; all

the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. They break in pieces Your people, O LORD, and afflict Your heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, ‘The LORD does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand’” (vv. 4-7).

When you believe that God is not omniscient (i.e. He does not see) and He is amoral (i.e. He is neither a rewarder of those who seek Him nor a punisher of those who disobey Him), your theology will produce wicked behavior. When modern-day supporters of abortion declare that murdering the innocent is the work of God, there is a fundamental, fatal flaw in their theology. When proponents of sexual perversion of any kind contend that there is divine approval of such a lifestyle, there is a fundamental, fatal flaw in their theology.

To believe that “The LORD does not see nor...understand” is to believe the absurdity that the creature is greater than the Creator. What folly! “He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge?” (vv. 9-10). The LORD knows the foolish thoughts of the wicked (v. 11). What fatal folly it is to think and believe otherwise.

“Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O LORD, and teach out of Your law” (Psalm 94:12).

Blessed is the man who rejects the fundamental, fatal flaw of the wicked.

Praising Jehovah’s Sovereignty

For the righteous, few doctrines in Scripture burst forth with greater praiseworthiness and comfort than the doctrine of Jehovah’s sovereignty. The beginning of Psalm 95 joyously focuses upon this wondrous truth. The resounding call to worship is trumpeted with: “Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with

psalms” (vv. 1-2). Following this rousing exhortation, four glorious truths about God’s sovereignty are given. Consider carefully their simple profundity.

- **Jehovah is greater than all others.** “For the LORD is the great God and the great King above all gods” (v. 3).
- **Jehovah has immense power.** “In His hand are the deep places of the earth; the heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; and, His hands formed the dry land” (vv. 4-5).
- **Jehovah is the creator of humanity.** “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker” (v. 6).
- **Jehovah is man’s shepherd (i.e. protector and guide).** “For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand” (v. 7).

Superior. Omnipotent. Creator. Shepherd.

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power” (Revelation 4:11).

Jehovah’s Sovereignty and Today

Psalm 95 aptly describes how the sovereignty of God ought to have a distinct and practical two-pronged impact upon your life today. First, the greatness of the King above all gods ought to impact your heart so that it bursts forth with joyous praise (vv. 1-5) and reverent worship (vv. 6-7). Second, the sovereignty of our great Shepherd ought to impact your will so that it yields in eager, prompt, and complete obedience (vv. 8-11). Today is the day that God’s voice ought to be obeyed (v. 7).

Delaying your obedience to the will of the sovereign God has been tried repeatedly throughout human history, and it has NEVER ended well. One of the many examples that could be cited is the time when the nation of Israel failed to obey God’s command to take the Promised Land when led by Moses. As always, it was

a colossal failure. “Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation and said, ‘It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.’ So, I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest’” (vv. 8-11). And, they did not enter His rest.

The sovereignty of God is not some esoteric theory which is devoid of all real-world usefulness. The weight of this profound and practical truth ought to impact every today of your life. Because of Jehovah’s sovereignty, He deserves our joyous praise and reverent worship today. Because of Jehovah’s sovereignty, He deserves your prompt and precise obedience today.

Tomorrow does not cut it.

Joyful Worship

Humanity is a creature that lives in the parentheses within eternity called time. Because of this, we talk in three tenses—past, present, and future. In Psalm 96, each tense is acknowledged as containing a reason for joyful worship of Jehovah.

“Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples” (vv. 1-3) is appropriate because of:

The past: Jehovah is our Creator. “For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary” (vv. 4-6).

The present: Jehovah is our King. “Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, give to the LORD glory and strength. Give to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering and come into His courts. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!

Tremble before Him, all the earth. Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns; the world also is firmly established, it shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously” (vv. 7-10).

The future: Jehovah is our Judge. “Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and all its fullness; let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the LORD. For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with His truth” (vv. 11-13).

Oh, the worthiness of LORD!

Worthy

Balance scales—two plates attached to an overhead beam—have been a part of human history for at least 4,000 years. An innumerable multitude of business deals has been transacted because of this simple device.

The concept of an appropriate counter balance to something of value and weight is what permeates the word “worthy.” When the great I AM is accurately weighed in the balances of the human heart, the only appropriate and fitting counter balance is joyous, reverent worship. “Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth” (Psalm 96:1).

- Because of His **salvation**, Jehovah is worthy. “Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day” (Psalm 96:2).
- Because of His **glory**, Jehovah is worthy. “Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples” (Psalm 96:3).
- Because of His **greatness**, Jehovah is worthy. “For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (Psalm 96:4-5).

- Because of His **strength and beauty**, Jehovah is worthy. “Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary” (Psalm 96:6).

When properly evaluated in the human heart, one should “give to the LORD glory and strength. Give to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering and come into His courts. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him...” (Psalm 96:7-9).

It is what He deserves.

Where do You Live?

Jehovah’s extreme superiority to humanity is seen in Paul’s declaration that God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). God’s thoughts are not our thoughts and our ways are not His ways (Isaiah 55:8); in fact, they are not even close—for “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9). There is much about God that our feeble minds will never be able to fully grasp; therefore, “clouds and darkness surround Him” (Psalm 97:2). What we decide to do with our limitations determines our earthly days and eternal destiny.

A fool trusts his limitations and thus believes only those things that he can fully comprehend. That is why an atheist—living in the self-imposed prison of empiricism—will always be a fool (Psalm 14:1). How dark. How dank. How dreary.

How different is the perspective of Biblical theism! “The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad! Clouds and darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne” (Psalm 97:1-2). Rather than living by faith in my many limitations, the child of God chooses to live by faith in the limitless One.

Even though a comprehensive knowledge of Jehovah is humanly impossible, these three facts about Jehovah must be embrace wholeheartedly:

Jehovah is sovereign. The “LORD, is most high above all the earth; He is “exalted far above all gods” (Psalm 97:9). Regardless of the amount of rebellion generated against Him, no coup will ever overthrow the Sovereign One. Every enemy of His will be crushed in defeat.

As Sovereign, Jehovah reigns upon an immovable throne. “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne” (Psalm 97:2). Those two pillars which undergird His throne endure from everlasting to everlasting.

As the righteous Sovereign, Jehovah “preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 97:10). Therefore, “rejoice in the LORD, you righteous and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name” (Psalm 97:12).

By rebelling against Jehovah and His immovable throne, life will be lived in a dark prison of despair. By obeying Jehovah, life can be lived in the sunlight of righteousness with gladness (Psalm 97:11).

Where do you live?

God’s Sovereignty and You

“The LORD reigns” (Psalm 97:1) is either a truth of immense comfort or extreme terror.

To the enemies of God, His sovereignty is a terror. “A fire goes before Him and burns up His enemies round about. His lightnings light the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory. Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, who boast of idols. Worship Him, all you gods” (Psalm 97:3-7).

To the people of God, His sovereignty is a comfort. “Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice because of Your judgments, O LORD. For You, LORD, are most high above all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods. You who love the LORD, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name” (Psalm 97:8-12).

Do you find God’s sovereignty a comfort or a terror?

The Antidote for Boredom

Boredom is spiritual quicksand. The rut of “going through the motions” is unbecoming worship of the great I AM. Throughout human history, spiritual boredom has prompted worship innovations. To solve the malady of boredom, humanity tends to try to increase its interest and enthusiasm using the placebo of novelty, not the divine remedy of introspection and repentance.

Psalm 98 provides the divine antidote to boredom. It states three reasons why our worship can be perpetually fresh and vigorous. It explains how we can ever “sing to the LORD a new song!” (v. 1).

- **Reflect upon Jehovah’s salvation.** “He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. The LORD has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations. He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (vv. 1-3). Israel’s deliverance out of physical slavery by Moses was stunning. However, it pales in comparison to the deliverance out of spiritual slavery by Christ. Meditating upon the eternally-purposed, precise-

and-perfect-in-every-detail plan of salvation is a strong antidote to spiritual boredom.

- **Meditate upon Jehovah’s authority.** “Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth; break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. Sing to the LORD...shout joyfully before the LORD, the King” (vv. 4-6). The words of the King of kings are so powerful they can speak something like light into existence out of nothing! When His will is expressed in heaven, it is obeyed immediately, completely, and precisely.
- **Ponder upon Jehovah’s judgment.** “Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it; let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world and the peoples with equity” (vv. 7-9). He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. He has prepared a place for the righteous; He has prepared a place for the wicked (Matthew 25:34-46). Every person in human history will appear before His judgment seat and be rewarded eternally for their words and actions, whether they have been good or evil (2 Corinthians 5:10).

There is no place for boredom in a heart that ever contemplates Jehovah’s salvation, Jehovah’s authority, and Jehovah’s judgment.

Reverence for God

A distressing fact of modern culture is the widespread cancer of disdain for God and holy things. Profaning the sacred is a sickeningly popular sport among the foolish. Irreverence is a certain path to perdition.

Psalms 99 is the antithesis to this popular sport of our age. It pulsates with reverence for Jehovah’s highness and holiness. Three times reference is made to God pre-eminent holiness (vv. 3, 5, and 9). In fact, the psalm’s climactic crescendo is “Exalt the

LORD our God and worship at His holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy” (v. 9).

This psalm enumerates these seven reasons for immense reverence:

- **Jehovah’s sovereignty.** “The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble!” (v. 1).
- **Jehovah’s glorious dwelling.** “He dwells between the cherubim; let the earth be moved!” (v. 1).
- **Jehovah’s exalted greatness.** “The LORD is great in Zion, and He is high above all the peoples” (v. 2).
- **Jehovah’s pristine holiness.** “Let them praise Your great and awesome name—He is holy. The King’s strength also loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the LORD our God and worship at His footstool—He is holy” (vv. 3-5).
- **Jehovah’s listening ear.** “Moses and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel was among those who called upon His name; they called upon the LORD, and He answered them” (v. 6).
- **Jehovah’s revelation of His perfect will.** “He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar; they kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them” (v. 7).
- **Jehovah’s graciousness.** “You answered them, O LORD our God; You were to them God-Who-Forgives, though You took vengeance on their deeds” (v. 8).

Reverence for God is the wisest decision you can make today.

Giving Thanks—Part 1

The placement of the 100th Psalm is most appropriate. A consistent thread running through Psalms 92-99 is the sovereignty of God. “You, LORD, are on high forevermore...The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty...the LORD is the great God, and the

great King above all gods...Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns; the world also is firmly established, it shall not be moved'...The LORD reigns...All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God...The LORD reigns" (Psalms 92:8, 93:1, 95:3, 96:19, 97:1, 98:3, 99:1). Because of this comprehensive truth, Psalm 100 exhorts us to "Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing...Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name" (vv. 1-2, 4).

In the third verse of Psalm 100, four reasons are stated for giving thanks. They are:

Because the LORD is God. "Know that the LORD, He is God." This certain knowledge is that the supreme being of our universe is not fate, dumb luck, or blind chance; it is Jehovah. He is not a philosophy, a theory, an idea, or a leap in the dark. He is a person. He is the Person who has revealed Himself in nature and Scripture (Psalm 19).

Because the LORD is our Creator. "It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves." Humanity has not evolved from lower life forms; it has been carefully crafted in the image of a higher life form. In physical and spiritual terms, we—not any idol—are the earthly manifestation of the great I AM.

Because God has redeemed us. "We are His people." We have been bought and brought out of slavery and have become His people. Our legal standing is not as His slave but as His son, His heir.

Because God cares for us, "the sheep of His pasture." Like sheep, we need continuous care, concern, and providence. Like a shepherd, He cares for His people. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1).

"Be ye thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

Giving Thanks—Part 2

For the child of God, thanksgiving is to be a continuous occurrence. God commands His children “in everything give thanks” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Psalm 100 gives seven reasons for thanksgiving. The first four are found in verse 3—“Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture”; the last three are located in verse 5—“For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.” Consider more closely these final three:

God is good. Jehovah is kind and benevolent to all people. “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). His offer of all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3) is made to every creature in all nations (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3), and these things are available to all because of the abundance of His goodness.

God is merciful. “He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14). Therefore, He has mercifully made provisions for forgiveness when His children fail to walk in the light as they ought (1 John 1:7-2:1). He has placed a great High Priest—merciful and faithful—at His right hand who can sympathize with our weaknesses, aid us when we are tempted, and provide mercy and grace to help us in time of need (Hebrews 2:17-18, 4:14-16). Oh, the riches of God’s mercy!

God’s truth endures forever. Truth belongs to God. He is the essence of truth because He cannot lie (Titus 1:2); in fact, He cannot even be tempted to lie (James 1:13). He is faithful to His word to the thousandth generation (Psalm 105:8). Heaven and earth will pass away (Matthew 24:35), but the word of the Lord abides forever (1 Peter 1:25). It has no expiration date.

“Be ye thankful” (Colossians 3:15).

Righteous Leadership

Psalm 101 describes how genuine righteous leadership is possible. Just as Paul would state about a thousand years after David (in Acts 20:28), righteous leadership requires two basic things:

Take heed to yourself. Conduct yourself and your personal affairs righteously. David stated it this way: “I will sing of mercy and justice; to You, O LORD, I will sing praises. I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness” (vv. 1-4). Note the continuous echo of “I will” in those words. To be able to lead others in the paths of righteousness, you first must be walking in them yourself. Being righteous requires a proper love of God, upright behavior, consistent obedience to God’s will, the abhorrence of evil, and steadfast refusal to fellowship the unfruitful works of darkness.

Take heed to your assigned sphere of leadership. Use the God-given authority of your position to promote righteousness and oppose evil. Note King David’s words: “Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; the one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure. My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land that they may dwell with me; he who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence. Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD.” Be righteous: promote the good; punish the wicked; protect the innocent.

Righteous leadership in the home, in the church, and in the nation is a most present need of our day. Are you part of the problem or the solution?

Purposeful Living

Life is what you choose to make of it. Living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age does not occur accidentally. It requires flint-like (Isaiah 50:7), steadfast (Luke 9:51) determination. Godly living is achieved via the backbone, not the wishbone.

In the first four verses of Psalm 101, David enumerates three purposeful pillars for his life. Three determinations by which he *will* live. Note the purposes of David's life:

- **Worship.** "*I will* sing of mercy and justice; to You, O LORD, *I will* sing praises" (v. 1). There are some who have the habit of not assembling to worship with God's people (Hebrews 10:25). David was thrilled at the opportunity to worship: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD'" (Psalm 122:1). The dozens of psalms attributed to him demonstrate that David's determination and desire to worship God was intense and lifelong.
- **Obedience.** "*I will* behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? *I will* walk within my house with a perfect heart" (v. 2). David sought to walk wisely before His God. Obedience was not a spasmodic concern; it was constant. He hungered and thirsted for righteousness because it fueled his soul.
- **Purity.** "*I will* set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me; *I will* not know wickedness" (vv. 3-4). Purity in a crooked and perverse generation is no fluke. Keeping oneself unspotted from the world and meditating upon virtuous and praiseworthy things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and of good report require great willpower. David's transgression with Bathsheba is a somber reminder of how much lifelong damage can be done with a brief lapse in one's determination to be pure in heart.

Are you living purposefully or aimlessly?

Choosing Your Friends

One of the grave dangers of evil is its powerful influence to subtly weaken and ultimately destroy good. This spiritual cancer is aggressive and relentless. Because of this, Solomon wrote, “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Proverbs 12:26).

In Psalm 101, David gives a pretty handy list of people to avoid and embrace in friendship. He writes: “Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; the one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure. My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land that they may dwell with me; he who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence. Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD.”

Note carefully those people whom he seeks to avoid—slanderers, the haughty, the proud, the deceitful, liars, the wicked, and evildoers.

Consider thoughtfully those he seeks to embrace—the faithful and the blameless. Friendship with people who have integrity, honesty, humility, and goodness is imperative.

Choose your friends carefully.

Hope in the Midst of Darkness

Few situations sound as bleak and desperately lonely as the one described in Psalm 102—“my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned like a hearth. My heart is stricken and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread. Because of the sound of my groaning, my bones cling to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert.

I lie awake and am like a sparrow alone on the housetop. My enemies reproach me all day long; those who deride me swear an oath against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread and mingled my drink with weeping, because of Your indignation and Your wrath; for You have lifted me up and cast me away. My days are like a shadow that lengthens, and I wither away like grass” (vv. 3-11).

Because of these dire circumstances, the writer turned to God: “Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come to You. Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble; incline Your ear to me; in the day that I call, answer me speedily” (vv. 1-2).

In the midst of this bleak darkness, the psalmist found hope— “But You, O LORD, shall endure forever and the remembrance of Your name to all generations. You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, has come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones and show favor to her dust. So, the nations shall fear the name of the LORD and all the kings of the earth Your glory, for the LORD shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory. He shall regard the prayer of the destitute and shall not despise their prayer. This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD. For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven the LORD viewed the earth to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to release those appointed to death, to declare the name of the LORD in Zion and His praise in Jerusalem when the peoples are gathered together and the kingdoms to serve the LORD” (vv. 12-22).

In the midst of this bleak darkness, the psalmist found peace: “He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days. I said, ‘O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days; Your years are throughout all generations. Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will

have no end. The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You” (vv. 23-28).

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13).

The Blessing of Weakness

God’s prescriptions for blessing can be most unusual.

The apostle Paul, for example, wrestled with a painful “thorn in the flesh...a messenger of Satan” which buffeted him and humbled him (2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul pleaded earnestly with the Lord three times that it might depart from him, but, alas, to no avail. He was told, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). Therefore, Paul declared, “most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

The composer of Psalm 102 found a similar blessing in weakness. When recounting this blessing, he wrote that God “weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days” (v. 23). Like the apostle Paul, he prayed for the antidote to this weakness. “I said, ‘O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days; Your years are throughout all generations’” (v. 24). The prescription for his weakness was found in the knowledge that Jehovah is powerful, enduring, unchanging, and eternal (vv. 25-27). “The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You” (v. 28).

The grace of God is all-sufficient, regardless of how weak we are.

What a blessing!

Loneliness

Few similes paint a more vivid picture of loneliness than the three used in Psalm 102:6-7. Here it is written: “I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert. I lie awake and am like a sparrow alone on the housetop.” Consider the haunting isolation that each bird faced.

A pelican’s customary habitat is near water. How strange it would be to find one in a wilderness, far away from its usual environment.

A desert is a locale where few creatures live. It is a place away from the hustle and bustle of a busy city. The owl was living in a desert—far away from a crowded city.

Sparrows are social creatures. Rarely will you find a single sparrow perched in a location. A sparrow sitting alone on a housetop is unusual.

Though facing severe isolation, incredible loneliness, and extreme vulnerability, the psalmist knew that he was not alone. “The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You” (Psalm 102:28).

God Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake You” (Hebrews 13:5).

Jehovah is still God and is faithful to His people, even when you are feeling all alone.

“Bless the LORD, O My Soul”

From beginning to end, Psalm 103 is a great outburst of praise. Sandwiched between its first and last note of “Bless the LORD, O my soul” (vv. 1, 22) is a crescendo of praise. Beginning with David’s lone pronouncement of his heart’s deepest praise (vv. 1-5), it builds into a chorus of praise from a grateful nation (vv. 6-18), and then climaxes with the addition of angels and all His works adding their resounding praise (vv. 19-22).

Praise of Jehovah befits every human and heavenly being. The beauty of His holiness, the perfection of His character, the immensity of His unfathomable love, the riches of His grace and kindness ought to stir each soul to desire, like David, for “all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (vv. 1-5).

Does it?

“Forget Not”

Spiritual amnesia is deadly. Remembering God’s past and present blessings fuels your present and future faithfulness. Remembering all His benefits is the mainspring of genuine, passionate praise. “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul and forget not all His benefits” (Psalm 103:1-2).

In Psalm 103:3-5, David instructs his soul to recall five blessings from Jehovah to feed his desire for praising God. He reminds himself to forget not:

God’s forgiveness: “Who forgives all your iniquities.” Jehovah covers over, or pardons, your legal infractions—the crooked dealings you have had with Him and others.

God’s healing: “Who heals all your diseases.” In addition to providing legal help, Jehovah has restored your physical health. Every recovery from a physical ailment has come from His healing hand.

God’s redemption: “Who redeems your life from destruction.” Sin enslaves; it reigns over its slaves as a cruel taskmaster and ruthless tyrant. Finally, when you can no longer serve it heinous purposes, it kills you—plunging you into the abyss of eter-

nal torment. God delivers you from this horrific nightmare—a life of abject slavery.

God’s royal treatment: “Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.” In God’s family, you are given “royal treatment.” You are not considered servile but royal. Continuous lovingkindness and tender mercy flow as the standard treatment God has for His beloved.

God’s blessing: “Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” God’s concern for His children is detailed and minute. In addition to the spiritual blessings He gives, He provides physical blessing—including your daily bread. He sustains your life.

“Bless the LORD, O my soul and forget not all His benefits.”

“Praising the Praiseworthy”

Few word pictures are more stunning and breathtaking than the ones used by David in Psalm 103. Like an overstuffed pillow, he is bursting at the seams in his exuberant desire to praise the Lord so that all that is within him blesses His holy name. In verses 3 to 5 David recounts five distinct blessings that he personally enjoys and desires to not forget—God’s forgiveness, healing, redemption, royal treatment, and blessing.

Beginning in verse six, the pronouns change from singular to plural as a chorus of praise joins David’s lone voice. Like a mighty ocean—powerful and plenteous—Jehovah’s praise is continued and is most deserved. Here we find four additional profound truths about the great I AM. He is praiseworthy because of:

His righteous government. “The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel” (vv. 6-7).

His incredible patience. “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins nor punished us according to our iniqui-

ties. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (vv. 8-12).

His tender pity. “As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more” (vv. 13-16).

His consistent lovingkindness. “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him and His righteousness to children’s children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them” (vv. 17-18).

Is your voice part of this chorus?

Praising God for His Sovereignty

In the closing verses of Psalm 103, David calls all the heavenly host to join his anthem of God’s exaltation. He writes: “Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure. Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion” (vv. 20-22).

The reason for this entreaty is stated in verse 19. Here it is written, “The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.” Because of Jehovah’s holy omnipotence, He is sovereign over every nook and cranny of heaven and earth.

Though evil men and imposters grow worse and worse—deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13), though nations may rage and the people plot vain things against the Lord and His Anointed (Psalm 2:1-2), though perilous times come (2 Timothy 3:1), Jehovah’s sovereign throne remains immoveable. His kingdom rules over all. What a joyous truth, what a wonderful reason for rejoicing in the sovereignty of God.

“Bless the LORD, O my soul!”

A Tribute to God’s Mercy

“For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:11-14).

Few tributes are more poignant than this beautiful one written by David. Here we find:

- The **height** of God’s mercy—as high as the heavens above the earth.
- The **length** of God’s mercy—as far as the east is from the west.
- The **motive** of God’s mercy—as a father’s pity upon his children.
- The **reason** for God’s mercy—He knows our frame and remembers that we are but dust.

“The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him” (v. 17).

“Bless the LORD, O my soul!”

Temporary vs. Eternal

“As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him and His righteousness, to children’s children, to such as keep His covenant and to those who remember His commandments to do them” (Psalm 103:15-18).

In both the Old and New Testaments, the brevity of life upon this earth is compared the fleeting lifespan of a flower. In both testaments, our temporary existence upon our planet is contrasted with something eternal. In Psalm 103, it is contrasted with the mercy of the LORD, which is from everlasting to everlasting. In 1 Peter 1:24, it is contrasted with the word of the LORD which endures forever. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

Are you building your life on things that are eternal like the mercy of God and His word?

“How Great Thou Art”

Like the previous psalm, “Bless the LORD, O my soul!” brackets the content of Psalm 104. This psalm of praise focuses on the beauty and glory of the created world. Instead of worshipping nature, the psalmist worships the God who created nature. The heavens (v. 2), the water cycle (vv. 3-14), the vegetation and forests (vv. 15-18), the sun and moon (vv. 19-23) are all components of Jehovah’s manifold works and continuous testaments to His incomparable wisdom (vv. 24-26). All creation is utterly dependent upon Jehovah for its sustenance and survival (vv. 27-30).

The glorious creation of God prompted the psalmist to the following conclusion: “May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in His works. He looks on the earth, and it trembles; He touches the hills, and they smoke. I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LORD. May sinners be consumed from the earth, and the wicked be no more” (vv. 31-35).

Many years later, another song writer (Carl Boberg) wrote:

*When through the woods, and forest glades I wander,
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees.
When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze*

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*
“Bless the LORD, O my soul! Praise the LORD! (v. 35).

“Jehovah’s Faithfulness”

The immutable truth that God is faithful to His word permeates the pages of the Holy Scriptures. Jehovah’s faithfulness is the focus of Psalm 105. Here it is written, “Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; talk of all His wondrous works! Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore! Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth, O seed of Abraham His servant, you children of Jacob, His chosen ones! He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth. He remembers His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations” (Psalm 105:1-8).

Beginning in verse 9, the psalmist traces God’s enduring faithfulness over a span of more than five hundred years:

- To the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (vv. 9-13).
- Through Joseph (vv. 16-22).
- To Israel while in Egypt (vv. 23-25).
- Through Moses and Aaron (vv. 26-41).

“For He remembered His holy promise and Abraham His servant. He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with gladness. He gave them the lands of the Gentiles, and they inherited the labor of the nations, that they might observe His statutes and keep His laws” (vv. 42-45).

“Praise the LORD!” (v. 45).

God's Goal

From Genesis 12 to Exodus 20 there is a record of God's purposeful and successful implementation of His promise made to Abraham. Moses details how, over the span of about six hundred years, Jehovah made and kept His covenant to Abraham; He made of him and his descendants a great nation (Genesis 12:2). "For He remembered His holy promise and Abraham His servant. He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with gladness (Psalm 105:42-43).

Why does God redeem? What is His goal? Psalm 105:44 states the answer quite succinctly: "That they might observe His statutes and keep His laws."

Obedience remains the goal of God's redemption. According to Jesus Himself, His disciples are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and are to be taught to observe all things that He has commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). He is "the author of salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Therefore, He warns, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Obedience is essential to your redemption from sin. Obedience is essential to your sanctification in Christ.

Your obedience is God's unchanging goal for your life.

"The Faithfulness of God"

Like its immediate predecessor, Psalm 106 begins and ends with the same call to "Praise the LORD!" The focus of this psalm of heartfelt praise is Jehovah's glorious mercy toward His extremely imperfect, foolish people.

"Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? Who can declare all His praise? Blessed are

those who keep justice, and he who does righteousness at all times! Remember me, O LORD, with the favor You have toward Your people. Oh, visit me with Your salvation, that I may see the benefit of Your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, that I may glory with Your inheritance” (vv. 1-5).

In verse six, the author details the heinous transgressions committed by the people that Jehovah had personally redeemed out of Egypt. They sinned, committed iniquity, had done wickedly (v. 6); they did not understand, did not remember, and rebelled (v. 7). “Nevertheless, He saved them for His name’s sake that He might make His mighty power known” (v. 8).

No psalm better illustrates the truth of “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13) than does Psalm 106.

Praise the LORD! for his great and enduring faithfulness to His word.

“The God of ‘Nevertheless’”

The immense patience and pity of Jehovah ought ever to be a reason for praise, not presumption. Beginning in verse 13, Psalm 106 compiles an ugly laundry list of infamous days in Israel’s history:

- In the Wilderness of Sin they forgot His deliverance from Egypt, did not wait for His counsel and lusted exceedingly—testing Him (vv. 13-15).
- In Kadesh they envied Moses and Aaron (vv. 16-18).
- At Mount Horeb they made and worshipped a golden calf (vv. 19-23).
- At Kadesh Barnea they refused to obey God’s command to conquer Canaan; they believed not His word and complained in their tents (vv. 24-27).
- At Peor they joined themselves to the idol Baal and ate sacrifices to the dead (vv. 28-31).

- At Meribah they angered God and provoked Moses to speak rashly with his lips—preventing him from entering the Promised Land (vv. 32-33).
- In Canaan they failed to obey God’s command to completely exterminate the idolatrous inhabitants. They learned idolatry and served idols, even engaging in child sacrifices to demons (vv. 34-39).

They so lived that “the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, so that He abhorred His own inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, and those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times He delivered them; but they rebelled in their counsel and were brought low for their iniquity” (vv. 40-43).

“**NEVERTHELESS** He regarded their affliction, when He heard their cry; and for their sake He remembered His covenant and relented according to the multitude of His mercies. He also made them to be pitied by all those who carried them away captive” (vv. 44-46).

“Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, ‘Amen!’

“Praise the LORD!” (v. 48)

Praise the God of “Nevertheless.”

“Innocent Blood”

One of the seven things which Jehovah emphatically states that He hates, yea He abominates, is “hands that shed innocent blood” (Proverbs 6:16-17). Psalm 106 provides a crystal-clear commentary on this heinous, abhorrent act. It conclusively demonstrates that the practice of infanticide—regardless of whether it be prior to or after a child’s birth—is abominated by the Holy One of Israel.

It is written: “They served their idols which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. Thus, they were defiled by their own works and played the harlot by their own deeds” (Psalm 106:26-39).

When the blood (i.e. the innocent blood) of sons and daughters is shed, it is done by idolators who pollute the land and defile themselves. Abortion is the sacrament of the god called Self and the goddess called Feminism. It is a moral pollutant and severe spiritual stain that defiles. It kindles the wrath of God and provokes His abhorrence (Psalm 106:40).

What a horrific blight is the shedding of innocent blood.

“The Fatal First Step”

Though millions have been deceived by false teachers on the matter, the Scriptures—Old and New Testaments alike—teach the possibility of apostasy. Hebrews 3:12 somberly warns against it—“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.” The word translated “departing” is *aphistemi*; it literally is the Greek word for apostasy.

In various locations in Psalm 106, the writer identifies the fatal first step of apostasy. It is spiritual amnesia, a failure to remember. It is written, “They did not remember the multitude of Your mercies...They soon forgot His works...They forgot God the Savior” (vv. 7, 13, 21).

Always remember: Spiritual amnesia is fatal to your faith.

“Thank God for His Goodness”

The theme of Psalm 107 is easy to determine. “Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness and for His

wonderful works to the children of men!” echoes resoundingly through the psalm (see vv. 8, 15, 21, 31). In various settings of life, the psalmist declares the appropriateness of giving thanks in all things. These are:

- When God has satisfied your longing, hungry soul with goodness (v. 9) after a period of physical and/or spiritual desolation (vv. 4-5), when He has delivered you out of trouble and distress and has led you forth by the right way (vv. 6-7), it is time to **thank God for His goodness.**
- When God has broken the bondage caused by personal rebellion and rejection of His wisdom (vv. 10-12) and has answered your cries of distress (v. 13) with deliverance (vv. 14, 16), it is time to **thank God for His goodness.**
- When God has healed your soul and delivered you from foolish behavior and the guilt of sinful actions (vv. 17-18), when He has heard your troubled cries (v. 18) and sent His word to rescue you from certain destruction (v. 20), it is time to **thank God for His goodness.**
- When the forces of nature have terrified you and brought you to your wits’ end (vv. 23-27) and God has heard your distressed cry for help—calming the storm and guiding you to a haven of safety (vv. 28-30), it is time to **thank God for His goodness.**
- When God has brought His judgment upon the wicked (vv. 33-34), when He has blessed you with material provisions (vv. 35-38), when the unrighteous and mighty are brought low (vv. 39-40), when the afflicted are delivered and blessed (v. 41), when good triumphs over evil (v. 42), it is time to **thank God for His goodness.**

“Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD” (v. 43).

Thank God for His goodness.

“Immanuel”

Psalm 107:25-30 clearly states that only Jehovah can quiet a raging storm. Here it is written: “For He commands and raises the stormy wind which lifts up the waves of the sea. They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man and are at their wits’ end. Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; so, He guides them to their desired haven.”

When sailors find themselves in a violent storm—at their wits’ end—and great calm comes in response to their terrified pleas to the LORD, it is time to “give thanks to the LORD for His goodness” (v. 31). Only Jehovah has such power to subdue nature.

While sailing on the Sea of Galilee, a great windstorm and tempest came down upon Jesus and His apostles (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25). It covered their boat with waves, filling it with water. They were in jeopardy while Jesus slept. Once He was awakened, Jesus arose and with two (Greek) words rebuked the winds and the raging sea: “Peace, be still.” Immediately the wind ceased and there was a great calm. The apostles asked one another, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

Psalm 107 confirms the truth of Matthew 1:23—It is Immanuel, “God with us.”

A Steadfast Heart

Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is much more than a sentimental feeling; it is commitment made by a resolute heart. It is a heart that is not tossed to and fro by its circumstances.

In Psalm 108, David describes two essential characteristics of a steadfast, fixed heart.

It is always determined to sing God's praise because of the greatness of God's mercy and glory. "O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. Awake, lute and harp! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise You, O LORD, among the peoples, and I will sing praises to You among the nations. For Your mercy is great above the heavens, and Your truth reaches to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens and Your glory above all the earth" (vv. 1-5).

It is always determined to trust God and His word because of His sovereignty. "That Your beloved may be delivered, save with Your right hand, and hear me. God has spoken in His holiness: 'I will rejoice; I will divide Shechem and measure out the Valley of Succoth. Gilead is Mine; Manasseh is Mine; Ephraim also is the helmet for My head; Judah is My lawgiver. Moab is My wash pot; over Edom I will cast My shoe; over Philistia I will triumph.' Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me to Edom? Is it not You, O God, who cast us off? And You, O God, who did not go out with our armies? Give us help from trouble, for the help of man is useless. Through God we will do valiantly, for it is He who shall tread down our enemies" (vv. 6-13).

Do you have a steadfast heart?

Overcoming Evil

Revenge is a divinely forbidden fruit which appeals mightily to our dark side. Avenging oneself instead of leaving room for God to exact His righteous wrath upon an evil doer can be quite tempting. But God expects His people to overcome evil with good, instead of repaying evil for evil. What a spiritual challenge Jesus gives His disciples when He said, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven..." (Matthew 5:44-45).

Psalm 109 was written by a heartbroken David. He writes: “Do not keep silent, O God of my praise! For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They have also surrounded me with words of hatred and fought against me without a cause. In return for my love they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer. Thus, they have rewarded me evil for good and hatred for my love” (vv. 1-5). David had been lied about with hateful and unprovoked accusations. He had received evil in repayment for good, hatred in response to his love. His enemies were unmerciful and vicious (v. 16); they were profane (v. 17). Because of their evil actions, David has a wounded heart which was bleeding profusely (v. 22).

Instead of allowing the spiritual poison of bitterness to take root in his heart and defile it, instead of pursuing a plot to exact revenge upon these workers of iniquity, David turns to God in prayer. Since vengeance belongs to God, David purges his heart of anger, wrath, and malice by making twenty-one specific petitions to God (vv. 6-20).

Honestly confessing the spiritual toxins he felt, David thoroughly cleanses his heart. This purifies his perspective and lifts him above the evil that had been poured out upon him. His prayer closes with these words: “Help me, O LORD my God! Oh, save me according to Your mercy, that they may know that this is Your hand—that You, LORD, have done it! Let them curse, but You bless; when they arise, let them be ashamed, but let Your servant rejoice. Let my accusers be clothed with shame, and let them cover themselves with their own disgrace as with a mantle. I will greatly praise the LORD with my mouth; yes, I will praise Him among the multitude. For He shall stand at the right hand of the poor to save him from those who condemn him” (vv. 26-31).

It is never easy to overcome evil with good, but, with God’s help, it is possible; and expected.

Christ's Unique Reign

A necessary component in the study of human history is an examination of Pharaohs, Kings, Caesars, Presidents, Czars, and Potentates. Far different than every one of these historic rulers is the reign of the Messiah. It is one of a kind. As prophesied in Psalm 110, Jesus Christ's reign is most unique.

Its **location** is unique, because it is at the right hand of God. "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand...'" (v. 1). All other rulers had capitols with an earthly location. Jesus' throne, inherited from his forefather David, is in heaven at God's right hand.

Its **duration** is unique, because it will last until all His enemies are conquered. "...till I make Your enemies Your footstool" (v. 1). Most rulers in history do not and cannot begin their reign until all this rivals and hostile forces have been defeated. Jesus' reign began long before that point. In fact, once all His enemies are destroyed, His reign will conclude.

Its **subjects** are unique, because they include all His enemies and His allies. The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth" (vv. 2-3). To secure their power, earthly rulers will usually execute every possible rival who they view as a potential threat. Jesus rules over both His enemies and His voluntary allies while seeking to turn His enemies into His allies.

Its **reason** is unique, because it was decreed by God. "The LORD has sworn and will not relent..." (v. 4). Earthly rulers usually come to power through military might, not an election by voters. The Scriptures record Jehovah's prediction of the Persian king Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1) and the great Greek conqueror Alexander the Great (Daniel 8); they also describe the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar as being God's battle axe (Jeremiah 51:20).

These men seized power through military conquest; Jesus reigns because of spiritual conquest and divine decree.

Its **purpose** is unique, because its focus is reconciliation to God. “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (v. 4). Earthly rulers seek power because of their thirst for personal wealth, power, fame, and prestige; they are driven by ambitious pride. Jesus’ purpose is to act as humanity’s perfect High Priest, reconciling God’s enemies via His atoning blood.

Its **power** is unique, because it is universal. “The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. He shall drink of the brook by the wayside” (vv. 5-8). Though many have sought universal authority, no mortal in history has ever had power over every person of every nation. Jesus does. He has all authority over heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). He is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power” (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

The uniqueness of Christ’s reign is good news for every one of His voluntary allies. It ought to cause each of them to lift up their heads (v. 7) in hope, joy, peace, and thanksgiving.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

A Priest According to the Order of Melchizedek

No better commentary on Psalm 110:4 can be found than the inspired one found in Hebrews 4:14-10:18. Here, the Spirit-guided penman makes the following points about Jesus’ high priesthood:

- Like the Levitical high priesthood of the Old Testament (Hebrews 5:1), Jesus is our high priest because He was appointed/called by God to so function (Hebrews 5:5, 10).
- Just as God swore to Abraham that He would bless Him (Hebrews 6:13-14), so “The LORD has sworn and will not relent” that Jesus would become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20).
- The uniqueness of Melchizedek is that he was both a king of righteousness and of peace and a priest of the Most High God (Hebrews 7:1-2). This was impossible under the Law of Moses because the kings came from the descendants of David (of the tribe of Judah) and the High Priests came from the descendants of Aaron (of the tribe of Levi). For Jesus to be both King and Priest there had to be a change of the law; a new covenant—the one prophesied by Jeremiah (Hebrews 8:7-13)—had to be given (Hebrews 7:12-17).

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

The Superiority of Jesus’ High Priesthood

Jesus’ high priesthood is vastly superior to the Old Testament’s Levitical priesthood. The promise of “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4) is such a blessing because:

- Aaron, through his forefather Abraham, paid tithes to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:4-10); this is an indication of the superiority of Melchizedek’s superiority.

- Levitical high priests were prevented by death to continue in their work; Jesus “always lives to make intercession” (Hebrews 7:25).
- A Levitical high priest had to offer up a sacrifice for his own sins and then sacrifices for the sins of the people; Jesus had no sin—He is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26-27).
- The Levitical high priest offered sacrifices on earth in the copy and shadow of heavenly things (Hebrews 8:3-5); Jesus is high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, the true tabernacle of God (Hebrews 8:1-2).
- Jesus “has obtained a more excellent ministry” because He is “Mediator of a better covenant, established on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6); the first covenant was not faultless (Hebrews 8:7-12)
- The Levitical high priest offered inferior sacrifices—the blood of bulls and goats which could not possibly take away sins in a permanent way (Hebrews 9:9-10, 10:3-4); while Jesus, in contrast, “with His own blood He entered the Most Holy place once for all” and “obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12).
- The Law under which the Levitical priests served could “never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect” (Hebrews 10:1); therefore, they had to minister daily and make sacrifices repeatedly (Hebrews 10:11). Jesus, however, “after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool” (Hebrews 10:12-13).

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in

full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:19-25).

David’s Son and Lord

According to each of the Synoptic writers, Jesus posed two questions to the Pharisees about the Christ which they found unanswerable: “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool”’? If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” (Matthew 22:43-45). As Peter points out, this promise of Psalm 110:1 was not made to David; he would not ascend into the heavens and sit at God’s right hand (Acts 2:34). Obviously, therefore, it was made to one of David’s descendants, the Christ.

The point of this promise is that of the dual nature of the Christ; He would be both human (David’s physical descendant) and deity (a member of the Godhead, a peer of Jehovah). Or as it more often stated in the New Testament: Jesus is the Son of Man (i.e. human) and the Son of God (i.e. deity).

The gospel which the LORD God promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures was focused upon “His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:3-4).

Therefore, know assuredly that this man Jesus of Nazareth is both Lord and Christ.

Hallelujah

Ten psalms begin with the Hebrew exclamation “Hallelujah” (Psalms 106, 111, 112, 113, 135, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150); the English translation is “Praise the LORD!” At least two of these psalms—111 and 112—are acrostic. This means that each of their lines begins with a different Hebrew letter, starting with the first (Aleph) and ending with its twenty-second and final letter (Tau). This is the Hebrew equivalent to the English idiom “from A to Z” and the Greek phrase “from Alpha to Omega.”

This presents an interesting, useful, and challenging question to modern day Bible students—Have you ever stopped to literally praise God from A to Z? Psalms 111 and 112 demonstrate that it has been done before. Can you add your name to the list of those who have?

I’ll help you get started; see if you can finish.

Praise the LORD! for His...

Abundant Affection,

Bountiful Benevolence,

Compassionate Care,

Dependable Decrees...

The Wisdom of Praising Jehovah

The popularity of ingratitude and irreverence can be easily seen in society today; however, its folly may not be as readily apparent. Therefore, Psalm 111 is most helpful. It is a brief tutorial on why such attitudes and actions are foolish.

Its first verse expresses the psalmist’s determination to praise God wholeheartedly and unashamedly—“Praise the LORD! I will praise the LORD with my whole heart in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation.” Its final verse explains the wisdom of such actions—“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever” (v. 10).

Sandwiched between the first and final verses is a meaty description of the LORD's enduring praiseworthiness. Because of His wonderful works towards His people, the wisdom of praising Jehovah is clearly seen. Here it is written, "The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant. He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever and are done in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name" (vv. 2-9).

The choice is unmistakably plain: You can be wise by praising Jehovah for His wonderful works, OR you can be foolish by neglecting to praise and obey Him.

Which option will you choose today?

The Ultimate Goal of Faith

The ultimate litmus test of your faith is how extensively it transforms your character and conduct into the imitation of God.

This principle is taught repeatedly in Scripture. In the book of Romans, for example, the apostle Paul's pen carefully leads its readers through a thorough examination of the glorious gospel (Romans 1:18-11:32); it fittingly ends in exalted praise of God's wisdom and knowledge (Romans 11:33-36). Immediately after this, Paul entreats his brethren to let this wondrous gospel transform their thinking and impact their daily living. He writes, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that

you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

In the Psalter, the praiseworthiness of Jehovah from “a to z” is announced and described in Psalm 111; the next Psalm (112) uses the same acrostic format to describe the complete blessedness of the man whose character and conduct is transformed by his faith: “Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments” (Psalm 112:1).

Sound doctrine (i.e. healthy teaching) is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. It is the nutritious spiritual diet that God has given to transform us into conformity with His glorious, holy nature. Psalm 112 details the blessedness of such a transformation. The LORD’s righteousness endures forever (Psalm 111:3); so does the man who fears the LORD and delights greatly in His commandments (Psalm 112:3). The LORD is gracious and full of compassion (Psalm 111:4); so is the man who fears the LORD and delights greatly in His commandments (Psalm 112:4).

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10).

It is also the beginning of the transformation which will ultimately culminate in eternal glory (1 John 3:2; Philippians 3:21).

The Blessed Life

Living your life so that you are blessed is important to God. Therefore, the Bible has a host of beatitudes informing you how you live so as to be abundantly blessed by God. The book of Psalms begins with a beatitude and contains over a dozen declarations of blessing on those who live in such a way as to enjoy God’s lovingkindness. The blessing that begins Psalm 112 is worthy of close and careful meditation. Here it is written: “Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments.”

Deep, abiding reverence for God and all things holy is the bedrock of blessed living. Accurate discernment between the sacred

and the profane is essential. Keeping the temple of your heart free from the impurities of idolatry and full of profound respect for the true God is the lifeblood of the blessed life.

Cultivating a love for God's holy commandments, which delights greatly in their content, and results in your joyful compliance to them, is essential to blessed living. Obedience to God is not optional nor is it drudgery. Possessing an intense appetite and thirst for the authoritative and holy will of God is a distinct characteristic of one who will enjoy God's richest blessings.

Being blessed by God is not a spiritual mystery hidden away in the secret things of God and only discovered by a few elite spiritual explorers. The Bible plainly and repeatedly tells us how to live the blessed life. "Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways" (Psalm 128:1). "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). "Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments" (Psalm 112:1).

The knowledge and opportunity of living the blessed life is available to all.

Praise the LORD!

The Fruits of Righteousness

From the outset of the book of Psalms, there is a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Psalm 1 declares that it is like the difference between a deep-rooted, healthy tree and chaff which can easily be blown about by the faintest of breezes. Psalm 112 gives an acrostic description of the blessedness of the man who truly fears the LORD and delights greatly in His commandments. Consider the following traits that are highlighted in this divine portrait:

- **Generosity.** "He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man deals graciously and lends" (vv. 4-5).

- **Discretion.** “He will guide his affairs with discretion” (v. 5).
- **Steadfastness.** “Surely he will never be shaken; the righteous will be in everlasting remembrance. He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established; he will not be afraid” (vv. 6-8).

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10); it is also the firm foundation upon which a righteous, abundant life is built.

How great is your delight in God’s commandments?

The Utter Praiseworthiness of Jehovah

At the Passover meal, the faithful Jew would traditionally sing Psalms 113 and 114 at the beginning of his observance and then sing Psalms 115, 116, 117, and 118 at its close. Matthew 26:30 lends credence to the possibility that Jesus did this in His final observation of the Passover.

Psalm 113 is a declaration of pure praise. It begins with “Praise the LORD!” and calls all the servants of Jehovah to praise His name (i.e. His character, authority, and person). It pronounces a beatitude upon the LORD and declares that He is to be universally praised. “Blessed be the name of the LORD from this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its going down the LORD’s name is to be praised” (vv. 2-3).

Jehovah’s utter praiseworthiness is stated in incomparable majesty. “The LORD is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens. Who is like the LORD our God, Who dwells on high, Who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth? He raises the poor out of the dust and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes—with the princes of His people. He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children” (vv. 4-9).

The incarnation of Jesus, who so humbled Himself to be born of a woman so He could raise all humanity out of the abject poverty and ash heap of sin and make sons/princes of God out of the sons of Adam, intensifies exponentially the psalm's final burst of "Praise the LORD!"

Reverence

The foundation of acceptable worship is a proper reverence for God's sovereignty and might. The final psalm recited by a Hebrew prior to his observance of the Passover was Psalm 114. It reads: "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah became His sanctuary and Israel His dominion. The sea saw it and fled; Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs. What ails you, O sea, that you fled? O Jordan, that you turned back? O mountains, that you skipped like rams? O little hills, like lambs? Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob Who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters."

What vibrant, vivid language is used to describe the birth of the Hebrew nation, the intended focus of the Passover's remembrance. The flight of the Red Sea, the turning back of the Jordan River, the skipping of the mountains and hills, the trembling of the earth, and the production of water by the rock and flint all testify of the Sovereign might of the God of Jacob.

If the earth—its seas, rivers, mountains, and hills—trembles at the presence of the Lord, shouldn't I do likewise? Reverence is foundational to acceptable worship.

How blessed is the man who reverently fears the LORD.

"The Importance of Worship"

The importance of worship is clearly enunciated in the first eight verses of Psalm 115. Here it is written: "Not unto us, O

LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth. Why should the Gentiles say, ‘So where is their God?’ But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them.”

Just as “you are what you eat” governs the health and well-being of the body, so “you become like what you worship” (Psalm 115:8) governs the health and well-being of the soul. According to Jesus (John 4:24), worshiping Jehovah must be done with the proper spirit of reverence, joy, sincerity, and submissiveness and in truth (i.e. according to His written instructions—John 17:17).

Worshiptainment is NOT acceptable worship of the one true God; it only furthers self-centeredness in a person’s life.

“Focused Worship”

Several years ago, the word “worshiptainment” was coined to describe a popular phenomenon occurring in our society. The word sought to reflect the fact that entertainment has been injected into the worship activities of various religious organizations. It is a sad testament to an increasing appetite of Americans to profane the sacred.

Worshiptainment is unbecoming of Jehovah. Consider these four reasons—found in Psalm 115—why this is true:

God’s mercy. “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy” (v. 1). Because of His great love, God is rich in His mercy toward sinful humanity (Ephesians 2:4). The eternally purposed plan of salvation which enables a person to go from being dead in sin to alive together

with Christ (Ephesians 2:5) is alone sufficient to prompt worship that is focused upon God and His mercy, not self.

God's truth. "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory...because of Your truth" (v. 1). Because of His immense desire that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), Jehovah spent about 1,600 years moving holy men by the Holy Spirit to record His incorruptible word, which is able to generate a new birth (1 Peter 2:23), build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:32). The existence and ability of the Holy Scriptures is alone sufficient to prompt worship that is focused upon God and His truth, not self.

God's help and protection. "O Israel, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield" (vv. 9-11). Jehovah's willingness to help and protect His people collectively, by families, and individually is alone sufficient to prompt worship that is focused upon Him and His goodness, not self.

God's mindfulness. "The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the LORD, both small and great" (vv. 12-13). "The LORD is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens. Who is like the LORD our God, Who dwells on high, Who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth?" (Psalm 113:4-6). What humility Jehovah truly has! Not only has He humbled Himself to behold the affairs of earth, He has humbled Himself to the point of knowing the very hairs on your head (Luke 12:7) and the death of every sparrow (Matthew 10:29). Jehovah's mindfulness—His blessing upon countries, families, and individuals both great and small—is alone sufficient to prompt worship that is focused upon Him, not self.

When it comes time to worship, focus it like a laser upon the One who is worthy: Praise **the LORD!**

“The Impartiality of God”

God is no respecter of persons. “He will bless those who fear the LORD, both small and great” (Psalm 115:13).

Though a society may esteem the great and disregard the small, it does not change one whit God’s impartiality.

Because of God’s impartiality, He has given **one universal plan of salvation** which asserts the same demands on everyone. “Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him’” (Acts 10:34-35).

Because of God’s impartiality, each person has **an appointment with death**. Job expressed this passing from the land of the living to the realm of the dead with these terse words: “The small and the great are there” (Job 3:19).

Because of God’s impartiality, there will be **one universal judgment day for all humanity**. “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:11-12). Each of us will be judged according to our deeds: “eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God” (Romans 2:7-11).

Because of God's impartiality, "my brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality" (James 2:1).

Reasons for Worship

"Praise the LORD!" is the theme and focus of the book of Psalms. It is the expressed theme and focus of Psalm 115. This composition begins with, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth" (v. 1), and ends with, "The dead do not praise the LORD, nor any who go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD! (vv. 17-18). Of the myriad of reasons for worshipping the great I AM, the composer of Psalm 115 chose these three:

His uniqueness (vv. 3-8). Unlike idols with useless mouths, eyes, ears, noses, hands, and feet, Jehovah is self-existent and independent. He is in heaven and does whatever He pleases. He is in a league all His own.

His help and protection (vv. 9-11). To the nation, family, and person who trusts in Him, He is their help and shield.

His generosity (vv. 12-16). He is ever mindful of His people and will bless them, both small and great. The creator of heaven and earth blesses those who serve Him.

Praise the LORD!

"The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving"

When it comes to thanksgiving, Americans tend to think of a day, not a daily sacrifice. This is not true of those who composed the psalms.

Psalm 116, for example, connects being a servant of Jehovah with a daily sacrifice of thanksgiving. Here it is written, "O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to

You the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD, now in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the LORD's house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!" (vv. 16-19).

This was the irresistible conclusion reached by the composer. He had arrived at this mindset by doing the following:

He had **reflected on Jehovah's answers to His prayers**. "I love the LORD, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live. The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the LORD: 'O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!'" (vv. 1-4)

He had **meditated upon Jehovah's bountiful grace**. "Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yes, our God is merciful. The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. Return to your rest, O my soul, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you" (vv. 5-7).

He had **remembered Jehovah's deliverance**. "For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living" (vv. 8-9).

He had **considered his rightful obligations**. "What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD, now in the presence of all His people" (vv. 12-14).

He had **recognized the blessing of death to those who are holy**. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (v. 15).

Psalm 116 provides a pattern that you can follow to transform your thinking about thanksgiving from being a day to being a daily sacrifice of your lips.

“Precious”

Because the cattle on a thousand hills belong to Jehovah (Psalm 50:10), what God finds of great value is quite different than the typical thinking of humans. Jesus recognized the profundity of this frequent difference when He told the Pharisees: “what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15).

In the eyes of God, the following things are expressly stated as being precious:

- **The death of the righteous.** “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15).
- **Genuine faith.** “the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes...” (1 Peter 1:7).
- **The blood of Christ.** “you were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ... (1 Peter 1:18-19).
- **The work of Christ in building His church.** “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious...it is also contained in the Scripture, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious...’” (1 Peter 2:4, 6).
- **A gentle/meek and quiet spirit.** “let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:4).

Are these the things you value most, or is fool’s gold most precious to you?

“God’s Indescribable Gift”

Though Psalm 117 is the shortest psalm, it packs a powerful punch. Its first verse is quoted by the apostle Paul in Romans 15 as a proof text of his inspired declaration that Jewish and Gentile

Christians ought to “receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (v. 7), because “Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy” (vv. 8-9). The eternally purposed mystery “which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men” is that “the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” as the Jews (Ephesians 3:4-6). Therefore, “Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!” (Psalm 117:1).

The fulfillment of this wondrous plan of salvation which has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles in one body through the cross (Ephesians 2:16) has come through the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). This is the same note sung in Psalm 117:2—“For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!”

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

“Jesus’ Final Song”

“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matthew 26:30). According to Jewish tradition, Psalms 113 and 114 were sung prior to the Passover meal and Psalms 115 through 118 were sung after its completion. As Matthew indicates, Jesus and His disciples did this.

Like each of the other Hallel (i.e. praise) psalms sung on this evening, Psalm 118 focuses specifically upon Jehovah’s praiseworthiness. The psalm begins and ends with the same exhortation: “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (vv. 1, 29). The psalm’s rationale for thanksgiving is:

- **Jehovah’s impressive history of answered prayers.** “I called on the LORD in distress; the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place” (v. 5).
- **Jehovah’s unwavering companionship.** “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The LORD is for me among those who help me” (vv. 6-7).
- **Jehovah’s history of deliverance.** “All nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me; but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They surrounded me like bees; they were quenched like a fire of thorns; for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. You pushed me violently, that I might fall, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation” (vv. 10-14).
- **Jehovah’s promise of salvation through the rejected cornerstone (i.e. Christ).** “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (vv. 22-24).

Jesus’ final song spoke of the climatic fulfillment of His earthly ministry—the rejection of the Jews and the building of His church. Before the next sunset, the Jews’ rejection of Him would be finally completed!

One can only wonder what Jesus thought and felt as He sang these words of His final song.

“The Lord is my Helper”

The false doctrine of deism has been around for many years. This unbiblical concept teaches that God created the universe (wound it up like a clock), then crossed His Almighty arms and

watched the events of history unfold as an aloof and passive spectator. Such is categorically untrue.

Psalm 118:5-7 alone gives three distinct reasons why deism is false:

- **Jehovah hears and answers prayer.** “I called on the LORD in distress; the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place” (v. 5).
- **Jehovah sides with the righteous.** “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (v. 6).
- **Jehovah protects His own from those who hate them.** “The LORD is for me among those who help me; therefore, I shall see my desire on those who hate me” (v. 7).

“It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes” (Psalm 118:8-9).

How blessed are those to whom Jehovah is “our help and shield” (Psalm 33:20).

“God’s Marvelous Work”

The paradox of the cross is that Calvary was man at his worst and God at His best; it was the darkest hour of humanity’s wretched history, yet the brightest moments for human redemption. The stone which the builders rejected at Golgotha became the chief cornerstone of the holy temple built by Jesus to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:5). Just as promised (Matthew 16:18), Jesus built His church and adds those He saves to it (Acts 2:47).

It is because of the Lord’s doing—marvelous in our eyes—that we can declare the gloriously good news of a new day: “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” because “God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 2:21; 10:34-35). Let us rejoice and be glad in God’s marvelous work and “give

thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (Psalm 118:29).

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD” (Psalm 118:26).

“In a League of Its Own”

Psalm 119 is a literary masterpiece of the highest order. It is the *crème-de-la-crème* of all human music. It is in a league all its own because of...

Its focus. As declared in its initial verses, this psalm seeks to thoroughly explore and explain the blessedness of those who live in harmony with the divine teaching of Jehovah. “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!” (vv. 1-2). One hundred seventy-six verses were needed to accomplish this task!

Its structure. Psalm 119 is an acrostic (i.e. alphabetical) poem. As noted in most standard translations, the praise of Jehovah’s word is sung using each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet—from Aleph (vv. 1-8) to Tau (vv. 169-176).

Its beauty. What the English translators cannot duplicate in translation is the fact that each of the eight verses dedicated to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet begin with the corresponding letter. For example, each of the first eight verses begin with the Hebrew letter Aleph; each of the next eight verses begin with the Hebrew letter Beth. This pattern is repeated with each letter of the Hebrew alphabet! In music, eight is the perfect number, for there are eight notes in an octave. In essence, the unknown—yet clearly inspired—composer calls each letter of his native tongue to sing an octave’s praise of God and His all-sufficient word. Imagine how difficult that would be using each of the twenty-six letters of our English alphabet!

What a matchless composition!

The Life God Offers

There have been many tributes to God's word. None is as exquisite and extensive as Psalm 119. As an overview of this unique masterpiece, consider the life God offers to anyone who will read, study, meditate upon and do His word:

- joy (vv. 1-8),
- purity (vv. 9-16)
- spiritual abundance (vv. 17-24)
- renewal (vv. 25-32)
- endurance (vv. 33-40)
- mercy (vv. 41-48)
- hope (vv. 49-56)
- fellowship (vv. 57-64)
- gratitude (vv. 65-72)
- freedom from shame (vv. 73-80)
- confidence (vv. 81-88)
- stability (vv. 89-96)
- wisdom (vv. 97-104)
- victory (vv. 105-112)
- protection (vv. 113-120)
- righteousness (vv. 121-128)
- enlightenment (vv. 129-136)
- knowledge (vv. 137-144)
- obedience (vv. 145-152)
- redemption (vv. 153-160)
- security (vv. 161-168)
- delight (vv. 169-176)

The Glorious Word of God

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” was Jesus' first recorded cita-

tion of Scripture (Matthew 4:4). It summarizes the “jot and tittle” love and respect that Jesus had for God’s word and His utter submissiveness to it.

His profound reverence for the Scriptures came from His clear understanding and appreciation of God’s word. Psalm 119 describes its immense glory in the following ways:

- Righteous (vv. 1-8)
- Holy (vv. 9-16)
- Delightful (vv. 17-24)
- Strengthening (vv. 25-32)
- Good (vv. 33-40)
- All-sufficient (vv. 41-48)
- Indestructible (vv. 49-56)
- Trustworthy (vv. 57-64)
- Faithful (vv. 65-72)
- Right (vv. 73-80)
- Dependable (vv. 81-88)
- Unshakable (vv. 89-96)
- Truthful (vv. 97-104).
- Enlightening (vv. 105-112)
- Immovable (vv. 113-120)
- Instructive (vv. 121-128)
- Inerrant (vv. 129-136)
- Pure (vv. 137-144)
- Able to save (vv. 145-152)
- Eternal (vv. 153-160)
- Infallible (vv. 161-168)
- Perfect (vv. 169-176)

It is the pilgrim’s map, the pilot’s compass, the soldier’s sword. It contains all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

Aleph's Tribute to God's Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God's Word.

Aleph's tribute begins with beatitudes: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart! They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways" (vv. 1-3).

This is followed by an emphatic statement of God's expectation of obedience and the writer's fervent desire to live accordingly. "You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently. Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!" (vv. 4-5).

Aleph's tribute continues with the wonderful result that comes from obeying God's Word. "Then I would not be ashamed when I look into all Your commandments" (v. 6).

The conclusion is a two-fold resolution with an earnest petition. "I will praise You with uprightness of heart when I learn Your righteous judgments. I will keep Your statutes; oh, do not forsake me utterly" (vv. 7-8).

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Beth's Tribute to God's Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God's Word. The second letter of the Hebrew alphabet is Beth (pronounced "bet" because the final letter is silent). Its focus is upon the spiritual health and hygiene that God's holy word offers to all who engraft it into their hearts and minds.

The tribute begins with a question and its wonderful answer: “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word” (v. 9).

Because of the powerful spiritual antiseptic the Scriptures are, the writer states his actions and desire: “With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!” (v. 10).

His commitment to holiness is genuine because “Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You” (v. 11).

His praise is heartfelt and practically expressed. “Blessed are You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes. With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies as much as in all riches” (vv. 12-14).

His determination to know and sanctify God’s word is expressed in these three resolutions: “I will meditate on Your precepts and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word” (vv. 15-16).

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Gimel’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word.

Gimel—the third letter—begins its chorus of praise with two earnest petitions: “Deal bountifully with Your servant that I may live and keep Your word. Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (vv. 17-18).

The reasons for these requests are declared next. “I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me. My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times. You rebuke the proud—the cursed who stray from Your commandments” (vv. 19-21).

Because a life of faith is a pilgrimage through hostile territory, an additional request is made: “Remove from me reproach and contempt, for I have kept Your testimonies. Princes also sit and speak against me” (vv. 22-23).

Such opposition does not deter the writer’s embrace of God. “Your servant meditates on Your statutes. Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors” (vv. 23-24).

What a source of comfort and strength is God’s Word during the spiritually challenging portions of life’s pilgrimage!

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Daleth’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. Daleth (pronounced da-let) is the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Its octave of praise reflects a desperate sense of abasement: “My soul clings to the dust...My soul melts from heaviness” (vv. 25, 28). This can only be remedied by God’s written counsel: “revive me according to Your word...strengthen me according to Your word” (vv. 25, 28).

To enjoy God’s blessings to the fullest, the writer states: “I have declared my ways, and You answered me; teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts, so shall I meditate on Your wonderful works” (vv. 26-27). Then he requests, “Remove from me the way of lying and grant me Your law graciously” (v. 29).

Daleth’s tribute concludes with three personal decisions made by the writer: “I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me. I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! I will run the course of Your commandments for You shall enlarge my heart” (vv. 30-32).

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

He’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. The fifth letter is He.

Because of the composer’s intense desire—“Behold I long for Your precepts” (v. 40)—this octave of praise contains eight fervent requests: “Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes...Give me understanding...Make me walk in the path of Your commandments...Incline my heart to your testimonies... Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things...revive me in Your way...Establish Your word to Your servant...Turn away my reproach which I dread” (vv. 33-39).

These requests are coupled with three solemn resolutions: “I shall keep Your law...Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart...I shall keep it to the end” (vv. 34, 33).

Liking God’s Word is different than loving it. He’s tribute demonstrates what loving it looks like.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Waw’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. The sixth letter is Waw.

Its tribute begins with two requests: “Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD—Your salvation according to Your word... And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in Your ordinances” (vv. 41, 43).

The motive for the requests is the fulfillment of two earnest desires: “So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me for I trust in Your word...So shall I keep Your law continually forever and ever” (vv. 42, 44).

The final four verses of this octave of tribute (vv. 45-48) focus on six personal resolutions of the composer:

- I will walk at liberty for I seek Your precepts;
- I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings;
- I will not be ashamed;
- I will delight myself in Your commandments which I love;
- My hands will I lift up to Your commandments which I love; and,
- I will meditate on Your statutes.

Defending one’s faith and obeying God’s Word requires a steadfast and resolute heart.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Zayin’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. The seventh letter is Zayin.

In the first half of this tribute, the focus is upon the comfort, strength, and hope that can be found in Scripture during times of affliction, heartache, and mistreatment. “Remember the word to Your servant upon which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction for Your word has given me life. The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from Your law. I remembered Your judgments of old, O LORD and have comforted myself” (vv. 49-52).

The second half of this tribute begins with a description of how God's will has shaped his life. His love of God's Word has thoroughly motivated him to abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good. "Indignation has taken hold of me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law. Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" (vv. 53-54).

Zayin's tribute concludes with a wonderful statement of how the Scriptures are ever present in the life of the composer. "I remember Your name in the night, O LORD, and I keep Your law. This has become mine, because I kept Your precepts" (vv. 55-56).

God's Word is not intended to be put on a coffee table to record family birthdays, marriages, and death; it is best used when it is engrafted into your heart so that it can reign supreme in your life.

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Heth's Tribute to God's Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God's Word. Heth is the eighth letter of the alphabet.

The first four verses of this tribute describe the actions taken by the composer because "You are my portion, O LORD" (v. 57). These actions are enumerated:

- "I have said that I would keep Your words" (v. 57).
- "I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; be merciful to me according to Your word" (v. 58).
- "I thought about my ways and turned my feet to Your testimonies" (v. 59).
- "I made haste and did not delay to keep Your commandments" (v. 60).

In the face of opposition—“The cords of the wicked have bound me”—the author did not forget God’s law (v. 61). He rises at midnight to give Jehovah thanks for His righteous judgments (v. 62). He chooses His companions carefully—only those who fear God and keep His precepts are chosen (v. 63). Because the earth is full of the LORD’s mercy, the composer desires instruction of His statutes (v. 64).

As Jesus so vividly states in his elegant allegory of the vine and its branches (John 15:1-12), to be a thriving, fruitful branch in the true vine, God’s word must abide in you (v. 7).

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Teth’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. Teth is the 9th letter of the alphabet.

Its tribute focuses upon the blessings of trials, an inevitable part of life for a child of God (2 Timothy 3:12; James 1:2-4). Difficult circumstances can arise in one’s life because of disobedience—“before I was afflicted, I went astray” (v. 67); they also can arise in one’s life because of obedience and bring the blessing of spiritual improvement—“It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I may learn Your statutes” (v. 71).

Regardless of the reason for such trials, several wonderful blessings can be seen and enjoyed from such unpleasant circumstances:

- **God’s faithfulness to His word.** “You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word” (v. 65).

- **Wisdom** (i.e. good judgment and knowledge). “Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments” (v. 66).
- **The importance of obedience.** “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Your word” (v. 67).
- **God’s goodness.** “You are good and do good; teach me Your statutes” (v. 68).
- **The proper esteem for and value of God’s Word.** “The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver” (v. 72).

Difficult trials and afflictions may arise because of your enemies—the proud may forge a lie against you—but you can still be faithful to God and keep His precepts with your whole heart, delighting in His law (vv. 69-70). Imagine how difficult and brutal it would be to endure the trials and afflictions of life without the patience and comfort of the Scriptures to fuel your hope (Romans 15:4)!

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Yod’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. The tenth and smallest letter is yod. It probably is the “jot” that Jesus refers to in Matthew 5:18.

Yod’s tribute begins with a statement of fact followed by a request. “Your hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments” (v. 73). Nothing is more sensible than seeking and learning thoroughly the instructions published by an inventor concerning his invention.

After this, there is a desire for fellowship with like-minded individuals: “Those who fear You will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in Your word” (v. 74).

The next note played in this chorus of praise is a distinct expression of love and trust. “I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me” (v. 75).

The tribute concludes with five earnest petitions:

- “Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Your word to Your servant” (v. 76).
- “Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; for Your law is my delight” (v. 77).
- “Let the proud be ashamed, for they treated me wrongfully with falsehood; but I will meditate on Your precepts” (v. 78).
- “Let those who fear You turn to me, those who know Your testimonies” (v. 79).
- “Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes, that I may not be ashamed” (v. 80).

Living faithfully to God when afflicted and treated wrongfully is possible if you cling tenaciously to His word during such ordeals.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Kaph’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. Kaph is the eleventh letter of the alphabet. Its tribute focuses upon the comfort (i.e. strengthening) of the Scriptures (Romans 15:4) that the author received from the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3) during difficult times.

His trials included persecution (v. 84), pits (i.e. snares) dug by the proud (v. 85), and ill treatment (v. 86) which almost made an end of him on the earth (v. 87). He became like a wineskin in smoke (v. 83)—dried up and dirty.

Yet, through each ordeal, he hoped in God’s Word (v. 81), focused upon not forgetting Jehovah’s statutes (v. 83), did not forsake His precepts (v. 87), and prayed, “Help me!” (v. 86). His concluding request was “Revive me according to Your loving-kindness, so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth” (v. 88).

God and His Word of comfort are faithful during the trials and hardships of life.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Lamed’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. Lamed’s tribute is found in verses 89 to 96.

Its praise of God’s Word begins with the eternal (and thus, enduring) nature of divine revelation. “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides. They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants” (vv. 89-91).

The practical value of the Holy Scriptures is addressed in verses 92 and 95. Here it is written, “Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction...The wicked wait for me to destroy me, but I will consider Your testimonies.”

In addition, the incredible power of the written word to provide spiritual life and salvation from sin is eulogized. “I will nev-

er forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life. I am Yours, save me, for I have sought Your precepts” (vv. 93-94).

Lamed’s tribute concludes with this observation: “I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad” (v. 96). Clearly the composer of this incredible ode to God’s Word did not find His commandments burdensome.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Mem’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. Mem is the thirteenth letter.

Its tribute has a most interesting beginning and ending—“Oh, how I love Your law! ...Therefore, I hate every false way.”

The first half of this letter’s chorus of praise focuses upon the extraordinary blessings of wisdom and understanding that result from a love of God’s Word and daily meditation upon it. “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts” (vv. 97-100).

The second half describes the purity of life and the glorious peace and joy that God’s Word gives to those who love and obey it. “I have restrained my feet from every evil way that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments for You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way” (vv. 101-104).

God's Word is able to make you wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15).

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Nun's Tribute to God's Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God's Word. The fourteenth letter is Nun.

Its tribute begins with one of the Psalter's more picturesque metaphors—“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (v. 105).

The earnestness of the composer's commitment to God is expressed in verse 106—“I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments.” And, as is always the case when there is a genuine commitment to God, evil responds with opposition. “I am afflicted very much; revive me, O LORD, according to Your word...My life is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget Your law. The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not strayed from Your precepts” (vv. 107, 109-110).

The petitions of verse 108 are noteworthy. “Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me Your judgments.”

Nun's tribute concludes with the composer's enduring commitment to hearing and heeding God's will. “Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end” (vv. 111-112).

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Samek's Tribute to God's Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God's Word. Samek is the fifteenth letter.

Its tribute begins with the composer's emphatic declaration. "I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law" (v. 113). Loving God and His word inherently causes certain effects, especially in your attitude toward wickedness.

The next verse explains an important spiritual cause and effect. "You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word" (v. 114). To truly have God as a hiding place and shield you must trust and obey His Word.

Verse 115 is addressed specifically to evildoers. "Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God!"

Three passionate petitions of God follow: "Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live; and do not let me be ashamed of my hope. Hold me up, and I shall be safe, and I shall observe Your statutes continually" (vv. 116-117).

Two immutable truths about Jehovah explain the psalmist's intense love of God's Word. "You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, for their deceit is falsehood. You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore, I love Your testimonies" (vv. 118-119).

A proper fear of God is essential to your spiritual health. Samek's tribute ends with a concise statement of this. "My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments" (v. 120). Fearing God and keeping His commandments is what life on earth is all about (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Such is possible only because of the Holy Scriptures.

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Ayin's Tribute to God's Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God's Word. Ayin is the sixteenth letter; its tribute begins with the composer's statement of how he has lived. "I have done justice and righteousness" (v. 121).

This is followed by three requests: "Do not leave me to my oppressors. Be surety for Your servant for good; do not let the proud oppress me" (vv. 121-122).

Next, there is a graphic declaration of the hunger and thirst the composer has for spiritual things, followed by another request. "My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation and Your righteous word. Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy and teach me Your statutes" (vv. 123-124).

The composer's submissive spirit is the basis for his next entreaty. "I am Your servant; give me understanding that I may know Your testimonies" (v. 125).

The final three verses are premised upon the need for divine activity because of the utter disregard some had for God's authoritative Word. "It is time for You to act, O LORD, for they have regarded Your law as void. Therefore, I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold! Therefore, all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way" (vv. 126-128).

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Pe's Tribute to God's Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God's Word. The seventeenth letter is Pe.

The beginning verses of this tribute encapsulate the proper spirit from which all compliance to God’s Word should spring. “Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore, my soul keeps them...I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Your commandments” (vv. 129, 131).

The wonderful power and blessing of God’s Word are stated in verse 130. Here it is written, “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”

The next four verses contain earnest requests of God.

- “Look upon me and be merciful to me, as Your custom is toward those who love Your name” (v. 132).
- “Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me” (v. 133).
- “Redeem me from the oppression of man that I may keep Your precepts” (v. 134).
- “Make Your face shine upon Your servant and teach me Your statutes” (v. 135).

Pe’s tribute concludes with: “Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep Your law” (v. 136).

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Qoph’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. Qoph is the nineteenth letter.

Its tribute begins with a description of the intensity (“my whole heart”), purpose (to “keep Your testimonies”), and diligence (“before dawn...through the night watches”) with which the composer cultivates his relationship with God. He writes, “I cry out with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD! I will keep Your statutes. I cry out to You; save me, and I will keep Your testimo-

nies. I rise before the dawning of the morning and cry for help; I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the night watches that I may meditate on Your word. Hear my voice according to Your lovingkindness; O LORD, revive me according to Your justice” (vv. 145-149).

This pursuit of Jehovah inevitably results in opposition from evil—“They draw near who follow after wickedness; they are far from Your law” (v. 150)—and comfort from God—“You are near, O LORD, and all Your commandments are truth” (v. 151). The author’s peace during such turbulent times comes from the enduring, eternal nature of the Scriptures. “Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever” (v. 152).

God’s Word is both the nourishing food for the hungry soul and its steadfast and sure refuge when troubled.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Resh’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. Resh—the twentieth letter—focuses its tribute primarily upon the spiritual battle between evil and good, and the invaluable role God’s law, word, statutes, judgments, testimonies, and precepts play in providing strength, comfort and victory. It concludes with one of the most important and often ignored truths of Scripture and the rightly dividing of it—the entirety (not some but the sum) of God’s Word is truth.

Resh’s tribute is: “Consider my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget Your law. Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word. Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes. Great are Your tender mercies, O LORD; revive me according to Your judgments. Many are my

persecutors and my enemies, yet I do not turn from Your testimonies. I see the treacherous, and am disgusted, because they do not keep Your word. Consider how I love Your precepts; revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness. The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever” (vv. 153-160).

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Shin’s Tribute to God’s Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God’s Word. Shin is the twenty-first letter.

Its tribute begins with a threefold statement of the proper attitude—reverence, joy, and love—you should have toward the inspired text. “Princes persecute me without a cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your word. I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure. I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law” (vv. 161-163).

This godly attitude toward Scripture results in praise, peace, hope, and joyful obedience. “Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments. Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble. LORD, I hope for Your salvation, and I do Your commandments. My soul keeps Your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly. I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies for all my ways are before You” (vv. 164-168).

“Attitude is everything” is true about many things in life, including God’s Word.

“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Tau's Tribute to God's Word

The exquisite uniqueness of Psalm 119 is that its composer uses each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet to sing an octave of praise to God's Word. Tau is the twenty-second and final letter.

Its tribute contains eight petitions: "Let my cry come before You, O LORD; give me understanding according to Your word. Let my supplication come before You; deliver me according to Your word...Let Your hand become my help, for I have chosen Your precepts...Let my soul live, and it shall praise You, and let Your judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments" (vv. 169-170, 173, 175-176).

The author's determination to wisely use his mouth is seen in verses 171 and 172. Here it is written, "My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes. My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness."

Verse 174 describes the reason for these petitions and determination—"I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and Your law is my delight."

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

The Best Life

Without a doubt there has always been a distinct difference between the carnal definition of the best life and God's. Psalm 119:11 encapsulates quite nicely God's description of the best life possible. Here it is written, "Thy word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against Thee." The three ingredients of the best life are:

Pursuing the best treasure—God's Word. The inspired, all-sufficient, authoritative, imperishable word of God—the perfect

law of liberty—which is able to convert, feed, guide, equip, comfort, warn, build up, and correct the child of God is the greatest treasure found on planet Earth. It is the pre-eminent treasure.

Hiding the best treasure in the best place—your heart. The Scriptures are not intended to be embraced theoretically but actually. They are safest when engrafted in your heart. This is the greatest and best storehouse in which to keep the world’s greatest treasure.

Retaining the best treasure for the best reason—prevention of sin. Your life is best lived when you earnestly and constantly strive to sin less and less. A holy life is the best life. A holy life is possible because of the Holy Scriptures.

Are you living the best life?

The Blessings of Affliction

Physical and emotional hedonism are wildly popular philosophies in our world. Anything that feels good or that gives me pleasure is believed to be desirable; everything that does not ought to be avoided. Psalm 119:67 clearly contradicts this mindset. “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep your Word.” Afflictions are a blessing when:

- They make you wiser.
- They reveal hidden imperfections in your heart and/or faith.
- They prompt you to purge sin from your life.
- They increase your appetite for prayer and spiritual pursuits.
- They decrease your love of the world.
- They motive you to draw closer to God.
- They intensify your determination to obey God more precisely and promptly.
- They allow you to have greater fellowship with Christ and His sufferings.

“...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered...For whom the Lord loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 5:8; 12:6).

Many rich blessings are found in the furnace of affliction!

The Entirety of God’s Word

A popular mistake made with the Scriptures is found in the question—“Where does the Bible say, ‘Thou shalt not _____’?” Implicit in this question is the premise that the only way the Bible authorizes is through explicit prohibitive commands; this premise is false. Psalm 119 easily demonstrates this fact.

In this exquisite tribute to God and His Word, there are at least ten different words employed to describe the contents of the inspired revelation of God’s will, and, as verse 160 states, “the entirety of Your word is truth.”

Consider the following terms found in Psalm 119:

- **Commandment** (mitzvah)—an obligation enjoined by God. “I made haste and did not delay to keep Your commandments” (v. 60).
- **Law** (torah)—instruction from God. “Your law is truth” (v. 142).
- **Ordinances/judgments** (mishpat)—a judicial verdict made by God. “I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right” (v. 75).
- **Precept** (piqqud)—a mandate given by God. “You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently” (v. 4).
- **Statute** (choq)—a decree of God cut in stone (i.e. unchanging and unchangeable). “Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!” (v. 5).
- **Testimony** (edah)—a recorded verdict of God. “Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!” (v. 2).

- **Way** (orach)—a road/way/path for travel or pilgrimage. “I have restrained my feet from every evil way that I may keep Your word” (v. 101)
- **Way** (derek)—a course of life, a lifestyle approved by God. “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!” (v. 1).
- **Word** (dabar)—a spoken message which was put in written form. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (v. 105).
- **Word** (imrah)—oral communication from God. “Your word is very pure; therefore, Your servant loves it” (v. 140).

Every component of Scripture—every commandment, judgment, law, ordinance, precept, statute, testimony, way, and word—is truth.

That is why the Scriptures are accurately termed “all-sufficient.”

God’s All-Sufficient Word

Since the Garden of Eden Satan has relentlessly attacked humanity’s belief in the all-sufficiency of God’s Word. Some of his attacks are subtle (like “Has God really said?”); some are brazen (like “You shall not surely die”).

Satan knows the power of God’s Word. He knows the spiritual victory it can deliver. Therefore, his attack on its all-sufficiency will continue until time is no more.

Psalm 119 details a broad range of circumstances in which God’s Word is all-sufficient. The Holy Scriptures can provide:

- **Strength.** “My soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word” (v. 28).
- **Salvation.** “Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD—Your salvation according to Your word” (v. 41).

- **Comfort.** “This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life” (v. 50).
- **Life.** “I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life” (v. 93).
- **Hope.** “The wicked wait for me to destroy me, but I will consider Your testimonies” (v. 95).
- **Wisdom.** “You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me” (v. 98).
- **Renewal.** “I am afflicted very much; revive me, O LORD, according to Your word” (v. 107).
- **Understanding.** “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (v. 130).
- **Direction.** “Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me” (v. 133).
- **Peace.** “Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble” (v. 165).

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!” (vv. 1-2).

The Immense Importance of God’s Word

It is humanly impossible to overestimate the certain peril you put yourself in when you disregard God’s Word. Consider these ominous descriptions used in Psalm 119:

- **A fat (i.e. unhealthy) heart.** “The proud have forged a lie against me...Their heart is as fat as grease” (vv. 69-70).
- **Darkness.** “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (v. 130).
- **Divine rejection.** “You reject all those who stray from Your statutes” (v. 118).

- **Destruction.** “Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes” (v. 155).

Diligently and carefully heeding God’s every word is not legalism or “Bibliotry”; the Scriptural term is “obedience.”

God’s Word and Sin

Humanity’s gravest danger is sin. This heinous spiritual cancer plagues all humans. Thankfully, Jehovah through His Word provides an all-sufficient remedy for sin.

God’s Word identifies sin. “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). We can know what is true and hate every false way (vv. 104, 128).

God’s Word prevents sin. “Thy word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against Thee...I have restrained my feet from every evil way that I may keep Thy word” (vv. 11, 101). The Scriptures produce a healthy and proper reverence for God; “My flesh trembles for fear of Thee, and I am afraid of Thy judgments” (v. 120).

God’s Word remedies sin. It offers salvation (v. 41) which gives life (v. 50) and provides an escape from sin’s dominion (v. 133).

How wonderful are the testimonies of God! (Psalm 119:129).

The Value of God’s Word in Trials

Over twenty verses in Psalm 119’s tribute to God’s Word refer to trials faced by the author. He was reproached (vv. 22-23, 51, 69), mistreated (vv. 61, 78), plotted against (vv. 95, 110), and had continuous opposition from his enemies (vv. 98, 115). Obviously, he knew a thing or two about life’s trials.

His response during such unpleasant circumstances is truly noteworthy. He sought to:

- Be reverent toward God’s Word (v. 161).

- Meditate upon Jehovah’s statutes (vv. 23, 78).
- Remember God’s law (v. 61).
- Be revived according to God’s Word (vv. 25, 107).
- Keep, not forsake or stray from, God’s precepts (vv. 87, 110, 134).
- Give attention to God’s testimonies (v. 95).
- Be strengthened according to God’s Word (v. 28).
- Delight in God’s commandments (v. 143).
- Not turn from God’s testimonies (v. 157).

What a source of comfort and hope God’s Word is during life’s darkest hours! (Romans 15:4).

Is it a fragile relic during your life’s rain, floods, and winds (Matthew 7:25-27), or is it an essential asset?

“Sum” or “Some”?

The words “sum” and “some” are homophones; i.e. words that sound the same but do not have the same spelling or definition. “Sum” is a noun used in mathematics to mean the answer to an addition problem; it denotes the totality of a set. “Some” is an adjective used to describe a portion of a set. Using the number sentence of $2 + 2 = 4$ to illustrate, we can say that 4 is the sum of 2 plus 2, and that 2 is some of 4.

The importance of understanding the difference between these two homophones cannot be overemphasized, because it is essential to the proper understanding and application of God’s word and to the determination of one’s eternal state. The Psalmist wrote: “The sum of Thy word is truth” (Psalm 119:160 NASV). He did not write: “*Some* of Thy word is truth”; he wrote that the **sum** is.

Because the **sum** (not *some*) of God’s word is truth, no human guess work is even needed to determine what parts of God’s word are accurate and therefore must be believed. In other words, God’s word is not like harvesting wheat wherein a reader has to

separate the grains of truth from the chaff of error. “All (i.e. the **sum**, not *some*) Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16); therefore, we must think and act accordingly.

In the New Testament, Jesus Himself authoritatively declared that man is to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). As our example of what is expected, Jesus lived by every jot (the smallest Hebrew letter) and tittle (the smallest portion of a Hebrew letter) of God’s Word (Matthew 5:18). In other words, He lived by the **sum** of God’s word, not *some* of it.

In like manner, Jesus expects His disciples to be taught to observe all things that He has commanded (Matthew 28:20). Like the word “every,” the word “all” does not mean *some*; it means the **sum**.

Because the **sum** (not *some*) of God’s word is truth, focusing on the teaching in one New Testament passage to the disregard of the teaching of another New Testament passage—like the devil did when tempting Christ in Matthew 4:5-7—is wrong. To be saved from sin, for example, the Bible teaches that the following things are necessary: God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8), Christ’s atonement (Romans 3:24-27), humanity’s response of faith (Acts 16:31), repentance (Luke 13: 3, 5), confession of faith (Romans 10:10), immersion for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21), and faithful obedience to Christ (Revelation 2:10). Tragically, there are many today who only tell people *some*, but not the **sum**, of what God says concerning the gospel’s glorious plan of salvation.

Phonetically-speaking, sum and some are the same. Spiritually-speaking, there is a fundamental and eternally significant difference between them.

Are you giving heed to *some* of God’s word or to its **sum**?

The Blessings of Worship

Attendance and worship are not the same. Not only does God expect His children to be in the habit of attending worship services (Hebrews 10:25), He also requires that such a habit results in acceptable worship—done in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Drawing near to worship with your body while your mind is far from God is unacceptable.

Psalms 120 to 134 are given the superscription of being “Psalms of Ascent.” They are titled such because they were sung or chanted as the Jews walked up the inclined paths that led into Jerusalem. They served the extremely practical purpose of preparing the descendants of Abraham for worship.

The first of these psalms—Psalm 120—focuses upon the blessings of worship. Here are four that are found in this psalm:

Reassurance. “In my distress I cried to the LORD, and He heard me” (v. 1). Genuine worship of our distress-seeing, prayer-answering Sovereign Father soothes and calms a troubled soul. What right-thinking saint would want to miss this wonderful blessing of worship?

Refuge. “Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue. What shall be given to you, or what shall be done to you, you false tongue? Sharp arrows of the warrior, with coals of the broom tree” (vv. 2-4). Spiritual worship is a wondrous refuge from the persecution and pollution of evil. Worshiping with brethren of like precious faith who value truth spoken in love over lies and deceit helps us to properly cope with and respond to the stresses and distresses of life. What right-thinking saint would want to miss this wonderful blessing of worship?

Remembrance. “Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!” (v. 5). For the child of God, life is a pilgrimage of faith. We are “tent dwellers” because this world is not our home. We are to be about the business of laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). How easy it is to for-

get this essential truth about life. What right-thinking saint would want to miss this wonderful blessing of worship?

Renewal. “My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war” (vv. 6-7). Spiritual warfare is a perpetual fact of life. The war between good and evil ever rages. Unless we surrender, our spiritual battles will not stop until we die. God’s emphatic expectation is that we stand and fight tenaciously (Ephesians 6:10-13). Worship provides an oasis of renewal to the battle-weary soldier of God. What right-thinking saint would want to miss this wonderful blessing of worship?

The LORD is my Helper and Keeper

The setting of Psalm 121 is of a pilgrim some distance from Jerusalem who can lift up his eyes and see the hills which encircle the temple (v. 1). With this view on his horizon, he asks, “From whence comes my help?” (v. 1). The answer is resounding and emphatic.

The LORD is my helper (v. 2). He who made heaven and earth will not allow my foot to be moved (vv. 2-3). He is ever watchful of me and all His people because He neither slumbers nor sleeps (vv. 3-4).

The LORD is my keeper (v. 5). His protective care shades me from the sun and moon (vv. 5-6). He keeps me from all evil and preserves my soul (v. 7) now and forevermore (v. 8).

Oh, how this unnamed pilgrim so longed for this arrival in the holy city to joyfully worship the One who is His helper and keeper!

Do you?

Pilgrimages to Worship

Ritual that is meaningless to the worshiper is also meaningless to God. Genuine, acceptable worship must be in spirit and in

truth (John 4:24). It does not automatically happen simply because your body is in a certain locale at an appointed time.

In the Old Testament, God authorized an exact location for His worship—first, it was the tabernacle, then it became the temple in Jerusalem. For many, traveling to the specified location meant making a journey of some distance, a pilgrimage. To some, this journey was an occasion for gladness—“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD.’” (Psalm 122:1).

In the New Testament, the worship of God continues in a specified place—His spiritual temple, the church that Christ built (Ephesians 2:19-22). However, the geographic location of this temple and its worship is immaterial (John 4:20-21).

Like the Old Testament temple, the worship of the church ought to be permeated with joyful thanksgiving “to the name of the LORD” (Psalm 122:4). Prayers for peace among the people of God (Psalm 122:6-8) and for civil authorities (1 Timothy 2:1-2) are also befitting of our worship.

All of this anticipates our final pilgrimage: When we journey to the heavenly city—the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2)—and join all the redeemed in eternal, unbreakable, joyous fellowship with God.

About that final pilgrimage, can you truthfully say you are looking forward to the angels coming to tell you, “Let us go into the house of the LORD”?

Proper Motivation for Worship

Motives matter to God. Jesus plainly teaches that doing good so that you can be seen of men is fundamentally different than doing good so that God is glorified (Matthew 6:1ff). Evil and pure motives are readily discerned by God.

One continual motive for worship that all of God’s family ought to have is the joy and gratitude of deliverance. Like Israel’s frequent deliverance from physical harm and devastation, every

member of spiritual Israel—God’s holy nation—has been repeatedly blessed with deliverance from spiritual harm and devastation.

Psalm 124 declares that Jehovah’s deliverance from harm is a worthy motive for His worship. “‘If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,’ let Israel now say—‘If it had not been the LORD who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul; then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul’” (vv. 1-5).

The only appropriate response to such a realization is fervent adoration. “Blessed be the LORD who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth” (vv. 6-8).

How wonderful it is that “our help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth” is still true!

Those who Trust in the LORD

The city of Jerusalem is nestled within protective mountains. On the north, south, east, and west, elevated terrain encircles Mount Zion. Like Jesus’ use of the location and construction of Caesarea Philippi to illustrate the building of His church (in Matthew 16:13ff), the psalmist uses the geography of Jerusalem to express a most comforting truth: “Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people from this time forth and forever” (Psalm 125:1-2).

As the history of Israel’s occupation illustrates—from the time of David onward, Jerusalem was invincible if its king and inhabitants trusted in the LORD. When Israel left God—when the scepter of wickedness rested on the land allotted to the righteous (v.

125:3)—all the mountains in the world could not protect Jerusalem and her inhabitants from desolation.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: To those who are good and whose hearts are upright, Jehovah does good (v. 4). Those who turn aside to crooked ways He punishes (v. 5). To you, He is either an immovable, encompassing Protector or an inescapable, victorious Punisher.

It's your call.

The LORD Has Done Great Things

The history of humanity's salvation begins with an extraordinary promise made to the serpent/devil—"I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).

From this introduction, the Holy Scriptures proceed to document how this blood-red thread of redemption has been divinely woven into the fabric of history. From the call of Abram (Genesis 12) to the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem's wall over 1,500 years later in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the distinct message is the LORD has done great things.

When Judah returned from Babylonian slavery, Psalm 126 was composed. Here it is written, "When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.' The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad. Bring back our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South" (vv. 1-4).

How much more joyfully can and should this declaration of praise be sung by those who live after the most prominent features of redemption's scarlet thread—Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, the fulfillment of the Old Testament's prophetic prophecies! The declaration of the good news of spir-

itual victory, of deliverance from spiritual slavery is the ultimate proof of God's wisdom, grace, and greatness.

Not only is it true that "The LORD has done great things for them"; it is also true at this very hour that "the LORD has done great things for us."

How glad are we?

Sowing Tears

Often, today's blessings of spiritual growth have been abundantly watered by yesterday's tears of repentance. The joy of deliverance only comes after the turmoil and tears of godly sorrow. The exuberant joy of Christ's empty tomb was preceded by the dark travail of Calvary.

This truth is recognized in the final verses of Psalm 126. The joy felt by those who were returning from captivity came only after an abundant flow of tears. Hence, the psalmist's declaration: "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (vv. 5-6).

Because of the harvest of abundant joy that was set before Him, Jesus endured the tremendous travail of the cross (Hebrews 12:2). An abundant harvest of spiritual growth and victory requires sowing in tears.

How are you sowing?

Construction Counsel

The breakdown of society in America is directly linked to the breakdown of the home. Deliberate rejection of God's wisdom concerning the family has resulted in the acceptance of humanism's folly. Sowing the winds of human wisdom brings the reaping of the whirlwinds of chaos and ruin. Every time.

The composer of Psalm 127 recognizes this immutable truth. With sobering words, he writes: "Unless the LORD builds the

house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep” (vv. 1-2).

Hundreds of years later, Jesus echoed these same basic truths as He concluded the Sermon on the Mount. “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” (Matthew 7:24-27).

The quality of the building materials used to construct a house does matter. The foundation upon which it is built matters supremely. So, upon which foundation is your home and your life being built?

Are you laboring wisely or in vain?

“Like Arrows” (Part 1)

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed but shall speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5). The psalmist’s simple simile in verse 4—“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth”—provides much food for thought.

Like arrows, children need external direction and guidance to be successful. The nature of fallen humanity is such that “it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23), “he that trusts in his own heart is a fool” (Prov. 28:26), and “there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12); therefore, the timeless truth is that “foolishness is

bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Prov. 22:15). Given adequate and timely portions of life’s physical necessities all children will grow up; however, to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) necessitates abundant parenting, significant amounts of spiritual direction and guidance.

“Like Arrows” (Part 2)

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed but shall speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5). The psalmist’s simple simile in verse 4—“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth”—provides much food for thought.

Like arrows, children need two distinct and different external aids—an archer (father) and bow (mother). Without an archer, an arrow never takes flight. Without a bow, an arrow can be nothing more than a puny spear. By divine design, every child has a father (its archer) and a mother (its bow).

The accuracy and force that an arrow has is largely dependent upon the aim and strength of the archer and the integrity and caliber of the bow. Every child needs a godly father like Abraham who commanded his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do justice (i.e. righteousness) and judgment (Genesis 18:19), and like Joshua who determined that he and his house would serve the Lord, regardless of what others may choose to do (Joshua 24:15). Every child needs a virtuous bow like Lois and Eunice who taught their offspring from childhood the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15; 1:5), and like the woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31.

How our world has been blessed with archers and bows like Zacharias and Elizabeth, whose marksmanship with their son John was highly praised by Jesus Himself in Luke 7:28; and like

Amram and Jochebed, who instilled the virtue and values found in Moses' life as described in Hebrews 11:24-27! How our world has been blighted by those demonic doctrines that deny every child's innate need of a father who is a strong spiritual archer and of a mother who is a virtuous bow!

“Like Arrows” (Part 3)

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed but shall speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5). The psalmist's simple simile in verse 4—“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth”—provides much food for thought.

Like arrows, children must be aimed and released. To talk about arrows without talking about targets is absurd. Arrows, especially in ancient days, were not recreational toys or childish playthings. They were weapons used for livelihood (i.e. hunting) and self-preservation (i.e. warfare). Because it was a life-or-death matter, great concern and effort were given to developing the skill of accurately aiming and rightly releasing an arrow. In far too many parents' minds today, conceiving and raising children are viewed, at best, as recreational matters, rather than solemn spiritual responsibilities. Therefore, as many children mature, they have little, if any, sense of purpose; their lives are blighted by the slavery of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual hedonism. Instead, children should be aimed at godliness (Malachi 2:15) so that they will “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13) from the days of their youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1) “unto death” (Revelation 2:10).

In the heat of an intense and dangerous battle no warrior would view the aiming and releasing of his arrows as a casual matter; the stakes are too high. How much more then, the Christian parent/soldier in the ongoing war that rages between good

and evil!! The stakes of eternal life in heaven and eternal death in hell are even higher.

“Like Arrows” (Part 4)

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed but shall speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5). The psalmist’s simple simile in verse 4—“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth”—provides much food for thought.

Like arrows, children have great potential for good and evil. Few things in life are more devastating and depressing than the regrets of careless, foolish, short-sighted parents. Consider what heartache God says awaits them: “he who begets a scoffer does so to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy” (Proverbs 17:21); “a foolish son is the grief of his mother” (Proverbs 10:1); “a foolish son is a grief to his father: and bitterness to her who bore him” (Proverbs 17:25); “a foolish son is the ruin of his father” (Proverbs 19:13); “the rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Proverbs 29:15).

Few Biblical portraits of human anguish are more vivid than the one of David when he learned of the death of his foolish and rebellious son: “And the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: ‘O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—If only I had died in your place! O Absalom, my son, my son!’” (2 Samuel 18:33). Tragically, human history contains an ever-growing gallery filled with portraits containing the same theme of gruesome parental heartache and horrific regrets that splattered the canvas of David’s life. The anguish he felt was self-inflicted for he had pierced his own heart by disregarding the fact that a child has great potential for good and evil; therefore, every wise father

does not provoke his children to wrath but brings them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4), and “every wise woman builds her house” and does not “pull it down with her hands” (Proverbs 14:1).

“Like Arrows” (Part 5)

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed but shall speak with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5). The psalmist’s simple simile in verse 4—“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth”—provides much food for thought.

Like arrows, children are a one-shot deal. As David so poignantly proved, there are no Mulligans (“do-overs”) in parenting. What a sad epitaph it is when it can honestly be said, “It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” Such a sad sentiment is true of every eternally cursed inhabitant of hell. The Scriptures clearly teach that “the soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:20). Therefore, each person reaches an age in which he is accountable to God for the choices he makes. In the vast majority of cases, when that age arrives, the child usually continues toward the target his parents have pointed him.

Archers and bows, at what bull’s eye are you aiming your children? Each arrow in your quiver has only one shot at going to heaven. May God abundantly bless all parents as we proceed through the stages of: “Ready. Aim. Fire.”

The Good Life

Many false definitions of what the good life consists have been foisted upon humanity. At the heart of each of these erroneous definitions is the rejection of the wise counsel to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Psalm 128 begins with another divine explanation of the good life. It reads, “Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD (vv. 1-4).

“Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). It is the abundant life. It is the good life.

Vines and Plants

One of the fundamental challenges of being a parent is the responsibility of recognizing and cultivating a child’s uniqueness. Some parents assume that since a child looks a lot like a certain member of the family or has been named after someone(s) in the family that it is the child’s obligation to become a carbon copy of that family member. The Bible does not teach this.

In fact, it teaches that each child born into a family is its own unique creation of God. It will have similarities with all members of the human race, but—like its fingerprints—it will have its own individual personality, interests, and preferences. Notice how beautifully this is pictured in Psalm 128:3—“Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table.”

In a garden, a healthy, fruitful vine has a sphere of influence and growth that may touch nearby plants, but it is not identical to the plant.

Vines and plants are not the same.

Olive Plants

Like most Americans, I am not familiar with the cultivation of olives. Therefore, it is easy for me to glean nothing from the simile used in Psalm 128:3—“Your children like olive plants...” With a little research, I have learned several powerful facts about olives which bring this inspired simile to life.

Like children, olive plants mature slowly. You cannot plant an olive seedling today and pick fruit from it within a year or two. A baby born today will not be full grown by its third birthday. Olive plants usually need about twenty years to reach maturity.

Like children, olive plants must be nurtured intentionally and continuously. Olive plants are raised. They must be purposefully cultivated, thoughtfully pruned, and tenaciously protected. Far too many children today simply grow up, instead of being raised/reared. Becoming a parent is not the same as being one.

Like children, olive plants can be destroyed quickly. A vineyard of olives that has been carefully tended by several generations of a family can be destroyed in a few hours by hostile invaders. Most olive trees in ancient days were grown in an enclosed space called a “garden.” The enclosure was designed to protect the olive plants from destructive animals. By divine design, children are to be born into a protective enclosure called the home. A father and mother are to guard and protect their offspring, just like an olive plant is.

Your Children’s Children

“If I had known that grandchildren were this much fun, I would’ve had them first” is a sentiment expressed by several grandparents I know. The composer of Psalm 128 connects the thought of enjoying God’s blessing and being a grandparent

when he writes: “The LORD bless you out of Zion, and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel!” (vv. 5-6). Consider several of the blessings that are enmeshed in grandparenthood:

Good health. People who die prematurely via accidents or tragedies do not live long enough to see any of their grandchildren. It is old men who get to enjoy the crown of grandchildren (cf. Proverbs 17:6).

Successful pregnancies and deliveries. At least three have occurred—your mother’s which produced you, your child’s, and your grandchild’s. Three consecutive generations of a family have been blessed with arrows in its quiver (Psalm 127:3-5). Both sacred and secular history sadly record pregnancies which resulted in the deaths of children prior to or shortly after their births.

Joy. A child’s innocence, adoration, and unfeigned love are the distinct and joyous blessings of a grandparent. They remind all who are wise that the Giver of such a bundle of joy is the focal point of their existence and He is the ultimate destination of this journey called “life.”

What a brilliant way to remind us that God is love! (1 John 4:8).

The Lifeline of Comfort in Affliction

Persecution and mistreatment are facts of life for God’s people (2 Timothy 3:12; Matthew 5:10-11). Much of Israel’s history was written by its enemies in blood-red ink. Psalm 129 affirms this fact: “Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth, let Israel now say—‘Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth...The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long.’” (vv. 1-3). It also affirms that this is not the final chapter. What a thrilling declaration is “Yet they have not prevailed against me” (v. 2)!

Though the affliction inflicted has been often and brutal, it has not been fatal, because “The LORD is righteous; He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked” (v. 4). Human tribunals do not give the final verdict about a person’s life and character. God does.

Therefore, “Let all those who hate Zion be put to shame and turned back. Let them be as the grass on the housetops which withers before it grows up, with which the reaper does not fill his hand, nor he who binds sheaves, his arms. Neither let those who pass by them say, ‘The blessing of the LORD be upon you; we bless you in the name of the LORD!’” (vv.5-8).

The righteousness of God is not a fanciful Bible theory. Instead, it is the lifeline of comfort that anchors the afflicted during the perilous tsunamis of persecution and affliction. Its powerful cables sustained Christ when He suffered for us, “who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed (literally—“kept committing”) Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

The righteousness of God.

What an anchor and lifeline of the soul!

Abundant Redemption

At the conclusion of Jesus’ conversation with Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7, the Lord stated a most significant truth: Those who are forgiven much are those who love much; “but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little” (v. 47). His point at the time was to explain the reason for the vast differences between the way Simon had treated Him (vv. 44-46) and the way a forgiven sinful woman had (vv. 37-38).

The composer of Psalm 130 viewed his salvation from sin as an “abundant redemption” (v. 7). It is clear from the prior verses that he felt a huge debt had been removed from his account with God. He reached this conclusion by meditating upon:

The horrors of sin. “Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (vv. 1-3). Sin is like a spiritual black hole from which no one can escape.

The hopelessness of sin. “No hope” is the terse and simple way the apostle Paul expressed the situation of the Gentiles apart from Christ (Ephesians 2:12). “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning—yes, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD” is the way the composer of Psalm 130 expresses his joyous hope in God’s forgiveness of his sin (vv. 5-7).

“But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared...For with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (vv. 7-8).

What abundant redemption God has made to remedy the horrors and hopelessness of our sins!

Genuine Peace

The annals of history are crowded with numerous people—known and unknown—who desired but never found peace. Like an elusive shadow, they never could quite lay hold of that which would calm their restless, fevered spirit. In Psalm 131, David gives three valuable insights into this precious, rare spiritual blessing.

Genuine peace is the fruit of humility. “LORD, my heart is not haughty nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters nor with things too profound for me” (v. 1). Overestimating your importance is a surefire way to prevent peace of mind. The noxious weeds of self-importance and pride strangle the lovely, delicate plant called peace. You can either have your pride or peace; you cannot have both.

Genuine peace is the byproduct of maturity. “Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me” (v. 2). Once the soil of your heart has gotten rid of an over inflated sense of self-importance, you can mature to the point of realizing that God’s sovereignty rules this universe; thus, you are ready to trust God’s providence when life becomes difficult. You do not have to personally sort everything out because you know that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). Like the apostle Paul, you have matured to the point of learning that fairy tale endings to each of life’s challenges are neither realistic nor necessary because God’s grace is sufficient for you (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Genuine peace is the companion of hope. “O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever” (v. 3). Confidence in God’s sovereignty, providence, and grace produces a hope which is both sure and steadfast, an anchor of the soul during the storms and trials of life (Hebrews 6:19).

No wonder David calls upon all “from this time forth and forever” to join him in the path of peace!

Like a Weaned Child

The life of a Christian is clearly designed to be one of spiritual growth and maturity (Hebrews 5:12-14). Having been born again through the incorruptible seed of God’s word which lives and abides forever (1 Peter 1:23), the child of God must “lay aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, [and] as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:1-2).

The Word’s milk will nurture and sustain spiritual growth until God’s child is able to ingest its meat. It is God’s intention that His children reach a state of spiritual and emotional maturity, that their trust in Him has grown to a point that they are like a weaned

child: “Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me” (Psalm 131:2).

When unanticipated difficulties arise—when you fall into various trials (James 1:2), do you respond like an infant that needs instant reassurance at its mother’s breast, or do you calm and quiet your soul like a weaned child?

When you do good to another and do not even receive the courtesy of a sincere “Thank you,” do you respond like an infant that needs instant reassurance at its mother’s breast, or do you calm and quiet your soul like a weaned child?

When you are expecting a different outcome than the sorely disappointing one you received, do you respond like an infant that needs instant reassurance at its mother’s breast, or do you calm and quiet your soul like a weaned child?

When you work hard on a project that turns out magnificently and a fellow worker takes all the credit, do you respond like an infant that needs instant reassurance at its mother’s breast, or do you calm and quiet your soul like a weaned child?

When life’s rains descend, floods come, and its winds blow and beat upon you (Matthew 7:25, 27), do you respond like an infant that needs instant reassurance at its mother’s breast, or do you calm and quiet your soul like a weaned child?

Joseph is an excellent Bible example of one who calmed and quieted his soul like a weaned child with his mother through the many trials of his life.

Can the same be said of you?

Confidence in Prayer

Through His Word, God declares that “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). Psalm 132 illustrates this truth quite clearly.

The opening verses record the fervent prayer of the “man after God’s own heart.” Here it is written, “How he swore to the LORD

and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob: ‘Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house or go up to the comfort of my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob’” (vv. 2-5).

The concluding verses record how effectively this prayer availed much: “The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: ‘I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body. If your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony which I shall teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore.’ For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: ‘This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There I will make the horn of David grow. I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon Himself His crown shall flourish’” (vv. 11-18).

Even prior to the new and better covenant with its great High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man availed much.

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16).

Jehovah’s Oath to David

The words of Jehovah’s oath to David with its lone condition contain four cardinal truths that deserve closer examination. Psalm 132:11-12 explains the oath and its terms as follows: “The LORD has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: ‘I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body. If your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony which I shall teach them, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore.’” Note the following timeless truths found in this passage:

The resurrection of Christ. In addressing this very point on the Day of Pentecost, the inspired apostle Peter declared, “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:29-32). To fulfill His word, Jehovah had to resurrect Jesus the Christ “who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:3).

The coronation of Jesus. Although Jesus was mockingly tried and crucified for being the King of the Jews, heaven’s response to His coronation immediately after His ascension (Daniel 7:13) was one of great reverence and joy (Psalm 24:7-10) when the fruit of David’s body was set upon his throne. When the mighty victor over sin, death, and Hades ascended, “then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).

The sinlessness of Christ. This oath of God contained one condition—there had to be the keeping of God’s covenant and testimony. Not one of the twenty descendants in David’s dynasty met the terms of the oath. It was not until Jesus fulfilled every jot and tittle of the Law that Jehovah seated Him on David’s throne. Because of God’s omniscience, He alone would know whether Jesus truly was sinless. By resurrecting and coronating Him, we have divine, infallible proof that Jesus was without sin. The Lamb of God was completely sinless; thus, our redemption is possible!

The faithfulness of God to His word. About a thousand years elapsed between the day of God’s promise to David and the day

of Jesus' coronation in heaven. The passage of a millennium did not erode God's faithfulness to his word. "Beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise" (2 Peter 3:8-9). He never is.

The resurrection and coronation of Jesus, the sinlessness of Christ, and the faithfulness of God to His word are immutable truths, essential to a faith that is steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work. (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Unity

Talking about unity is much easier than attaining it. Because of its strenuous challenges, far too many people choose to think of unity as "agreeing to disagree." This is NOT a Scripturally accurate conception or definition.

Jesus' longest recorded prayer gave the standard of unity for His disciples. It is "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us...that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:21-23). No wonder David exclaimed, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

For several years in his adult life, David personally experienced the horrors of living in a kingdom which was not united. As King Saul self-destructed, David knew firsthand how evil and unpleasant it was when brethren had divided allegiances. How he longed for better.

Two similes are used in Psalm 133 to illustrate the blessedness and pleasantness of unity. Here, David's inspired quill writes, "It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forevermore" (vv. 2-3).

The holy, fragrant, and unique blend of myrrh, cinnamon, cane, cassia, and olive oil that was used to sanctify the most holy items of the tabernacle and its priests (cf. Exodus 30:22-33) is used to picture the holy and unique blessing of God called unity. Both are most exquisite and distinctive commodities. Like the precious oil used by Aaron and his sons, unity ought to be supremely esteemed.

The cool, refreshing, renewing dew of Mount Hermon with its pristine purity and sweet, blessed influence is the second simile used for unity. Jesus spoke explicitly in John 17 about this wondrous aspect of unity: “that the world may believe that You sent Me...that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (vv. 21, 23). Because of such disunity among those who claim to be followers of Christ, our world is like the scorched, barren surface of a parched desert instead of a vibrant, refreshed, dew-covered valley.

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

For about a decade there was prominently posted on our family’s refrigerator door the following counsel: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” Its purpose was to remind an active set of parents that busy-ness is not the same as being about the Father’s business. Keeping the main thing the main thing does not happen accidentally.

Beginning in Psalm 120 and ending in Psalm 134 are the Songs of Ascents—the psalms sung, chanted, or recited by the travelers as they ascended the roads leading to Jerusalem and its temple. The final psalm indicates that the pilgrimage has been

completed successfully, for it is addressed to “all you servants of the LORD who by night stand in the house of the LORD” (v. 1).

This psalm gives a simple yet important reminder to all who are themselves spiritual sojourners and pilgrims (1 Peter 2:11): The focus of your pilgrimage and the end goal of the sojourn is to “bless the LORD” (vv. 1, 2). That is the main thing and keeping the main thing the main thing is the challenge of each pilgrim’s day.

God’s Goodness, Pleasantness, and Greatness

It is only fitting that the first psalm after the final Song of Ascent is an exuberant call to worship. Once the traveling pilgrim has arrived at his destination, it is only fitting that his focus is upon joyous, heartfelt worship of Jehovah. “Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; praise Him, O you servants of the LORD. You who stand in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God...Bless the LORD, O house of Israel! Bless the LORD, O house of Aaron! Bless the LORD, O house of Levi! You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD! Blessed be the LORD out of Zion who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 135:1-2, 19-21).

Sandwiched between these rousing words is a beautiful anthem of Jehovah’s praiseworthiness. It begins with: “Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant. For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure. For I know that the LORD is great, and our Lord is above all gods” (vv. 3-5).

Acceptable worship of God requires the proper spirit (John 4:24). Included in this requirement must be an accurate recognition of God’s goodness, the pleasantness of His unique name, and His unrivaled greatness.

A worshiper whose spirit is not mindful of these truths is a worshiper who does not worship God acceptably.

The Greatness of God

In Psalm 135, the composer emphatically states, “For I know that the LORD is great, and our Lord is above all gods” (v. 5). In the next nine verses, He details three ways that Jehovah’s greatness is clearly demonstrated in our world. These are:

In His creation of our planet. “Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures” (vv. 6-7).

In His government of our world. “He destroyed the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast. He sent signs and wonders into the midst of you, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh and all his servants. He defeated many nations and slew mighty kings—Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan—and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to Israel His people” (vv. 8-12).

In His faithfulness to His word. “Your name, O LORD, endures forever, Your fame, O LORD, throughout all generations. For the LORD will judge His people, and He will have compassion on His servants” (vv. 13-14).

Incomparable. Unique. Sovereign.

Praise the LORD!

The Folly of Idolatry

Twice in the book of Psalms, there is an exposé on the folly of idolatry (Psalm 115:4-8, 135:15-18). In each, there are three striking facts which demonstrate the utter folly of such a belief system. These are:

The inanimate nature of an idol. “The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands” (Psalm 135:15). Every idol is made by humans (living, animate beings) out of non-living, inanimate materials. As the apostle Paul so eloquently

pointed out in Athens: If humans are the offspring of deity, it is utter foolishness to think that “the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising” (Acts 17:29). The scientific law of biogenesis declares that life comes from life. Humans who are living beings are not inferior to their non-living inventions. How foolish to think otherwise!

The inability of an idol. “They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat” (Psalm 115:5-7). An idol is mute, blind, and deaf. It also cannot smell, touch, or walk. If you met a human with such disabilities, would you consider them more capable and superior to you? If you would not think such about a fellow human being with such profound limitations, how much more foolish it is to consider something created by human hands with the same limitations to be superior to you!

The degrading influence of an idol. “Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them” (Psalm 135:18). The scientific law of sowing and reaping has been around since the beginning of history (cf. Genesis 1:11-12). It exists in the spiritual world as well (cf. Galatians 6:7-9). You become spiritually like what you worship. If you worship a mute, blind, deaf idol, you will spiritually become like it. If you worship the holy, living, true God of love you will become like Him. Worshiping an idol degrades. Worshiping Jehovah in spirit and in truth uplifts. How foolish to be devoted to something that diminishes you intellectually, morally, and spiritually!

The Uniqueness of the One True God

There are three great names that are usually used in reference to the Creator and Ruler of our universe. Each is used in the opening verses of Psalm 136. “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for

He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever” (vv. 1-3).

Jehovah (“LORD” in verse 1) is His personal name, the enduring description of His personality and character. “I AM that I AM” is the divine definition of this name (Exodus 3:14). It speaks to God’s personality, eternity, and unchanging nature. He is not fictional; He is not a theory; He is not simply the necessary and impersonal conclusion to a valid syllogism of logic. He is neither the work of man’s hands nor the figment of human imagination. He is the holy, self-existent, and autonomous One—from everlasting to everlasting.

Elohim (“God” in verse 2) is the distinct description of His power and ability. This Hebrew word is plural in form, intimating a supremacy of power and a plurality of persons. It speaks of His unlimited ability to create and provide. It is a declaration of omnipotence. He is the God of gods.

Adonai (“Lord” in verse 3) is the declaration of His authority. He is sovereign. He answers to no one; everyone answers to Him. No creature in heaven, on earth, or under the earth is outside of His dominion. He is Lord of lords.

Verses four to twenty-five document how this personal, powerful Sovereign created the universe and introduced the scarlet thread of redemption into the warp and woof of human history. How fitting and timeless is the psalm’s conclusion: “Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His mercy endures forever” (v. 26).

Amen and Amen!

Jehovah’s Enduring Mercy

Echoing through the history of humanity is the sweet kindness, tender pity, enduring mercy, and compassionate love of Jehovah—the God of gods and Lord of lords. From the creation of the

heavens and earth in Genesis to the giving of a new heavens and new earth in Revelation and beyond, His mercy endures forever.

This is the thunderous, reverberating message of Psalm 136. Each of its twenty-six verses ends with the same refrain “For His mercy endures forever.” His compassionate love can be clearly seen in His creation (vv. 4-9), in His deliverance (vv. 10-15), in His providence and protection (vv. 16-25).

No wonder this psalm begins and ends with the following exhortations: “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever...Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His mercy endures forever” (vv. 1, 26).

By the Rivers of Babylon

Psalm 137 was written shortly after the nation of Judah had “become victims of plunder” to all its enemies (2 Kings 21:14). The Babylonians had been used as Jehovah’s battle axe and weapon of war; they had broken the nation of Judah into pieces (Jeremiah 51:20). Jerusalem’s calamity was so great that everyone who heard of it had both ears tingle (2 Kings 21:12). Jerusalem had been wiped out and turned upside down like a dish—just as Jehovah’s prophets had predicted (2 Kings 21:13).

When the vanquished survivors of Jerusalem’s downfall arrived in Babylon as slaves, it clearly was a time to weep and mourn. So, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there, those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, and those who plundered us requested mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy” (vv. 1-6).

Because of the fresh and deep wounds of devastation, grief, and loss, the psalm ends with these words: “Remember, O LORD,

against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, ‘Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation!’ O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, happy the one who repays you as you have served us! Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!’ (vv. 7-9).

Four important, sobering lessons can be gleaned from this psalm written by the rivers of Babylon:

- There is a time to weep and mourn (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4); when that time comes, do so.
- Insincere worship is foolish and fraudulent; it ought to be avoided.
- The wages of sin are always unpleasant; they are never enjoyed by those who receive them.
- The heart crushed by grief and loss may desire God’s righteous judgment with unrighteous motives; wise and loving ears listen with this in mind.

Dashing Your Little Ones Against the Rock

To most Bible readers, the conclusion of Psalm 137 is troubling. Here it is written, “Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, ‘Raze it, raze it to its very foundation!’ O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, happy the one who repays you as you have served us! Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!” (vv. 7-9).

To gain a better perspective on these words, consider these three observations:

First, the destruction of evil is the complement of the preservation of good. Before Paul exhorts his brethren in Roman 12:9 to “cling to what is good,” he commanded, “Abhor what is evil.” To be truly righteous one must be just as passionate in opposing evil as in supporting good. The great beauty and appeal of heaven is that “there shall by no means enter anything that defiles or causes an abomination” (Revelation 21:27). The reason why this will be

true about heaven is because “anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). The belief that you can have heaven to reward the righteous without having hell to punish the unrighteous is nonsensical and unbiblical.

Second, the words of Psalm 137:9 are actually an echo of an earlier prophecy about Babylon. In Isaiah’s “burden against Babylon” (chapter 13), he wrote the following: “I will halt the arrogance of the proud and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible...Everyone who is found will be thrust through, and everyone who is captured will fall by the sword. Their children also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered, and their wives ravished. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not regard silver; and as for gold, they will not delight in it. Also, their bows will dash the young men to pieces, and they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye will not spare children. And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah” (vv. 11, 15-19). How ungodly is it for a person who has been captured, carried away to a foreign country, and forced into slavery to desire the day when their captors who have brutalized them are stopped? Civil wars have been fought to end the horrific practice of slavery. Is it unrighteous to desire the end of such inhumane treatment?

Finally, it is amazing how often the sensitivities of Bible critics are offended with such language as “Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!” (Psalm 137:9), yet these same people support the abject barbarity of abortion! How does dismembering an innocent child via medical instruments while in its mother’s womb somehow not generate any sense of outrage, but Psalm 137:9 does? Hypocrisy is an evil and hideous character flaw.

ALL or Nothing

Some things in life are “all or nothing” propositions. For example, you cannot be “a little bit married” or “a little bit pregnant”; it’s all or nothing. Neither can you be “a little bit obedient.” The greatest commandment is an all-or-nothing proposition: “you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

From God’s perspective, loving Him with anything less than all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is to hate Him. If you are not completely with Him, you are against Him (Matthew 12:30). He prefers hot or cold over lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-16).

When it came to worshiping God, David exclaimed, “I will praise You with my whole heart” (Psalm 138:1).

Heartfelt worship is ALL or nothing.

Reasons for Exuberant Worship

Worship **MUST** be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). The proper spirit for worship includes a glad anticipation of the privilege of assembling together with others of like precious faith (Psalm 122:1). It also includes an intense joy or exuberance for the privilege of praising and adoring the great I AM.

In Psalm 138, David writes of his passionate reasons for worship. Here it is written, “I will worship toward Your holy temple and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name. In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul. All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O LORD, when they hear the words of Your mouth. Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. Though the LORD is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar” (vv. 2-6).

Note briefly, the reasons David gives for exuberant worship:

- God’s revelation of His immense lovingkindness in His word (v. 2)
- God’s wonderful answer to the prayer of His children (v. 3)
- God’s great glory (vv. 4-5)
- God’s tender regard for the lowly and His disdain for the proud (v. 6).

These same reasons for exuberant worship remain, three thousand years later!

High and Low

When I was a kid, my dad and I used to play a game called “Long and Short” (I have learned since that some call it “21”). It is a basketball shooting contest in which each shooter takes a long shot (ten feet or further from the basket) and then a short shot (less than ten feet from the basket). If you made your long shot, you scored two points; if you made your short shot, you scored one; if you made both shots, you scored a total of four points and got to keep shooting. The first person to a score of exactly 21 points was the winner.

As I read Psalm 138:6, I am reminded of the name of this game because the proper relationship with Jehovah on high is found in being low. Hence, David writes: “Though the LORD is on high, yet He regards the lowly; but the proud He knows from afar.”

Now, your relationship with God is not a game to be played. It is not like the one my dad and I spent countless hours playing in the waning minutes of an Indiana twilight; rather, it is a sobering responsibility.

Because Jehovah is on high, I ought to live in lowly self-regard—being poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3), clothed with humility (1 Peter 5:5), doing nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind, esteeming others better than myself (Philippians 2:3).

High and low.

God and me.

That is the long and short of the matter.

The Wills of God

When talking about what God wants everyone to do, we must speak of the will of God (i.e. in the singular). When talking about what God does for His people, we have to speak of the wills of God (in the plural), because God does so much for His people.

In Psalm 138, David writes of three things that God does for His people. Here it is written, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me. The LORD will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O LORD, endures forever; do not forsake the works of Your hands” (vv. 7-8).

What comfort to know the wills of God:

- When I am up to my eyeballs, and disheartened and wearied in difficult, trying times, God **will** revive me (v. 7).
- When the wrath of my enemies threatens me, God **will** save me (v. 7).
- Jehovah never does anything halfway; therefore, He **will** mercifully and faithfully help me to fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith (v. 8).

“And, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20) remains God’s expressed will of what He **will** do.

Exceedingly, Abundantly, Above All We Ask or Think

No human has comprehensive, exhaustive knowledge of God. As Paul emphatically declares in Ephesians 3:20, “He is able to

do exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think. Psalm 139 reflects this poignant truth.

- God’s **omniscience** (His knowledge of everything that can be known in the past, present, and future) is exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think (vv. 1-6).
- God’s **omnipresence** (His ability to be everywhere that exists) is exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think (vv. 7-12).
- God’s **omnipotence** (His power to do everything that can be done) is exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think.
- God’s **holiness** (His absolute righteousness that makes Him so utterly pure that He cannot even be tempted to sin) is exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think (vv. 19-22).

This makes David’s requests at the close of this meditation so stunning. To the God whose omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and holiness is exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think, David prayed: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting” (vv. 23-24).

David truly was a man after God’s own heart!

A Detailed Consideration of God’s Omniscience

The omniscience (“omni” = “all” + “science” = “knowledge”) of God is not taught in Scripture as some vague, abstract concept. It is something that is incredibly personal and extremely detailed: “O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thoughts afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down and are ac-

quainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before and laid Your hand upon me” (Psalm 139:1-5).

According to this inspired passage, God’s omniscience includes:

- His ability to search and know everything about me.
- His awareness of my every movement in a day.
- His discernment of my current and future thoughts.
- His ability to know all my motives that prompted my actions.
- His awareness of every single syllable spoken by my mouth.
- His wisdom to providentially care for me every moment of my life. (The Greek word for “foreknowledge” is *prognosis*; it means “to know beforehand.” The Greek word for “providence” is *pronoia*; it means “to look out beforehand; to consider in advance.”)

When David tried to “wrap his head around” God’s omniscience, He exclaimed: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it” (v. 6).

Amen and Amen!

God’s Inescapable Omnipresence

In David’s tribute to Jehovah’s omnipresence in Psalm 139, he declares two inescapable truths.

First, space does not limit God. “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me” (vv. 7-10).

Second, darkness does not hide anything from God. “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall fall on me,’ even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You” (vv. 11-12).

Idols have eyes but do not see (Psalm 135:15-16), but “the eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3).

God’s omnipresence is inescapable.

Darkness, Light, and God

One reason a wise father gives his children a curfew is because of the increase of evil done at night. As the apostle Paul observed, “those who get drunk are drunk at night” (1 Thessalonians 5:7). Thieves prefer doing their work in the night (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2). Evildoers have fewer pangs of conscience and less fear of discovery under the cloak of darkness.

The folly of this is crystal clear in Psalm 139:11-12. Here it is written, “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall fall on me,’ even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You.”

Truly, “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).

God and the Unborn

David’s tribute to God’s omnipotence in Psalm 139 is focused upon the prenatal development of an unborn human. Of all the amazingly powerful things that Jehovah has created—the extraordinary energy within an atom, the vast oceans of water, the brute strength of an elephant, et. al.—David points to the creation and forty-week gestation period of a human baby as the most fit-

ting example of God’s powerful craftsmanship. His inspired quill writes: “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed, and in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me when as yet there were none of them” (vv. 13-16).

Every conception within a woman’s womb is a unique, divine masterpiece. No one in human history is exactly like you. No one will ever be.

This truth only blackens the heinousness of the murderous practice called abortion—the shedding of innocent blood that Jehovah abominates (Proverbs 6:16-17).

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

In a Newsweek article published over twenty years ago (March 3, 1997), there was a special report on “How a Child’s Brain Develops.” Although King David was not privy to any of this scientific research, he still marveled long ago: “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well” (Psalm 139:13-14).

Three items mentioned in this special report help to add to the sense of awe that we ought to feel. These are:

- The cells in a developing embryo’s “neural tube” multiply at the rate of 250,000 per minute until the brain and spinal column are formed.
- At birth, a baby’s brain contains 100,000,000,000 (100 billion) neurons (or nerve cells). This number is roughly the same as the number of stars in the Milky Way galaxy.

- By birth, 1,000,000,000,000 (1 trillion) glial cells—the protectors and nourishers of the body’s neurons—are in place in the baby’s brain.

According to the article’s author, “What awes scientists who study the brain, what stuns them, is not that things occasionally go wrong in the developing brain but that so much of the time they go right.”

To be able to document and stand in awe of the amazing design and precision of an unborn child’s development and yet deny the fact that there is a Designer of it all is utterly incomprehensible and reprehensible to any clear-headed person. Equally so is the preposterous notion of abortion advocates (i.e. murderers) who contend that the unborn, still-developing child (which will produce 1 trillion glial cells and 100 billion nerve cells, not to mention the multitudes of other cells and tissues in its body in forty weeks) is not actually a living human being.

A fool is known by his folly.

David’s Response to the Incomparable God

Although David sought more thoughts of God in his life than the number of grains of sand on the earth, he was by no means “so heavenly minded that he was of no earthly good.”

The final third of Psalm 139 (i.e. vv. 17-24) records David’s response to the incomparable God. His deep and diligent meditation upon Jehovah’s omniscience (vv. 1-6), omnipresence (vv. 7-12), and omnipotence (vv. 13-16) resulted in three practical, earthly actions. These are:

- **An intense love for God.** “How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with You” (vv. 17-18).
- **An equally intense hatred for God’s enemies.** “Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, there-

fore, you bloodthirsty men. For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies” (vv. 19-22).

- **Utter transparency with God.** “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting” (vv. 23-24).

What a challenging example to follow!

Grains of Sand

David was a man after God’s own heart for many reasons, Psalm 139 illustrates two of them.

First, He willingly strained himself to meditate seriously upon God’s divine characteristics—i.e. His omniscience (vv. 1-6), omnipresence (vv. 7-12), and omnipotence (vv. 13-16). He was not superficial in his thinking about God. He ever sought to realize the enormous chasm between his mortal limitations and Jehovah’s limitless nature.

Then, he sought to respond appropriately to God’s utter worthiness and live accordingly. Verses 17-18 contain David’s response to his profound meditations of verses 1-16. Here it is written, “How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with You.”

“More in number than the sand.” What a vast number that must be! David sought to make the sum of his thoughts of God as close to infinity as was possible for an earthbound creature. He truly sought to set his mind on things above, not on things on the earth (cf. Colossians 3:2). How deserving he is of the moniker “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14)!

If (or maybe I should say, When) your thoughts of God are added up, how close would they be to being more than the number of grains of sand found upon this earth?

Set your mind on things above!

All Who Desire to Live Godly Lives

From the days of Cain and Abel to the end of time, all who desire to live godly lives will suffer persecution and mistreatment from the ungodly. Psalms 140-144 are five psalms ascribed to David; each is written while he was in the crucible of evil treatment. The underlying reason for this is found in David's righteous abomination of evil, as described in Psalm 139:19-22. Here it is written, "Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men. For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies."

Because David sought to abhor evil and cling to what is good,

- Violent men planned evil things against him, sharpening their tongues like a serpent, the poison of asps under their lips (140:1-3);
- Wicked, violent men purposed to make him stumble (140:4);
- Proud enemies had hidden a snare for him, spreading a net by the wayside, setting traps for him (140:5);
- Workers of iniquity had laid snares for him, seeking to trap him in their nets (141:9-10);
- Persecutors stronger than he had secretly set a snare for him (142:3, 6);
- His enemy had persecuted his soul, crushing his life to the ground, filling his heart with distress (143:3);
- Foreigners had spoken lying words about him (144:7, 11).

In response to these situations, David beseeched God for deliverance (140:1); he cried out to the Lord to make haste (141:1); he desired for his prayer to be set before Jehovah as incense (141:2); he sought refuge in God the Lord (Psalm 141:8, 142:5); he poured out his complaint and declared his trouble before Jehovah (142:2); he entreated the Lord to hear his prayer, give ear to his supplications and answer him in faithfulness and righteousness (143:1); he sought a speedy answer from Jehovah, delivering him from his enemies (143:7, 9); he asked the Lord to revive him for his name's sake, bringing his soul out of trouble for His righteousness' sake (143:11); he requested, "Bow down Your heavens, O LORD, and come down; touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. Flash forth lightning and scatter them; shoot out Your arrows and destroy them. Stretch out Your hand from above; rescue me and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of foreigners" (144:5-7).

The final psalm of David in the Psalter concludes with these thrilling words: "The LORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever" (145:17-21).

Truly, "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9).

Do NOT stop striving to live a godly life.

The Godly's "Secret Weapon"

In worldly terms, those who serve the god of this world have every conceivable advantage over those seeking to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age. Like Goliath, the forc-

es of evil have an imposing, intimidating presence. The godly's defeat looks to be inevitable. And, yet, it is not.

Because the godly wrestle not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12), the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:4). David understood this. His words of Psalm 140:6-8 describe beautifully and accurately the godly's "secret weapon": "I said to the LORD: 'You are my God; hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD. O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle. Do not grant, O LORD, the desires of the wicked; do not further his wicked scheme, lest they be exalted.'"

"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).

Therefore, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer is your unstoppable "secret weapon."

Abhorring Evil and Praying for Your Enemies

One of the greatest challenges of godly living is keeping the proper balance of abhorring evil while loving and praying for those who do evil. Only Jesus did this perfectly throughout His entire life.

It is clear from reading the words of David that he abhorred evil. His words in Psalm 140:9-11 clearly prove that he abominated evil and desired the righteous judgment of God upon them. He writes, "As for the head of those who surround me, let the evil of their lips cover them; let burning coals fall upon them; let them be cast into the fire, into deep pits, that they rise not up again. Let not a slanderer be established in the earth; let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow him."

Yet, David did not hate his enemies. He refused to take King Saul's life on more than one occasion. Because he was God's anointed, David would not stretch out his hand against him (1 Samuel 24:6, 26:4). The young messenger who brought the news

of Saul's death—claiming to have struck the fatal blow to the wounded and dying king, was executed (2 Samuel 1:9-16). His reaction to the news of the death of his traitorous son Absalom, the leader of a coup attempt, was one of great sadness, not joy (2 Samuel 18:33).

Though it is not easy, it is possible to abhor evil and love evil-doers. It is possible to strive to pull the workers of iniquity out of the fire of certain condemnation while hating the garment of sin that defiles them and makes their condemnation certain.

Certain Knowledge

Because of our finite nature, every human has some things he knows and some things he does not know. When facing the vicious desires and evil intentions of the wicked as David did in Psalm 140, he found great comfort in what knowledge he had that he was certain of. This knowledge gave him peace as he weathered the powerful storm of persecution that had burst in his life.

“I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted and justice for the poor. Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; the upright shall dwell in Your presence” (vv. 12-13).

Read his words again slowly, thoughtfully, carefully, repeatedly. Breathe in the calm he felt as the torrential rain of opposition descended, and the floods of slander and evil speaking arose, and the winds of persecution blew and beat on David and his life.

He did not live in a bubble.

Like you and me, he lived in a battle between good and evil.

And, he lived with certainty in the midst of it.

As Incense

In heaven there are no refrigerators with magnets. There are no filing cabinets with files in them. There are no “Post-It” notes.

So, how can you illustrate the lingering, long-term effect on God that the prayer of a righteous man has?

The inspired writer David uses incense. He writes, “LORD, I cry out to You; make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You. Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Psalm 141:1-2).

Long after a portion of incense has been completely consumed by fire, there is an aromatic reminder of its previous existence. What a beautiful way to illustrate the power of prayer and its lingering effect upon God and the future!

The curious mind has to wonder what continued effect a prayer offered days, weeks, months, even years ago by a righteous man may still be having today on the mind and providence of the Sovereign God.

We “always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1).

Purity

To some, denying ungodliness and worldly lust and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age is of nominal concern. For them, it is simply a hobby, not a holy obsession. Clearly, David was not of this mindset, for he writes: “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies” (Psalm 141:3-4).

David desired genuine purity; therefore:

- He sought spiritual victory in humanity’s toughest battleground—the tongue.
- He desired purity in humanity’s ultimate war zone—the heart.
- He sought uncompromised fellowship with God by having no association with those who work iniquity.

Pure mouth. Pure heart. Pure fellowship.

How powerful is your passion for purity?

The Rebuke of the Righteous

Blind spots.

Even with two or more exterior mirrors and one interior, every driver still has them.

Every person traveling on the road of life has them too.

Because of blind spots, you and I need courageous and tender-hearted people who are willing to help us see what we cannot readily see. David's desire was to "let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it" (Psalm 141:5).

Nathan's rebuke of David for his ungodly behavior with Bathsheba and wickedness toward her faithful husband Uriah was viewed by David as a kindness and an excellent oil. There was no petty retaliation. The king did not demand the head of the prophet when he told him what he saw in David's blind spot, thus striking him in his guilty heart and rebuking him to his face.

How wise David was to not stubbornly refuse to hear and heed the rebuke of righteous Nathan! "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 27:6), and wise is the person who welcomes the help and rebuke of his blind spots by the righteous.

How the Righteous Rebukes

According to Psalm 141:5, the rebuke of the righteous is a kindness, like an excellent oil (think of one that has the perfect combination of optimal medicinal healing and pleasing aroma). David would know such to be true, because the righteous prophet Nathan rebuked him for his sin with Bathsheba which had prompted the premeditated killing of her husband Uriah in battle.

According to the apostle Paul, it is the spiritual who seek to reclaim erring brethren (Galatians 6:1). Their rebuke ought not be stubbornly refused but prized and readily accepted (Psalm 141:5).

So, how exactly does the righteous rebuke? The simple answer is: by speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). To flesh this answer out a little more, consider these four ingredients found in the excellent oil of the righteous' rebuke:

- **Honesty.** Righteousness requires truthfulness. Sin is hideous, horrific, and heinous. Therefore, when Peter addressed the unrighteousness in Simon of Samaria's heart, he did not use tepid, generic, vague language. Instead, "Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.'" (Acts 8:2-23). Nathan's rebuke of David was even more direct, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7).
- **Meekness.** "Power under control" is an accurate working definition of this word. A person in sin is in a grave state of spiritual vulnerability and brokenness. How they are handled while in that state will go a long way toward determining whether their brokenness heals properly or whether they are scarred for life. Meekness matters.
- **Empathy.** Paul's inspired instructions are clear—"restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Arrogance—a "better than thou" attitude—is the antithesis of empathy. Arrogance poisons a rebuke of sin; empathy enhances the healing powers of one's rebuke. Be empathetic.
- **Self-examination.** As Jesus so graphically illustrates in Matthew 7, do not worry about another's speck in his eye when you have a telephone pole sticking out of yours. Examine yourself and eliminate your flaws before striving to help another with their shortcomings. There is something

particularly distasteful about the image of a morbidly obese physician lecturing his patient about being five pounds overweight.

Rebuking sin is something the righteous do; it is especially helpful when these four ingredients are expertly combined and used appropriately. “Let my head not refuse it” (Psalm 141:5).

Peace in a World of Injustice

A corrupt legal system that dispenses injustice as frequently or more often than it does true justice is nothing new in our world. David prayed against the deeds of the wicked and their judges who legally aided and abetted their evil and left the bones of their victims in their wake (Psalm 141:5-7). Such injustice is maddening to the innocent. Such injustice torments the sensitive soul of the righteous. How can one find peace in such a wicked world of injustice?

David did it by doing the following:

- He kept his eyes upon God and took refuge in Him (Psalm 141:8).
- He prayed for God’s protection from the snares and traps of the workers of iniquity (Psalm 141:9).
- He requested God that the wicked fall into their own nets, so that he could escape safely (Psalm 141:10).

Do not let evildoers rob you of peace.

It’s not necessary.

Importunity

When His disciples asked Him, “Lord, teach us to pray” in Luke 11, Jesus’ instructions addressed two essential areas—the verbal component (vv. 2-4) and the spiritual component (vv. 5-13) of prayer. To engage in genuine prayer, both components are essential.

Prayer is neither a magical incantation of prescribed words recited mindlessly by rote, nor is it a casual address which lacks such spiritual ingredients as reverence, submissiveness, consecration, trust, humility, and a passionate desire for spiritual victory.

To illustrate the spiritual component of prayer, Jesus used a unique word in verse 8—“importunity” (KJV) or “persistence” (NKJV). It is at the very heart of God’s definition of prayer. To God, prayer is communicating with Him out of a desperate sense of need which results in reverent shamelessness and extreme boldness before God’s Sovereign throne.

There was a great sense of importunity and urgency in David’s prayer that is recorded in Psalm 142. Here, David states, “I cry out to the LORD with my voice; with my voice to the LORD I make my supplication. I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble” (vv. 1-2).

“I cry out...I make my supplication...I pour out my complaint...I declare my trouble.”

Importunity.

It’s the dynamic motivation of genuine prayer.

How importunistic are you?

Cave Praying

The Bible does not require a specific posture or place for prayer. Jonah, for example, prayed in the belly of a great fish. Jesus prayed face down in an olive garden. According to the superscription of Psalm 142, David prayed in a cave.

What the superscription does not state, but the psalm itself clearly indicates, is that David was hanging on by the barest of threads. Slowly read aloud and carefully listen for the intense pathos of these words: “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk they have secretly set a snare for me. Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul. I cried out to You, O LORD: I said,

‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name; the righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me.’”

While you may never have prayed in a physical cave, how many times have you found yourself in the cave of being overwhelmed (v. 3), or the cave of vulnerability and exposure—without refuge (v. 4), or the cave of loneliness (v. 4), or the cave of humiliation (v. 6), or the cave of persecution and mistreatment (v. 6), or the cave of spiritual imprisonment (v. 7)?

David’s been there. Done that. And, was delivered by prayer.

My Refuge, My Portion

Any traveler in a vast and scorching desert must be keenly aware of the locations of its every oasis. Knowledge of such a refuge is essential to survival in a desert.

When the trials of life burn white-hot like the desert sand and they overwhelm you, when others have set a secret snare for you, and profound loneliness engulfs your soul because no one cares for you (Psalm 141:3-4), it is essential that you, like David, know the One who is your refuge, your portion in the land of the living (Psalm 142:5).

What a wonderful spiritual oasis is the One that we can call, “my refuge, my portion in the land of the living,” especially when in the crosshairs of Satan’s fiery darts.

God’s Faithfulness and Righteousness

Two important pillars of prayer are God’s faithfulness and righteousness. David begins Psalm 143 by touching on both these foundational matters. He writes: “Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications! In Your faithfulness answer me, and in

Your righteousness do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous” (vv. 1-2).

Because of God’s faithfulness, prayer is a blessing. What a spiritual boon it is to know: God hears; God cares; God is trustworthy.

Because of God’s righteousness, prayer is a privilege. It is not an entitlement; it is not an inherent, inalienable right; it is not something we deserve or have earned.

God went to great lengths to place a “High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” for us in His presence (Hebrews 6:19-20). It is only because of the riches of God’s wisdom, grace, and mercy that there now is an unchangeable High Priesthood so that we have One who “always lives to make intercession” for us (Hebrews 7:24-25). Therefore, “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just [or righteous] to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Thank God for His faithfulness and righteousness.

In the Sight of the Righteous God

“I don’t see anything wrong with it.” How often that foolish statement has been used as the standard to justify a person’s actions. “Behold, I thought,” kept General Naaman a leper (2 Kings 5:1-11) and Saul of Tarsus a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent man (Acts 26:9; 1 Timothy 1:13).

Psalms 143:2 reminds us that in God’s sight “no one living is righteous.” The guilt of sin is universal. Because sin pollutes our tastes and jaundices our eyes, determining what is holy and good and just is not decided by what you or I think or feel. We are not omniscient and cannot be totally objective; therefore, the only thing that matters is what God says.

God is righteous. Thus, He knows what is right.

Every time.

Overwhelmed by Life

I learned recently of a speaker who told her audience that Christians ought always to be optimistic. She explained that Elijah's negativity and pessimism after his titanic battle with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18-19) was unacceptable to her. Though tolerated compassionately by God who prescribed food and rest for his battle-tested prophet, such doom and gloom, in her opinion, was unbecoming of a godly, thus optimistic, person.

After reading Psalm 143, it is quite apparent that David did not get this speakerette's memo either. "For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in darkness, like those who have long been dead. Therefore, my spirit is overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is distressed" (vv. 3-4).

Life happens in real time, not hindsight; its trials and spiritual battles are diverse and rarely give you any advanced warning (James 1:2). Many of Satan's attacks are intentionally covert and unpleasant. Satan's wiles (*methodia* is the Greek word) are intended to crush, overwhelm, and distress. He is fighting to defeat and destroy you.

So, when you, like David, can truthfully say, "My spirit is overwhelmed within me" (cf. Psalm 142:3), remember that God wants you to turn to Him and listen to His words. He will give you rest and legitimate help, not a foolish lecture on optimism.

When Life Overwhelms

The "EASY" button was a brilliant advertising idea. It readily connects to that part of each person's psyche which prefers life to be far less stressful and far more convenient than it is. Because the "EASY" button is fictional, anyone feeling overwhelmed by life—crushed to the ground, dwelling in darkness, and distressed—ought not to think that there is an "EASY" button for

spiritually difficult times. But this does not mean that such times are without hope and comfort.

David describes what he did to hang on and hang in there during life's overwhelming periods. He writes, "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands. I spread out my hands to You; my soul longs for You like a thirsty land. Selah" (vv. 5-6).

Because he writes "Selah" at the end of verse six, he is indicating to us that we need to slow down, pause, reflect, and ruminate on his words. Consider thoughtfully these three things David did when his life caved in.

He remembered the days of old. "To everything there is a season" (Ecclesiastes 3:1); therefore, every life has its sunny days and its gloomy days. The patriarch Job recognized this; his wife refused to accept it (Job 2:9-10). The apostle Paul had periods/seasons in his life in which he abounded and those in which he was abased (Philippians 4:12). Every person who desires to live a godly life will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). Remembering days of old in which God gave your soul gladness is an excellent way to help you remember that "this too shall pass."

He meditated on all of God's works, pondering upon them. Quiet, focused reflection on the works of God helps to remind of Jehovah's eternal power and Godhead. This is my Father's world; therefore, I know that good WILL triumph over evil. Though I be assailed by the principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this age, and the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12), my Lord—by the working of God—has been seated at God's right hand, "far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:20-21). If God be for me, who can (successfully) be against me? (cf. Romans 8:31).

He prayed, spreading out his hands to God. It appears that the purpose of this physical posture was intended to imitate a needy child beseeching a caring adult. What loving parent would

not respond promptly to a distressed child at his/her side whose outstretched arms and frightened face indicate an intense need for comfort? If an imperfect father would immediately embrace his terrified child and seek to succor him, how much more will your Father in heaven do this for you?!

Persevering faith is not EASY, but it is possible.

Like a Thirsty Land

Because of their latitude, there are some places in this world which only have two seasons—dry and rainy. In Africa, for example, the winter months of July, August, and September have no rain. Wells dry up. Rivers evaporate and disappear. Dust is king. The rainy season usually begins in late October or early November, and the initial precipitation is hungrily consumed by the parched and thirsty earth.

Importunity—an overwhelming sense of desperation, need, and urgency which eliminates meaningless utterances and compels straight talk with God—is the wellspring of prayer (Luke 11:8, KJV). When your soul feels like a thirsty land, pray.

Pour out your heart to God like David did: “Answer me speedily, O LORD; my spirit fails! Do not hide Your face from me, lest I be like those who go down into the pit. Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You. Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; in You I take shelter. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness. Revive me, O LORD, for Your name’s sake! For Your righteousness’ sake bring my soul out of trouble. In Your mercy cut off my enemies and destroy all those who afflict my soul; for I am Your servant” (Psalm 143:7-12).

Does your soul long for God like a thirsty land? (Psalm 143:6).

If your prayers were used as the basis by which that question was answered, what would they reveal?

Praying When Overwhelmed by Life

Psalm 143 clearly indicates that David is up to his eyeballs in difficulties. Feeling overwhelmed, incredibly lonely, and crushed beneath the oppressive onslaught of our common foe, David spread out his arms like a frightened child beseeching for a parent's care and comfort. From a parched soul, he speaks freely from the heart: "Answer me speedily, O LORD; my spirit fails! Do not hide Your face from me, lest I be like those who go down into the pit. Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You. Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; in You I take shelter. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness. Revive me, O LORD, for Your name's sake! For Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. In Your mercy cut off my enemies and destroy all those who afflict my soul; for I am Your servant" (vv. 7-12).

From David's words we get an excellent template on how to pray when life overwhelms you. Considering the following supplications embedded in his prayer:

- **Fellowship.** "Do not hide Your face from me, lest I be like those who go down into the pit" (v. 7).
- **Discernment.** "Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust" (v. 8).
- **Wisdom.** "Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You" (v. 8).
- **Deliverance.** "Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; in You I take shelter" (v. 9).
- **Instruction.** "Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God" (v. 10).

- **Guidance.** “Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness” (v. 10).
- **Renewal.** “Revive me, O LORD, for Your name’s sake! For Your righteousness’ sake bring my soul out of trouble” (v. 11).
- **Victory.** “In Your mercy cut off my enemies and destroy all those who afflict my soul” (v. 12).

The basis of David’s urgent request is stated at the psalm’s conclusion—“for I am Your servant” (v. 12). How much more appropriate are such supplications in our prayers, for we are sons (Matthew 6:9).

Blessed be the LORD!

Spiritual warfare is not optional for a Christian. There is no such thing as a spiritual pacifist or a conscientious objector. The adversary is a relentless, aggressive, and powerful foe.

David was a warrior. He fought in so many battles that God denied him the privilege of building His temple because he had shed much blood and had fought in too many wars in his life (1 Chronicles 22:8). Jehovah had trained David’s hands for war and his fingers for battle (Psalm 144:1).

In the beatitude that begins Psalm 144, David gives a beautiful, seven-fold description of the reason for his courage and victories as a soldier. His inspired quill writes: “Blessed be the LORD my Rock, Who trains my hands for war and my fingers for battle—my lovingkindness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer, my shield and the One in whom I take refuge, Who subdues my people under me” (vv. 1-2).

- My Rock
- My Lovingkindness
- My Fortress
- My High Tower
- My Deliverer

- My Shield
- My Refuge

No wonder he defeated Goliath (1 Samuel 17), killed two hundred Philistines (1 Samuel 18:27), and repeatedly delivered mighty blows to Israel's enemies (1 Samuel 19:8, 23:5, 27:8, 30:17-18) prior to becoming king at the age of thirty (2 Samuel 5:4)!

The God of David desires to be to you the same thing He was to David. He wants you to be ultra-victorious in your spiritual battles (Romans 8:37).

Are you interested?

God vs. Man

Because of our inherent limitations, our failure to properly use our spiritual imagination, and the blinding power of pride, we humans really struggle to adequately and wisely understand the immense gulf that exists between the natures of God and man.

In Psalm 8, as David reflected upon the immensity of the heavens that he could see with his own two eyes, he asked, "What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?"

In Psalm 144, as David reflected upon the victory Jehovah gave him as His Rock, Lovingkindness, Fortress, High Tower, Deliverer, Shield, and Refuge (vv. 1-2), he immediately asks "LORD, what is man, that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that You are mindful of him?" (v. 3).

Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow" (Psalm 144:4), yet the eternal, self-existent One—the One who is "I AM that I AM"—lovingly guides, guards, and protects His people.

Blessed be the LORD!

The Brevity of Life

Numerous are the places in Scripture which seek to graphically describe the brevity of every human's lifespan.

Moses quantified it in Psalm 90 as "seventy years and if by reason of strength, eighty years" (v. 10).

Job declares that "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue" (Job 14:1-2).

James describes a human lifespan to be like a morning fog, "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14).

David depicts the brevity of human life with these words: "Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow" (Psalm 144:4).

In a best case scenario—one which has no tragic accidents in which you die as a child, a teen, or a young or middle-aged adult—life on this earth is incredibly short, especially when its length is compared to the timelessness of existence in the life to come.

O LORD, "teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

Freedom of Speech

There is a most breathtaking word used in the Book of Hebrews in its discussion of each Christian's access to and privileges in the presence of God. It is **parrhesia**.

According to Strong's, this noun is a compound word. Literally, it means "all speech." It was coined by the ancient Greeks to encapsulate the freedom of speech every citizen had. If you were a rightful citizen of one of the Greek city-states, you had the freedom to publicly state anything you thought without repercussions from any who may dislike your point of view.

The inspired writer of Hebrews uses this dynamic word when he wrote: “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come **boldly** to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need... Therefore, brethren, **having boldness** to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God...” (4:14-16, 10:19-21).

Though he lived prior to these provisions of the new covenant, David clearly and repeatedly demonstrates that God allows the citizens of His kingdom freedom of speech in His august presence. Consider this example from Psalm 144: “Bow down Your heavens, O LORD, and come down; touch the mountains, and they shall smoke. Flash forth lightning and scatter them; shoot out Your arrows and destroy them. Stretch out Your hand from above; rescue me and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of foreigners whose mouth speaks lying words and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood” (vv. 5-8).

Political freedom of speech is an immense blessing that is sparsely enjoyed in our world today. However, it pales in comparison when placed beside the extraordinary blessing of spiritual freedom of speech in the presence of God.

Don’t just read and comprehend Hebrews 4:14-16 and Hebrews 10:19-21, exercise your freedom of speech in God’s presence.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5: 17).

A New Song

Like the composition of “The Star Spangled Banner” in America’s history, great spiritual victories were often commemorated in the Scriptures by the composition of a new song.

When the final shackle of Egyptian slavery was removed from Israel at the Red Sea by the Lord’s utter destruction of Pharaoh and his army, Moses composed a new song and taught it to Israel (Exodus 15).

When David was delivered from a horrible pit of miry clay and his feet were set upon a rock again, he declared that God had put a new song in his mouth (Psalm 40:1-3).

In Psalm 144, as David anticipates Jehovah’s granting of his bold requests to rescue and deliver him from the hands of his foreign enemies (vv. 5-8), he describes his response to such a sweet victory with these words: “I will sing a new song to You, O God; on a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You, the One who gives salvation to kings, Who delivers David His servant from the deadly sword” (vv. 9-10).

Is it not a delicious spiritual morsel to anticipate the salvation of the Lamb when it has passed into its final phase of eternal glorification, everlasting deliverance, and unceasing security in heaven with the entire company of the redeemed singing a new song before the throne of God (Revelation 14:1-3)?

Only those who have fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith will know the lyrics and music of heaven’s new song (Revelation 14:3). Only those who have followed the Lamb wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4) will be in the company singing the new song.

David and His Harp

When David is introduced in Scripture, he has a shepherd’s rod and staff (1 Samuel 16:11). In the next scene of his life that the Scriptures record, David has a harp (1 Samuel 16:23). One of

King Saul's servants described him as one "who is skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the LORD is with him" (1 Samuel 16:18). What an accurate thumbnail sketch!

Because David lived and died under the Law of Moses, David's harp was authorized in the worship of Jehovah. Second Chronicles 29:25 clearly states that King Hezekiah "stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the LORD by His prophets." It is significant to note that it was by the mouth of three different witnesses that God plainly commanded (and thus expected) the worship of David to include his voice and his harp. Therefore, David writes, "I will sing a new song to You, O God; on a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You" (Psalm 144:9).

When Jesus died, the Law of Moses ended (Romans 7:1-4; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:13-14). Its duration was from Mount Sinai to Mount Calvary. With His death, Jesus' new testament went into effect (Hebrews 9:16-17). His blood shed at Calvary inaugurated the new covenant (Luke 22:20) prophesied by Jeremiah (Hebrews 8:8-13; Jeremiah 31:31-34).

While there are some similarities between the old covenant (which David lived under) and the new covenant (which we live under), there is a host of differences—no animal sacrifices, no annual feasts in Jerusalem, no Sabbath worship, no required circumcision of males on the eighth day, etc.

Another difference is in the music offered in praise to God. David praised God using his voice and his hands. You and I are to praise God using our voices and our hearts; we are to be "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19) when we worship.

Ask any schoolboy, and he can show you the difference between your hands and your heart whenever he says the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

The Blessedness of Being God's People

Because of its inferiority, the primary focus of the God's old covenant (made with Israel) is upon physical blessings and material wealth. In the new and better (i.e. vastly superior) covenant, the focus is upon spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3) and eternal wealth (Matthew 6:19-21, 33).

In David's day, the blessedness of being God's people was seen in having peace and physical prosperity. Therefore, David concludes Psalm 144 with these words: "Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouth speaks lying words, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood—that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as pillars, sculptured in palace style; that our barns may be full, supplying all kinds of produce; that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields; that our oxen may be well laden; that there be no breaking in or going out; that there be no outcry in our streets. Happy ("blessed" in NASV and ESV) are the people who are in such a state; happy ("blessed" in the NASV and ESV) are the people whose God is the LORD!" (vv. 11-15).

As Jesus so graphically illustrated in Luke 12 (the rich farmer—vv. 16-21) and Luke 16 (the rich man—vv. 19-31), a superabundance of grain, livestock, and physical security is not humanity's greatest, most essential need. Spiritual blessings in this life and treasures in heaven are.

Oh, how blessed are the people of God under the law of Christ! They have life abundantly on earth (John 10:10) and life eternally in heaven (Matthew 25:46).

Sons and Daughters

Because the vile lie of postmodernism—that truth is whatever I believe it is—has been applied to human sexuality, a growing babble of chaos has been injected into our society.

The Bible contains no such confusion and evil: God created all of humanity in His image; there are only two sexes/genders; and, each gender is unique and purposefully created (Genesis 1:27). God deliberately constructed women to complement and complete men (Genesis 2:22). Because of this, when a lawful marriage of one man and one woman occurs, they become one (Genesis 2:24).

Each sex plays a distinct and essential role in the health and well-being of human civilization. When talking about children in Psalm 144, David writes of sons “as plants grown up in their youth” and daughters “as pillars (“corner pillars” is the NKJV’s footnote), sculptured in palace style” (v. 12). What a fascinating, thought-provoking choice of similes.

Males are like vigorous, active plants. For them to be productive, they—like all plants—must be pruned often and purposefully so that their innate vigor is focused and channeled into productive/fruitful ways.

Females are like strong, supportive, beautiful pillars that hold up the essential structures of family, church, and nation. Their quiet strength of virtue and the beauty of their holiness permeate their environment and add an adorning loveliness that whets one’s appetite for heaven.

How blessed are the people who understand their innate characteristics—intentionally different between the sexes—and then live according to God’s perfect plan.

David’s Final Psalm

Most likely the last psalm David wrote in his life is found in Second Samuel 23. According to verse 1, the last words of David,

the sweet psalmist of Israel, are found in verses 2 to 7. Because the Psalter has been divided into five Books (Psalms 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150), there is clear evidence that—like any good song book—it has been thoughtfully and carefully arranged. Therefore, the placement of David’s composition that has been numbered Psalm 145 is not accidental. It has been purposefully placed in the book as the final psalm attributed to David.

A careful consideration of this psalm’s contents points to why Psalm 145 has been placed where it is.

It is an anthem of praise. It begins and ends with brilliant outbursts of the LORD’s utter praiseworthiness. “I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness and shall sing of Your righteousness...My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever” (vv. 1-7, 21).

It is an acrostic composition. Beginning with the first Hebrew letter—aleph—and concluding with the final letter—tau, the psalm seeks to extol Jehovah, the great King of the universe whose praiseworthiness is from A to Z.

It begins the climactic finish of the book. “Praise the LORD” (i.e. Hallelujah) is the first and last declarations of the final five psalms (146-150). This psalm is the introduction to the Scriptures’ version of its own Hallelujah chorus.

“One generation shall praise Your works to another and shall declare Your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4). David in his generation did just that. And now, three thousand years later, it is our generation’s turn to Praise the LORD!

Focused and Purposeful Worship

True worship of the God of heaven—the King of kings and Lord of lords—is as far from a spectator sport as you can get. It requires the focus and purposeful involvement of your body, soul, and spirit. It is an ongoing challenge to offer to the great King of heaven a sacrifice of worship that is worthy of His august presence and will be a sweet-smelling aroma before Him.

David was a mortal who spent many hours of his life in worship. “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:2); therefore, His excellent counsel in Psalm 145 on how to offer focused and purposeful worship requires close examination and intentional implementation. He writes, “One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness and shall sing of Your righteousness” (vv. 4-6).

When worshipping the great I AM:

- Rehearse His mighty acts (in your life and in the past) (v. 4). Use Isaiah 53, Ephesians 2:1-10, Titus 3:3-8, and Romans 8:24-37 as aids in this.
- Meditate upon the glorious splendor of His majesty and wondrous works (v. 5). Use Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 to assist you.
- Reflect upon His greatness, the might of His awesome acts. Use Psalm 139 and Psalm 29—David’s meditation after a powerful thunderstorm had passed through Palestine—to help you.

These things ought to help you to eagerly utter and joyfully sing the praises of God (Psalm 145:7).

The LORD is...

At its subcellular level, faith is an unshakable conviction: 1) that God is and 2) that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). The heavens—i.e. natural revelation—declare the existence and glory of God (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20). The Scriptures—i.e. supernatural revelation—begin with the proclamation of God’s existence that is proven in natural revelation and then proceeds to demonstrate the nature and character of all creation’s Sovereign.

There is a multitude of accurate descriptors that could be used after the phrase “the LORD is...” Our focus will be upon the six used by David when he wrote: “The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psalm 145:8-9).

What profound truths are found in such simple words:

- The LORD is gracious.
- The LORD is full of compassion.
- The LORD is slow to anger.
- The LORD is great in mercy.
- The LORD is good to all.
- The LORD rules over all His works with tender mercies.

How fitting that David’s next words are: “All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power” (vv. 10-11).

Do you?

The God of All

Like TNT, the word “all” is small yet powerful. It occurs thirteen times in the final thirteen verses of Psalm 145. Here it is written, “The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are

over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD upholds all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever” (vv. 9-21).

Consider the relationship of God and “all”:

- God is good to all (v. 9).
- God is merciful to all (v. 9).
- God is praiseworthy to all (v. 10).
- God upholds all who fall (v. 14).
- God is benevolent to all (vv. 15-16).
- God is righteous in all His ways (v. 17).
- God is gracious in all His works (v. 17).
- God is near to all who call upon Him (v. 18).
- God preserves all who love Him (v. 20).
- God destroys all of the wicked (v. 20).
- God is praiseworthy to all flesh (v. 21).

Does your mouth, like David’s, speak the praise of the God of all?

Jehovah's Praiseworthiness

Jehovah's praiseworthiness is like a brilliant diamond with an endless number of facets. It is a bottomless well which can never be exhausted. In Psalm 145:10-16, David states four facets of Jehovah's utter praiseworthiness when he wrote, "All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD upholds all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing."

Jehovah is eternally praiseworthy because of:

- The glory of His kingdom and power (vv. 11-12).
- The everlasting nature of His kingdom (v. 13).
- His support of the fallen and overwhelmed (v. 14).
- His timely providence (vv. 15-16).

Because of his meditation upon Jehovah's praiseworthiness, David determines "My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD" (Psalm 145:21).

Have you?

My God and I

The climactic conclusion of David's final composition in the Psalter (Psalm 145) returns to the very basics of human existence: my God and I.

God is and He is a rewarder of all those who diligently seek Him. What, therefore, is my response? How, therefore, do I choose to live?

In verses 17 to 20, David paints one final portrait of the great King of heaven: “The LORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.” Righteous. Gracious. Near. Watchful. Listening. Protective. Just. These are forever etched into the indestructible word of God.

David’s response to such a glorious and worthy being is: “My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever” (v. 21). In this life, David willed to speak the praise of God. In the life to come, David desired to bless His holy name forever and ever.

Each of us writes our own ending to the story of “My God and I.” The writer of Psalm 146 determined to: “Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! While I live I will praise the LORD; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being” (vv. 1-2).

How similar will yours be to David’s?

The Original Hallelujah Chorus

Though George Frideric Handel’s masterpiece was called the “Hallelujah Chorus,” the original composition preceded it by over 2,500 years. The final five psalms in the Psalter begin and end with the same exuberant exclamation, “Praise the LORD!” (which translates the Hebrew word “hallelujah”).

What an extensive list is made of Jehovah’s praiseworthiness.

- He made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them (146:6).
- He keeps truth forever (146:6).
- He executes justice for the oppressed (146:7).
- He gives food to the hungry (146:7).
- He gives freedom to the prisoners (146:7).

- He opens the eyes of the blind (146:8).
- He raises those who are bowed down (146:8).
- He loves the righteous (146:8).
- He watches over the strangers (146:9).
- He relieves the fatherless and widow (146:9).
- He shall reign forever (146:10).
- He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds (147:3).
- He counts the number of the stars and calls them all by name (147:4).
- He is great and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite (147:5).
- He lifts up the humble (147:6).
- He casts the wicked down to the ground (147:6).
- He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, and makes grass to grow on the mountains (147:8).
- He gives food to the beasts and the young ravens that cry (147:9).
- He takes pleasure in those who fear Him and whose hope is in His mercy (147:11).
- He sends out His command to the earth and His word runs very swiftly (147:15).
- He gives snow like wool, scatters frost like ashes, and casts out hail like morsels (147:16-17).
- He commanded and the heavens were created (148:1-5).
- His name alone is exalted (148:13).
- His glory is above the earth and heaven (148:13).
- He has exalted the horn of His people (148:14).
- He takes pleasure in His people (149:4).
- He will beautify the humble with salvation (149:4).
- He executes vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples (149:7).

What a fitting climax concludes this five-psalm chorus of praise—“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 150:6).

HALLELUJAH!

Misplaced and Well-Placed Faith

The bulk of Psalm 146 is a contrast between misplaced faith in humanity (verses 3 and 4) and well-placed faith in God (verses 5 to 10). Here it is written: “Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God, Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; Who keeps truth forever, Who executes justice for the oppressed, Who gives food to the hungry. The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners. The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; the LORD raises those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down. The LORD shall reign forever—your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!”

What a contrast is found between verses 4 and 10: “His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish...The LORD shall reign forever—your God, O Zion, to all generations.” Your investment of faith in yourself or any other human is bankrupt on the day that death comes. Placing your faith in the God Who reigns forever pays eternal dividends.

“Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! While I live, I will praise the LORD; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being” (vv. 1-2). Because of Jehovah, I can have a well-placed faith.

The Plans of Man

Regardless of whether death comes to a man unexpectedly or as the culmination of a lengthy battle with disease, the truth of Psalm 146:4 remains. “In that very day, his plans perish.” As the Son of Man Himself so eloquently stated, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4).

What a contrast between God and man! A man’s plans perish the day of his death. God’s plans never end in this manner; they always end when His plans have been accomplished!

The church which Jesus built was eternally purposed by God (Ephesians 3:8-12). Though scores of human generations came and went between the creation of the world and the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, God’s eternally purposed plan never perished. Even though His Son was taken by lawless hands and brutally put to death by crucifixion, it was all part of God’s determined purpose and foreknowledge (Acts 2:23).

Because human life is a vapor, our plans ought always to be made with the proviso of “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that” (James 4:14-15). Not so with God. All His plans reach fruition because “The LORD shall reign forever” (Psalm 146:10).

Praise the LORD!

Turned Upside Down

One of the praiseworthy facts about Jehovah that is listed in Psalm 146 is “the way of the wicked He turns upside down” (v. 9). The Scriptures contain an impressive track record of God’s ability to do this.

Joseph’s brothers, for example, were sure they could eliminate him and his divinely communicated dreams of being a ruler over them (Genesis 37:5-8, 18-28). But, their wicked plot got turned upside down.

In the days of Queen Esther, wicked Haman built gallows which were about 75 feet high to hang Mordecai upon (Esther 5:14). His plans were turned upside down and less than 24 hours later, he himself was hanging from them (Esther 6:9-10).

The high priest Caiaphas determined that it was expedient for Jesus to die for the people so that the whole nation should not perish (John 11:50). Though Jesus was put to death, it did not result in His elimination; God turned the way of the wicked upside down through Christ's resurrection and Jesus then gathered into one nation—the church—the children of God (John 11:52).

How praiseworthy is the God Who has and still does take the way of the wicked and turn it upside down!

Three Vivid Adjectives of Worship

The second psalm in the Psalter's "Hallelujah Chorus" (Psalms 146-150) begins with a call to worship—"Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful" (Psalm 147:1). These three vivid adjectives proclaim a mouthful about worship.

Worship is **good**. The Hebrew word translated here covers a broad spectrum of possible meanings. The Greeks were more specific; they had two words for "good"—one to identify something that is morally right and another to distinguish something that was beneficial in effect. Both thoughts are appropriate descriptions of the worship of Jehovah—it is good because it is the right thing to do, thus pleasing to God; it is good because it is beneficial to the worshipper.

Worship is **pleasant**. The word used here denotes a flavor of sweetness or enjoyment. Those who are truly glad when encouraged to "go into the house of the LORD" (Psalm 122:1) are those who find worship a most delightful and delicious spiritual activity. It is they who passionately long to add their voices to the heavenly throng gathered around heaven's throne, praising God (cf. Revelation 4, 5).

Worship is **beautiful**. In a world which ever seeks to profane God and His holy name, how beautiful it must be to Jehovah's ears to hear reverential, heartfelt praise. The beauty of holy adoration cannot be overestimated.

Do these three vivid adjectives describe you and your worship?

Jehovah's Utter Uniqueness

Within the book of Psalms there is an untiring effort made to emphasize the utter uniqueness of Jehovah. Psalm 147:2-6 is yet another focus upon the preeminent distinctiveness, and thus complete worthiness, of Jehovah. Here it is written: "The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite. The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground." What impressiveness! What distinctiveness! What uniqueness!

Jehovah builds up Jerusalem. Through His providence, He is personally and actively involved in human affairs at this very hour. He ever seeks to lift the humble and cast down the wicked.

Jehovah gathers together the outcasts. He knows the daily plight of individuals. He is neither ignorant of nor impervious to any considered "Dalits" by their communities.

Jehovah heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. When the incarnate Word lived upon this earth, He compassionately raised a widow's only son (Luke 7:11-15), a distraught father's only daughter (Luke 8:41-56), and a close, beloved friend at whose grave he wept (John 11). According to Isaiah, the Spirit of the LORD was upon Him to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind (Luke 4:18), and He did.

Jehovah counts the number of the stars and calls them by name. What is more unfathomable than that? Not only is His knowledge microscopic—He intimately knows the thoughts, words, and deeds of every human in history, it is also telescopic—He knows the number and name of every star in the universe!

“Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.”

What a most fitting description of Jehovah’s utter uniqueness!

Jehovah and the Stars

To the naked eye, there are about 3,000-4,000 stars that can be seen on a clear, dark night. With a good pair of binoculars, that number rises to around 200,000. With a small personal telescope about 15,000,000 are visible. To the eyes of God, every one of the estimated 1 septillion (1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000) stars is visible.

According to Psalm 147, Jehovah does not have an estimated number of the stars; He has the exact number, for “He counts the number of the stars” (v. 4). For we who stagger at trying to fathom the United States’ national debt (of over 23,000,000,000,000—that’s 23 trillion—dollars), the thought of a number 40 billion times bigger than the national debt is way above our pay scale!

But this is not all that Psalm 147:4 declares about God and the stars. Not only does He count them, He “also calls them all by name.” Like every human in history whose name and every thought, word, and action He knows, He also has personally named every star and remembers every name!

How great Thou art!

Singing with Thanksgiving

Praising God is never to be a perfunctory matter. In the Old Testament, the exhortation is to “sing to the LORD with thanksgiving” (Psalm 147:7); in the New Testament, it is to sing and

make melody in your heart to the Lord, “giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:19-20).

Psalm 147:8-9 gives four reasons why such praise of God is befitting:

- **God “covers the heavens with clouds.”** Imagine what a barren and parched land we would have without the atmosphere which encircles our planet.
- **God “prepares rain for the earth.”** Plant and animal life require adequate water. Without this simple blessing, all life would vanish off our planet. Earth’s water cycle is the most extensive and impressive ongoing recycling project ever constructed.
- **God “makes grass to grow on the mountains.”** Vegetation is essential to a mountain’s biome. Without it, massive mudslides would increase in severity and frequency.
- **God “gives to the beasts its food and to the young ravens that cry.”** The delicate ecology of the food chain enables land and air animals to be fruitful and multiply, avoiding extinction and improving humanity’s existence.

Because the water cycle, nature’s ubiquitous ecology, and the food chain are so fundamental to our existence, they are not usually pondered when one reflects upon God’s praiseworthiness. But even a brief contemplation of the vital role that the clouds, rain, and grass have in our daily existence, it ought to result in our fervent thanksgiving to the LORD.

God’s Pleasure

A good indicator of a man’s character and values is what makes him laugh, cry, and angry. Another indicator would be what it is he derives his greatest pleasure from. According to Psalm 147:10-11, Jehovah “does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD takes

pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy.” According to Psalm 149:4, “the LORD takes pleasure in His people.”

What food for thought!

God takes pleasure in those who fear Him. It matters immensely to Him whether you reverence and obey Him. It is eternally in your best interest (Ecclesiastes 12:13), and He passionately wants what is best for you.

God takes pleasure in those who hope in His mercy. It matters immensely to Him whether you trust Him and His loving compassion and kindness. It will eternally bless you if you do (Ephesians 2:8-10); therefore, He passionately wants you to confidently hope in Him.

God takes pleasure in His people. It matters immensely to Him whether you are His child and heir. It will eternally bless you if you are (1 Peter 1:3-5); therefore, through the gospel, every creature in every nation can become one of “His own special people” so that those who were once not a people can now be the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10).

God’s keenest interest and greatest pleasure is in you doing what is in your best interest spiritually-speaking (3 John 4).

Can the same be said about you?

The Swiftness of God’s Word

According to science, the speed at which light travels is 186,282 miles per second. According to Scripture, the speed at which God’s spiritual light—His authoritative word—travels is comparable: “He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly” (Psalm 147:15).

The swiftness of God’s word is readily seen in Genesis’ first chapter. Here, God said:

- “Let there be light,” and there was light (v. 3).

- “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters,” and it was so (vv.6-7).
- “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one place, and let dry land appear,” and it was so (v. 9).
- “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth,” and it was so (v. 11).
- “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth,” and it was so (vv. 14-15).
- “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens,” and it was so (vv. 20-21).
- “Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind,” and it was so (v. 24).
- “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth,” and it was so (vv. 26-27).

Because of the incredible swiftness of God’s powerful word, “in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Exodus 20:11).

Our challenge is to imitate such speed by being swift to hear and obey God’s authoritative Word (James 1:19).

The Unique Powers of God and His Word

According to Psalm 147:15-18, the word of God governs nature in several unique ways. Here it is written, “He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. He gives snow

like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes; He casts out His hail like morsels; who can stand before His cold? He sends out His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow.”

Jehovah gives snow like wool, scatters frost like ashes, casts out hail like morsels. What striking similes!

His swiftly running word causes water to change its state from a visible solid to a liquid.

He is the same Being Who “declared His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel” (Psalm 147:19).

He is the same Being Who sent His only begotten Son into this world of snow, frost, and hail and declared on the Mount of Transfiguration “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matthew 17:5).

His Son is the mediator of the new covenant, “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks” (Hebrews 13:5).

Spiritual Privileges and Spiritual Responsibilities

The final two verses of Psalm 147 place in capsule form Israel’s spiritual privileges and her failure in her spiritual responsibilities. Here it is written, “He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; and as for His judgments, they have not known them” (vv. 19-20).

What spiritual privileges they had! Israel was the trustee of God’s word—He had uniquely declared His statutes and judgments to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Romans 9, the apostle Paul enumerates in more detail the spiritual privileges that Israel of old enjoyed: “to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came” (vv. 4-5).

Yet, Israel had chosen to respond irresponsibly to such glorious privileges—“as for His judgments, they have not known them” (v. 20). The greater the privileges the greater the responsibilities. Jesus Himself stated that “to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48).

In comparison to the old covenant given through Moses, the new covenant is better, i.e. vastly superior, in its privileges. Because of His divine power, God has given to His New Testament family all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). God has blessed each Christian with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

This places every Christian with a most sobering decision—Am I going to shirk my sobering spiritual responsibilities like Israel did, or am I going to diligently and zealously fulfill them?

The Universal Praiseworthiness of Jehovah

Part One

Because of William J. Kirkpatrick’s composition of the music and use of Psalm 148 as the lyrics, the song “Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah!” probably has made this psalm the most recognizable and remembered of the Psalter’s “Hallelujah Chorus” (Psalms 146-150).

The psalm has two distinct sections—the call for exuberant praise of God from the heavens (vv. 1-6) and the call for like praise of God from the earth (vv. 7-14).

Biblically speaking, there are three spheres that are identified as heaven—the place where birds fly (i.e. the earth’s atmosphere), the place where the sun, moon and stars call home (i.e. space and outer space), and the place where God resides and to which Jesus went when He ascended from earth (i.e. the “third heaven” of 2 Corinthians 12:2). The composer summons each of these heavenly realms and instructs them to render the praise that Jehovah is due.

“Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His hosts! Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all you stars of light! Praise Him, you heavens of heavens and you waters above the heavens!” (vv. 1-4).

The rationale for such praise from the heavens is given in verses 5 and 6—“Let them praise the name of the LORD, for He commanded, and they were created. He also established them forever and ever; He made a decree which shall not pass away.”

Creatures and creations within and beyond the earth’s gravitational pull owe a debt of profuse praise to the utterly praiseworthy Jehovah. The heights with all its angels and hosts do. The sun, moon, and stars do. The waters above the heavens do.

You do.

Do you?

The Universal Praiseworthiness of Jehovah

Part Two

Psalm 148’s clarion call to zestful praise of Jehovah begins with the heavens (vv. 1-6; see previous devotional). It concludes with an equally rousing call to earth’s creations—“Praise the LORD from the earth, You great sea creatures and all the depths; fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word; mountains and all hills; fruitful trees and all cedars; beasts and all cattle; creeping things and flying fowl; kings of the earth and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth; both young men and maidens; old men and children” (vv. 7-12).

What a list of earth’s inhabitants and earthly things!

- Animals created to dwell on the land, within the sea, and in the air.
- Atmospheric creations which produce the many varieties of weather.
- Topographical features of the earth.

- Trees created for food and lumber.
- Governmental leaders their underlings, and all their citizens.
- Humans—young and old, male and female.

Each is identified and then instructed: “Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and heaven” (v. 13).

The psalm concludes (v. 14) with a final exhortation addressed to all those who are privileged to be His people: “He has exalted the horn of His people, the praise of all His saints—of the children of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the LORD!”

The incomparable and utter praiseworthiness of Jehovah ought ever to be foremost in your heart and mind.

Three of Jehovah’s Unique and Praiseworthy Features

As the composer of Psalm 148 concludes his paean of praise, He succinctly states three of Jehovah’s unique and praiseworthy features when he writes: “Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and heaven. And He has exalted the horn of His people, the praise of all His saints—of the children of Israel, a people near to Him” (vv. 13-14).

The name of God—the sum total of His eternal, divine nature and His perfect, virtuous character—is unique. It is above all others, exalted. It rises to a level far above everyone and everything else. Its brilliance is clearly seen in the exquisite beauty of His holiness.

The glory of God—His august and terrible presence which makes it impossible for human eyes to behold Him and live (Exodus 33:20)—is unique. It reaches heights above human and angelic levels.

The people of God—that family of earthlings by whom He has woven the scarlet thread of redemption into human history for their salvation—are unique. His wondrous plan of transforming sinners into saints demonstrates the immensity of His grace, mercy, love, and patience. That a Being Whose throne is in heaven and has earth as His footstool (Isaiah 66:1) would be intimately and intensely concerned and be personally involved in creating a family from every nation on the earth defies the ability of human language to comprehensively extol. All His saints, the people near to Him, ought ever to Praise the LORD!

Another New Song

Though others had sought to praise Jehovah with previous psalms, the composer of Psalm 149 rightfully believed that it was most fitting to write another. Therefore, he writes, “Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song and His praise in the assembly of saints” (v. 1). And, apparently, the compiler of the Psalter agreed, for this “new song” was placed within the book’s Hallelujah Chorus” (Psalm 146-150).

As the beginning and concluding verses demonstrate, this new song of praise was written with the intention of it being sung by God’s joyful saints (v. 5). The dominant themes of this psalm are:

- Rejoicing in one’s Maker (v. 2).
- Being joyful in one’s King (v. 2).
- Singing praises to the LORD Who takes pleasure in His people (v. 4).
- Praising He Who beautifies the humble with salvation (v. 4).
- Joyfully singing aloud the high praises of God’s justice and the execution of His written judgment and vengeance upon all the wicked in all the nations (vv. 5-9).

It is never inappropriate to write a new song of heartfelt praise of the worthy One Who is Creator, Sovereign, Father, Savior, and Judge.

The Blessedness of Jesus' Meekness

Meekness is an oft misunderstood virtue. Its best definition is “power under control.” It is like a powerful medicine with tremendous potential to heal when used properly. It is like a powerful horse with tremendous potential to labor when its strength is harnessed and focused.

Jesus ever possessed the power to summon thousands of angels (Matthew 26:54); yet He was so meek that a woman caught in the very act of adultery was rebuked for her sin but not stoned by the One who was without sin (John 8:1-11).

A Samaritan woman who had had five husbands and was currently living in an adulterous marriage was not offended by the “man who told me all the things that I ever did”; instead, she wanted everyone in the city of Sychar to “come, see Him” (John 4:29).

As Isaiah prophesied, “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench” (Matthew 12:20). What power under control! Therefore, He invites: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Oh, the blessedness of Jesus' meekness.

The Blessedness of Meekness

Centuries before Jesus' beatitude in His sermon on the mount, the Psalmist extolled the greatness and blessedness of meekness with these words: “the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the meek with salvation” (Psalm 149:4, KJV).

Meekness is the furthest thing from weakness. It is he who “has no rule over his own spirit” that is like “a city broken down, without walls” (Proverbs 25:28). Meekness is power under control. It is one who is swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath (James 1:19).

Isaiah 66 aptly describes the blessedness of meekness when he wrote, “on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit and who trembles at My word” (v. 2). It is the one who discards all filthiness and wickedness so he can receive with meekness the word, then engraft that word into his heart and be a doer of it whose soul will be saved (James 1:21-23). He is the person who Jehovah beautifies with salvation.

The meek enjoy the abundant life on earth (John 10:10) and eternal life in heaven.

Oh, the blessedness of meekness!

God’s Pleasure in Meekness

God highly prizes meekness.

A woman with a meek and quiet spirit has a beauty that is incorruptible and is very precious in His sight (1 Peter 3:4).

The Father rewarded His Son’s meekness by highly exalting Him (He seated Him above all principalities, power, might, and dominion—Ephesians 1:21) and then giving Him the name which is above every name (not only in this age but also in that which is to come—Ephesians 1:21) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

The LORD takes pleasure in His people and will beautify them with salvation, because of their meekness (Psalm 149:4).

How blessed are the meek!!

God's Soldiers

Those who have a skewed view of Christianity find the words of Psalm 149:6 impossible. “Let the high praises of God be in their mouth and a two-edged sword in their hand.”

The apostle Paul clearly agrees with the image of a Christian soldier, for He instructs His brethren to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10-11).

In the Old Testament, Jehovah used those who sang His high praise to wield the sword as a minister of His vengeance and an executioner of His judgments (Psalm 149:7, 9). In the New Testament, it is the function of the civil government to serve as God's minister for the punishment of evil and an avenger that executes His wrath upon evildoers (Romans 13:4).

The function of God's people in the New Testament is to fight against the principalities, the powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age, and the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). We have been equipped with the whole spiritual armor of God—the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the footwear of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit—to fight and defeat these spiritual Goliaths.

“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Soldiers of Christ arise!

The Psalter's Final Anthem of Praise

Psalm 150 serves as a most excellent conclusion to the Psalter. Three important prepositions—in, for, and with—help to succinctly summarize the theme of the Jews' hymnal.

- “In” describes a location. “Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty firmament!” (v. 1). Jehovah’s praiseworthiness ought to be recognized and expressed on earth—“in His sanctuary”—and in heaven—“in His mighty firmament.” Every creature He has given life to ought to praise Him.
- “For” provides a reason and a degree. “Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His excellent greatness!” (v. 2). The Almighty God is due worship because of His mighty deeds. The praise given the Almighty God ought to correspond to His pre-eminent and excellent greatness.
- “With” tells of the instruments to be used. Since the composer of this psalm was living under a covenant where God had authorized instruments which could be played with one’s hands (see 2 Chronicles 29:25), he instructs his fellow Jews to praise Him with the sound of the trumpet, lute, harp, timbrel, flutes, stringed instruments, and loud clashing cymbals (vv. 3-5). In the new and better covenant, God has authorized everyone who worships Him to each use two instruments—his voice and his heart. We are to sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19).

The final verse of the final psalm provides a clear and concise conclusion to the Psalter: “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!”

Amen and Amen!

Predictive Prophecies in the Psalms

Predictive prophecy is the seminal proof of the Bible's divine authorship. It is what infallibly proves that the sixty-six books of the Scriptures are unique from all others. It is what clearly demonstrates that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, written revelation of the mind of God.

In the Psalter alone there is a staggering amount of predictive prophecy about Jesus the Christ. Consider these dozen prophecies:

- His unique nature as divine and human (110:1).
- His deity and Messiahship (45:6-7; cf. Hebrews 1:8-9).
- His zeal for God's house (69:9).
- His teaching in parables (78:2).
- His rejection by man and acceptance by God (118:22).
- His betrayal by a close associate (41:9).
- His gruesome death followed by His resurrection (22; 69:21).
- His dying words (22:1; 31:5).
- His death without any broken bones (34:20).
- His heavenly coronation after His ascension (24:7-10).
- His unique role as King-Priest after His ascension (110:4).
- His disbursement of spiritual gifts after His ascension (68:18).

Only God knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). The Holy Scriptures present clear evidence for the existence of God. God presents clear evidence for the inspiration of the Scriptures. Wise people believe that God is and that He is faithful to His word.

How wise are you?

Beatitudes in the Psalms

The book of Psalms begins with a beatitude and concludes with a thunderous chorus of praise for God (Psalms 146-150). Between these two terminal points, the blessed are described in the following ways:

- They do not walk in the ungodly's counsel, stand in the path of sinners, or sit in the seat of the scornful (1:1).
- They put their trust in the Son of God (2:12).
- They have had their transgressions forgiven, their sin covered, and their iniquity not imputed (32:1-2).
- They have no deceit in their spirit (32:2).
- They are citizens of the nation whose God is the LORD (33:12).
- They trust in Jehovah (34:8; 84:12) and do not respect the proud or the apostate (40:5).
- They are considerate of the poor (41:1).
- They enjoy God's fellowship (65:4).
- They dwell in God's house and praise Him (84:4).
- They derive their strength from God and approach life as a pilgrimage (84:5).
- They walk in the light of God's countenance (89:15).
- They are instructed by Jehovah out of this law (94:12).
- They keep justice and always do righteousness (106:3).
- They fear the LORD and delight greatly in His commandments (112:1).
- They are blameless; they walk in the law of the LORD (119:1).
- They keep Jehovah's testimonies and seek him with their whole heart (119:2).
- They fear the LORD and walk in His ways (128:1).

Enjoying a blessed life is not a deep, dark secret. God's Word makes it abundantly clear.

How blessed are you?

A Fundamental Message of the Psalms

Life has its seasons. In nature there has been a continuous cycle of seedtime and harvest, cold and hot, winter and summer (Genesis 8:22) since the completion of the flood.

Life has its peaks and valleys. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance (Ecclesiastes 3:4, cf. vv. 1-8).

The book of Psalms clearly recognizes the spectrum of human emotions that comes with being made in the image of God. Numerous psalms were written while their composers were desperately clinging to the final thread of their frazzled faiths. David cried out to God from the dark, dank pit called depression (Psalms 42, 43); he beseeched Jehovah while in a cave of overwhelming fear and with a front row view of the valley of the shadow of death (Psalms 3, 57); he personally knew the overwhelming, agonizing, terrifying guilt of egregious sin and intentional transgression (Psalms 32, 51).

David also experienced the exhilaration of deliverance (Psalms 18, 34), the joy of thanksgiving (Psalm 145), and the wondrous blessing of intimate fellowship with God (Psalm 15).

A careful study of the Psalter is incomplete without making this obvious observation: One of the fundamental messages of the Psalms is that no matter where on the spectrum of human emotion you are—no matter how wonderful or dismal your present circumstances are, regardless of what season your life may currently be in—honestly and courageously communicate the contents of your heart to God.

He hears.

He cares.