



TODAY IN THE WORD™

A ministry of Moody Bible Institute

# LONGING FOR GOD

*A Study in Psalms, Book Two*

OCTOBER 2020

# Your Prodigal Heart

From the President of Moody Bible Institute

*“There’s no worse place to be than to have tasted the power of God, to have been born again, but to be living in the midst of sin.”*



Maybe you’ve never considered yourself a prodigal. On the surface, everything seems okay. You read your Bible and

spend time in prayer. On Sunday, you go to church.

You haven’t run anywhere, but your heart is far away. When we live with unconfessed sin, we feel separated from God’s presence and lose the joy of our salvation. There’s no worse place to be than to have tasted the power of God, to have been born again, but to be living in the midst of sin. The prodigal allows sin to take hold, resisting what God wants to do. Maybe we think that if we let Him in, we’ll have to stop what we’re doing or do something we don’t want to do.

David wrote Psalm 51 after the prophet Nathan confronted him about serious sins in his life: murder and adultery (2 Samuel 12). Once called a “man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14), David was far from God. But Psalm 51 was David’s cry of repentance: “Have mercy on me, O God” (v. 1). David had stopped the deception. He acknowledged his sin,

saying, “I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me” (v. 3).

Like David, we must admit our sin: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (v. 4). God wants our heart to be contrite and broken before Him—willing to change and be restored. We come to Him humbly, asking, “Create in me a clean heart” (v. 10).

The act of repentance is marked by longing. We long for the guilt to be removed. We want freedom, restoration, and renewal. The incredible news is that when we do confess and repent, the Bible teaches that “he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Nothing we do has that same effect; God alone has the power to “cleanse” and “wash” us (v. 7). The result is liberating, life-changing.

A repentant heart is like a once clogged fountain that now runs freely. We discover that our heart once again overflows with joyful worship, just as David’s does: “My tongue will sing of your righteousness” (v. 14). What about you? Do you have a prodigal heart? Return, repent, and receive God’s forgiveness today. ■

# Cry for Justice

by Dr. John Koessler

*“These psalms show that we do not need to be afraid to tell God how we truly feel, even when those feelings are not pretty.”*

The psalms reveal that our spiritual life is an emotional one. The wide range of human emotions in Psalms 42–72 is so frank that it may even disturb us. The “imprecatory” psalms called upon God to judge the Psalmist’s enemies. The request of Psalm 69:24 is typical: “Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them.” How can we reconcile such fiery sentiments with Jesus’ command to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44)?

First, it is helpful to realize that some of these psalms were prophecies of the Messiah’s experience. In Acts 1:20, Peter cited Psalm 69:25 and 109:8 as predictions of the fate of Judas. Second, imprecatory psalms expressed the feelings of human authors who had been the victims of injustice. Finally, they reflected God’s hatred for sin and anticipated His coming judgment. Jesus used similar language about sin at times (Matt. 11:21–24; 18:6–7; Mark 14:21).

We can be assured that God’s justice and mercy do not contradict one another. Both reflect His perfect

nature. Through the cross, God is able to be “just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). Although the term “imprecatory” means to invoke evil or call down curses on someone, the imprecatory psalms were not intended to call for bad things to happen to people we do not like. Nor were they models of how we should respond to enemies. When Jesus taught His disciples to love their enemies and pray for their persecutors, He echoed the command of Leviticus 19:18: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”

Like James and John, who were rebuked by Jesus when they offered to call down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan village, our cry for justice does not necessarily mean our motives are pure (Luke 9:51–56). Only God is truly just. However, these psalms show that we do not need to be afraid to tell God how we truly feel, even when those feelings are not pretty. ■

## For Further Study

To learn more, read *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace* by James Adams (P&R).

We hope these questions will help you consider (or discuss with others) what God is teaching you through this month's study of His Word. We've left a bit of room to write down your thoughts as well!

**WEEK 1:** Have you ever felt far from God like the Psalmist describes in Psalm 42? How could this psalm help you in that situation?

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**WEEK 2:** Is there a time in your life you can look back on and recognize that God was your refuge and strength? (see Psalm 46)

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**WEEK 3:** How does David serve as a model of true repentance? (see Psalm 51)

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**WEEK 4:** What are some of your favorite images of God in Psalm 68? Why?

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**Want more questions? Check out the Go Deeper section on our website or app!**

# TODAY IN THE WORD™

## Longing for God: Psalms, Book 2

*You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you.—Psalm 63:1*

As Christians, we all want to know God better, walk closely to Him, and love Him more. But at times we may find ourselves struggling with how to pray. Praise the Lord that He not only speaks to us through His Word but also gives us the language to speak back to Him!

The psalms are divided into five books, each ending in a doxology. This month in *Today in the Word*, we'll study Book 2 (Psalms 42–72). For the study of Book 1 (Psalms 1–41), see our September 2019 issue, *Honest Talks with God*.

In Psalms, Book 2, we'll learn how to commune with God through a gamut of emotions—joy, fear, anger, lament, forgiveness, and ultimately, confidence in God's love. This collection of ancient Hebrew poetry will show us how to rely on the Lord, clinging to Him in every season of our lives. Our prayer is that by the end of our study we will:

- Learn how to rely on God during times of suffering or distress
- Understand how to praise God in the midst of unanswered prayer
- Embrace the hope we have in Jesus our Messiah
- Express thanks and praise for all God has done

We hope you will find inspiration and comfort in this powerful book. May these psalms guide your heart to an attitude of reverent worship of the Lord Jesus—our Savior and King. To Him be the glory! ■

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# Longing for God

## Read Psalms 42–43

*Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.—Psalm 42:5*

“There are two easy ways to die in the desert: thirst and drowning,” says naturalist Craig Childs. We depend on water for life! In the second “book” of Psalms, our longing for God is compared to thirst. Chapters 42 and 43 were originally one Psalm—as evidenced in several manuscripts, as well as in the repeated refrain (42:5, 11; 43:5). In this lament, the Psalmist feels cut off from God’s presence (42:4). He is surrounded by enemies who taunt him, asking: “Where is your God?” (vv. 3, 10).

The Psalmist uses water as a metaphor in both a positive and negative way. He longs for God “as the deer pants” for life-giving water (42:1). He drinks his own tears (v. 3). By contrast, he experienced God’s judgment, which he describes as God’s “waves and breakers” sweeping over him (v. 7). The Psalmist’s sense of abandonment by God and the presence of enemies led him to

despair. He tries to remember when times were better, when he had experienced God’s presence and blessing at the temple or in the “land of the Jordan” (vv. 4, 6).

All through Psalm 42, he is speaking to himself. A shift takes place in the first verse of Psalm 43. He addresses God directly, asking Him for help, begging for His “light” and “faithful care” to guide him (43:3). This allows him to see hope for the future when he “will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God” (v. 4). Finally, he addresses himself, saying, “put your hope in God,” taking some positive steps in that direction (v. 5).

► Today, we do not have to travel to a temple to experience God’s presence. Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit, “the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:16). When God seems far away, pour out your heart to God and know that He cares.

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### Pray with Us

As we begin this study, Lord, we ask that you speak to our hearts through the words of the Psalmists and show us what we need to learn from them in our day and age.

# Awake, Lord!

## Read Psalm 44

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?—Romans 8:35*

On average, eleven Christians a day were killed for their faith in Jesus last year. In May 2019, the BBC reported that persecution of Christians was reaching “near genocide levels” in some parts of the world. This can lead us to ask “Why?” and “Where is God in the midst of this?”

In today’s reading, the Psalmist raises similar questions to God. We do not know the exact circumstance in which Psalm 44 was written, but clearly, Israel had suffered a devastating military defeat. Reeling from the loss, the Psalmist begins by recounting what God had done for Israel in the past. He had defeated other nations, especially during the time of Joshua (vv. 1–8). These victories were not accomplished because of the strength of Israel’s army, but because God gave them victory (vv. 6–7).

Verse 9 describes Israel’s current plight. They have been rejected and humbled by God. They have fled before their enemies (v. 10). They have

been plundered (v. 11). Worst of all, they have been publicly shamed and disgraced (vv. 13–16). Yet, this defeat was not for any known sin. Israel had not worshiped other gods or forgotten their covenant (vv. 17–21).

Israel thought that if they were faithful to God, God would be faithful to them. They could not understand their current defeat. Their theology did not align with their experience. This did not lead Israel to unbelief, but to their knees. They conclude by begging God to “Awake! . . . Rouse yourself! . . . Rise up and help us!” (vv. 23–26). In many ways, their request to God is not for an explanation, but for His action.

► Like the Psalmist, we can express our bewilderment to God and plead for Him to act. We can cling to God when life doesn’t make sense. Paul quotes this psalm, reminding believers that nothing, not even suffering, can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35–39).

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### Pray with Us

God, we ask for your encouragement today. May Paul’s quote from Psalm 44 encourage us even more: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:35). We know the answer: Nobody!

# Future Hope

## Read Psalm 45

*Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever. —Psalm 45:6*

The Battle of Gettysburg was costly. In just three days of fighting, there were more than 50,000 casualties. The nation was weary of war and wondered if it would ever end. In his famous Gettysburg address, Abraham Lincoln presented a vision for the future: “[T]hat this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.”

Psalms 42–44 present us with two main problems: separation from God’s presence and military defeat. Psalms 45–49 provide answers to these problems. While Psalm 44 lamented a great military defeat, Psalm 45 presents a vision of a Davidic king who would “ride forth victoriously” and defeat the nations (vv. 4–5). This king is described in lofty terms: “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever” (v. 6). This description goes beyond any historical king of Israel and is a vision of a future Messiah.

While Psalms 42–43 lamented being cut off from God’s presence

(42:1–3; 43:3–4), Psalm 45 describes a bride being led into the presence of this exalted king “with joy and gladness” (v. 15). This psalm looked to a time of future hope for God’s people. The bride described here is a figurative representation of the speaker of Psalm 42–43, who longed to come into God’s presence with “joy” (43:4). This fits with the regular Old Testament image of God’s relationship with Israel as a marriage (Jer. 2:2; 31:32; Isa. 54:5; Hos. 2:16–20). As one commentator explains, “It is best to understand Psalm 45 as speaking figuratively about a wedding between the divine Messiah-King and His people.”

▶ As we look at the state of the world around us, it can be easy to get discouraged. This psalm encourages us to reflect upon our future hope. We have a great wedding feast to anticipate when the Lord will declare, “I am making everything new!” (Rev. 21:5).

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### Pray with Us

Together, we reflect on our future hope, the wedding feast of the Lamb. We thank you, Lord, that even now your promise from Revelation is true: “I am making everything new!” (Rev. 21:5).



# A Mighty Fortress

## Read Psalm 46

*God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.—Psalm 46:1*

In October 1527, Martin Luther's life looked bleak. He had been hiding for years because of his commitment to salvation by faith alone. In August, the bubonic plague swept the area where he lived. It must have felt like the world was falling apart. In response to this situation, he took comfort in Psalm 46 and wrote the hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Psalm 46 presents two terrifying images. First, a natural disaster with the ground shaking and mountains tumbling into the turbulent seas (vv. 2–3). Second, we see the foreign nations in an uproar (v. 6). One can imagine vast armies surrounding Jerusalem and threatening its very existence. Yet in the midst of these chaotic and frightening circumstances, the psalmist was able to proclaim, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (v. 1). Israel was able to take comfort not in a vast army, or strongly fortified city, but in the presence of a God who is able to help (v. 5).

In verses 8–9, the psalmist addresses the nations directly, inviting them to "Come and see what the Lord has done" (v. 8). They are invited to remember the great victories He achieved in the past: the defeat of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, for example (v. 9). The tone shifts dramatically in verse 10. The Lord Himself addresses the rebellious and threatening nations. He commands them to "be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations" (v. 10). The command to "be still" is not so much an encouragement to silent meditation but a warning to cease fighting and to acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty.

► Terrifying and frightening things happen in the world today. This psalm is a good reminder that God is our refuge and strength. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He promised, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

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### Pray with Us

Are you going through difficulties right now? Read Psalm 46 back to the Lord as your prayer, and may its beautiful words strengthen you. Indeed, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1).

# Clap Your Hands

## Read Psalm 47

*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.—John 12:32*

C. S. Lewis noticed that when people find something they love, they naturally want other people to join them in praising it. “Isn’t the painting beautiful?” “Wasn’t that play magnificent?” He reflected upon the reason for this: “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.”

In today’s psalm, the writer encourages all the nations to “Clap your hands . . . shout to God with cries of joy” (v. 1). He was so delighted in God that he wanted the whole world to join him. God had done great things for Israel. He had subdued the Canaanites under the leadership of Joshua during the period of the Conquest (v. 3). He had fulfilled His promise to Abraham that Israel would dwell in the land of Canaan (v. 4). This demonstrated His love for Israel and His faithfulness to them (v. 4).

God is also to be praised because He is “awesome” (v. 2). He rules over

the nations and is “greatly exalted” (vv. 8–9). This psalm envisions God ascending to His heavenly throne and ruling over all people (vv. 5–8). In a final picture of God’s universal rule, the poet describes how “the nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham” (v. 9). Even though this psalm began by celebrating things God had specifically done to help Israel, it ends by presenting a vision of leaders from every nation assembling with Israel in homage to God. This anticipates the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that through his offspring “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:3).

► One way to think about evangelism is wanting other people to join you in your delight in Jesus and what He has done for you. Today, call others to join you in worship of Him—in anticipation of the time when people from all nations will bow in worship (Phil. 2:9–10).

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## Pray with Us

We invite you to pray and worship the Lord in a new way. Maybe follow the invitation in today’s psalm to “clap your hands” or to “shout to God with cries of joy” (v.1). The Lord delights in our creativity!

# Great Is Your Faithfulness

## Read Psalm 48

*Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise,  
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.—Psalm 48:1*

When Hezekiah was king of Judah, the powerful nation of Assyria marched into their land and threatened Jerusalem. The commander of the Assyrians taunted the Judean king, even offering to give him 2,000 horses for their upcoming battle (2 Kings 18:23). Hezekiah went into the temple and prayed for God to intervene. That night, the angel of the Lord decimated the Assyrian army, forcing them to head back to their own country (2 Kings 19:35–36).

This event had a profound impact on the nation of Judah. It is possible that Psalm 48 was written in response to this crisis and God’s miraculous intervention. The Psalmist proclaims, “Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise” (v. 1). That sets the tone for this joyful hymn which celebrates Jerusalem as the place where God dwells as the “Great King” (v. 2). He compares Jerusalem to the “heights of Zaphon” (v. 2). Zaphon was the mountain north of Israel where Canaanites believed their god Baal reigned as king. The Psalmist here

declares that the Lord alone is the real King.

Julius Caesar once famously proclaimed, “Veni, Vidi, Vici” (“I came, I saw, I conquered.”) The kings described in verses 4–7 “came, saw, and fled!” They surrounded Jerusalem, but were dismayed by its secure position. The city was not secure because of its magnificent towers or fortifications, but because it was where God dwelled (v. 8). The Psalmist ends by meditating on the faithfulness of God to protect His people (v. 9). Because of the salvation God has accomplished, the people praise Him “to the ends of the earth” (v. 10). His people want to pass on to their children and grandchildren their testimony of God’s faithfulness.

► We need to tell the next generation about God’s work in our lives. Perhaps you have children or grandchildren who have never heard stories about how God met a need in your life, whether physical or spiritual. Today might be a good day to have that conversation.

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### Pray with Us

Lord, our prayer is that each of us will leave a legacy of faith, telling the next generation about your love and mercy in our lives. May we have the strength and determination to serve you faithfully until the end.

# Wealth and God

## Read Psalm 49

*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served,  
but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.—Mark 10:45*

Wellington R. Burt was a lumber baron in the late 19th century and one of the wealthiest men in America. While he was generous with others, he was famously tight-fisted with his own family. He included a “spite clause” in his will that specified that none of his descendants could inherit any of his money until 21 years after the death of his last grandchild. Sure enough, in 2010 his \$100 million fortune was divided between his twelve great-great-grandchildren.

Psalm 49 addresses prosperity and the wealthy. The “wicked” in verse 5 are people who “trust in their wealth” (v. 6). They find their value in what they have acquired and look down on those in a more humble position (vv. 6, 13). The psalmist points out that the wealthy are often praised in this life simply because they are wealthy (v. 18). Wealth seems to erase moral distinctions. These wealthy are honored and even had lands named after them (v. 11).

However, we do not have to fear these people or be envious of them (v. 5). Nothing they acquired will last in any significant sense: “Their tombs will remain their houses forever, and their dwellings for endless generations” (v. 11). Their incredible wealth will not be enough to redeem their life from the grave (v. 7). Ultimately, their wealth will be left to others and they will be forgotten (v. 10). The Psalmist is confident that “God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself” (v. 15). He knows that death will not have the ultimate say for him because of his relationship with God. His hope is that he will live with God forever.

► This psalm reminds us that no one is able to redeem themselves from death, “no payment is ever enough” (v. 8). Thank the Lord today for the work of Jesus who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

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## Pray with Us

Let’s follow the invitation of today’s devotional to thank the Lord for His gift of eternal life. Praise Christ for His victory on the cross as He gave His life “as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

# Wrong Motives

## Read Psalm 50

*For every animal of the forest is mine,  
and the cattle on a thousand hills.—Psalm 50:10*

Why do you pray? Read your Bible? Tithe? Do you do these things to earn God's favor? Today's psalm explores the difference between the things we do that truly honor God and the things we do which are a thinly disguised attempt to impress God with our own righteousness.

In most psalms, Israel addresses God. In today's reading, God addresses Israel. Verses 1–6 describe God summoning the heavens and the earth "that he may judge his people" (v. 4). God's message to Israel begins with a reminder. In the ancient world, people offered sacrifices in order to feed the gods. God makes clear that He does not need their sacrifices in order to satisfy His hunger (v. 12). He owns every animal of the forest and the "cattle on a thousand hills" (v. 10). Furthermore, God does not eat bulls or goats (v. 13).

Sacrifices were intended to teach Israel about the nature of sin and its atonement as well as to express thanks to God. However, the sacrificial system could easily be misunderstood.

Israel could have thought that if they just did the right rituals and sacrificed the right offerings, then they would be acceptable. God strongly counters that idea. It is not enough to sacrifice in the right way, the motives of the worshiper matter. God accused some in Israel of stealing, false testimony, and adultery and then coming to sacrifice and reciting the law before God (vv. 16–21). This kind of worship is abhorrent to God who warns, "Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with no one to rescue you" (v. 22). However, to those who honor Him in the right way, He promises, "I will show my salvation" (v. 23).

► Our relationship with God impacts our entire life. Faith in Christ should not only determine how we spend our Sunday mornings but also how we live our lives the rest of the week. We cannot allow the truth that Jesus died for our sin to become justification for sinning (Rom. 6:1–2).

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## Pray with Us

Our prayers and worship are not limited to Sunday! We are to be consistent and faithful in our walk with Christ every day. Thank you, God, for Your grace and for the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit.

# True Repentance

## Read Psalm 51

*Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.—Psalm 51:2*

Seventeenth-century pastor John Donne was also a celebrated poet. In one of his *Holy Sonnets* reflecting on the Second Coming, he wrote, “When we are there; here on this lowly ground / Teach me how to repent; for that’s as good / As if thou hadst seal’d my pardon with thy blood.” Donne understood the power of repentance.

Psalm 51 is one of the most famous chapters in the Psalter. For thousands of years, it has modeled for believers a prayer of repentance. The title of the psalm informs us that it was written after David had been confronted for committing adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). David’s sin included coveting a neighbor’s wife, adultery, lying, and murder. He begins his prayer by pleading to God for mercy, “Have mercy on me, O God” (Ps. 51:1). He knows that he does not deserve God’s forgiveness. His hope is in the compassion of God (v. 1).

David clearly and honestly acknowledges his sin. He realizes

that his sin comes from a deep place within him, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (v. 5). He prays for God not only to forgive him but also to cleanse him and restore him to a state of holiness (v. 7). He prays that God would so work in his heart that it would be transformed (v. 10). He wants to not just be forgiven but also changed. David’s cry is the essence of repentance. Finally, David declares that in his restored state, he will engage in ministry. He will “teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you” (v. 13). He desires to use his new life to declare God’s praise (v. 15).

► Ultimately, God was able to forgive David on the basis of a future “son of David” who would die for his sins (Rom. 3:25–26). Know today that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

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### Pray with Us

Psalm 51 shows the importance of confession and repentance. Lord, we come to you boldly in prayer of confession—just as you mercifully forgave David’s sin, forgive ours today.

# Destructive Words

## Read Psalm 52

*The tongue has the power of life and death,  
and those who love it will eat its fruit.—Proverbs 18:21*

When David was fleeing from King Saul, he came to the sanctuary city of Nob and asked Ahimelek, the priest, for help. Ahimelek assumed David was still working for Saul and assisted him with provisions. One of Saul's servants, Doeg the Edomite, overheard this and denounced the priest to Saul who ordered that Ahimelek and 85 other priests be put to death (1 Sam. 21:1–8; 22:6–19). Today's reading represents David's lament over this tragic turn of events.

David addresses Doeg directly in the opening of the psalm, "Why do you boast of evil, you mighty hero?" (v. 1). He denounces Doeg for his deceit. In a vivid image, David describes the deceitful tongue as a razor that brings destruction (v. 2). Words can do incredible damage. These destructive words come out of the heart of a person whose values are skewed. "You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth" (v. 3).

In verses 5–7, David reminds his adversary that God is aware of what

he has done and will bring judgment (v. 5). While it might look like the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, that would not be the case forever. One day, "the righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at you, saying, 'Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold'" (vv. 6–7). David contrasts himself with the wicked. Drawing from the image of the righteous as a flourishing tree in Psalm 1, David declares, "But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God" (v. 8). Instead of putting his faith in his own achievements, David trusts in the Lord's "unfailing love" (v. 8). Instead of deceit, his lips will pour forth praise to God (v. 9).

► Today's reading describes the power of words. You can boast, deceive, destroy others, or praise God with them. Ask the Lord to help you use the gift of language wisely today. As Paul reminds us, "each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully" (Eph. 4:25).

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### Pray with Us

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of language. We ask for wisdom to use it for good and not for evil, to build up and encourage others and not destroy. May we use our words to honor the Living Word!

# All Have Sinned

## Read Psalm 53

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.—Romans 3:23*

According to the Pew Research Center, atheists account for less than 4 percent of the United States population. However, around 25–30 percent are considered “nones,” people who have no religious affiliation. This statistic should arouse our compassion. As Paul reminded the church in Ephesus, they too were once “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12).

In today’s reading David declares, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’ ” (53:1). David is not referring to a philosophical atheist—that kind of person did not likely exist in the ancient world. Rather, this “fool” is a functional atheist—a person who lives as if God does not see or care. There are consequences to this kind of unbelief. The lack of a moral standard or sense of accountability leads to corrupt and destructive actions (v. 1).

Beginning in verse 2, we see God’s view of humanity. The conclusion is sobering: “Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no

one who does good, not even one” (v. 3). It is not just a small percent who do not live up to God’s standard, but all of humanity. Living as a functional atheist leads to a life filled with fear. David describes it this way, “[T]here they are, overwhelmed with dread, where there was nothing to dread” (v. 5). Like people who run from shadows, the evildoers in this psalm live in fear and under God’s judgment (v. 5). David expresses a longing for deliverance and salvation, “Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!” (v. 6).

▶ The apostle Paul quoted from this psalm in Romans 3:10–12 as a part of his argument that all people stand under God’s judgment. No one can earn their salvation through good deeds, or keeping the law: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23)!

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### Pray with Us

Today’s psalm sends a convicting message of humanity’s total depravity outside of God. There is indeed no one righteous. We praise you, Lord, that you didn’t leave us in this lost state and for salvation in Christ!



# Crying for Help

## Read Psalm 54

*Surely God is my help; the LORD is the one who sustains me.—Psalm 54:4*

My children often come to me with requests that might seem strange if someone else asked them: “Can you read me a book? Can you make a sandwich for me? Can you play cars with me?” Yet, because I am their father, they know that they have the right to ask those kinds of things. That is often how David approached God. In the Psalms, David makes bold and specific requests of God because he has a relationship with Him.

David penned this lament after being betrayed by the Ziphites (1 Sam. 23:19–20). These were men from his own tribe. David addresses God urgently asking for salvation from these “arrogant foes” (v. 3). These were “people without regard for God” (v. 3), or more literally, men who “have not set God before them.”

David is honest about his sense of betrayal. He expresses his desire for vengeance (v. 5). God invites us

to be honest about our anger so we can hand over our desire for revenge to Him (Rom. 12:19). In spite of his imminent danger, David expresses confidence in God. He declares, “Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me” (v. 4). His attitude stands in stark contrast to his enemies. His eyes look first to God for help. As one commentator put it, “Placing our gaze fully on God changes the way we see the rest of the world.” David ends this short lament with a vow. When God delivers him, he will not be silent about it (v. 6).

► Today’s reading encourages us to fix our eyes on Jesus even in the midst of difficult and trying circumstances. Soak in the words of this classic hymn today: “Turn your eyes upon Jesus / Look full in His wonderful face / And the things of earth will grow strangely dim / In the light of His glory and grace.”

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## Pray with Us

Following David’s example in Psalm 54, we ask that God will help us grow in our trust and dependence on Him. In any circumstance, may our eyes look to the Lord first.

# When Betrayed

## Read Psalm 55:22

*Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken. — Psalm 55:22*

Stress and anxiety can take a toll on one's body. According to WebMD, emotional stress can cause dizziness, a fast heartbeat, the inability to concentrate, headaches, muscle tension, and even short-term memory loss. If not handled well, high emotional stress can have a lasting negative impact.

David was in a state of extreme stress. He had experienced danger and persecution (v. 3). His enemies prowled the streets looking for an opportunity to attack him (vv. 9–11). Most poignantly, one of his enemies had been at one time a close friend. He laments, “But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the house of God” (vv. 13–14). This situation has taken a physical toll on David. “My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me” (vv. 4–5).

David's first impulse was to run. “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest” (v. 6). Perhaps you have been in a situation where your greatest desire was to flee. David's heart expressed not the courage of the man who had faced down giants but the timidity of a bird. His second impulse was to turn his anxiety over to God. Although David's circumstances looked grim, God has not changed (v. 19). He assured himself that God heard his cry for help (v. 17). He knew that God would ultimately judge the wicked (v. 23). This psalm was David's way of casting his cares on the Lord (v. 22).

▶ This psalm is a wonderful model of prayer for those who feel that they have been betrayed. David affirmed as his final word in this psalm, “But as for me, I trust in you” (v. 23). Remember that even our Lord Jesus was betrayed by a close friend and surrounded by enemies.

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### Pray with Us

We have been given a somber reminder of the pain of betrayal. If you can relate to David's anguish, ask the Father to help you heal, overcome, and forgive.

# When I Fear

## Read Psalm 56

*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.  
In God, whose word I praise.—Psalm 56:3–4*

Moses experienced fear. When God called him to deliver Israel from Egypt, Moses was afraid that his own people would not listen to him, that Pharaoh would not respect him, and that he could not speak well enough to accomplish the job (Exodus 3–4). Even so, God worked through Moses. His fear was overcome by God's promise to be with him every step of the way.

In Psalm 56, David was fearful. He had enemies dogging his every step (vv. 1–2). They chased him “all day long” with the hope that they would ultimately take his life (vv. 2, 6). These adversaries wanted not only to kill David but also to destroy his reputation (v. 5).

David confessed that he was afraid (v. 3). This admission was the first step to transforming his mindset. “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you,” he declared (v. 3). David reminded himself of two truths about God. First, God is powerful. He can take down nations and deliver us from any situation (vv. 7, 13). Second,

David reminded himself that God cares for him. In a beautiful image, David declared, “You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not all in your book?” (v. 8, ESV). God not only knows about David's suffering, He keeps track of every sleepless night and every shed tear.

Having reminded himself of God's power and compassion, David was able to change his perspective. He proclaimed, “In God I trust and am not afraid. What can man do to me?” (v. 11). Humans can do enormous damage to one another, but David's point here was that they were not powerful enough to thwart God's plan for his life.

► Fear is a normal part of life in a fallen world. That is why the most often repeated command in the Bible is “Do not be afraid.” We all need to be reminded that “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

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### Pray with Us

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you” (Ps. 56:3). These words show us an escape from the grip of fear. God, we look to you in both good and bad times, in times of victory as well as failure.

# Questions & Answers

by Dr. Winfred O. Neely, Vice President  
and Dean of Moody Theological Seminary

**Q** I have been hearing a lot about structural or systemic injustice. As Christians, how should we respond to the current critiques of our social and government structures?

**A** As Christians, we are called to think biblically about all of life, and we should not restrict our biblical thinking to our personal and corporate church life. I will not answer this question directly, but I will offer a biblical framework for our thinking and a practical conclusion. First, because of the sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:14–24), the entire universe is alienated from God (Rom. 8:18–21; Col. 1:15–20). We live in a fallen world marked by death, mourning, crying, and pain that will not be removed until the creation of the new heaven and the new Earth (Rev. 21:1–4). Sinful and fallen people live under the power of sin in our fallen world (Rom. 3:9–18). Consequently, all human structures—social, cultural, and governmental—are fallen. Even our best systems and governmental structures bear the taint of sin, because fallen people established them. Therefore, all structures stand in need of assessment, evaluation, and reform. It is a form of idolatry to think that any system that we set up is beyond the need of God’s

repair and reformation. The practical conclusion is this: In the power of the Spirit, based on the gospel, Christians should seek to be healing agents of redemption, salt and light, in our broken world (Matt. 5:13–14), leading men and women to Christ, and working to bring reformation and healing in every area of life, including the ongoing reformation and healing of fallen structural systems.

**Q** How can I tell the difference between sinful anger and holy anger?

**A** Jesus is our model. One trait of holy anger is sorrow. In Mark 3:5, the Lord was grieved. The implication of the Greek word translated as “grieved” is that His grief and sorrow were deep. In His holy anger there were deep grief and sorrow for the hardness of heart of these religious people. We could say that Jesus felt sorrow for the people. When we see people living in sin and unyielding to the overtures of God’s grace and compassion, it should break our hearts with sorrow and grief.

On the other hand, sinful anger is destructive and never brings hope and healing. Jesus was angry and grieved, but He healed the man with the withered hand. Holy anger restores

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**“In the power of the Spirit, based on the gospel, Christians should seek to be healing agents of redemption, salt and light, in our broken world.”**

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and heals; sinful anger destroys and kills.

**Q** In Mark 3:1–6, Jesus was angry because the Pharisees were hard of heart. How could Jesus, the perfect man, experience anger?

**A** In His humanity, Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20–21), born of the virgin, Mary (Matt. 1:22–25). The Lord Jesus knew not sin (2 Cor. 5:21), committed no sin (1 Peter 2:22), and in Him there is no sin (1 John 3:5). Since Jesus is sinless, it is obvious that anger can be holy and pure and free from sin. The Lord’s anger in Mark 3 was neither a loss of self-control nor the rage of a powerless person, but the perfect demonstration of His holy nature and heart toward sin.

**Q** In John 2:4, when Jesus referred to his mother as “woman,” was He being rude and disrespectful?

**A** I am 65 years old. Frankly, if I could live to be 9 billion years old, I would never address my late mother, Annie Lou, the product of rural Mississippi, as “woman.” At first glance, especially to our 21st-century ears, our Lord’s words seem rude and cutting. But in reality, they are

not. In the culture of His day, our Lord’s reference to His mother as “woman” was a term of endearment and profound respect. The Lord valued and honored His mother’s womanhood as bearer of the image of God (Gen. 1:27). You will not find a trace of sexism or misogyny in the person of Jesus. May we all value, cherish, and honor our mothers the way He did His (John 19:25–27).

**Q** When the Lord creates the new heavens and the new Earth, will we have physical bodies?

**A** Yes. At the resurrection, God will reunite our departed souls and spirits with our physical bodies (1 Cor. 15:35–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–18). Our resurrected bodies will be glorified (Rom. 8:23), suited for the enjoyment of God forever (Rev. 22:3–5). Our physical embodiment matters to God. On a sad note, God will resurrect unsaved people, who die without trusting Christ, at the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11–15). Their resurrected bodies will be designed to endure the eternal judgment of God in the lake of fire. That’s one of the reasons we preach the gospel and plead with people to trust Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior before it’s eternally too late. ■

# Safe with You

## Read Psalm 57

*Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me,  
for in you I take refuge.—Psalm 57:1*

When our children were toddlers, and we brought them into an unfamiliar situation, like a wedding or graduation party, they would often hide behind my legs when someone tried to talk to them. When little ones feel uncomfortable, they look for safety by clinging to a parent.

In Psalm 57, David reflects on the time he had “fled from Saul, in the cave.” This could be the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22) or the cave in the Desert of Ein Gedi (1 Samuel 24). David prays, “Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge” (57:1). It would seem that the cave was his refuge. But David knew better. God is a far more secure place to hide. David describes God as a mother bird who protects her young by spreading her wings (v. 1).

David was in a difficult situation. He describes his flight from Saul as being “in the midst of lions; . . . men whose teeth are spears and arrows,

whose tongues are sharp swords” (v. 4). Yet in the midst of this violent onslaught, David expresses confidence in God’s great love and faithfulness (v. 10). Even though David has not experienced deliverance yet, his confidence in God makes him want to break out in praise, “I will sing and make music, Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn” (vv. 7–8). David wanted others to join him in this praise. He called out to other nations and peoples to hear about the glory of God (v. 9). In a world where each nation worshiped their own deities, David affirmed that the God of Israel is actually the God over all nations and peoples. His glory is over “all the earth” (v. 11).

► We all long for safety and security. Life is full of potential dangers and disappointments. David models for us a way to lament as well as express confidence in God’s faithfulness. The Lord is our refuge and strength.

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## Pray with Us

David was hiding in a cave, but he knew his real refuge was God alone. May we as believers find our security, protection, and confidence in the Lord, and not in the things of this world.

# Longing for Justice

## Read Psalm 58

*Surely the righteous still are rewarded;  
surely there is a God who judges the earth.—Psalm 58:11*

Of the 3,500 species of snakes in the world, only about 600 are venomous. Nevertheless, snakes can do significant damage. According to the World Health Organization, every year 81,000 to 135,000 people die from snake bites. In today's reading, David compares his enemies to snakes, and the damage they inflict—to venom.

In the opening of Psalm 58, David confronts corrupt “rulers” directly (v. 1). The word here for “rulers” is unusual and could be a reference to supernatural beings or human judges. Based on the language of the psalm as a whole, it is best to understand the term as a reference to corrupt human rulers, who were encouraged and empowered by malevolent spiritual entities. These corrupt rulers had caused enormous suffering, violence, and injustice (v. 2).

Envisioning them as poisonous snakes or ravenous lions, David asks God to “break the teeth in their mouths: “O God! LORD, tear out the fangs of those lions!” (v. 6).

David prays that these rulers would become powerless to continue their oppression. David is honest with God about his desire for their defeat. He prays that they will be “like a slug that melts away” or “like a stillborn child that never sees the sun” (v. 8). His harsh language may be difficult for modern readers, but it is important to remember two things. First, David is praying to God. God already knows the deepest desires of our heart and can handle our unbridled honesty. By praying, we can give these desires over to God. Second, David's ultimate desire was for justice to be done, so that people will know that “there is a God who judges the earth” (v. 11).

▶ I have often had people ask how to pray psalms like this when we are not personally suffering. One way is to pray on behalf of those who are. We can intercede for believers around the world who are suffering for their faith in Christ. Together we pray, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

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### Pray with Us

Today, we pray for believers around the world who are suffering for their faith. They endure injustice and persecution, but you, the Lord of justice, the righteous Judge, are on their side. We praise you—your truth will prevail!

# A Broken World

## Read Psalm 59

*But I will sing of your strength,  
in the morning I will sing of your love.—Psalm 59:16*

Since Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, the world has been broken. As one writer expressed, we live in a world where people “exhibit a corruption of thought, emotion, intention, speech, and disposition.” This impacts every area of our life: work, school recess, even a well-planned vacation. Things are not the way they were supposed to be.

Today’s reading expresses the emotion of living in a broken world. David feels surrounded by adversaries who want to take him down. He describes them as enemies, attackers, evildoers, bloodthirsty, people who lie in wait, conspirators, and slanderers (vv. 1–5). He pictures them like vicious, wild dogs prowling the streets, waiting to pounce (vv. 6, 14). This psalm reminds us of how persistent and pervasive evil is in our world.

But Psalm 59 also reminds us of a deeper reality. God is David’s strength

and fortress (v. 1). David can call to God for deliverance knowing that He is able to hear and powerful enough to act (vv. 5, 8). While this psalm is full of the violence and scheming of the wicked, its final word returns our focus to God’s love and faithfulness. “You, God, are my fortress, my God on whom I can rely” (v. 17). The word translated “rely” is the Hebrew word for God’s covenant love, *hesed*. God is love and will remain faithful to His promises. David knows this and even though his enemies “prowl about the city,” he declares, “but I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love” (vv. 14, 16).

► Over 100 years ago after a revival in Wales, William Rees wrote the hymn “Here is Love,” which reminds us that at the cross, “Heaven’s peace and perfect justice / Kissed a guilty world in love.” Look up the lyrics to this hymn today and join with David in singing of God’s love (v. 16).

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## Pray with Us

Like David, we live in a broken world. And like David, we cry out for God’s mercy and justice. Use the words of Psalm 59 as your prayer today: “You, God, are my fortress, my God on whom I can rely” (v. 17).



# The Promises of God

## Read Psalm 60

*With God we will gain the victory.—Psalm 60:12*

God makes many promises in the Bible. He promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5). Jesus promised that those who seek first His kingdom would have their needs met (Matt. 6:33). Paul assured the Philippians that if they presented their requests to God, “the peace of God . . . will guard your hearts and minds” (Phil. 4:7). What do we do when our experience does not line up with what God has promised?

The people of Israel had been promised by God that the land of Canaan would be given to them (Gen. 12:7). In today’s reading, Israel had suffered a military defeat. David states, “You have rejected us, God, and burst upon us; you have been angry—now restore us!” (60:1). The promise of the land was under threat. What did David do? He clearly describes the problem to God. “You have shaken the land and torn it open . . . You have shown your people desperate times”

(vv. 2–3). Then in poetic language, David reminds God of His promise regarding the land: “God has spoken from his sanctuary: ‘In triumph I will parcel out Shechem and measure off the Valley of Sukkoth’ ” (v. 6). David asks God for help, “Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered” (v. 5).

Finally, David restates his trust in God. He confesses that “human help is worthless” and “with God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies” (vv. 11–12). David knows that his temporary failure doesn’t mean that God’s promises had failed. He trusts that God will be able to make things right.

► Psalm 60 provides us with a model of how to relate to God in times when His promises seem unfulfilled. We can be honest with God and claim His promises. We can remind ourselves that we do not fully understand what God is doing and reaffirm our trust in Him.

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### Pray with Us

When we face disappointment and seemingly unfulfilled promises, we can react like David. Choose honesty with God, claim His promises, and reaffirm your trust in Him. Lord, help us stay faithful even in challenging times.

# Hear My Cry

## Read Psalm 61

*I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.—Psalm 61:4*

During my years as a pastor, I had the privilege of visiting the sick in the hospital. I vividly remember one day meeting with an elderly man from our congregation who was nearing the end of his life. I asked if we could pray together. He began by praying the words of this psalm as if they were his own, “Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint” (vv. 1–2).

We do not know the precise situation David was in when he wrote this psalm, but he was clearly in distress. He felt far from God and longed to experience His presence and hand of blessing again. Throughout this poem, David uses rich metaphors to describe God. He calls God “the rock that is higher than I,” a “refuge,” and a “strong tower” (vv. 2–3). In a world filled with danger, being in God’s presence is safer than any castle or stronghold.

In verse 4, David describes his desire to live in the tabernacle, where

God’s presence was most manifest in ancient Israel. He prays, “I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings” (v. 4). Even in his distress, David is confident that God can hear him and that He cares (v. 5). For David, God was never more than a prayer away.

In verses 6–7, David prays for the king. He asks that God would protect him with His covenant love and faithfulness (v. 7). David understood that in his office as king, he represented both Israel as a nation and the future hope of descendant on the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:11–16). This allows him to end his prayer on a note of hope and praise.

► In his distress, David found hope. He clung to the promise that one day a Davidic king would be “enthroned in God’s presence forever” (v. 7). Give thanks today that we share in that hope. We can “set [our] hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1).

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### Pray with Us

Lord, we thank you for the beautiful Messianic prophesy of Psalm 61. David saw ahead, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the coming of the Eternal King—the Son of David, the Son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1).

# Rest in God

## Read Psalm 62

*Yes, my soul, find rest in God;  
my hope comes from him.—Psalm 62:5*

It is easy to say, “I trust in God,” when things are going well. However, when a crisis hits, our trust is put to the test. We may think that we trust God to supply all our needs until we are faced with a lost job or a sudden downturn in the economy. In that moment, we may find that we have really been trusting in wealth for our security.

In today’s reading, David’s position and security have come under threat. He feels as fragile as a “leaning wall” or a “tottering fence” ready to topple at any moment (v. 3). His enemies are particularly insidious in that they speak well of him to his face, but curse him in their hearts and spread lies about him to others (v. 4).

This situation has caused David to reevaluate what he puts his trust in. He declares that most of the things that people look to for security are not able to provide it. He says, “the lowborn are but a breath, the

highborn are but a lie” (v. 9). In other words, your social position will not bring you security. Riches are a vain hope as well. Therefore, you should “not set your heart on them” (v. 10).

True contentment and security are gifts that come from God alone. “Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him” (v. 1). Therefore it only makes sense to “trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (v. 8). David concludes the psalm by describing the two primary reasons why God is so trustworthy. He is the only source of true power (v. 11) and He is just (v. 12).

► What or who are you putting your trust in? Ask the Lord today to show you if there are any areas of your life that you need to reevaluate so that you can truly place your trust in God and find rest in Him alone.

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### Pray with Us

Do you know how to rest in God? Ask the Lord to help you overcome fear and anxiety. Make David’s words your prayer today: “Truly my soul finds rest in God, my salvation comes from him” (Ps. 62:1).

# Better Than Life

## Read Psalm 63

*You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you. — Psalm 63:1*

The early church father Augustine sought for meaning or fulfillment in his life for years. When he finally came to faith in Christ, he gave thanks to God by saying, “You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they find rest in you.”

In today’s reading, David expresses a deep longing for God’s presence. He knows that only God can satisfy. He confesses, “I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there is no water” (v. 1). As a dry and cracked desert landscape needs water for life to flourish, David knows that he needs intimacy with God in order to survive.

David finds the answer by searching his memory. He looks back on the times when he saw God in the sanctuary and beheld His power and glory (v. 2). He remembers God’s faithful commitment to Him and His people. He declares, “Your love is better than life” (v. 3). The word for love here is *hesed*. It refers to God’s loyalty to His covenant with Israel. David knows that to be in

right relationship with God is more important than life itself.

As David is reminded of God’s faithfulness, he breaks forth in praise, “I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands” (v. 4). David prayed this while in the wilderness. He was likely on the run from Saul, or Absalom. In that context, sleep is a time when one would be especially vulnerable to surprise or attack. David declares, “On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night” (v. 6). He knows that God is his shelter. Because of this, he is confident in God’s protection (vv. 9–10). He knows that ultimately the “mouths of liars will be silenced,” but his mouth will be wide open “with singing lips” (vv. 11, 5).

► In Christ’s work on the cross, we have seen God’s love powerfully displayed. When we feel like God is distant, like we are in the wilderness, we can remember what God has done. Our longing for God can be transformed into praise.

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### Pray with Us

David praised God in “a dry and parched land”—the wilderness of Judah. Do you praise God when you’re going through hard and lonely times? Lord, help us see that “your love is better than life” (Ps. 63:3).

# The Hope of the Righteous

## Read Psalm 64

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.—Proverbs 1:7*

What is the difference between the righteous and the wicked? Is it simply that the righteous generally do the right thing while the wicked do not? While that is partially true, it's not the full story. As seen in our study of the second book of Psalms, the primary difference between the righteous and the wicked relates to their understanding of God as a just judge. The righteous believe that God is just and that He will hold all people accountable for what they do. They live in a healthy fear of God. The wicked do not believe that God sees what they do, or that He cares.

In today's reading, David complains about his enemies, saying, "They encourage each other in evil plans, they talk about hiding their snares; they say, 'Who will see it?'" (v. 5). These enemies work together to slander David to try to bring him down. They are not restrained by any sense that God will judge them for their actions. However, David knows

better. In a profound statement of faith in God, David declares that his enemies will be judged for their actions (vv. 7–8).

There is beautiful symmetry in God's judgment. David's enemies slandered him and used their words like arrows in order to bring about his destruction (vv. 3–4). But the reality is that God "will shoot them with his arrows; they will suddenly be struck down. He will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin" (vv. 7–8). Like a boomerang, the attacks of the enemy will bounce off David and rebound upon themselves. God's justice will lead people to both proclaim the glory of God and ponder what He has accomplished (v. 9).

► David's hope in a just God is our hope as well. While in this life the wicked may seem to get away with evil, we know that ultimately justice will be done. Take a moment today to ponder what God has done and proclaim it to others (v. 9).

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### Pray with Us

We join David's praise—his hope in a just and loving God is our hope as well. The same God works in our lives, giving us a hope and a future. Praise the Lord!

# Praise God

## Read Psalm 65

*Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.—Psalm 65:4*

Have you ever been in a situation where you know you have wronged someone and are anxious for an opportunity to apologize and ask for forgiveness? When you do finally get a chance to say you are sorry, and even restore the relationship, it comes with a huge sense of relief.

David had this experience with God. In today's reading, David praises God because "you forgave us our transgressions" (v. 3). In the Old Testament sins could be forgiven through repentance and participation in animal sacrifice at the temple. Ultimately, Jesus' death would fulfill the requirement for sacrifice. Because of His death, we too are forgiven. We have all the more reason to declare, "Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts!" (v. 4).

In verses 5–8 of this psalm, David praises God for His mighty works in creation. God formed the mountains and is able to calm the mighty power of the seas (vv. 6–7). In the ancient world, the sea was

viewed as a primeval source of chaos and destruction. Even the gods were afraid of its power. But not the God of Israel. He created the sea and can easily tame it. Creation itself joyfully proclaims God's glory from morning to night (v. 8).

In the final stanza, David praises God for His bountiful provision of food and water. In the industrialized world, we are often far removed from our sources of food and don't think much about them. But when David looked at the fertile hills and streams, he recognized God's goodness and care (vv. 9–13). God is the One who clothes the valleys with grain and the fields with flocks (vv. 12–13).

► Even if you don't regularly pray before your meals, take time today to thank God for His provision. It is because of Him that we have nourishment for each day. "You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly" (v. 9). Honor Him with praise today!

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## Pray with Us

God is the Creator and sustainer of all life. We pray together with the Psalmist and praise "God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas" (Ps. 65:5).

# Come and See!

## Read Psalm 66

*Praise our God, all peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard.—Psalm 66:8*

Do you know your family's history? A friend of mine often recounts the story of how and why his family came to Chicago. They were a part of the Great Migration of African-Americans from the South in the early 20th century. This helps him share in the sufferings and joys of his family and community.

In today's reading, the Psalmist celebrates what God has done for Israel by recounting their history. He encourages all people to "Come and see what God has done!" (v. 5). He tells of God's mighty acts during Israel's exodus from Egypt and entry into the Promised Land (v. 6). God is to be praised because He rescued Israel and provided for them.

However, God's care involved more than just miraculous acts. God also disciplined Israel when necessary (vv. 9–11). This was also reason to praise God, as it demonstrated His

love. In verse 13, the Psalmist shifts from speaking about the community as a whole to what God had done in his own life. "Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me," he declares (v. 16). He testifies that God delivered him when he was in trouble (v. 14). It's important to note that he set his personal testimony in the context of the big story of God's salvation in the Old Testament. God did not deliver him for his own sake, but so that he could participate in God's mission to the world. Part of that mission is declaring God's goodness to all people and calling them to worship.

▶ You probably enjoy telling stories of your family's history. But how often do you tell your family's God stories? Take time today to share one thing you saw God do in your family. Thank God for the way He cares for us.

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### Pray with Us

Lord Jesus, thank you for your faithfulness to all generations! Thank you that your miraculous power works from parents to children to grandchildren. We will tell of your wonderful deeds to those who come after us.

# Praying for Blessing

## Read Psalm 67

*May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face shine on us.—Psalm 67:1*

Have you ever felt like your prayer was one long wish list? “Help Aunt Katie to heal from her hip surgery. Help my daughter to do well in math this year. Help. Help. Help.” Are these kinds of prayers selfish? Today’s reading will encourage you that bringing your requests to God is not selfish when done from the right perspective.

The Psalmist begins by asking for God’s blessing (v. 1). God’s blessing can be best understood by reading Deuteronomy 28:1–6. In that passage, Moses describes the blessings of obedience to the covenant as resulting in children, abundant crops, large herds, and full pantries. Notice that this is not a prayer for a lavish lifestyle or excess. Rather it is a prayer that there will be plenty of food, healthy relationships, and the peace to enjoy them. We too can pray with the Psalmist, “May God be gracious to us and bless us” (Ps. 67:1).

Beginning in verse 2, with the word *so*, the Psalmist expresses *why*

God should bless us. “So that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations” (v. 2). The Psalmist’s desire is not merely for his own wellbeing or for Israel, but for the nations around Israel to know God and praise Him (vv. 3–5). God’s promise to Abraham would benefit all people (Gen. 12:3). By witnessing God’s hand of blessing on Israel, others would be drawn to God. True peace and justice would only be possible when all people come under the rule of God (v. 4). The hope of this Psalm will be fulfilled in Jesus. In His death, He “purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9).

► Today’s reading helps us focus on the “why” of our prayers. We can pray for God’s blessing so that His mission and purpose may be fulfilled. May the Lord bless you and keep you today!

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## Pray with Us

Today’s short psalm (only seven verses) shows how important it is to ask God for His blessing and bless others. Pray a simple prayer of blessing today.



# Names of God

## Read Psalm 68

*Our God is a God who saves.—Psalm 68:20*

Most of us have a number of different roles or titles by which we are known. I have been called a husband, father, son, uncle, professor, and a hapless Detroit Lions fan. Each of those titles gives a little understanding about part of my life. Today's reading gives insight into who God is by describing His unique characteristics. A majestic and powerful hymn, Psalm 68 begins by celebrating God's power. The psalmist describes God's care for Israel in the wilderness (vv. 7–10), His defeat of Israel's enemies (vv. 12, 18), and His residence on Mt. Zion (vv. 15–18).

There are many titles used to describe God in this psalm. He is described as the one "who rides on the clouds" (v. 4). This was a title Canaanites used for their storm god, Baal. Here David uses the title for Israel's God. It's his way of saying that the Lord is the true God, not Baal. The Lord is described as "a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows" (v. 5). It is important to

recognize that God uses His power to help and protect the most vulnerable in society. For many today who do not have a father figure, or parent in their life, this verse is a precious reminder of God's care.

God is also called "the One of Sinai" (v. 8). God revealed Himself to Israel through the giving of the Law. Our God is one who communicates with His people. The Lord is "our Savior, who daily bears our burdens" (v. 19) and a "God who saves" (v. 20). This is most vividly seen and fulfilled in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. All these names are reasons to sing praise to the Lord (v. 32)!

► Psalm 68 celebrates both God's transcendent power and His fatherly care for each person. Thank the Lord today that both of these aspects of God are true. We can also look forward to the day when we will experience God's presence in person (Rev. 21:3).

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### Pray with Us

If you've ever lost a parent or a spouse, may these words from Psalm 68 comfort you: "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling" (v.5). You are not alone. Praise His holy name!

# Save Me, God

## Read Psalm 69

*Save me, O God, for the waters  
have come up to my neck.—Psalm 69:1*

In Buffalo, New York, a young woman drove her car into a flooded viaduct not realizing the depth of the water. As water rushed into her vehicle, she escaped out of the window and climbed onto the roof. News cameras captured the dramatic scene as emergency crews used a rescue boat to reach the stranded woman, safely rescuing her from atop the submerging vehicle.

Sometimes life feels like that news story. When things go wrong or people attack us, we may feel like we are sinking under the pressure. David gets right to the point in his lament. He describes himself as being engulfed by deep waters, his throat is hoarse from crying out to God, and his eyes are tired from looking for God's answer (vv. 1–3). There are many reasons why he was suffering. He was threatened by enemies (v. 4), slandered and disgraced (vv. 4, 7), and scorned even by his family (v. 8).

In the depth of his suffering, David lashes out and prays that his enemies will be paid back for what they had done (vv. 22–28). This may sound harsh to our modern ears. But, as one commentator said, “We live in a culture that seeks to deny pain and death. The Psalms . . . saw that the way to hope is through fear; the way to real joy is through depression; the way to loving one's enemies is through hostility. Not around these realities but through them.” God does not want us to pretend like everything is okay when it is not. This psalm models a way to give our anger and desire for vengeance over to Him.

▶ Do you feel up to your neck with difficult situations? If so, this psalm provides language we can use to talk to God. The Psalmist also describes the suffering of Jesus. It's because of His victory over sin and death that we can have hope, even in dark times.

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### Pray with Us

Our Scripture reading today predicted Jesus' suffering. Reflect on the psalms we've read so far and thank God for revealing to the Psalmists the coming Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world—Jesus Christ.

# Saving Help

## Read Psalm 70

*May those who long for your saving help always say, "The LORD is great!"—Psalm 70:4*

Sometimes we have a hard time asking for help. On more than one occasion this has caused me to get into a difficulty that I could have easily avoided. One reason why many of us struggle with asking for help is that we like to think that we want to be thought of as self-sufficient.

In today's reading, David recognized that he could not solve his problems by himself. He needed God's help, and he needed it quickly! Notice the urgency in his language. He begins this short lament with the word "hasten" and ends it with the command "do not delay"! In between these two pleas he twice urges God to "come quickly" (vv. 1, 5).

David illustrates his plight by describing two groups of people. There are those who want to take his life, shame him, and discredit him (vv. 2–3). David prays that these people will be stopped in their tracks. Then there are people who rejoice in the Lord. These people

never tire of declaring that "The LORD is great!" (v. 4). David prays that they will be supported and blessed. He places himself in this latter group and declares, "But as for me, I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God" (v. 5).

This prayer teaches us that we should recognize and confess our need for God. We are not self-sufficient and there is no shame in begging God for help. It also teaches us that in the midst of a difficult situation, we can still proclaim that "The LORD is great!" (v. 4). When we do so we are joining with the faithful throughout the ages who have testified to its truth.

► In the gospels, a father asked Jesus to heal his son. Jesus said if he really believed He would help. The father replied, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). This father illustrates the sense of dependence on God displayed in today's psalm.

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### Pray with Us

Lord, show us how to recognize our need for you. Help us always to turn to you in our time of difficulty. Today's psalm teaches us how to do this in a humble and honest way.

# I Will Praise You

## Read Psalm 71

*Do not cast me away when I am old;  
do not forsake me when my strength is gone. — Psalm 71:9*

Western society often idolizes youth and marginalizes the elderly. In 2019, people in the United States spent over 53 billion dollars on anti-aging products. This reflects a widespread anxiety about growing older. We fear the loss of significant work, the deterioration of our health, and the ability to be heard and valued.

While we do not know who wrote Psalm 71, it was someone advanced in years (vv. 9, 18). He fears being disrespected and shamed by others (vv. 1, 4, 10–11). He recognizes the loss of physical strength (v. 9) and feels vulnerable and dependent upon others (vv. 4, 11, 18). Yet this is someone who has walked with God. “For you have been my hope, Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth” (v. 5). In the midst of lamenting his situation, the Psalmist models several ways to process these fears and anxieties.

First, he looks back over his life and recognizes that God has been faithful in the past and can be trusted

with the future (vv. 6, 14, 15, 17). Long experience has taught him of God’s faithfulness. He can take comfort in God’s continued care.

Second, he knows he has an important purpose in life. He has a responsibility to relay what God has done to the next generation. He asks God not to forsake him, “till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come” (v. 18). He can testify to God’s might and power in a unique way, given the perspective long years of walking with God have given him. By the end of the psalm he has worked through his lament and turned instead to joyful praise (vv. 22–24).

► Today’s reading has encouragement for both the young and old. The young should learn from the experience and wisdom of older saints. Those who are more advanced in years should communicate God’s goodness and grace to the next generation.

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### Pray with Us

Thank God that followers of Jesus of any age can serve Him and bless others. May Psalm 71 encourage you, whether you are young or old. Ask for the Holy Spirit’s power to use your age and to surrender your whole life to God’s will.

# Your Kingdom Come

## Read Psalm 72

*May all kings bow down to him  
and all nations serve him.—Psalm 72:11*

Has there ever been a perfect king or president? While history books record the achievements and the failures of those in positions of power, I'm sure we'll agree that it's difficult to find any leader who is completely without fault. In today's psalm the prayers of those seeking justice are answered with the gift of an ideal king. This prayer provides us with a vision of what such an ideal king's reign would look like.

Here the Psalmist prays that the king will reflect the character of the Lord in administering justice (v. 1). The success of this king will not be measured by his wealth, but by how he treats the poor and the needy (vv. 2, 4). This king will rescue the vulnerable from the hand of oppressors (vv. 12–14). This king's reign will be marked by prosperity for all, a long reign, and an enduring peace (vv. 3–7). His rule will extend from "sea to sea and from the River to

the ends of the earth" (v. 8). Under his just and righteous rule, there will not be hunger or violence.

In Genesis 12:1–3, God promised Abram that through his offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed. That promise is fulfilled in the reign of this king. The Psalmist declares, "Then all the nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed" (v. 17). His praise turns to God "who alone does marvelous deeds" (v. 18). In case you haven't figured it out already, this psalm finds its fulfillment in Jesus. He is the King who will bring true peace and justice. He alone will rule over the nations (Rev. 21:25–26).

► Today, make a list of leaders who need your prayer. They can be leaders in your church, your community, your workplace, and in our nation. We know that God is the King of kings, and all true power and justice come through Him alone.

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### Pray with Us

Psalm 72 is a visionary prayer of Solomon for the future king. We pray today for leaders in our churches, communities, and in our nation. You can use Janet Parshall's booklet, *Prayer and Politics*, this month's featured resource.

# A Longing Satisfied

## Read Psalm 42

*But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.—John 4:14*

It has always amazed me that you do not have to teach children how to talk. Language is incredibly complex—as anyone who has tried to learn a second language knows well. Yet, children learn to speak just by listening to those around them. Their mastery comes by seeing speech modeled for them day after day.

We conclude our study by returning to the place where we started, with Psalm 42. Here, the speaker expresses his longing for God's presence. To him, God seems distant and remote. Twice the Psalmist rouses himself, saying, "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (vv. 5, 11).

He realizes the need to embrace God's promised future. He knows that ultimately, God will work things out. The psalms in Book 2 model for us how to put our hope in God. Just as a child learns how to speak by listening to others, we can learn how to put

our hope in God by praying through the psalms. In these powerful poems, the Psalmists engage with God during difficult and trying circumstances: pursued by enemies, when falsely accused, as their nation is defeated, when they see the wicked prosper, when they are confronted by their own sin, when they are under God's judgment, and when God answers their requests.

They are honest with God and with themselves, trusting in God's plan and intentions, looking to Him instead of at others for their worth and value, and by trusting that God's promised Messiah will come to redeem and rule.

► Biblical faith is characterized by hope. Just like the Psalmists looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, we long for His return. This gives us confidence to approach God's throne boldly, praying that "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

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### Pray with Us

We conclude this month the same way we started . . . with the hope we have in God! As we pray today, follow the Psalmist's exhortation: "Put your hope in God" (Ps. 42:5, 11).

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