

June 1 : Scriptures Psalm 17-19

SUMMARY

Psalm 17. This is another Davidic psalm, as you can read, and it appeals to God for protection from the wicked. David says his appeal is for a just cause. Why? Because his speech is not deceitful (which is characteristic of the wicked in scripture as we've read), nor is his heart (his being) guilty of sin. He's also kept back from the path of the wicked, i.e., living like them (17:1-5). Therefore, David makes his appeal based on his right standing with Yehovah. David calls to God and asks Him to answer and protect him. Why does David call to the Lord? Because he knows God will answer him (17:6). He also makes a great comparison between those who seek refuge (the faithful like him) vs. those who rebel against God's strength (the wicked). David's plea for protection under the Lord's wing is a sweet image as it refers to helpless baby birds hiding under the mother bird's wings for safety and security. This act of protection is especially true when enemies surround the nest. Like the bird's enemies must go through the mother bird first, David asks the Lord to keep his enemies at bay. They lurk around, looking for an opening to attack (17:10-12). David appeals to the Lord to protect him and go after them to "bring them down" (17:13). The wicked focus on this life, but David's eyes are firmly fixed on the Lord, whom he'll see when he wakes up (17:14-15).

Psalm 18. Psalm 18 has a very helpful heading in my Bible and perhaps yours. It explains the context of David's situation. "For the choir director. Of the servant of the Lord, David, who spoke the words of this song to the Lord on the day the Lord rescued him from the grasp of all his enemies and the power of Saul." So, this is David's psalm thanking God for His deliverance. As I see it, protection is needed when enemies advance, but deliverance is necessary when the enemy is upon us, or we're in their grasp. If you read through Samuel and Kings, you'll see how often David was threatened by his enemies – Saul, Saul's supporters, Absalom, and those from the nations surrounding Israel. David's been in a lot of tight spots. The theme of Yehovah's deliverance was a familiar tune in King David's life.

The psalm begins with David's praise to God for being his "rock, fortress, deliverer, the rock of refuge, shield, horn (strength) of my salvation (from enemies, and my stronghold" (18:1-3). That's quite a list. So, here's an exercise – Ask yourself, "What is a fortress?" Describe how a fortress functions. Now apply those functions to God, and you'll see and understand more about the Lord in David's mind. Don't rush. Let the imagery fill your imagination, and you'll come to a whole new appreciation of God.

David moves to describe the dire situation(s) he was in (18:4-6). Again, let the imagery fill your mind and spark your emotions. In short, David says, "I was in a place where I would die if the Lord didn't step in." Step in He did, and what an appearance (18:7-15)! In David's poetic eye, the Lord shook heaven and earth with His glorious presence when Yehovah acted on David's behalf. Now, did this really happen? Not that we know of in David's day. But the king is wonderfully poetic as he describes how God intervened. However, we *do* know the Lord did some astonishing manifestations – a pillar of fire, a pillar of smoke, Yehovah causing thunderous storms, and sending down lightning. What David is saying is his deliverance came when God "showed up." He describes his rescue in equally poetic ways – God pulled him out of his tight spot and set him in a spacious place (18:16-20), and being a shepherd as a kid, David knows the beautiful freedom and peace in the expanse of wide-open spaces. Why did the Lord help David? Per David, it was because he worked hard to keep himself right with the Lord (18:20-24). God deals with people according to the way they walk with Him (18:25-27). Therefore, God helped David (18:28-29). He finishes his psalm with praise for God and how the Lord has trained him to triumph over his enemies and be a respected king (18:30-45), and only God gets the credit (18:46-50)!

Psalm 19. I remember being in northern Minnesota along a road called the Gunflint Trail. The place where my wife and I and our children were camping was only about 30 miles from the Canadian border. We were *far* from city lights, so the stars were astounding. The stars can be impressive under regular city/suburb night sky, but "you ain't seen stars 'til you see 'em up close and personal in the middle of a wilderness." It makes God's promise to Abraham astounding, "Then he brought Abram outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars if you think you can count them.' He continued, 'This is how many children you will have'" (Genesis 15:5, CEB). Take a good look at God's creation, and you'll see God. Every work of art carries the artist's "being" in it because it's the work of their hands. Every piece of art is a product of the artist's mind, will, emotions, and spirit. So it is with God's creation. Do people say they can't see God? Then they aren't looking at this world. Even a blind person can experience God because interacting with God's handiwork is more than seeing. For a person to not see God in creation, they either refuse to see him, are spiritually blind, or are physically dead. Those three things, by the way, God can heal.

Psalm 19 comes from the pen of one who has intimately experienced God and His creation as a shepherd, soldier, and worshipper of Almighty God. He knows the heavens and the earth "speak" about God, although there are no words. Their witness of God is still there for all willing to look (19:1-6). As David mulls God's revelation through nature, he moves to God's revelation through His Word, the Torah. Why is David so turned on

about God's laws, commands, statutes, guidelines, and directives? Because it's what they do in a person's life when they follow them. Look at the benefits David lists: "renewing one's life, making the inexperienced wise, making the heart glad, making the eyes light up." When was the last time you heard the average Christian crow about God's word like that? Do *you* think about the Lord's word like that? David desires God's commands, statutes, guidelines, and directives *because* they're the Lord of Creation's words that keep things in order (like the heavens and earth), and "your servant is warned by them, and in keeping them there is an abundant reward" (19:11). And speaking of being warned by God's word, David asks for the Lord's help to keep him from sinning (19:12-13). As we read the Lord's word, those words help keep us "blameless and cleansed from blatant rebellion" (19:13). Therefore, the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart (will) be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer."

INSIGHT

There are many wicked people in this world, and by wicked, I mean the Bible's definition of wickedness. The baseline idea of a wicked person is someone who refuses to acknowledge God or walk His ways. They aren't necessarily violent, but their words and actions often bring harm to others. Sometimes they deliberately target God's people, as in David's case. If we were in David's place and this was happening, what should we do based on this psalm? Make sure we're clean before God, appeal to Him to protect us because we're His child, and ask Him to deal with them. When we let the Lord fight our battles first, we learn to "rest in Him," as the scriptures say. "God has this" is a great attitude to have.

June 2 : Scriptures Psalm 20-24

SUMMARY

Psalm 20. OOH, COOL! A battle psalm by David, Israel's God-given King and Commander! At least that's the heading in my Bible. Let's read through it to see if the heading is correct. I see a couple of things. 1) This psalm is a blessing that could be sung, chanted, or spoken by King David over his troops. 2) I could also see it sung by later generations of Israelite soldiers as encouragement before the battle. This short psalm's core is, "Some take pride in chariots, and others in horses, but we take pride in the name of the Lord our God" (20:7). Let's not misplace our trust. The only thing that can consistently help us is the Lord. He may use other things to help us, but David has it right – without the Lord, nothing will help us. With the Lord, nothing can withstand us.

Psalm 21. This short praise psalm perfectly supplements Psalm 20, a preparation for battle. This psalm is David's poem of thanks and praise for victory in battle. King David rejoices like crazy over the Lord's victory on his behalf. He cried for the Lord's help, and Yehovah dished it out (21:2)! Therefore, David wins. "So, King David, what's the secret of your success?" asks the reporter for the Jerusalem Times. "For the king relies on the Lord; through the faithful love of the Most High he is not shaken" (21:7), says the King. "He's the one who will rout the enemy and destroy them and their family lines. They can plan all they want, but the Lord will foil those plans." David's conclusion is, "Be exalted, Lord, in your strength; we will sing and praise your might" (21:13).

Psalm 22. And now things take a downward turn, but not completely. The heading of this psalm is different across a couple of versions. The CSB and HCSB say, "From Suffering to Praise." The Amplified Bible says, "A Cry of Anguish and a Song of Praise." So, let's see if they're right. Okay, I just read through the whole psalm again, and it most certainly is from "Anguish to Praise." This psalm is from David, and I can't imagine his situation that provoked such intense feelings and poetic language. What happened to him to make him feel like God abandoned him? What made him feel like "a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by people?" It must have been a bad situation where "those who scorn God" mocked David by saying, "He relies on the Lord; let him save him; let the Lord rescue him, since he takes pleasure in him." David doesn't refute their words. Instead, he affirms them! He knows he belongs to God from birth, and because of that, King David will cry to the Lord alone to help him (22:9-11).

Meanwhile, David returns to his situation. He depicts his enemies as strong bulls, lions, and dogs encircling him, ready to tear him to shreds. David feels like he's helpless. A disjointed body can't do anything, a melting heart speaks of courage drained by fear, his

strength is gone, and he feels dried out (weak) (22:12-18). Pretty intense description, huh? David calls out to his only hope (the Lord) with the promise to declare his deliverance from his deathly situation (22:19-24). We know David will praise Yehovah publicly because "the great assembly" means "in the midst of the people gathered in the Tabernacle courtyards." That meaning is confirmed because "fulfilling vows" is performing a sacrifice to fulfill a promise made to the Lord. In David's case, his sacrifice is a thank offering (*shelamim*, a type of peace offering recognizing God's deliverance) to praise the Lord for his help. During the thank-offering, the worshipper shares the meat with the Lord, with the priests, and with those with whom he wants to share his joy, "The humble will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise him" (22:26). Poetically speaking, when people and nations see God's deliverance, they will come and bow down to the Lord (22:27-31) and share it not only all over but to generations to come. Be sure you read the insight below.

Psalm 23. Now we come to one of the most beloved psalms, the famous Good Shepherd Psalm. There have been myriads of books written, and sermons preached about this psalm. A good read is *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23* by Phillip Keller. Since there's already so much material, I'm not going to reinvent the wheel. I just want to share a few things for the person who's never read this psalm before and for some who have. Psalm 23 is an intensely personal psalm by Israel's Shepherd-King, David. It comes from his experience of shepherding as a young boy. That job fell to the youngest in the family, and it was good training for David. Leading people is a lot like taking care of dumb sheep. A shepherd's job is to provide for his flock by taking them to rich pasturelands and reassuring them in scary places and times. A shepherd helps, guides, and protects (the shepherd's rod and staff) his sheep and eases their afflictions by applying oil to their heads (oil on a sheep's head helps keep the pesky flies from annoying them). David sees himself as a shepherd for God's people but sees God as his ultimate personal shepherd. Everything he did for the sheep, Yehovah did for him every day of his life. The Lord is a Good Shepherd, "Yes, (God's) goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the Lord's house as long as I live" (23:6). In other words, "the Lord's goodness and unfailing love will be with me as I live in His presence forever." I encourage you to take a few minutes and search the web for posts that expand on the details and realities of being a shepherd, shepherding, and sheep in ancient times.

Psalm 24. The last psalm of our daily reading is a glorious ode to our Great King, Israel's True King, Yehovah, the One True Almighty, and Ever-Living God. Over the top, you say? David would beg to differ. Yehovah is the Lord over all creation by virtue of creating them. I don't see any other being, physical or spiritual, capable of doing what God did. Therefore, He is the sole God who runs creation and humanity. He is accountable to no

one, and all are accountable to Him (24:1). David asks, "since Yehovah is the world's Creator, how are we to approach Him" ("ascend the hill of the Lord" is a picture of walking up to God's Temple)? In the manner that our God wants us to, as people who are innocent of sin and living with integrity, who pursue and stand for truth and reject anything false or deceitful. Such people will not only be able to approach the Lord, but He'll bless them and regard them as being right with Him, the God who saves them from inward sin and sinful ways (24:3-5). These are the marks of those seeking the Lord (24:6).

The imagery here created the picture of receiving an approaching king, victorious in battle. It's a call to open the city's gates to receive and exalt him for his glorious victory. Every time I read this, I see the final verses as a call to be open and receptive to the Mighty King and to give Him the glory that only He deserves for all He's done. That Mighty King is Yehovah alone. There is no other king of creation.

I came across a fascinating note in the Amplified Bible about this psalm. It says, "In the Talmud, it is said that the Levites sang a particular psalm for every day of the week, and this was the psalm for the first day." What a fitting way to start a new week – Acknowledge the Lord as Sovereign King and remind ourselves to be proper subjects, ready to receive Him!

INSIGHT

If you knew nothing about Jesus and His crucifixion as written in the Gospels, Psalm 22 would be just a highly picturesque account of a man under great distress who finds deliverance from God and wants to share it with everyone he meets. But if you're familiar with Jesus' crucifixion, you'll quickly realize David wrote an amazing prophecy over 1,000 years before it came about.

When Jesus was on the cross, he quoted the opening line, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Did His Father really abandon Him? Some take it as face value and say Jesus' Father turned away from Him in repulsion over the sin and punishment Jesus was taking upon Himself. But I don't think that's correct because Jesus often used a form of teaching common to the teachers (rabbis) of His day. The technique was to quote a small part of a scripture and let His disciples "fill in the rest." It was a type of shorthand teaching called *remez*, meaning "alluding to." The rabbi would allude to something in God's word and let his disciple's minds fill with as many scriptures they had memorized to make connections. As they did so, they would get an "Aha!" moment, the precise point their rabbi intended them to know and understand. This moment of self-revelation was far more effective than just giving the information to the student. So what does Psalm 22 have to do with Jesus teaching by *remez*?

By quoting the opening verse as His own words, Jesus is alluding that the entire psalm is about Him. Read through the psalm again and see how many “pictures” were fulfilled in Jesus’ trial and crucifixion – “But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by people. Everyone who sees me mocks me; they sneer and shake their heads:” And here the crowds actually became part of the Psalm 22 prophecy *by saying the same thing David wrote a millennium before*, “He relies on the Lord; let him save him; let the Lord rescue him, since he takes pleasure in him” (22:8; Matthew 27:42; Mark 15:31; Luke 23:35). And here’s a wild connection. The word for “despise” (*bazah*) is the same word used in Isaiah 53, which also talks about Jesus’ crucifixion, “He was despised (*bazah*) and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; He was despised (*bazah*), and we didn’t value Him.”

Psalm 22 speaks of people surrounding Jesus, snarling for his death (22:12-13), while his body became disjointed from the effects of the crucifixion (22:14). He was thirsty (22:15; John 19:28), His feet and hands were pierced (22:16; Acts 2:23), and they cast lots for his clothing (22:18; Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; esp. John 19:24).

When Jesus uttered those words of Psalm 22:1, He was saying in effect, “Read Psalm 22, and you’ll see Me. This was planned long ago. Trust Me. I knew it was coming.” And when it was done, and Jesus rose from the dead, the remainder of Psalm 22 kicked into action, “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord. All the families of the nations will bow down before you, for kingship belongs to the Lord; he rules the nations. All who prosper on earth will eat and bow down; all those who go down to the dust will kneel before him – even the one who cannot preserve his life. Their descendants will serve him; the next generation will be told about the Lord. They will come and declare his righteousness; to a people yet to be born they will declare what he has done.” Amen!

June 3 : Scriptures Psalm 25-29

SUMMARY

Psalm 25. This psalm is a beautiful song of dependence on the Lord. It breaks down very simply as I see it. David asks the Lord for help to keep from being disgraced in front of his enemies. He does this because David knows, "No one who waits for you will be disgraced; those who act treacherously without cause will be disgraced" (25:3). So, David depends on the Lord to help him in this situation as only He can. What are the characteristics of a person who relies on the Lord? What can we take away from David's example? Such a God-dependent person trusts the Lord (25:2), waits for Him (25:3), and asks for God's help to understand His ways, so they can know how to live truthfully (25:5). The dependent person knows and trusts God's character and mercy (25:6-7). The dependent person knows the Lord doesn't ignore sinners who humbly turn to Him and mercifully shows them the right way (25:8-9). A great benefit for the dependent person who fears the Lord is a good life (25:12) and being taken into the Lord's confidence (25:14). This last verse echoes something I've often noticed about how the Lord interacts with a trustworthy follower, "To those who trust God, great things will be entrusted to them." David's life is proof of that.

Why does David declare his dependence on Yehovah? Because he's in a tight place and needs help (25:16-19). And because he's utterly dependent on the Lord, he appeals for deliverance from the only one who can help him. Therefore, David will wait for the One he trusts. This psalm is wonderful to meditate on when we feel the trials of life rising against us and even overwhelming us.

Psalm 26. The theme of this psalm is "vindication." What does vindicate mean? The American Heritage Dictionary says, "To clear of accusation, blame, suspicion, or doubt." Have you ever been accused, blamed, suspected, or doubted falsely? Yeah, I think every person has. David calls for the Lord to declare him innocent of something.

The HCSB makes an interesting point, "Although the terminology seems strong, it does not proclaim sinless perfection, but moral and spiritual integrity. A sense of security comes from a life lived with integrity (Proverbs 10:9). This confidence is expressed in the psalmist's request that God test and examine him." Spot on. We're not perfect people, and we're not sinless. If that were the case, then we wouldn't need Jesus. But we can prove our faithfulness and integrity by freely acknowledging our sins, confessing them, repenting (turning away from them), and recommitting ourselves to living the right way. For this life, that's what God expects from His faithful followers.

What integrity does David claim? "I've trusted the Lord without wavering" (26:1). He boldly and unabashedly invites the Lord to check him out. He doesn't hang out with the wrong crowd (26:4-5) but instead spends time with the Lord (26:6-8) in innocence. Therefore, "please don't lump me in with the wicked. Recognize my innocence (vindicate me, "clear me of any accusation, blame, suspicion, or doubt") and have mercy on me." David must have received that sense of vindication from the Lord because the final verse, "My feet now stand on level ground," is an idiom that implies the person is confident of standing right with the Lord, nothing against them. Therefore, David will praise God!0s.

Psalm 27. This is one of my favorites because I became a Christian when contemporary worship music was starting to erupt in the Charismatic Movement in the 70s. One of those early worship songs used Psalm 27 for the lyrics. This psalm is a magnificent exaltation of the Lord as our protector in the face of threats. David talks about enemies, but we can use this psalm about any danger we see in life – financial, needs, etc. David declares two significant aspects of Yehovah, our God. He's light (light reveals the truth, the way we should go, and wisdom) and He's salvation (deliverance from our situation). Since the Lord gives us light and salvation, what do we have to be afraid of (27:1)? Any enemy? Nah! And because there is such great good to be enjoyed in the Lord's presence, David asks for just that, "I have asked one thing from the Lord; it is what I desire: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, gazing on the beauty of the Lord and seeking him in his temple" (27:4-6). *Selah!* And when we're in the Lord's presence, we often get a perspective that lifts us high above our problems and causes us to thank Him (27:6).

Sometimes, when we're in the midst of troubles, we forget the Lord. But like David, we hear the words, "My heart says this about you: 'Seek his face,'" and we respond, "Lord, I will seek your face" (27:8). David knows the Lord will not abandon him. Even if the most intimate and loving family members do, Yehovah won't. And because the Lord remains with him, David asks for His protection (27:11-12). When we get to this place of trust with the Lord, we know He'll help when we call. All we must do is be strong and full of courage as we wait for the Lord to act.

Psalm 28. This Davidic psalm is another lament, a cry for help (28:2). The wording here makes it sound like David is in trouble again, but this time God seems far from him, "do not be deaf to me...silent" (28:1). He appeals to Yehovah to not let him suffer the fate of evildoers because they do things David doesn't (28:3-5). But suddenly, the psalm shifts from appealing to the Lord to exuberantly thanking Him. Why? Because the Lord has answered David somehow, and the king affirms how God makes him strong and protects him (28:7) because David trusts God. David concludes the psalm by affirming the Lord

treats His people, Israel, the same way as their strength and shield. "Save your people, God! Bless your possession! Shepherd them and carry them for all time!"

Psalm 29. Chapter 29 is a *POWER* psalm! David addresses not Israel nor the people of the earth but the inhabitants (angels and other spiritual beings) of the heavenly realm, the supernatural dimension where God's throne is set. Because they see God, they above all should ascribe (to acknowledge) that Yehovah alone has supreme glory and strength and that He is holy. There is none like Him. David then shifts his description of the Lord's power to worldly terms. The voice of the Lord "here and through verse 9 is used as (Yehovah's) audible expression of His power, comparable to thunder" (HCSB commentary). Metaphorically speaking, God's power shows His dominion over the world's vast waters. His power shatters the mighty cedars of Lebanon (think of God speaking and His words shredding California redwoods). "Lebanon" means all the mighty cedars, and "Sirion" (Mt. Hermon) is the tallest mountain in Israel on the border it shares with Lebanon. In other words, the Lord's power shakes mighty forests and causes the most mighty mountain to tremble. As the Lord displays His power, it's like the most incredible lightning storm ever that shakes a vast wilderness, causes animals to give birth, and strips forests bare. What's the response of those in God's temple, i.e., heaven, where all the supernatural beings watch the Lord's power displayed? One word. "Glory!"

David closes his psalm by reassuring us that this mighty God strengthens His people and blesses them with peace. Do you need a little encouragement today? If you belong to the Lord, know that this is who watches over you to guard and protect you.

INSIGHT

I've experienced some very challenging things in my life. Those times were amplified because they affected me, my wife, and my children. When those bills piled up, a car broke down, or family stresses built up, there was only one place to go – Jesus. I've asked the Lord many times for "light" to understand my situation and what to do about it. I've asked for "salvation" to help us get through it. He came through every time. Not necessarily as I thought He would, mind you, and not always easy. Often, I had to put my "hand to the plow" to get through it. But the Lord provided the insight, understanding, and ability to make it through. And one of the best comforts I had was simply spending time with Him. This is why this psalm is one of my favorites.

June 4 : Scriptures Psalm 30-32

SUMMARY

Psalm 30. Ever have one of those days? You know the kind I'm talking about. It seems like everything you do goes wrong. People get ticked at you. Things break down. The cat throws up in your shoe during the night. Or it could have been something severe like getting fired or getting clobbered by the flu. Yes, it's tough, especially when we dwell on it for the rest of the day, running it over and over in our heads, praying for some relief. But then the next day comes! The nighttime darkness brightens with the illumination of a new day. The person who was ticked at you forgives you and asks for forgiveness for their part in the argument. Or you find out that fixing that broken thing is simple, and you happen to find the right part at Home Depot on the first try. Or what sounded like the cat throwing up in your shoe last night was actually the cat throwing up in someone else's shoe (Wow! That was close!). Or maybe what you thought was the flu was only a 24-hour bug, your fever breaks in the middle of the night, and by morning you feel great! All the grief from the dark day before just fades away, and the new day dawns.

Well, that's the feel of this psalm by David. As you read, it's clear David's on the other side of a problem (enemies or sickness, 30:1-2), and he feels like the Lord snatched him from hell. It's likely a sickness event because David writes as if it was something that was a real threat to his life (30:3). He sees the dire situation as discipline from Lord, likely due to his pride. "When I was secure, I said, 'I will never be shaken'" (30:6). But who really gave David the ability to stand firm? God. And all Yehovah had to do was "hide His face" ("hide your presence" – Common English Bible), and David got the point. Without the Lord sustaining him, he was nothing and heading to death. The Lord answered him after he repented and turned his situation around. The Lord's anger turned to favor, and what was weeping gave way to joy (30:5). What was crying turned to dancing, and instead of wearing grief, David wore gladness, "so that my whole being might sing praises to you and never stop" (30:12). Yes, sometimes Jesus lets us go through tough times to show us who sustains us and makes us strong – ourselves or Him. When we finally get the Lord's point, and the situation resolves, we experience the "joy comes in the morning" feeling.

Psalm 31. This psalm is another of David's pleas for help, for God to be His refuge and rock (protection) and save him from the trap. Confident of Yehovah's possession and control of David's life ("Into your hand, I entrust my spirit," 31:5). Rather than buddy up to those who reject God, David embraces and holds fast to the Lord. So now that he's in a distressful situation, it hits him emotionally and physically (31:9-10). His enemies see his distress and realize it's an opportunity to go after David. But David trusts the Lord (31:14) and prays that he would be in the Lord's power and not his enemies' (31:15).

Rather than David being disgraced, may it be his enemies who are disgraced (31:17). David praises the Lord for how He treats those who trust and fear God, for the Lord protects and shelters them from the plots of wicked people. David's conclusion? "Be strong, and let your heart be courageous, all you who put your hope in the Lord" (31:24)!

Psalm 32. If you've ever done something wrong, kept it hidden, and suffered for keeping it secret, you know exactly what David wrote about in Psalm 32. It's a psalm of rejoicing in the joy of confessing, repenting, and being forgiven! Don't read through it fast. Soak in the imagery for a while and feel how the emotions rise and fall and rise again. David starts with a "Man, it's great to be forgiven! Oh boy, I can't tell you how good it feels to be forgiven!" (32:1-2). In the next part, David describes how utterly miserable he became by keeping his sin a secret for so long, especially under the Lord's conviction. You can try to hold out for as long as you can. Still, God can press down really hard if He has to until you break. God doesn't do it to be mean, He just wants us to be honest with Him and clear the air. When that breaking point comes (32:5), forgiveness washes over us like cool water on hot skin.

After his experience, what does David recommend? Don't wait! Confess and take care of things now. Unloading personal sin puts you in a place of protection and joy (32:6-7). Finally, the next part is a tasty bit of wisdom from David (psalms are wisdom literature, after all). "Take a tip from me," he writes, "this is what you should do. Don't be like an animal that has to be forced to go the right way or do the right thing. If you go the way of the wicked, you'll be in a world of hurt. But those who do right will be surrounded by God's faithful love. So do right and rejoice, you righteous ones!"

INSIGHT

If you know the details of Jesus' last words on the cross, the last thing He said was, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Remember what I said in the insight from Psalm 22? A single quote can reference the entire context of that quote. Therefore, what might Psalm 31 say in light of Jesus' crucifixion? Jesus could have been quoting this psalm (in shorthand) to express His trust in His Heavenly Father as His refuge in the face of death, "You will free me from the net that is secretly set for me, for you are my refuge." What is this secret trap set for Jesus? It was 1) the leadership at the time who sought a way to get rid of this rabbi from Galilee who claimed to be Israel's messiah. Such a messiah-wanna-be would bring Rome's wrath down on Judea, and the leadership's positions and power might be lost. Or even more profound, 2) Satan planned to get rid of Jesus because He knew there was something about Jesus that would eventually bring his satanic reign to an end. I believe it was both explanations. Jesus was a threat to both earthly and supernatural powers. And yet He willingly surrendered

Himself to His Father's work to free humanity from sin and death and provide a way to transfer all who want to into His Father's kingdom. So even though Jesus was going through the *most* distressing situation imaginable – taking sin upon Himself, suffering and dying because of it – His Father saw and heard His cry and brought His Son back to life to seal the redemption deal for us all.

June 5 : Scriptures Psalm 33-35

SUMMARY

Psalm 33. Yup, Psalm 33 is one big "Praise the Lord" fest! As it opens, the psalmist tells us to sing to the Lord because it's beautiful, for us to praise him on instruments, and to let loose with news songs to Him. That sounds like a pretty good worship service to me!

"Why should we do this, Mr. Psalmist?" Because of all the good things Yehovah is – His word is right, His works are trustworthy, He loves righteousness and justice, and the whole earth is filled with His love. The psalmist goes on to give us a macro-look at what God did. He made the heavens, the seas, and the earth; He did it all by speaking! And while He frustrates the nations' plans, His plans are sure. Oh yeah, it's good to serve the Lord and be His people! And yet, even with all this big stuff, Yehovah knows every person, even to their hearts and what they do. Even the mightiest army is no good if the Lord isn't backing them. But for those who have the Lord's backing, those who fear Him, He rescues them from death amid famine. In other words, you may have power, but without God, it's worthless. And you may be helpless, but with God, you have all the help you need. So, therefore, Lord, we're keeping our eyes on You!

Psalm 34. This psalm is fascinating because it's tied to a particular event, and it comes from the time David escaped from the Land of Israel to the land of the Philistines as he fled from Saul's assassination attempts. David did this twice, and this is the first time. He went to King Achish to ask for sanctuary (1 Samuel 10-15). Still, before solidifying it, Philistine King Achish (known in this psalm as Abimelech) was reminded by his servants that this was the same David who killed many Philistine warriors. Fearing that the king would take revenge on him, David faked insanity. He scratched at doorposts and drooled on himself. Well, it worked! King Abimelech drove David out, saying, "Do I have such a shortage of crazy people that you brought this one to act crazy around me? Is this one going to come into my house?" (1 Samuel 21:15). David dodged a bullet!

This is David's psalm of thanks to the Lord for helping him out of that self-made lousy situation (like we never do that kind of thing to ourselves, right?). The Lord didn't tell David to hide from Saul among the Philistines, and David figured it was a good plan, yet it nearly cost him his head.

David opens the psalm with praise to the Lord (34:1-3), followed by his remarkable declaration of the Lord's faithfulness to those who call to Him for help. Verse 7 is another favorite of mine, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and rescues them. Taste and see that the Lord is good. How happy is the person who takes refuge in

him!" (34:7-8). Reminding myself that the Lord's presence surrounds those who revere Him has often encouraged me. The "taste and see" idiom means, "Experience this for yourself! Look to the Lord; you'll know Him to be your refuge and provider for all you need." The psalm then moves into the "wisdom" aspect through "Come, children, listen to me," much as a parent would instruct their child. What's the wisdom we should know? "Do you love life; do you relish the chance to enjoy good things?" (34:12, Common English Bible). Then stay away from evil and pursue good. How does that help? Because the Lord keeps His eye on His people and turns from the wicked (34:15-16). He helps the righteous when they're in trouble, brokenhearted, crushed, and carrying problems which certainly describes what David went through during his debacle with King Abimelech.

Psalm 35. A "Prayer For Victory" is how the heading describes David's Psalm 35. It certainly is. David asks the Lord to step ahead of him to fight his enemies (35:1-3) and follows it up with a mighty big imprecatory prayer, a prayer for harm against his foes. And what a list it is! As I read through it, I get the sense that David has found out about a plot against him. Could it have been from the Saul years, when King Saul schemed to take David's life? Perhaps. Some townsfolk sought to betray David to King Saul as well. Along those lines, it could also relate to the Absalom coup. But David knows he's in good hands with the Lord (35:9-10), unlike those who are moving against him. Apparently, his enemies are those he knew well enough to sympathize with their troubles and grief, only to be stabbed in the back now (35:15). David cries out for Yehovah to not delay but rescue him quickly (35:17). His foes are on the move with false assurances while plotting behind his back to falsely accuse him, saying, "Aha, aha! We saw it!" (35:21). But David knows the Lord sees what they're doing. He calls on the Lord to rise to his defense, humiliate his accusers, and ask Him to bless those working for his vindication.

INSIGHT

There's a lot of ugly news out there. I follow a bunch of news sites to see what's happening in the world, and sadly, bad news sells. So, that's what's often posted on the news aggregate sites. It can get downright depressing. But like the psalmist, I take a hefty dose of "looking out the window" rather than looking at my laptop's screen. When I look outside, I not only see the natural world as it is, but many times I see the majesty and creativity of the Lord. We need these times of "eye-raising" so we don't get caught in a cycle of "Woe is me!" or "The sky is falling!" We need the perspective God gives us through His remarkable creation and not the spin and twisted human perspective of the daily news. Lift your eyes!

June 6 : Scriptures Psalm 36-38

SUMMARY

Psalm 36. This psalm of David is a short, clear comparison between the righteous and the wicked. Verses 1-4 describe a person whose life has no regard for the Lord whatsoever. By day or night, the evil person speaks and acts in ungodly, God-rejecting ways. They don't seek God in any way; instead, they embrace ungodliness as their lifestyle. But for David, the Lord's covenant love, commitment to him, righteousness, and judgment are off the chart. This talk about how great the Lord is making the reader like me think, "Since this is so, then how dark and lost do the ungodly people have to be not to want this God who is so magnificent and willing to fill his people's needs?" David's conclusion is his request for the Lord to cover His faithful ones with His righteousness, covenant love, and protection from the ungodly.

Psalm 37. David's Psalm 37 is an excellent example of wisdom literature. If you've read anything from the book of Proverbs (which we will), you'll see how close Psalm 37 is to them. The heading captures the idea; it is a compendium of wise teachings comparing evildoers and their lives with the godly and their lives.

I've found great value in this chapter by reading the parts about how the righteous should act and how the ungodly act but doing it as a single group of instructions, a set for the godly and one for the wicked. For example: How should the godly be toward God and other people? Trust God, do good, delight yourself in the Lord, dedicate the way you live to Him, don't get frantic, but wait for the Lord to act, don't fret if someone else gets ahead, etc. You get the point. On the flip side, here's how the ungodly act: They harbor anger and rage, they plot against the good people, they threaten to hurt the vulnerable and needy, the wicked borrow money and can't pay it back, but the righteous person generously gives (37:21, one of my favorite memory verses). And so on.

I have two recommendations. First, after you've read this psalm, bookmark it and return to it. Read a single verse or verses that cover just one idea. Marinate your mind and heart in what you read and ask the Lord how you can "do" what you've read. Second, if you're in a small group, Bible study, or congregation Christian Ed class, go verse by verse or point by point through the psalm and dive deeply into what each verse means and how to apply it. Pray for each other to be Psalm 37 "doers." I think you'll be amazed at how it comes alive to you and how quickly you memorize it. Have fun!

Psalm 38. This psalm's heading is translated as a "Prayer of a Suffering Sinner." It's a Davidic psalm of "remembrance" or "memorial." It's most definitely a lament. David is

suffering in a big way, from what we don't know. But as the book of Job often recounted, there was a traditional belief suffering indicates sin that hasn't been addressed. David thinks that's his case. He's taking a mental, emotional, and physical beating because of his sins, iniquities, and foolishness (a moral failing) (38:3-5). I can almost feel his aches and distress from how David describes his burden. He refuses to hide anything from Yehovah (38:9), for the Lord sees all, especially his suffering and the reactions from those around him – family, friends, and haters. The rest of the psalm is about David confessing and putting himself in God's hands. There's no resolution to his pain. The psalm ends with David's cry for help.

INSIGHT

As we read in Psalm 37, one of the marks of a committed and wise follower of God is the ability to be still and wait for Him to act on their behalf. This attitude of patient wait is what we see at the end of Psalm 38. David concludes it with a cry for help, and that's it. Sometimes (often?), the Lord's answer doesn't come quickly. Often, we aren't taken out of the situation but led through it by the Lord. And for a time, we may have to park amid our troubles, waiting for the Lord to act. Does this mean we do nothing? Not really. David cried out to God. He rehearsed his situation to the Lord, did a self-inventory to see if he was responsible, confessed whatever sin he needed, and waited until the problem was resolved. It's good to wait, and it's good to pour our hearts out to the Lord. That may be all we can do now, and that's okay.

June 7 : Scriptures Psalm 39-43

SUMMARY

Psalm 39. If you're familiar with classical music or have a music education, you are probably familiar with music scores that a composer wrote for a particular purpose and a specific instrumentalist. This seems to be the case with Psalm 39. David wrote it for the choir director, and the soloist is Jeduthun. Jeduthun was one of David's primary worship leaders who prophesied as he played a musical instrument (1 Chronicles 25:1). Psalm 39 was later added to the collection of psalms we have today.

Has anyone ever told you to "shush" and stop complaining about a situation that's particularly troubling to you? You try to keep your mouth shut, yet your brain keeps rolling on, churning out rapid-fire thoughts about what you're going through. Growing emotions and bodily stress amplify those thoughts until you explode in a torrent of words! You got it. That's Psalm 39. David tries to keep quiet about his complaint (39:1-3) until he can't keep quiet any longer. What's David's complaint? The Common English Bible has a good translation, "Let me know my end, Lord. How many days do I have left? I want to know how brief my time is. You've made my days so short; my lifetime is like nothing in your eyes. Yes, a human life is nothing but a puff of air!" (39:4-6). David's psalm is about how fleeting life is and how meaningless it is for those who spend their lives chasing after the things of this world. But David's hope is in God, the Eternal One. And because he hopes in the Lord, David begs for the Lord to lift whatever torment he's going through. That torment might have come to the king either to teach him a lesson (how fast life goes) or a punishment for sin (39:11). Because life is short, David asks the Lord to answer him. He knows he's just a temporary resident in this world and wants to enjoy it before shuffling off this mortal coil (hat tip to William Shakespeare).

Psalm 40. What? *Another* psalm by David? Well, he was called "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1) in many translations. This psalm is both a thanksgiving song and a cry for help. David starts with a summary of his experience – he was in a tough place, but God got him out of it. Therefore, he will sing his head off to the Lord so loudly as a testimony to Him that those who hear of it will be motivated to trust God.

Psalm 41. Okay, here we are on the last psalm of Book I of the book of Psalms. Psalm 41 is straightforward. David is a man who follows the Lord's Torah, and one of the emphases of Yehovah's Law is caring for the poor. God's people are to lend to the poor without charging interest to help them get on their feet (Exodus 22:25), the poor are not to be denied justice (Exodus 23:6), and leaving some food behind during the harvest was a way for the poor to glean for their food (Exodus 23:11) freely.

On the other hand, it was against God's Torah to show favoritism to the poor in court cases (Exodus 23:3). The Lord is both merciful and fair in His dealings with the poor. Caring for the poor is the mark of a godly person and a highly commendable lifestyle. Doing so brings a blessing from God, "Kindness to the poor is a loan to the Lord, and he will give a reward to the lender" (Proverbs 19:17).

In this psalm, David touts his kindness to the poor as the reason Yehovah stood up for him against David's adversaries even when the king was sick (41:1-3). Again, David confesses his sin during his downtime to make sure there's nothing for which he's being punished and clearing the way for the Lord to heal him. However, during his illness, he can see his enemies hoping for his death (41:5). They may have visited David to wish him well, but he knows his enemies are spreading malicious rumors about how severe David's illness is. One of those is even an unnamed close friend (41:9), which makes the betrayal even worse. So David cries to the Lord to heal him. When Yehovah does, David will take care of those undercutting him.

Psalm 42. Welcome to Book II of the Psalms. Surprise! Psalm 42 is not from David. It is a *maskil*, meaning "insight," and it's also found in the heading for Psalm 32. The word might indicate this is a wisdom psalm, or it could be a term meaning "skillful" per the HCSB commentary. It's a lovely psalm many contemporary praise and worship music composers have set to music. It's a very descriptive psalm. In my mind, the image of a deer thirsting for water reminds me of the deer in the Judean desert in Israel's Jordan River valley. From May to October, the region can be arid except for a few watering holes of temporary creeks that form during the rare event of a storm. A thirsty deer panting for water is how the psalmist feels regarding his desire for the Lord. Why is he so intense about seeking the Lord? The psalmist is depressed because God seems distant from him (42:3, 5, 6, 9). The situation appears to be that the psalmist is far from Jerusalem, where God's physical presence dwelled in His Temple before the Babylonian exile. As evidence, the writer refers to the land of the Jordan River, Mount Hermon (the highest peak on Israel's northern edge and the source of the Jordan River), and Mount Mizar (likely near Hermon). If he's in this area, yeah, he's far from Jerusalem, the Temple, and God's presence. He tries to temper his depression by reminding himself that despite the sense of aloneness, the Lord is still his Savior and his God (42:5). He recalls with joy the times he worshiped at the Temple during the Feasts of the Lord (42:4). But now, some people taunt him, aggravating his feeling of divine isolation. But he has a solution, "Hope in God! Because I will again give him thanks, my saving presence and my God" (42:11).

Psalm 43. This psalm is interesting because it's so similar to Psalm 42 in theme and wording. Many Hebrew manuscripts connect Psalms 42 and 43. In this psalm, the writer laments the ungodly and their oppression (43:1-2) and feels God has rejected him. He yearns to go to God's "holy mountain, to Your dwelling place," just like it says in Psalm 42. Only by standing in the Lord's courts will the psalmist's desire for God's presence be satisfied (43:3-4). And to finish the psalm, he concludes with the exact words as the last verse in Psalm 42:11, "Hope in God! Because I will again give him thanks, my saving presence and my God."

INSIGHT

When I was first saved, I hungered for God and His word. I dove into the Bible and started "devouring" what I could understand. I told my family and my friends about my newfound relationship with Jesus. Yeah, it turned many of them off, and some scoffed, but it meant a lot to me. I was eager to go to church, sing to the Lord, and read and hear His word. When I experienced the Holy Spirit's touch during the wave of the Charismatic Renewal, I was even hungrier to go to worship services on Sunday evenings because the Lord was so *real*. It felt like He was right there with us as we sang and prayed. It wasn't a presentation or a performance. It was His presence.

Since that time, there have been periods when He seems distant to me. But I remind myself that Jesus isn't limited to a location or a time (a worship service). He lives in me, and I don't have to trek long distances to be with Him. It's only a 16" journey from my head to my heart. At that moment, I'm in His presence more quickly and closely than the psalmist could ever have imagined. Yet, the things of life oppress that awareness from me if I let them. But all I have to do is recall and return to my awareness of Him, and it's available any time I want.