



Lifted Up during Lockdown



Day Shares in the Psalms – Robert K Neilly

Lifted Up during Lockdown

27 September 2020 10:53

Introduction

It was in August to September 2019 that I felt that the Lord was leading me to start a work in His name. I had come to the decision that it was time for me to hand over to someone else to manage the Rawnsley site during the Keswick Convention. I was very aware that this would create a vacuum and I did not want to become depressed and downhearted. Satan can so easily take advantage of a situation like this - my mind had been very occupied as one of the team involved in setting up the Convention and then packing away all the equipment at the end of the three week event. My wife and I discussed how this would affect me and we prayed together about this.

It was my son who planted the seed of distributing the word of God using new information technology. Robin's whole career has been in multimedia and IT and he pointed out in a conversation that Christian leaders can reach a wider audience online than in a church building. The concept of Day Share emerged from this conversation.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom
Colossians 3:16.

This verse was the basis for Day Share. I was initially uncomfortable with the word admonishing one another. It seemed wrong for me to admonish other Christians. I was happy enough to teach the Word of God but the thought of admonishing was too much for me. However, I soon realised that I was not being true to the Word of God or to the Holy Spirit. The Lord was telling me to apply the Word of God to my life and to share this with other Christians. Every time we open the Bible prayerfully, we are challenged. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that the Bible is not a dead book like work of literature or non-fiction book.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
[Hebrews 4:12 ESV]

This reminds me of the onerous responsibility attached to Bible exposition and teaching. It is like rewiring a house with the mains supply still switched on. But there is an inexhaustible supply of divine truth available to us and we have the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. I pondered the phrase - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." I can so easily become spiritually impoverished while there is an abundance of nourishment available to me. I don't want to have a spiritual feast on my own - I want to share it with my fellow Christians. Is it not better that we share the word of God rather than all the destructive things we could be sharing?

Since September 2019, I have been sharing a short devotional Bible study every second day either by WhatsApp or by email. There are over 60 people who receive this every second day - I have not been able to do this every day. Those who receive the email with the attachment are unaware of other group members so there is no dialogue - although some reply to me personally with comments. The WhatsApp group allows for discussion and all members of the group can participate.

Even before lockdown, I was challenged by the number of members of Maddiston Evangelical Church who live alone and must experience isolation and loneliness. This has become even more acute in 2020 with Coronavirus causing the church building to close and bringing an end to us

meeting together for fellowship, prayer, Bible teaching etc. I have always been aware that there are some brothers and sisters who are not able to access Day Share.

As it seems likely that it may be many more months at least before we can meet together in the building in California Road, I thought I would share some of the studies we have looked at in the Psalms. They have been an encouragement to me in the last six months as I have read the Psalms. Although Day Share has now moved into the New Testament, I felt it was appropriate to make an effort to share some selected Day Shares from the Psalms with others who may be in need of encouragement. I know that you can study the Bible on your own and that there is a plethora of sources of Bible teaching. I just hope that there is some value in the meditations I am sharing. I hope I am not being presumptuous in any way.

So I have printed out a selection of Day Shares on the Psalms and have shared them with other church members because I have been encouraged and challenged by reading them and I wanted to share them more widely across the church. The date after each title is when they were issued to the group,

What are Psalms? 24/03/2020

The book of Psalms was originally Israel's hymn book - there are 150 Psalms. The New Testament contains many quotations from the Psalms. Psalms have been popular with Christians throughout the centuries and many of us have found comfort from the best-known Psalms - especially Psalm 23. The Free Church of Scotland has a tradition of using the book of Psalms as their hymn book.

The word 'Psalms' means 'praises' and there are psalms which are joyful and happy. Others are pretty mournful and a bit depressing. That's what I like about the psalms. I want to be honest - I am not always on the top of the world. I am not always wanting to sing cheerful songs. There are times when I get a bit downcast and overwhelmed. I have times when I am full of praise to God - but I have other times when things are not quite as rosy.

Janie and I were asked to be 'dragons' at a presentation given by a group at Go Youth Trust in Falkirk. Dave Bremner and his team do excellent work with young people and we were there for a group who are in their late teens and they are doing a course to help them to prepare for the world of work. They are setting up a mini-company and they were making a presentation as if it was Dragons Den - you maybe have seen it on TV. Janie and I were two of the dragons. We had to hide our emotions as the group made a presentation to us about their product and the company they were setting up. They were planning to make decorative candles. What I found interesting was that their USP (Unique Selling Point) was that the candles were intended to reflect different moods - and this was to appeal to the 16+ age group because they are prone to mood swings. If you know a teenager, you will maybe agree with this or maybe not.

This is just where the Psalms come in - they cover worship and praise when we are filled with thankfulness to God. They also deal with times when we are feeling depressed or despondent. There are psalms of lament - when the writer expresses his complaint to God. There are psalms when he complains that the ungodly have a better time than he has.

No matter how you are feeling today, there is a Psalm with your name on it.

Prayer,

We are confused and fearful about the future. Most of us have never lived through a situation like this. The news coming into our homes is frightening. The Psalms were written by people going through very hard times. They are also full of praise and Thanksgiving to you.

God and Father, Help us to turn from despair to worship. Help us to grasp that you are still the all-powerful One - the great Creator. Help us to appreciate your loving Kindness. May we support each other through this crisis.

Amen.

Word Pictures (Psalms) Additional 24/03/2020

We also need to remember that the Psalms were written to be sung. They are basically poetry and we need to interpret them as that. The psalms use a variety of word pictures and I want to introduce some of them briefly in this Day Share. Some psalms use images such as a 'way' or a 'path' and the writer is not meaning that we are going to be walking along a particular path in Palestine - it is a word picture for our 'Christian' life. The best known psalm is Psalm 23 and this uses a metaphor - The Lord is my Shepherd. David is using this word picture of a sheep and shepherd to describe his relationship with God. He is not saying that he is eating grass and sleeping in a sheep fold. Sometimes, the psalms have a comparison or a simile and use the word 'like' or 'as'. The best example of this is the first psalm - where the psalmist compares the godly person to a tree planted by streams of water. He is not saying that the godly stay in the one place long enough to have roots which go underground. There is also another figure of speech which is sometimes used - known as hyperbole. This is basically exaggeration - there is a statement made which we are not supposed to take literally. "My tears have been my food day and night." If we were to take this literally, we might suppose that he has given up eating and has taken to collecting his tears and then drinking them. No, this is a figure of speech where he is making the point about how unhappy he is. We need to be aware of this type of speech and language.

Who wrote the Psalms? 26/03/2020

I have always linked David, the shepherd boy who became king, with the Psalms and many, but not all Psalms, contain an inscription 'A Psalm of David.' The scholars dispute whether these were all written by David but we are not going to get too concerned about that. Some Psalms were clearly written by him and are linked to particular events in his life. David's name is linked to 73 Psalms and there are two other Psalms where the New Testament suggests that they were written by David. So half the Psalms were written by David. He was a musician - skilful in playing the lyre (1 Samuel 16:16-23) and he was an accomplished song writer (2 Samuel 1:17-27; 22:1 - 23:7). In 2 Samuel 23:1 he is described as 'the sweet psalmist of Israel.'

Other writers of the Psalms include Moses, David's son, Solomon and a man called Asaph who lived much later than King David.

The Psalms were probably written over a long period of time - maybe 1,000 years. It is great that we have these varied Psalms all collected in one place. It is amazing too that there are themes which run right through the Psalms from Psalm 1 to Psalm 150. We have set aside several Day Shares to look briefly at these themes.

We need to remember that the Psalms are part of the inspired Word of God for our day and generation. God wants us to read the psalms and to think about them. He wants us to allow the Psalms to give us a greater appreciation of God and to help us to see our faults and shortcomings in the light of God's word.

Prayer.

Lord, we ask you to open our hearts and minds to understand the wonders of these writings from so long ago. We thank you that we have them readily available to us today in 2020. We have so many guides and books to help us to understand the message you are conveying to us from the psalms. Above all, we have the Holy Spirit who guides us into the truth. We will learn more about ourselves - and our sinful ways. We will learn more about God and who you are. We will learn more about your Son, the promised Messiah. Lord, guide us as we read and meditate upon the psalms.

Amen

Themes in the Psalms 28/03/2020

I have compiled a list of themes that I have identified in the Psalms. There are many books written on the Psalms but I have read through the Psalms over the last month or so, noting the themes which are recurring. I have tried to avoid using any commentaries - as far as possible - to try to keep it simple and hopefully relevant. The numbers in brackets are the number of Psalms which contain a reference to the theme listed.

There are 7 major themes relating to God.

God's Sovereignty (70)
God as Creator (15)
God's Holiness (13)
God's Protection and Security (40)
God's Providence (15)
God's Deliverance (46)
God's Loving Kindness (36)

Then there are several themes relating to our response to God

Worshipping God (72)
Delight in God (13)
God's Covenant (6)
Joy (30)
Prayer to God (58)
Thanksgiving to God (18)
Faith and confidence in God (28)

In many psalms the writer feels angry and sad. Trying to come to terms with evil and feeling a sense of injustice

Laments to God (65)
Depression and anxiety (7)
Justice - desire for vengeance (86)
Enemies (6)
Sin and Disobedience (16)
The Ungodly (43) - total of 88 references.

The word of God is a theme which is featured in the longest Psalm - Psalm 119 which is primarily on that theme.

Word of God [2 Psalms 19 and 119]

Meditation on God's Word [The word 'selah' is used in 39 of the Psalms and it occurs a total of 71 times. This may have been used as an opportunity for pausing and reflecting on the message]

The last themes relate to history and future events

Israel's History - lesson to nations (11)

The Coming Messiah (14) - 28 passages quoted in New Testament

Future Glory

The Day Shares will now focus briefly on these themes. This will not be an intellectual exercise so much as a devotional study. We need to keep our hearts and minds focused on 'things above.' This deadly virus is not only harmful to the human body: it has the potential to destroy our spiritual life if we allow it to do so.

I have been amazed at how relevant the Psalms are to our situation in 2020.

God's Sovereignty (Psalms) 30/03/2020

The word sovereignty refers to the great truth about God. He is the ruler of the whole world. He is all-powerful - He exists eternally and He is above all His creatures on earth and in heaven. There is no one who can challenge His rule. He is all-knowing - there is nothing which is hidden from Him. He is always right in all His actions. He is always present everywhere in all the universe and He has always existed even before the beginning of this world.

Read Psalm 2 - a portrayal of the nations of the earth plotting together in a conspiracy against God. But God is presented as supreme ruler over the nations. He laughs at the puny attempts of humans to rebel against Him. He presents His Son before them as the anointed one whom all the nations should serve. The advice given to the rulers is contained in the last verse of this Psalm

Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Psalms 2:12 NIV

This advice is relevant to all rulers today - elected or not. By 'kissing the Son' it refers to the act of acknowledging His supremacy. When Alexander III, King of Scotland died in 1286, there were thirteen men who claimed the right to be the next king. It was decided to ask the king of England to decide which had the best claim to the throne. King Edward 1 insisted that all of the thirteen swore allegiance to him. This involved a ceremony which was similar to the idea contained in this expression, 'kissing the Son.' They all had to bow down before him and kiss his ring. This is what is advised for the great of the earth - Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, Kim Jong-Un, Bashar al-Assad etc. etc. must all bow down and recognise that Jesus is Lord.

Psalm 22 covers this same theme

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the

Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!
[Psalms 22:27-31 NIV]

This is looking forward to a future day when God's sovereignty - his right to rule over all the nations - will be acknowledged. Notice this Psalm refers to the rich of the earth - literally 'the fat' and they are bowing before the Lord and declaring that He is infinitely greater than they are. They are not doing this willingly - they have no choice but to admit that God is great and supreme. It does not matter whether they have believed on Him or not up till this point. They are now admitting that He is Lord of the Universe.

Prayer

We thank you that we have 'kissed the Son' - when we accepted Jesus as Lord of our lives. May we continue to allow him to be Lord of all of our lives. May there not be some rooms to which we do not allow him access. Stop us from having recesses and alcoves in our hearts where we store our unbelief and our sins. Lord reign in me today.

Amen.

God's sovereignty over His creation. (Psalms) 01/04/2020

Psalm 24 presents God as Sovereign over the world which He created.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. [Psalms 24:1-2 NIV]

This verse sees God as the creator of the world and establishing his claim to own the earth and its inhabitants by virtue of the fact that He is the creator. This is one reason why mankind are very reluctant to accept any notion of creation. Scientists have come up with theories which exclude God from the formation of the universe. Accepting the truth of creation implies admitting that there is a being who is greater than us and has rights over us.

Psalm 29 demonstrates God's power and sovereignty over creation by his power over the natural world. The Psalm speaks about thunder and earthquakes. It refers to floods. It speaks about the tall spectacular cedars of Lebanon being shattered by wind or other 'natural' phenomenon. It uses the picture of a calf skipping to describe whole forests bowing in the wind. We have seen the forces of nature at work in recent years in fires, floods, earthquakes and tsunamis.

The God of glory thunders. The Lord thunders over the mighty sea. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord splits the mighty cedars; the Lord shatters the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon's mountains skip like a calf; he makes Mount Hermon leap like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord strikes with bolts of lightning. The voice of the Lord makes the barren wilderness quake; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord twists mighty oaks and strips the forests bare. In his Temple everyone shouts, "Glory!" The Lord rules over the floodwaters. [Psalm 29: 3-10 NLT]

God Willing, we are going to be looking at two illustrations of how powerful and amazing God is when we look at Psalm 139. The Day Share devotional is entitled - O Lord, you examine me (Psalm 139) 03/08/2020. This will focus on God's omniscience - that just means that there is nothing hidden from God because He knows everything and God's omnipresence which means that He is everywhere at the same time so we cannot escape from His presence.

Prayer

Lord, we thank you that you are so powerful and so mighty. We find it hard to comprehend just how great you are. Lord, we confess that we often are guilty of making you smaller than you are - please forgive us for this. Help us to appreciate more of your majesty and greatness. Help us to see your greatness in this world and the forces of nature which are all around us. Help us to remember that you are far above all the rulers of the earth. May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen

God as Creator (Psalms) 03/04/2020

How many living things you have made, O Lord ! You have exhibited great skill in making all of them; the earth is full of the living things you have made. [Psalm 104:24 NET]

When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers— the moon and the stars you set in place— what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? [Psalm 8: 3-4 NLT]

The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world. God has made a home in the heavens for the sun. It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race. The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. Nothing can hide from its heat. [Psalm 19: 1-6 NLT]

The creation is God's continued proclamation of his glory. He is speaking to the human race through his creation. Every day that we live, we have evidence of the greatness of God's creation. God preaches a sermon without uttering a single word. Every part of the globe hears this sermon on the theme of God's glory in creation. In these verses, there is a focus on one aspect of God's creation - the sun. There are two similes - comparisons with the word 'like'. Firstly, the sun is compared to a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. The writer describes the sunrise in vivid terms - the sun 'bursts forth' speaking of the excitement and happiness of the bridegroom with his new bride. Secondly, the sun is compared to an athlete - in its vitality and energy and enthusiasm. Notice the sun is personified - it is described very much in the way we would describe a person. "The sun has got his hat on, hip hip hip hooray." This is a more childish statement of the same truth. Do we not all enjoy the sunshine and the beauty of the sunrise and the sunset? They are all evidence of the hand of God in creation. We know that the sun's rays can be harmful too but we all depend so much on the warmth the radiance of the sun.

The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. The Bible is not a scientific textbook - the sun does not move- the earth is in orbit round the sun. However, we all see the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. 'Nothing can hide from its heat.' David had not heard of global warming and he was living in a pre-industrial age - when there was no little or no pollution to destroy the protection God had provided to protect us from the rays of the sun . David is aware of our dependence on the heat from the sun.



Sunset in the Hebrides - Kintra Bay in Islay.

Prayer

Lord,

Help us to appreciate the beauty and wonder of your creation. When we look at a sunset or a sunrise, help us to worship the creator of the sun and the moon and all the planets. We see so many signs of your creation all around us - may we never forget the One who made all of this creation.

Amen.

God's rights over His creation. (Psalms) 05/04/2020

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. For he laid the earth's foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths. [Psalm 24: 1-2 NLT]

This is fitting reminder that our God has a claim to this earth. In the 21st century, we have forgotten that God is the creator. We have substituted science for God and we claim that this universe came about by accident. I find that so far-fetched and incredible. This universe is boundless and amazing in its complexity. Scientific knowledge has increased our knowledge of the work of God in creation. There are some reading this Day Share who know far more about science than I do. However, in broad terms the botanist can explain the complexity of the cells which make up each blade of grass and each flower. The biologist can explain the complexity of the cells which make up the human body. All of this points to a Creator - it could not have come about by accident. We need to remember that God has a claim over his creation.

For every wild animal in the forest belongs to me, as well as the cattle that graze on a thousand hills. I keep track of every bird in the hills, and the insects of the field are mine. Even if I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all it contains belong to me [Psalm 50 :10-12 NET]

Psalms 33 talks about our response to God as the creator.

By the Lord's decree the heavens were made; by a mere word from his mouth all the stars in the sky were created. He piles up the water of the sea; he puts the oceans in storehouses. Let the whole earth fear the Lord! Let all who live in the world stand in awe of him!

There are several psalms which make the point that the creation was due to God's spoken word. God had merely to give a command and the earth came into being. The writers of the psalms want us as humans to respect the greatness and majesty of our Creator God - we need to fear (in the sense of show reverence and awe) God. As Christians we should never forget the majesty of the Creator.

Prayer

Lord, We thank you that the earth is yours and everything in it belongs to you. We acknowledge you as our Maker and Lord over our lives. We thank you that you have spoken to us in your creation. Maybe our generation is not listening. Help us to set an example in thanksgiving to you for what you have done and caring for the planet.

Amen.

God's Holiness (Psalms) 07/04/2020

The Bible describes God as Holy but this is a hard idea for us to grasp. It is not just sinless - though God is, of course, completely sinless. It means that God is totally distinct and separate from us. He is so different from us that we find it hard to understand what He is like.

The ESV Study Bible says that "God is absolutely and uniquely excellent above all creation (majesty) and without sin (purity)." The same article says that this has implications for us - "God should be feared and obeyed, and his people should earnestly pursue moral purity."

There are some descriptions of God in the Psalms which emphasise that He is to be feared because He is holy and hates sin so much. Here is one passage which shows that God is indeed above us and is so different from us in his holiness and hatred of sin.

El, God, the Lord speaks, and summons the earth to come from the east and west. From Zion, the most beautiful of all places, God comes in splendour. Our God approaches and is not silent; consuming fire goes ahead of him and all around him a storm rages. He summons the heavens above, as well as the earth, so that he might judge his people. [Psalm 50:1-4 NET]

There is an even more powerful passage in another Psalm.

Smoke poured from his nostrils; fierce flames leaped from his mouth. Glowing coals blazed forth from him. He opened the heavens and came down; dark storm clouds were beneath his feet. Mounted on a mighty angelic being, he flew, soaring on the wings of the wind. He shrouded himself in darkness, veiling his approach with dark rain clouds. Thick clouds shielded the brightness around him and rained down hail and burning coals. The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded amid the hail and burning coals. He shot his arrows and scattered his enemies; great bolts of lightning flashed, and they were confused. Then at your command, O Lord, at the blast of your breath, the bottom of the sea could be seen, and the foundations of the earth were laid bare. [Psalm 18: 8-15 NLT]

This passage sends a shiver through my spine when I read it. How can I as a sinner ever expect to please a holy God like this? But we need to remember that as Christians, we are viewed 'in Christ' - this means that God in all His holiness sees us as He sees His Son. His own Son took the place of the sinner and bore the penalty for sin, so that we can come into God's presence - not in any righteousness that we may think we have - because it is totally unacceptable to such a God. But we have been justified - declared righteous in the same way as Jesus was righteous. He was the only One who did not sin and pleased God in everything He did. The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. [1 John 1:7]

The Hebrew word translated 'holy' is used many times in the Old Testament - 458 times, mostly in the early books of the Bible - Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. It is used at least 42 times in the Psalms. Here are two psalms which speak about us approaching God's presence - which is referred to in different ways - it is sometimes called 'the sanctuary' and other times it is referred to as a holy hill or mountain.

Who may worship in your sanctuary, Lord ? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill? Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts.
Psalm 15:1-2 NLT

Who may climb the mountain of the Lord ? Who may stand in his holy place? Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols and never tell lies. They will receive the Lord's blessing and have a right relationship with God their saviour. Such people may seek you and worship in your presence, O God of Jacob. [Psalm 24:3-6 NLT]

God is holy - what it means for us. (Psalms) 09/04/2020

Who may climb the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols and never tell lies. They will receive the Lord's blessing and have a right relationship with God their saviour. Such people may seek you and worship in your presence, O God of Jacob. [Psalm 24:3-6 NLT]

This writer is acknowledging that God is so holy that we cannot go into his presence in our sins. And yet, the writers of the Psalms were not completely sinless. David, for example, was only too aware of his sins. (See Psalm 51) He sought forgiveness from God and asked God to be cleansed from his sin and washed from his iniquity.

How blessed is the one whose rebellious acts are forgiven, whose sin is pardoned! How blessed is the one whose wrongdoing the Lord does not punish, in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I refused to confess my sin, my whole body wasted away, while I groaned in pain all day long. For day and night you tormented me; you tried to destroy me in the intense heat of summer. (Selah) Then I confessed my sin; I no longer covered up my wrongdoing. I said, "I will confess my rebellious acts to the Lord ." And then you forgave my sins. [Psalm 32: 1-5 NET]

This is the experience of the Christian. Our sin has been pardoned at the cross of Jesus. Our rebellious acts have been forgiven because of the shed blood and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. We know the thrill and joy of having our sins forgiven.

In another Psalm, the writer has been through a process of soul-searching.
You have tested my thoughts and examined my heart in the night. You have scrutinized me and found nothing wrong. [Psalm 17:3 NLT]

This is not saying that he has never sinned. It is not claiming that he is without sin. It is saying that he has been in the presence of the all-seeing God and is now in a right state before God. He has confessed his sins to God and has a clear conscience before God.

Reveal your light and your faithfulness! They will lead me, they will escort me back to your holy hill, and to the place where you live. [Psalm 43:3 NET]

Prayer

God our Father, We acknowledge that you are holy. You cannot tolerate sin. I could not enter your presence in my sin. I could never be in heaven when this life is over with my sin unforgiven. Praise your name that you provided a way for a sinner like me to be able to approach your holy presence. Praise your name that you made it possible for a sinner like me to be with you in heaven eternally - because of Jesus' death on the cross. I cannot really appreciate fully what you have done for me.

Amen

God's Protection and Security (Psalms) 11/04/2020

For the Lord watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction. [Psalm 1: 6 NLT]

This is an introductory statement in the first Psalm - God is looking after His own people. This is contrasted to the way of the ungodly which is heading towards destruction. This is a major theme of the Psalms - God protects those who have taken refuge in Him.

In Psalm 12, God's people are suffering oppression at the hands of ungodly people but God is aware of this and promises that He will intervene to protect His own people.

The Lord replies, "I have seen violence done to the helpless, and I have heard the groans of the poor. Now I will rise up to rescue them, as they have longed for me to do." [Psalm 12: 5 NLT]

The writer of this Psalm is assured that the Lord will protect them and guard them. This is very relevant to the many Christians who are suffering persecution today. There are Christians in prison in North Korea, for example - God is looking after them. They might still be in prison for their faith and God does not promise us a life exempt from trouble - but we know that God is still on the throne and He will remember His own. He will not forsake them. They are precious to Him.

In Psalm 17, the writer is praying for preservation from his enemies but he acknowledges that God powerfully delivers those who look to him for protection. He uses a lovely expression to show that those who are trusting in God are very close to His heart - he describes them as the pupil of God's eye. [Psalm 17:8 NET] Some translations use the term 'apple' of the eye. It is instinctive for us to blink when our eyes are threatened in any way. This is 'nature's' way of protecting such a valuable part of the body. So God instinctively (as it were) protects His own. To a Christian who is suffering for his or her faith, it may not seem like this - but God's word is reliable and God loving kindness is unshakeable. We are very dear to Him. In this Psalm, the writer asks for God to preserve him 'under the shadow of his wings.' This is how the mother hen looks after her young - she shelters them in the safest place - under the shadow of her wings.

Pictures of Protection (Psalms) 13/04/2020

There are some beautiful word pictures used in the Psalms to describe God's protection.

1. Shield - This was a defensive weapon used in Bible times and in fact used in many battles in our own history. The shield protected the soldier from arrows which were being fired at him. The shield took the blows of the arrows or the sword of the enemy and the soldier was unharmed underneath. He was still in the thick of the battle - but the impact of the enemy's weapons was weakened. In Psalm 3, David says "But you, Lord, are a shield that protects me." The shield would have many marks and indents where the arrows, daggers or swords had landed. The shield had taken the blow instead of him. Our Saviour on the cross took the blows that should have landed on us - He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities [Isaiah 53] Psalm 91 has a beautiful section *He will shelter you with his wings; you will find safety under his wings. His faithfulness is like a shield or a protective wall. You need not fear the terrors of the night, the arrow that flies by day, the plague that comes in the darkness, or the disease that comes at noon. Though a thousand may fall beside you, and a multitude on your right side, it will not reach you.* [Psalm 91: 4-10 NET]



2. Rock - My God is my rocky summit where I take shelter [Psalm 18:2 NET] In Bible a large rock provided great stability and protection. Edinburgh Castle is built on a huge rock - it towers over the landscape and provided great protection from the many enemies who tried to attack, David may have been referring to the holy mount in Jerusalem on which the temple was built. Janie and I had to shelter in a huge rock when we were out hiking in the island of Arran a few years ago. The tide had come in and we had to climb a massive rock for safety. We were maybe not particularly comfortable but we were safe from the waves below. Rocks often had crevices which provided shelter from the sun and the wind and rain. Our God is a shelter from the storms of life. We will still be aware of the storm - but our future is secure in His hands. The rock provided stability and permanence - it has been there for thousands of years and will continue to be there. The rock provided protection from enemies and from the storms. We can trust in our God - He is unchanging and will protect us from harm and evil.



Here is how the writer of Psalm 18 speaks about his experience of God's protection and security.

I love you, Lord ; you are my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my saviour; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety. I called on the Lord , who is worthy of praise, and he saved me from my enemies. The ropes of death entangled me; floods of destruction swept over me. The grave wrapped its ropes around me; death laid a trap in my path. But in my distress I cried out to the Lord ; yes, I prayed to my God for help. He heard me from his sanctuary; my cry to him reached his ears. [Psalm 18:1-6 NLT]

Prayer

Lord, we thank you that you are our protection and security in our day and generation just as you preserved David and other writers of the Psalms. They were not immune from troubles but in the midst of their troubles they experienced your preservation and protection. They enjoyed the bliss of your presence with them in the troubles.

We are often afraid of persecution and we shrink from troubles and adversity. But Lord, we know that the path you have for us is always best for us. We may not understand that when we are in the midst of trouble - but one day we will see that you always were there for us - keeping watch over us.

Amen

God's Providence (Psalms) 15/04/2020

Here are some statements made in Psalm 147 about God as the beneficent provider for His own people

- He heals the broken-hearted and bandages their wounds. [Emotional and psychological healing]
- The Lord lifts up the oppressed but knocks the wicked to the ground. [We are going to have a look at God as a God of Justice in a future Day Share]
- He blesses your children within you. [Children are a gift from God]
- He makes the bars of your gates strong. [Protection]
- He covers the sky with clouds, provides the earth with rain, and causes grass to grow on the hillsides. [Rain was so necessary for survival in the Bible lands because of the low rainfall.]

- He sends the snow that is white like wool; he spreads the frost that is white like ashes. He throws his hailstones like crumbs. Who can withstand the cold wind he sends? He then orders it all to melt; he breathes on it, and the water flows. [Even extreme weather is necessary]
- The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem and gathers the exiles of Israel. [Restitution]
- He brings peace to your territory. [Peace]
- He abundantly provides for you the best grain. [Harvest - arable crops]

It is hardly surprising that the writer of the Psalm encourages his hearers to praise the Lord. He says that "Our Lord is great and has awesome power; there is no limit to his wisdom."

Perhaps we should be making a similar list of all of God's provision for us in the UK in 2020. We are all guilty of complaining about what we don't like - especially the weather. Every time we see a video of a refugee camp in Syria we should be praying for them and thanking God for the relative comfort which we enjoy.

Psalm 146 provides some other examples of God's provisions for His people.

He gives justice to the oppressed and food to the hungry. The Lord frees the prisoners. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are weighed down. The Lord loves the godly. The Lord protects the foreigners among us. He cares for the orphans and widows, but he frustrates the plans of the wicked. [Psalm 146: 7-9 NLT]

Notice that God has a special care for the vulnerable groups in society. Successive governments may have made decisions which have adversely affected the poor and the needy but God is concerned for them and so should we be. It is interesting that there is a reference to the 'foreigners among us'. Immigrants have traditionally been persecuted throughout history - the Irish, for example, were despised in the West of Scotland in the 19th Century when they fled from the potato famine. They were accused of taking the jobs of the Scots. The Rangers / Celtic rivalry stems from this sad period of our nation's history. Romany groups have been vilified and stigmatised throughout history as have many other races. Jews were persecuted throughout Europe culminating in the holocaust. Our God is a God of justice who cares for the despised and the social outcasts.

The Lord helps the fallen and lifts those bent beneath their loads. The eyes of all look to you in hope; you give them their food as they need it. When you open your hand, you satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing. [Psalm 145: 14-16 NLT]

My grandfather died at age 32 leaving a widow with a young family. He had caught the Spanish 'flu which was raging at the end of World War One and he died of pneumonia. My uncle Willie was only 8 and my aunt Cathie was 7. My father was 4 years old and my uncle Joseph was only a few months old. Two other wee boys had died and are buried along with their father in Camelon Cemetery. My grandmother took the family back to Ayrshire and tried to keep the family fed and clothed but it was a struggle. She tried to work as well as looking after the young family. My father never wore any shoes in the summer months and his feet became as tough as leather. My uncle got a job in the Ardeer Foundry at age 14 to bring in some income and my father did two paper rounds before going to school. He used to tell me about how God provided for them in their poverty. My grannie Neilly, who died before I was born, always thanked the Lord for His goodness to the family.

God's Deliverance (Psalms) 17/04/2020

He said: "I love you, Lord, my source of strength! The Lord is my high ridge, my stronghold, my deliverer. My God is my rocky summit where I take shelter, my shield, the horn that saves me, and

my refuge. I called to the Lord , who is worthy of praise, and I was delivered from my enemies. The waves of death engulfed me, the currents of chaos overwhelmed me. The ropes of Sheol tightened around me, the snares of death trapped me. In my distress I called to the Lord ; I cried out to my God. From his heavenly temple he heard my voice; he listened to my cry for help. The earth heaved and shook; the roots of the mountains trembled; they heaved because he was angry [Psalm 18: 1-7 NET]

David spoke from a lifetime of personal experience of the Lord's deliverance. David's life was not a walk in the park on a summer day. He was the youngest son in a dysfunctional family where he was ignored and treated with disdain. While looking after his father's sheep, he had an early experience of God's deliverance when he had to defend this sheep from an attack by a lion and on another occasion, it was a bear. With God's help, the young shepherd boy was able to kill both predators.

He was anointed as Israel's next king after God decided that Saul was no longer fit to be king. David's major challenge came when his father ordered him to take food to his older brothers who were fighting against the Philistines. This was when God used the young shepherd boy to slaughter the giant Goliath using only a sling and a stone. David was skilled in the use of the sling but he acknowledged that 'the battle is the Lord's' and it would be God who would accomplish the victory against the Philistines. Goliath's body was totally covered with armour to protect him against arrows and swords - and this would safeguard him easily against a stone fired from a sling. But there was one gap around the face and the stone hit the right spot and the big Philistine died instantly from his head injury.

But David was not made king easily or without a long, protracted struggle. King Saul became insanely jealous of David and did not want him to become the new King. Saul tried several times to kill David but he was unsuccessful every time. Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin and was an expert with the javelin and yet he missed David at close range. This was not because Saul was incompetent. It was because God miraculously delivered David from his enemy. The same God who had guided David's hand as he swung his sling and fired at the monster, now deflected the javelin thrown by an experienced spear thrower and it missed a sitting target at close range. All because God was guiding the javelin away from his anointed King David. But Saul was only one of David's many enemies.

By the time David became king, he had had many encounters with the Philistines and the Amalekites and other enemy nations. David summed up his life history in one sentence -
From my youth I have suffered and been close to death. [Psalm 88: 15]

He had been delivered repeatedly from the hands of his enemies. His list of enemies included these enemy nations and the supporters of the previous king but they also included his own son, Absalom who tried to overthrow him. David spent many months and years living in caves and hiding from his enemies. But in all of this, he learned that his deliverance came from God. He describes God as his 'deliverer', his 'high ridge or rock,' 'his stronghold or fortress' and his 'source of strength.' He acknowledged that there were times when he felt threatened and he cried to the Lord in deep distress.

From his heavenly temple he heard my voice; he listened to my cry for help. [Psalm 18: 6 NET]

It is good to know that whatever situation we find ourselves in today, we can cry to God and we know that he will listen to our cry for help.

Delivered from his enemies (Psalms) 19/04/2020

There are many psalms where David calls on God to help him and to deliver him from his enemies.

Deliver me from my enemies, my God! Protect me from those who attack me! Deliver me from evildoers! Rescue me from violent men! For look, they wait to ambush me; powerful men stalk me, but not because I have rebelled or sinned, O Lord . Though I have done nothing wrong, they are anxious to attack. Spring into action and help me! [Psalm 59:1-4 NET]

Some scholars dispute that this was a psalm of David but I take the view that this psalm relates to a particular incident when Saul sent men to watch his house in order to kill him. Read the incident in [1 Samuel 19:11- 17] On this occasion God used David's wife who was incidentally also Saul's daughter to rescue him. It was surprising that Michal was prepared to save her husband and to go against her father by letting David escape. David appreciated that this was an answer to prayer.

There are some simple lessons to be learned from God's repeated deliverance of David. The basic lesson is what David said at the time of his greatest victory, humanly speaking. David addressed the heathen Philistine who was cursing him and threatening him with a dreadful end to his young life. Here are the words of David when he was facing Goliath.

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand."

[1 Samuel 17: 45-47 ESV]

This is a lesson for all time and not just for physical battles using weapons. Whenever there is an enemy fighting the work of God and the people of God, we need to remember that the battle is the Lord's - it is not our battle. We need to hand over the outcome to God but we also need to be prepared to allow God to use us to accomplish His will. David did not say - the battle is the Lord's and then run away back home to his sheep. He was ready to be used in the service of God but at the same time he knew that he could not win a victory in his own strength - no matter how skilful he was with the sling. Sometimes we begin to depend on gifts or skills which God has given us rather than on God himself.

This is something for us to remember today - The battle is the Lord's.

Every day we are fighting a spiritual battle with forces of evil. We cannot fight on our own strength. Read Ephesians 6:10-19

God's Loving Kindness (Psalms) 21/04/2020

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. [Psalm 63: :3-4 NIV]

Here is the same verse in another translation.

*Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.* [Psalm 63:3-4 ESV]

David is praising God for his steadfast love which he says is 'better than life.' He is extravagant in his praise and worship to God for His steadfast love.

The word translated as 'love' or 'steadfast love' is a keyword for understanding the Psalms. It is the Hebrew word *cheded* or *hesed* which is translated in the King James Version in the following ways. It is translated as 'mercy' 85 times; it is translated as 'kindness' 4 times; it is translated as 'loving kindness' 21 times and 'goodness' 6 times; 'mercies' 5 times; 'merciful' 2 times and 'loving kindnesses' 5 times.

So in the whole of the Psalms, this word is used a total of 128 times so it is a very important word. Please don't switch off while I try to unpack what this word means. Words are very important and it is worth getting an idea of what they mean. The word can sometimes be used with a person as the subject who is showing love or steadfast love [2 Samuel 9:7] but it is nearly always God who demonstrates this loving kindness or steadfast love towards us. This is one of the key features of our God.

The Hebrew scholars tell me that the word contains three important elements and they all need to be considered together to get a full idea of the meaning of the word *cheded* or *hesed*. I am fond of cooking and here is an illustration from making sweet and sour sauce. It is a mixture of three key ingredients - chopped tomato blended or passata, vinegar and sugar or honey. You can add other things but you need these three key ingredients - sugar to make it sweet; vinegar to give it a kick and tomato to give it colour and taste. If it was only sugar - it would be too sweet - if it was only vinegar you would not enjoy it. Tomato on its own is a bit of a let-down. In the same way to appreciate this great feature of our God, you need to think of the three key elements.

- The first aspect of this word is love - but this on its own is a bit too sentimental. It is more than just love. However, this is not just a legal matter such as a covenant - there is divine love involved.
- The second part of this word relates to strength - there is a weaker party (the nation of Israel and the human race) and a stronger party (God). He has made a covenant or promise to us to protect his own people.
- The third part of this word is about steadfastness. God will keep His promise to His people. He is merciful to His people.

Praise the Lord for His loving kindness or His steadfast love for us. He demonstrated this to His chosen people Israel even though they failed Him so many times. He demonstrates this to His church today - not the church in California Road in Maddiston - his church includes every believer in Jesus from after His ascension to heaven until the present day. He will never forsake us or leave us. He will never abandon us because of His steadfast love towards us.

Loving Kindness in Action (Psalms) 23/04/2020

We can now look at some verses from the Psalms and see how we can apply this lovely word *cheched* or *hesed* to us. We are looking at one Psalm - but there are many other examples.

I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted. I remembered you, God, and I groaned; I meditated, and my spirit grew faint. You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart meditated and my spirit asked: "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favour again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand. I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds." Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. [Psalm 77: 1-15 NIV]

This is not one of David's psalms. It was written by a man called Asaph - I have met a few men called David but I have still to meet an Asaph! He was having a bad time. He was down - really low and feeling yucky. Notice that his spirit is feeling faint and he is groaning. He was in distress. He had prayed to God but God did not seem to answer him immediately. And then he began to think about the past - the years of long ago. These were probably stories he had listened to when he was younger about the amazing things that God had done. At first he was thinking that this God had changed in some way - especially towards him. He is concentrating on the word we have studied in this devotional - remember he spoke Hebrew - so he knew the word in its original - *cheched*. He then begins to think about how special God is and how great is his steadfast love. Notice that he thinks about all aspects of this great feature of God. He refers to God's promises. He refers to God's mercy and compassion. But he grasped that this *cheched* or unfailing love means just that. Our God does not change - in the way that we do. We are nice one day and nasty the next. Not so with God - his love is unchanging and he demonstrates his love in his actions towards His people.

This was probably written when the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon. The Babylonians had come with their powerful armies and they had destroyed the city of Jerusalem and its amazing temple. It had captured large number of Israelis and taken them away to be captives in a strange land. He suddenly realised that God does not change - He is still the same God and He is still loving and gracious towards His people.

We as Christians can claim this God for ourselves today and this amazing steadfast love. He keeps his promises. I am relying on and trusting in a God whose love is unfailing and his mercies never cease. Here is another Stuart Townend hymn for us today.

Come, people of the risen King,
Who delight to bring Him praise;
Come, all, and tune your hearts to sing
To the Morning Star of grace.
From the shifting shadows of the earth
We will lift our eyes to Him,
Where steady arms of mercy reach
To gather children in.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Let every tongue rejoice!
One heart, one voice; O Church of Christ, rejoice!

Come, those whose joy is morning sun,
And those weeping through the night;
Come, those who tell of battles won,
And those struggling in the fight.
For His perfect love will never change,
And His mercies never cease,
But follow us through all our days
With the certain hope of peace.

Come, young and old from every land—
Men and women of the faith;
Come, those with full or empty hands—
Find the riches of His grace.
Over all the world, His people sing—
Shore to shore we hear them call,
The Truth that cries through every age:
“Our God is all in all”!

Worship to God (Psalms) 25/04/2020

When we think of the Psalms in the Bible we think of worship and praise. The Hebrew language uses the word TEHILIM as the name for the book of 150 Psalms. This word means praises or hymns. The psalms are associated with music and singing.

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians says

..... addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in your heart [Ephesians 5: 19 ESV]

The word 'worship' comes from 'worthy' and when we worship someone or something it means that we think that this person or thing deserves our praise. All human beings worship something or someone. There are many people who really worship celebrities such as rock stars or film stars or sports stars.



This picture was taken by the famous photographer Oscar Marzaroli and it shows Celtic supporters during the Cup Final in 1968. It would be good if we were as enthusiastic as this when we are in church. Incidentally, I am not criticising anyone for going to a football match! I have to look at my life - I may not be interested in football but there are other things which I could easily worship instead of God.

Before looking at the Psalms in the Old Testament, it is perhaps helpful to start with what Jesus said about worship. In John's Gospel there is a record of a discussion between the Lord Jesus and a Samaritan woman on the subject of worship. The Samaritan lady had tried to turn the conversation away from her lifestyle and she thought that she would start a discussion on the differences between the way the Jews worshipped and the Samaritans. "Let's get bogged down in theology and avoid uncomfortable home truths," she thought. But Jesus clearly defined what worship is all about.

"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." [John 4: 23-24 ESV]

These verses tell us that there are two essential ingredients for worship

- It is a spiritual exercise - 'worship in spirit'. I believe that this refers to the Holy Spirit which was later given to believers at Pentecost. It is the Holy Spirit who produces or instigates worship.
- It is based on truth or the Word of God. It is not just an emotional state of happiness - it is where the revelation of God or the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit produces a reaction of worship.

Worship to God (2) (Psalms) 27/04/2020

Let us look at some of the Psalms dealing with this important subject.

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord ; I sing for joy at what your hands have done. How great are your works, Lord , how profound your thoughts! [Psalm 92:1 - 5 NIV]

Some simple thoughts from this Psalm

- Worshipping God is a most worthwhile activity. God wants our worship.
- Worship should not be reserved for special occasions - we should begin our day with worship and end our day with the same. And this should be the normal pattern for every day.
- Worship might be accompanied by music which might be lively or it may be quietly reflective. Music is a matter of taste but there is no Biblical prescription for musical style.
- We have every reason to praise God because of what He has done for us.
- We will never exhaust God - He is eternal and unfathomable. There is always more to discover about Him

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord ; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. [Psalm 95: 1-7 NIV]

Here are some more headlines about worship

- We should be joyful when we worship - sometimes our worship can be a bit on the depressing side.
- We should express ourselves and not be silent.
- Our God fully deserves our worship.
- Our God is our Creator and His creation is a major cause for worship and praise
- We should bow down before Him (if not literally, then in spirit) - i.e. admit that we are 'unworthy' - we do not deserve all the blessings He has lavished on us.
- Our relationship with God (and His Son, Jesus Christ) is certainly a cause for thankfulness and worship

Worship to God (3) (29/04/2020)

Shout for joy to the Lord , all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his ; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalms 100:1-5 NIV

This is a short Psalm but it is worth thinking about. The writer of this Psalms wants every country, every nation and all generations to engage in the act of worshipping God. Janie and I visited St Kilda - a small group of islands way out in the Atlantic off the west coast of Scotland. There are pictures of the inhabitants going to church on Sunday and they looked positively miserable. They were dressed

as if they were going to a funeral and they did not show the slightest hint that they were looking forward to spending the next hour or so in church. The writer of the Psalm believes that all over the world people should be praising Him enthusiastically and joyfully. It would be good if the small minority of evangelical Christians in the UK could set a brilliant example to our neighbours many of whom associate church attendance with boredom and being miserable.



Islanders on their way to the Sunday service on St Kilda. I saw a much more close up picture when I was on the island, but it was an expensive and adventurous trip which we are unlikely to repeat.

When I first volunteered as a steward at the Keswick Convention, I was so thrilled with the singing that I was standing out in the alleyways leading the worship and waving my arms in the air. The team leader spoke to all the stewards at the next team meeting and advised us to be careful because if we waved our arms above our heads, we were giving the signal that the tent had to be evacuated. There was considerable amusement among some of the stewards because the wee Scottish 'Brethren' guy had been getting carried away with himself. It is good to praise our God and don't worry too much about the reactions from other people.

Can we still engage in worship even if the restrictions due to the spread of the coronavirus make it difficult for us to attend church in the normal sense? Are we still rejoicing in God? Are we giving God the worship He deserves? It may be some time before we are able to conduct our services in the usual way - we should not be short-changing God, however. He still deserves our worship.

Delight in God (Psalms) 01/05/2020

You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your right hand upholds me. [Psalm 63: 1-8 NIV]

Last year (2019) the theme of the Keswick Convention was 'Longing.' I was present for the whole Convention but I was too busy to hear the various talks. In the introduction to the Keswick Year Book for 2019 on the theme of Longing, James Robson, the Ministry Director said this:

"Longing is part of being human. We have thoughts, we have desires. We are not just thinkers, but lovers. That is how God made us and he made us for himself. So when our desires lead us astray, it doesn't mean that desire is wrong, rather that we are longing for the wrong things. Ultimately, whether we know it or not, our longing is for him.

Like a bride's love for the heavenly bridegroom, only our relationship with Christ will truly satisfy this longing. He offers life-giving water to our parched souls: 'Let everyone who is thirsty come to me and drink' (John 7:37) Longing speaks of the oneness we yearn for, a completeness in Christ. Longing fits our past and the object of longing is our future. " [James Robson: Ministry Director, Keswick Ministries]

If you look up to the quotation from Psalm 63 at the beginning of this Day Share, the writer of the Psalm speaks of longing for God and he compares it to a thirst. He describes the world in which he was living as a 'dry and parched land where there is no water.' He is saying that he has not found anything around him that can satisfy this thirst - this longing for God. And so he is earnestly seeking God. To the non-Christian this seems madness. What James Robson is saying is that all human beings have a deep desire for fulfilment and completeness which only God can fill. By the way, I know James Robson personally and he always strikes me as a man who is really enjoying the presence of God.

Notice that the Psalm 63 writer has a real delight in God. This is a common theme in the Psalms. He has had a vision of God in the sanctuary (probably referring to the temple) but for us we may get a sight of who God is in our church or in the quietness of our bedroom. It is important for us to spend time alone with God thinking about His 'power and glory.' I am finding all the news about the coronavirus very depressing and worrying- I need another vision of God in all His glory.

The writer says that this will satisfy him as if he was at a top restaurant and taking the best meal on the menu. You probably know that I like food - it's one of my weaknesses. My youngest daughter and her husband gave Janie and me a meal in Tom Kitchin's restaurant in Leith - it was spectacular. But a real experience of the God of glory can thrill me far more than that. Like the Psalm 63 writer, this sort of experience leads to worship and singing.

The psalmist is lifting up his hands and singing from his heart hymns or Psalms of praise to His God. He is aware of God's presence at all times. God is not far off from him - the writer is in the shadow of his wings. This is the image of a mother hen protecting her young and the chicks are nestling under her wings for safety and protection. That is how near to God he is. The chick is so close that he can feel the mother's heartbeat. That is intimacy and closeness. I long to be closer to God all the time. Not only to know his protection but the warmth of his presence. God longs for communion with us. I managed to get to a service at the Lakeside Chapel in Keswick and the speaker emphasised that point in his talk from the Song of Songs. God loves when we are close to him.

There are many other Psalms dealing with this subject but they will do for another Day Share perhaps. I can feel a hymn coming on!

I am weak but Thou art strong
Jesus keep me from all wrong
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee.

Just a closer walk with Thee

Grant it, Jesus, is my plea
Daily walking close to Thee
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

When my feeble life is o'er
Time for me will be no more
Guide me gently, safely o'er
To Thy kingdom's shore, to Thy shore.

Just a closer walk with Thee
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea
Daily walking close to Thee
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be

Source: LyricFind Songwriters: Traditional Just A Closer Walk With Thee lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

God's Covenant (Psalms) 03/05/2020

This is an important subject in the Bible - God made solemn promises to some of the men in the Old Testament - Abraham, Moses and David, for example. These promises are known as Covenants.

In the Psalms there are a few references to God's covenant with His own people - we might have expected more mention of the word 'covenant' or solemn promise made by God. However, the idea of the Jews being a special people is implied throughout the Psalms. The nation of Israel were God's chosen people. God made a covenant with a heathen man named Abram from a city called Ur and He promised Abram that he would have as many descendants as there were stars in the sky. Abram believed this God even though he had never known Him and none of his family knew Him. Abram left his birth city and started living in a tent as a traveller without any fixed abode because God had made this promise to him.

It must have taken some faith to do this because when God spoke to him Abram had no children and his wife was very old. His name was changed from Abram to Abraham. God promised him a land for his descendants and he promised to bless him and his many descendants. You might wonder what this has to do with us but the promise to Abraham included us because God promised that all nations would be blessed in Abraham - this was a hint to a future universal church to which we belong in faith along with Abraham.

God also made a promise to David and he took him from obscurity as a shepherd boy to become a king over the nation of Israel - the descendants of Abraham. David had a deep desire to build a house or temple for God instead of God's dwelling place being in a tent. God tells David through the prophet, Nathan that David's son (Solomon) would build a temple. Read 2 Samuel chapter 7 for the whole passage.

“The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me ; your throne will be established forever.”

[2 Samuel 7:10-13, 15-16 NIV]

In some Psalms the writer is asking God what has happened to this promise. Here are some extracts from Psalm 89 which may have been written long after David had died and things have gone badly wrong. The Babylonians have attacked the kingdom of Judah - all that was left of the great nation over which David had been king. They have destroyed Jerusalem which was regarded as David's city. Some scholars suggest that it was written during David's lifetime. In which case it was premature to assume that David's kingdom was at risk. I prefer the later time of writing.

You have renounced the covenant with your servant and have defiled his crown in the dust. You have broken through all his walls and reduced his strongholds to ruins. [Psalms 89:39-40 NIV]

There are times when we might even feel that God has forgotten us. It is good to keep reminding ourselves that our God will never break His promises He has made to us.

We fail to grasp the divine perspective and we are wrongly accusing our God. I have other Day Shares on Psalm 89 and the one on 4th July 2020 looks at this again. Today I want to remind us that we can rely on God's promises. Politicians may break their promises - they may have good intentions but find they are unable to deliver what they promised. Not so with our God.



God's Covenant (2) (Psalms) 05/05/2020

How long, Lord ? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David? [Psalms 89:46, 49 NIV]

The writer of Psalm 89 is lamenting the state of affairs and is openly saying to God that He has forgotten His covenant with His people.

There are times when we find it hard to understand what is happening. God sees everything from a divine perspective - we can only see events from our very limited human perspective. He works from a different timescale. God was fulfilling His covenant. He had placed David's son on the throne - Solomon and Israel became powerful and respected among the nations. But Solomon got distracted and became obsessed with his possessions and power - he was very rich. When he died the kingdom of Israel split into two - ten tribes in the north called Israel and 2 tribes in the south called Judah. Both nations continued to sin against God and eventually Israel disappeared - the Assyrians came and obliterated the nation from the map. And yet Judah did not change their ways and they continued to sin until they were taken into exile in Babylon and Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.

But God had made it clear that his covenant was conditional - if they sinned, there would be consequences and God would punish the nation for its sin. In the long term, the promise to David will be fulfilled in the coming kingdom when David's greater Son will reign and Jesus will be the perfect King over His kingdom.

What about us in our day? God has made a new covenant with us - the Old Testament is the Old Covenant and we are in the New Testament era when we are relying not on the old covenant - which depended on their obedience. We are relying on the New Covenant which is based on Christ's perfection and obedience. But we may still have thoughts like the writer of Psalm 89. Has God forgotten us? Is he going to fulfil His promises to us? Of course, He is. Remember God's timescale is different from ours.

A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.
[Psalms 90:4 NIV]

God's promises are long term and his timing is perfect.

He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit."
[Psalms 105:8-11 NIV]

Let us never forget that He remembers His covenant for ever. Maybe there were times when it seemed that God had forgotten. When Joseph was languishing in prison, it might seem like that. When the Israelites were suffering as slaves in Egypt, it might seem that God had forgotten His promise. But God acted according to his promise when the time was right.

For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham. He brought out his people with rejoicing, his chosen ones with shouts of joy; [Psalms 105:42-43 NIV]

Covenants are broken daily in our society - but God's covenant with us will never be broken. It does not depend on us.

Prayer to God (Psalms) 07/05/2020

Many psalms are really prayers. In this Day Share we will have a brief look at some of these. There are too many prayer Psalms to look at all of them. There are different types of prayer Psalms. Many Psalms are known as Laments because the writer is complaining about what he perceives as an injustice. At the opposite end there are prayer Psalms where he is expressing his thanks to God. These are often accompanied by worship and praise. Psalm 20 does not come into the category of Lament or Thanksgiving. It is a prayer on behalf of a king. One scholar suggested that this was a prayer uttered during or after sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. [The reference to the sanctuary in Zion (another name for Jerusalem) would indicate this]. In this prayer the priests (and other worshippers) are asking God to grant the king a victory in the battle.

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion. May he remember all your sacrifices and accept your burnt offerings. May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. May we shout for joy over your victory and lift up our banners in the name of our God. May the Lord grant all your requests. Now this I know: The Lord gives victory to his anointed. He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm. Lord, give victory to the king! Answer us when we call! [Psalms 20:1-9 NIV]

He prays for answered prayer for the king when he is in distress. This prayer would apply to us today - not only for kings and rulers but for all of us. The writer was making a clear statement of faith and trust in God. I love the statement made in verse 7

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

If we bring this up to the present day, some trust in their wealth and material possessions, others trust in their intellectual ability, others trust in their social status or their respectability - but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. This is the kernel of this prayer. It is an acknowledgement of the power of God.

He refers to the name of the God of Jacob - this is Yahweh. The Jews did not utter that name because it was holy to them. We pray to God in the name of Jesus. That is the name which allows us to enter God's presence. In this Psalm, he asks God to accept the burnt offerings and sacrifices that the king had made. This was the way that you were able to approach God in the Old Testament. The person brought an animal which was killed and its blood was sprinkled on the altar. We don't need to kill an animal and present it to God. He has died instead of us and if we are trusting in Him, we approach a Holy God knowing that our God is satisfied with the death of His Son on our behalf.

We are assured a victory in the name of Jesus. Our King has won the victory already - He has defeated the great enemy - the devil. We are on the victory side.

Joy (Psalms) 09/05/2020

The writers of the Psalms express a full range of emotions from anger to deep sadness and elation and worship. In this Day Share we are looking at the experience of joy which the psalm writers experienced.

Many people say, "Who will show us better times?" Let your face smile on us, Lord . You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine. In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord , will keep me safe. [Psalm 4:7-8 NLT]

The writer to this Psalm uses an interesting metaphor to describe the joy that he experiences in knowing God and experiencing His blessing - when the light of God's face shines upon him. He says that he experiences more joy than those who are celebrating after the harvest and they have plenty of wine to make them happy. The celebration of the harvest would be short-lived and might be accompanied by an unpleasant hangover the next day, but the joy that the Lord gives is long-lasting and is not accompanied by regret.

It is clear that the writers of the Psalms - including and especially David - had some really difficult and even life-threatening experiences. Psalm 16 describes one such experience where the writer - maybe David - has experienced God's deliverance and he is full of joy and gladness.

With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. [Psalm 16: 8-11]

He is rejoicing not only in God's intervention and deliverance but he is also enjoying God's presence. However, he is also looking forward to experiencing much greater joy and gladness in heaven in the eternal future. In his book called "Surprised By Joy" the great writer C.S. Lewis says that the earthly temporary experience of joy is a glimpse and foretaste of the eternal joy we will always experience in heaven.

This is the day, this is the day
That the Lord has made, that the Lord has made
We will rejoice, we will rejoice and be glad in it, and be glad in it

This is the day that the Lord has made
We will rejoice and be glad in it
This is the day, this is the day
That the Lord has made

Joy (2) (Psalms) 11/05/2020

Psalm 30 describes the experience of joy after a time of sorrow in graphic terms -

Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning. [Psalm 30: 5b NLT]

This style of writing is very similar to what we have in the Wisdom literature - in the Proverbs. Notice this lovely couplet - there are two statements which are contrasted and they are hinged with the word 'but'. Praise the Lord for the 'but' - the first half is a negative statement - a whole night spent

weeping is not nice but the second half is the balance to this - 'joy comes with the morning.' This makes us forget all about the weeping.

Even when the writer acknowledges that God has been angry with him and has allowed things to happen to correct his conduct, he sees this from a godly perspective

For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime [Psalm 30:5 NIV]

This is another contrasting couplet with 'but' in the middle. Our God is a gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in grace and love. Here is the evidence - his anger lasts only for a moment - it might not seem like that to the writer at the time, but when he meditates in the sanctuary (his quiet time with God) he appreciates that God is a God of love who has been so gracious with us. The old hymn which I remember from my primary school said this

Even when he chideth
Tender is his tone
[The word chide means to rebuke or correct us]

Psalm 30 ends on a high note

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever.

Psalms 30:11-12 NIV

Wailing was an Eastern response to loss and bereavement. God's intervention had turned wailing into dancing. I was brought up in a home and a church (gospel hall) where I was led to believe that dancing was always from the devil. But here we have dancing in the Bible - there are other references to it. Sackcloth was what a person wore to show that they were suffering - it was a visible sign of sorrow and repentance. It is expressed beautifully here. God had been acting in the life of the writer and he was in a period of mourning and repentance. God turned that into joy - or as he expressed it - you removed the sackcloth which was so uncomfortable to wear and instead you gave me lovely clothes - JOY. Are you clothed in joy this morning? Am I clothed in joy this morning?

I would like to finish this Day Share with a brief reminder of Psalm 32. This is on the list of future Day Shares where we will spend longer on this Psalm. This psalm begins with the word 'blessed' which also means 'happy' He says that real joy comes when we know the experience of sins forgiven by God.

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. [Psalm 32:1 NIV]
The writer talks from personal experience about how God tried to bring him to a recognition of his sin and this was bitter - 'my bones wasted away.' He was groaning all day long. His strength dried up. Then he confessed his sin and he found forgiveness.

The Psalm ends with a beautiful expression of joy in the Lord

*Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! [Psalm 32:11 ESV]*

Shout for joy! Even in lockdown!!!

Thanksgiving to God (Psalms) 13/05/2020

I will give you thanks with all my heart; before the heavenly assembly I will sing praises to you. I will bow down toward your holy temple, and give thanks to your name, because of your loyal love and faithfulness, for you have exalted your promise above the entire sky. When I cried out for help, you answered me. You made me bold and energised me. Let all the kings of the earth give thanks to you, O Lord, when they hear the words you speak [Psalm 138: 1-4 NET]

I would like to start this Day Share with a quotation from a book on the Psalms.

"The scene is a courtyard before the sanctuary in Jerusalem. In front of the shrine stands the altar of burnt offering. Here a grateful man takes a typical ancient posture for prayer facing the temple building and prostrating himself (verse 2A). In this posture of grateful reverence he composes a song of thanksgiving for answered prayer (verse 3) a hymn-like praise of the name of Yahweh (verse 2)" [Marshall D. Johnson: Psalms through the Year page 341]

The writer of this Psalm speaks about an answer to prayer.

When I cried out for help, you answered me. [Psalm 138: 3 NET] Johnson suggests that the writer had been suffering from a serious illness. You would not pick that up from the translation I have used above - the New English Translation. It simply says, *"You made me bold and energised me."* Other translations put it differently. For example, the English Standard Version which tends to be more accurate but maybe not as readable translates that sentence like this *"my strength of soul you increased."* I am not a Hebrew expert but I wonder if the writer was experiencing a time of depression or sadness or loss of confidence. He prayed to God and his prayer was answered. I have been there and maybe so have some of you who are reading this. You felt down - and could not see a way out. It is great when God answers prayer - especially when we are in a situation like this. His whole heart is filled with praise and thanksgiving.

The writer of Psalm 138 was 'walking in the midst of trouble' or maybe danger. He had many enemies who were angry with him. Life was not easy - but God answered the prayer of a man in distress.

This is a man who approaches the Lord in a spirit of humility.

Though the Lord is great, he cares for the humble, but he keeps his distance from the proud. [Psalm 138: 6 NLT]

This is a good principle to remember when we are approaching God. Sometimes God has to bring circumstances about to cause us to be humble. He has to deal with pride in our lives. Though the Lord is high, he cares for the lowly or the humble. In our society we are obsessed with the celebrities or the 'important people.' The bigger the celebrity, the greater the fee they can command for attending a function or giving their name to a charity. God does not work that way - he sees things totally differently from us. We don't need to be rich or famous or especially gifted. He accepts us the way we are. The writer was so grateful for this.

Thanksgiving (2) Psalms) 15/05/2020

In Psalm 138, the writer is thankful for two aspects of God's character.

- His steadfast love - or chesed [See Day Share 21/04/2020] God's love is special - he will not forget his promises to us or his covenant with us. His love is powerful and unchanging towards us. The Psalm ends with the words - "Your steadfast love endures forever."

- His faithfulness - he is always reliable and will not let us down.

Psalm 118 begins on this same note

Give thanks to the Lord , for he is good; his love endures forever. [Psalm 118: 1 NIV]

The words 'his love (chesed) endures for ever are repeated another three times. This is a cause for thanksgiving. As in Psalm 138, the writer is thankful to God because he has experienced deliverance from distress and he has known answered prayer.

*Out of my distress I called on the LORD;
the LORD answered me and set me free*
[Psalm 118:3]

He gives very good advice which is as relevant today as it was when it was first written

*It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in man.
It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in princes.*
[Psalm 8-9 ESV]

As a church we should be united in being thankful to God.

Praise the Lord ! I will thank the Lord with all my heart as I meet with his godly people. How amazing are the deeds of the Lord ! All who delight in him should ponder them. Everything he does reveals his glory and majesty. His righteousness never fails. He causes us to remember his wonderful works. How gracious and merciful is our Lord ! He gives food to those who fear him; he always remembers his covenant. [Psalm 111:1-5]

It is hardly surprising that in our selfish, self-centred materialistic world, it is not common to find people who are truly thankful to God. But when we meet as a church, we are meeting with other people who have every reason to be thankful to God. We should all be "thanking the Lord with all of our hearts." His deeds are amazing and we Christians should ponder them.

Paul, the apostle, wrote letters from a prison cell and they are full of thanksgiving to God for His goodness. For many of us our homes have become a bit like a prison - though we still have many comforts which Paul would not have enjoyed. Can we remember to thank the Lord for His goodness?

Faith and Confidence in God (Psalms) 17/05/2020

The Lord is my light and my salvation— so why should I be afraid? The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble? When evil people come to devour me, when my enemies and foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident. [Psalm 27: 1-3 NLT]

The first section of Psalm 27 is an impressive beautiful and comforting song of trust in our God. Look at the expressions the writer uses about God - He is our "light" (this was maybe in the sense of comfort rather than guidance); He is our "salvation" and our "fortress" or "stronghold." These word pictures of God are common in the Psalms - especially the stronghold or fortress. Perhaps the writer has fled for refuge to the temple, 'the house of the Lord.' He feels safe and secure there and he

wants to stay there for the rest of his life. He speaks about his enemies (whom he describes as 'evildoers') who are seeking to attack him like wild animals - devouring his flesh. When he is in the temple, he sees things from a different perspective - he is convinced that these enemies will stumble and fall. His faith in God's power to deliver him is strong

Though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident. [Psalm 27; 3 NLT]

He expresses his confidence in God's power to deliver him 'in the day of trouble' - no matter what that trouble is

For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. [Psalm 27:5 NIV]

There are other Psalms which give very good advice to us to trust in the Lord and not to be anxious or to worry. Here is a list of good advice from the writer of Psalm 37.

- [Don't worry about the wicked](#) [Psalm 37:1 NLT]
- [Don't envy those who do wrong](#). For like grass, they soon fade away. Like spring flowers, they soon wither. [Psalm 37: 1 NLT]
- [Trust in the Lord and do good](#). [Psalm 37:3 NLT]
- [Take delight in the Lord](#), and he will give you your heart's desires. [Psalm 37:4 NLT]
- [Commit everything you do to the Lord](#). [Psalm 37:5 NLT]
- [Trust him, and he will help you](#). [Psalm 37:5 NLT]
- [Be still in the presence of the Lord](#) [Psalm 37:7 NLT]
- [Wait patiently](#) for him to act [Psalm 37:7 NLT]
- [Don't worry](#) about evil people who prosper [Psalm 37: 7 NLT]
- [Don't fret](#) about the wicked schemes of evil people. [Psalm 37: 7 NLT]
- [Stop being angry!](#) Turn from your rage! [Psalm 37: 8 NLT]
- [Do not lose your temper](#)— it only leads to harm. [Psalm 37: 8 NLT]

Faith and Confidence in God (2) 19/05/2020

I would like to look at Psalm 62 to see more about the theme of faith in God. The writer of this Psalm is in the middle of a real crisis. He vividly describes his situation - he is being attacked and battered and his own personal defences are hopeless. This is figurative language and we don't know exactly how he is being attacked. He describes himself as a leaning wall or a tottering fence about to fall down. His enemies are hypocritical and cannot be trusted. They are doing everything in their power to bring about his downfall but they are always 'nice' to him -

They praise me to my face but curse me in their hearts. [Psalm 63: 4 NLT]

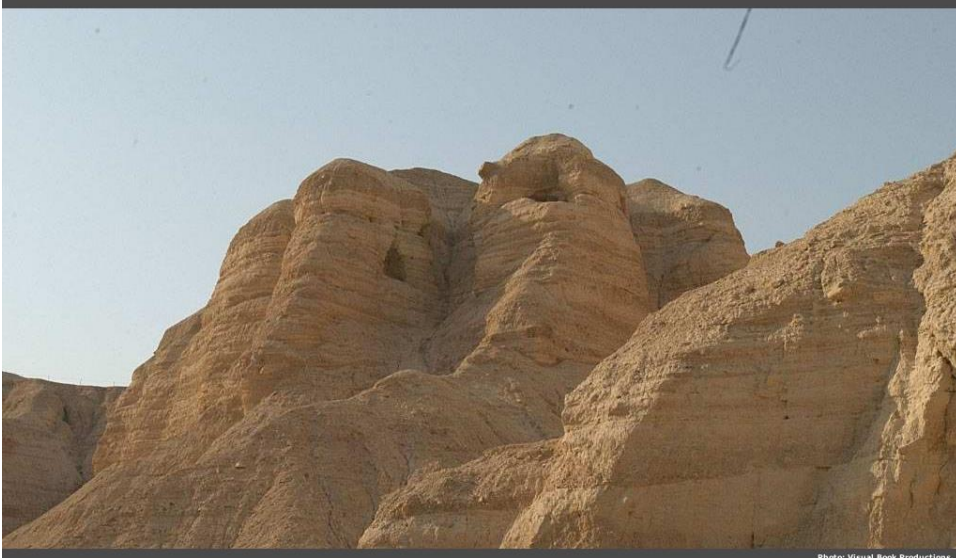
I seem to remember working with people like that! I have maybe encountered some in church situations.

But this same Psalm began on a positive note

I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will never be shaken. [Psalm 62: 1 NLT]

He has realised that he cannot solve his problems by his own strength or by his own ingenuity. He has turned to God. He described him as a 'rock' and a 'fortress' - two metaphors for security and protection. He is waiting quietly for God's salvation.

This is a picture of a rock at Qumran and it shows how a rock presented a natural refuge from the elements. It is a picture of stability and security. It will stand the test of time.



Here is a picture of ancient walls built for protection. A fortress would have had solid walls providing great protection from attack.



Read through these verses from this lovely Psalm.

Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honour depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.
[Psalm 62:5-8 NIV]

I want to highlight two phrases to take away with us today.

He is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

God is our refuge.

Laments to God (Psalms) 21/05/2020

There are some Psalms which are joyful and upbeat. There are many expressions of praise. However, there are other Psalms which are categorised as Laments. There are over 60 of these. They are written in times of distress and anguish. Some of these Psalms contain a confession of sin but there are others where the writer protests his innocence. Sometimes, the psalmist is asking for God to punish his enemies or the wicked - often these are speaking about the same people. Some of the Laments contain curses against the enemies who have caused the psalmist's distress. [This will be considered in Day Share for 4th June 2020.] It is important to observe that most of the Laments also contain statements of faith and confidence in God. Some lead on to expressions of thanksgiving and praise later on in the Psalm

Here is a flavour of the tone and content of some of these Psalms. I am listing some of the laments from various Psalms (they all are taken from the New English Translation (NET)).

- *Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger! Do not discipline me in your raging fury!* [Psalm 6:1]
- *for my bones are shaking! I am absolutely terrified, and you, Lord – how long will this continue?* [Psalm 6:2c,3]
- *Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you pay no attention during times of trouble?* [Psalm 10:1]
- *the godly have disappeared; people of integrity have vanished.* [Psalm 12:1]
- *Do not ignore me* [Psalm 28:1]
- *My eyes grow dim from suffering.* [Psalm 31:9]
- *My life nears its end in pain* [Psalm 31:10]
- *those who see me in the street run away from me.* [Psalm 31: 11d]
- *My wounds are infected and starting to smell* [Psalm 38:5]
- *I am numb with pain and severely battered* [Psalm 38: 8]
- *How long will you remain angry at your people while they pray to you? You have given them tears as food; you have made them drink tears by the measure.* [Psalm 80:4-5]

What have we to make of these strongly worded complaints - most of them are complaints to God. Is it legitimate or all right to complain to God in this way? After all, God punished the Israelites for complaining while they were journeying across the desert on their way to the promised land.

It is a bit surprising that these complaints are recorded. They don't show us the writers of the Psalms in a very good light. There is no window-dressing in the Bible - the Old Testament is not edited to remove incidents where the great men such as Abraham and David are shown to have done wrong. If there had been a PR organisation behind the production of the Bible, I am sure that they would have edited David's great sin against God when he committed adultery with Uriah's wife Bathsheba and then conspired to make sure that Uriah was killed in the battle. Similarly, it is refreshingly authentic to see the laments as they were expressed by these people living in difficult circumstances. Although they were written in a particular context, they are easily applied to us today in our post-modern world.

In future Day Share articles we are going to look at other aspects of the Psalms which might have been 'air-brushed' to make them politically correct. Praise the Lord that they were written down to express all the raw emotions of the writers.

God sees through our pretence and hypocrisy and there is nothing to be gained by window-dressing when we come to speak to God. We cannot pretend that we don't have feelings such as anger or bitterness. God expects us to be honest with Him and share our deepest thoughts even though they are not what we should be thinking. This is not to condone such thoughts - we are not encouraging us to think that these are what God wants from us. But, He knows our weaknesses.

There is also perhaps a difference between taking our genuine grievances to God in prayer or lament and what we often do - complain to each other about circumstances in our life when we are indirectly blaming God - because we claim to believe that he is sovereign (in full control of the world and the universe). If we have encountered people who do not treat us the way we expect, God has allowed this to happen. He has a reason for everything - even though we may not be aware of the reason at the time.

It is also very instructive to see that the psalmist learns lessons in the process of the Psalm. Laments turn into praise and thanksgiving and this is what happens to us when we go into God's presence. God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit and we see things differently.

Depression and Anxiety (Psalms) 23/05/2020

O Lord God who delivers me! By day I cry out and at night I pray before you. Listen to my prayer! Pay attention to my cry for help! For my life is filled with troubles and I am ready to enter Sheol. [This was the name for the place of the dead] They treat me like those who descend into the grave. I am like a helpless man, adrift among the dead, like corpses lying in the grave, whom you remember no more, and who are cut off from your power. [Psalm 88:1-5 NET]

I am oppressed and have been on the verge of death since my youth. I have been subjected to your horrors and am numb with pain. Your anger overwhelms me; your terrors destroy me. They surround me like water all day long; they join forces and encircle me. You cause my friends and neighbours to keep their distance; those who know me leave me alone in the darkness. [Psalm 88:15-18 NET]

Psalm 88 is a very bleak psalm - possibly the most depressing in the whole book of Psalms. It is a personal lament written by someone who was very ill and is near to death. He has lost all his friends. Many laments end up with the writer experiencing a spiritual uplift but this psalm does not end in a high note. But the writer is still praying to God - which is a good thing. He is praying for God to save him but he does not appear to acknowledge his sin or any wrongdoing on his part. He has 'one foot in the grave' but he has no idea of an after-life. Here is what he says about the state of the dead *Do you accomplish amazing things for the dead? Do the departed spirits rise up and give you thanks?* [Psalm 88: 10 NET]

This is a rhetorical question - a question which implies an answer and the answer the writer is implying is "No". He finds it hard to appreciate that those who have died will be praising God. He is saying that death is the end. No wonder he is depressed. His attitude was probably very common in the Old Testament. Praise the Lord that in Christ we have a future assured in heaven. This is a hope that we as Christians have - but many people then had no hope for any future beyond the grave. Indeed, many people in our day have no prospects beyond the grave.

Notice too that he is blaming God for his circumstances. Again, this is very common today. The writer of Psalm 88 says that his suffering is because God is angry with him - but he does not appear to have repented of his sin. He is afraid of God - he is suffering from God's terrors. He even blames God for the way his friends are treating him.

There are several psalms where the writer is experiencing depression. Psalm 69 has a graphic description of a person who is in a state of deep anxiety. Some commentators have different interpretations of these verses. I see this as a person who is in a deep state of anxiety - life is getting on top of him. He describes his condition in figurative language as sinking in the mud or drowning in deep water. This feeling of helplessness and hopelessness is common in today's society - even among Christians. It can be part of a mental health disorder.

Save me, O God, for the floodwaters are up to my neck. Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire; I can't find a foothold. I am in deep water, and the floods overwhelm me. I am exhausted from crying for help; my throat is parched. My eyes are swollen with weeping, waiting for my God to help me.
[Psalm 69: 1-3 NLT]

I have experienced depression at times in my life. It is not pleasant. God has a purpose in this experience. I am sure that many of us are feeling down because of this continued lockdown and the uncertainty that goes with it.

I remember wondering why I was going through such a bleak time and was feeling so despondent. This was a few years ago and I now know that God had a purpose in this period of depression. It has helped me to understand a bit better what it is like to suffer from this or similar psychological conditions. I don't want to pretend that I fully appreciate what you might be going through - for your experience is unique to you. Can I say, however, that God knows what you are suffering. He wants us to come close to him. God loves you and longs to be near you in your experience - whatever that may be.

Depression and Anxiety (2) (Psalms) 25/05/2020

Psalm 38 is another psalm where the writer is in a state of depression. He has discerned that God is rebuking him because of some sin in his life. He pleads with God to stop.

O Lord, do not continue to rebuke me in your anger! Do not continue to punish me in your raging fury! For your arrows pierce me, and your hand presses me down. [Psalm 38: 1-2 NET]

The New Testament does speak about God allowing us to experience suffering in order for us to learn lessons. [See James Chapter 1, for example] The Old Testament book of Job describes this good man's suffering which God has allowed this to happen. Satan has attacked Job and he has suffered so much - he lost all his possessions and family members have died. He was suffering from a whole variety of unpleasant ailments such as boils and sores. Job's friends were not helpful and they assumed that Job had committed severe sins - but in fact, Job was a very righteous good-living man. God allows suffering **not** because He is cruel to us. He corrects us because he cares for us as a Father. He is still a loving, caring God and it is sometimes hard for us to see that in the midst of our suffering. Here is more of this Psalm .

My whole body is sick because of your judgement; I am deprived of health because of my sin. For my sins overwhelm me; like a heavy load, they are too much for me to bear. My wounds are infected and starting to smell, because of my foolish sins. I am dazed and completely humiliated; all day long I walk around mourning. [Psalm 38: 3-6]

But the writer in all of this sad state of affairs turned to God for help

Yet I wait for you, O Lord ! You will respond, O Lord, my God! I have prayed for deliverance, [Psalm 38:15 NET]

Psalm 42 has several references to being cast down. He says that his soul is downcast within him [Psalm 42: 5]. He has been weeping and crying repeatedly. He put this in figurative language - *"My tears have been my food day and night."* I suggest that he has lost his appetite for food because he is so unhappy. Those who are looking on are repeating the question, *"Where is your God?"* The Psalm ends with the writer finding comfort in God, his Saviour.

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. [Psalm 42: 11 NIV]

In closing I want to turn to the Lord for his help in states of depression, despair, despondency or anxiety. I guess that these problems are very real as this lockdown continues. Here is what the writer says in Psalm 94.

If the Lord had not helped me, I would have laid down in the silence of death. If I say, "My foot is slipping," your loyal love, O Lord , supports me. When worries threaten to overwhelm me, your soothing touch makes me happy. [Psalm 94: 17-18 NIV]

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that you always want the best for us. Sometimes when we are in the midst of suffering, we find it hard to bear and we even wonder if you care for us. Help us never to doubt your love for us. You were prepared to let your own dear Son die the most horrible death for us. There is no limits to your love for us.

Some day we will really understand why we had to endure so much suffering. It will all become clear to us and the sufferings will seem nothing compared with all the wonders and the glory of heaven. It will all seem trivial then - but it is very real now. Maybe like the psalm writers we are feeling downcast and depressed. Maybe we are sinking in our anxiety. Help us to turn to you and find our comfort and deliverance from you.

Lord, as Christians help us to draw alongside those of our brothers and sisters who are experiencing difficult times. Helps us to empathise with them. Save us from being like Job's notorious friends who made things worse for the poor man in his suffering. Save us from being in any way judgemental or unsympathetic.

Lord, you love us and care for us at all times and you only want good for us. Thank you for all your loving kindness towards us.

Amen

Justice / Vengeance (Psalms) 27/05/2020

There are some Psalms with which we as Christians are uncomfortable. Hopefully, we have been influenced by the teaching of Jesus to love our enemies. As part of our Day Share journey, we have systematically visited each of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5 - love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self-control. And then when we read some verses in the Psalms, we might feel that they have no place in the Bible.

There are many Psalms called 'imprecatory psalms' where the writer is cursing the wicked or his enemies and calling for God's punishment in unrestrained language. Here is a flavour of such Psalms.

He will rain down blazing coals and burning sulphur on the wicked, punishing them with scorching winds.

Psalms 11:6 NLT

Slice their lips off their faces! Pull The braggart tongues from their mouths! I'm tired of hearing, "We can talk anyone into anything! Our lips manage the world."

Psalms 12:3-4 MSG

*You make my enemies retreat; I destroy those who hate me. They cry out, but there is no one to help them; they cry out to the Lord, but he does not answer them. **I grind them as fine windblown dust; I beat them underfoot like clay in the streets.***

Psalms 18:40-42 NET

*You prevail over all your enemies; your power is too great for those who hate you. **You burn them up like a fiery furnace** when you appear; the Lord angrily devours them; the fire consumes them. You destroy their offspring from the earth, their descendants from among the human race.*

Psalms 21:8-10 NET

*But evil men will die; **the Lord's enemies will be incinerated** – they will go up in smoke.*

Psalms 37:20 NET

*O daughter Babylon, soon to be devastated! How blessed will be the one who repays you for what you dished out to us! **How blessed will be the one who grabs your babies and smashes them on a rock!***

[Psalms 137:1-9 NET]

I am still finding it hard to cope with the intensity of the hatred and bitterness - the last quotation from Psalm 137 is perhaps the best known and the most troubling.

Should we not be reading or thinking about these Psalms because of these expressions of anger and hatred? Should these Psalms not be included in our worship in church? Should we be emphasising God's redeeming love and these psalms are in conflict with this? I want to quote from a book on the Psalms and this commentator thinks that we would be making a grave mistake if we were to avoid these psalms or remove them from church liturgy.

"As we have just discussed, the Psalms mirror every human emotion and help us articulate them in prayer to God. God invites our honest prayers. When we are deeply harmed and our anger boils It would be both fruitless (God reads our hearts) and dangerous to suppress those emotions rather than turning them over to God.

*And that is the important point: the imprecations are not just expressions of anger; **they allow us to turn our anger over to God for him to act as he sees fit.** These prayers do not ask God for the resources and opportunity to take vengeance on our enemies; they ask God to do so and acknowledge his freedom to act or not as he sees fit. In this way the imprecations conform to the*

advice at Paul gives to his readers: [The book quotes from Romans 12 - see below]" [Tremper Longman III: Psalms TOTC page 32]

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
[Romans 12:17-21 ESV] [

So how do we sum this up.

- These Psalms are the sincere expressions of how the writer is feeling as he is approaching God.
- They are not suggesting that he was going to carry out these acts of revenge.
- They were his inner thoughts - and we may have had similar thoughts - but we did not share them with anyone - even God.
- The advice of Paul stands firm today - we leave it to God to fight our battles and we not seek to take vengeance on our enemies.
- God knows our hearts and we cannot hide our feelings - it is better to be honest and let God know how we are feeling - He already knows and we cannot hide our anger from God.
- This does not condone feelings of anger - we need to pray that we will have the spirit of forgiveness which the Lord recommended to Peter - forgiving our brother who has done us wrong again and again without limit. [See Matthew 18:21 and Day Share on Forgiveness 7/11/19.]

I am going to explore more on this topic in a future Day Share entitled 'Where is God? - Psalm 10.

Enemies (Psalms) 29/05/2020

The writer of the 17th Psalm prays to the Lord for protection from his enemies.

Protect me from wicked people who attack me, from murderous enemies who surround me. [Psalms 17:9 NLT]

Psalm 3, the first prayer for help in Psalms, begins, "I have a lot of enemies, Lord." Almost all the prayers for help mention enemies, although other names for them are often used: "hateful people" (Psalm 6.8), "violent people" (Psalm 7.9), "evil people" (Psalm 9.5), and so on.

We learn that the psalmist's enemies make false accusations about him (Psalm 7.3-5). In another psalm, the writer speaks about neighbours who are trying to take advantage of the psalmist's troubles in any way that they can (Psalm 55.12,13). There are also mentions of nations who oppose God's people (Psalm 44.5; Psalm 123.4).

The writers of the Psalms tended to assume that their enemies were God's enemies? They were God's chosen people - Israel, Sometimes, however, God used their enemies to teach the Israelites a lesson. Throughout history, there has been a tendency to have a one-sided view of battles – God was on our side and not on the side of the enemy e.g.

- Crusades
- First World War

This kind of thinking is still prevalent today.

The Bible teaches us that by nature we are all God's enemies by nature (born sinners) and by practice. Though God is the creator of the world, He has many enemies.

*For if, **when we were enemies**, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.* Romans 5:10

The picture of God's enemies in the Psalms sadly is a mirror of us without Christ in our lives. Look at Psalm 10, for example.

In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. He says to himself, "Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble." Psalms 10:4-6 (NIV)

Who are the enemies of God?

What is clear about the enemies or the wicked is that they are selfish.

They try to find happiness not by looking to God, but rather by trying to get what they want. They show no responsibility to God or to other people (Psalm 10:3-11). Unfortunately, this suggests that most people are sometimes, if not most of the time, among the wicked.

- We don't want to let God rule our lives
- We are reluctant to accept His authority over us
- We don't live the sort of lives God wants us to live
- We live our lives without God
- We sin against God every day that we live

It is striking to realize that God has enemies. He does not force people to do his will. This in turn explains why the wicked sometimes succeed in opposing God and hurting God's people (Psalm 73:3-11). The ultimate punishment for God's enemies is that they cut themselves off from God (Psalm 28:4,5).

How does God expect us to treat our enemies?

Listen, all of you. Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for the happiness of those who curse you; implore God's blessing on those who hurt you. [Luke 6:27-36]

We are expected to love your enemies.

If someone slaps you on one cheek, let him slap the other too! If someone demands your coat, give him your shirt besides.

This was also taught in the Old Testament

Do not rejoice when your enemies fall into trouble. Don't be happy when they stumble. [Proverbs 24:17]

If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat. If they are thirsty, give them water to drink. [Proverbs 25:21]

The Lord Jesus suffered at the hands of His enemies (See Psalm 22: 12-13; 16 – 18)

Jesus took the place of the enemy.

Jesus took the place of the enemy on the cross so that we could become a friend of God. He was forsaken by God

My God, My God why have you forsaken me?

God wants us to become His friends. Although we are by nature and by practice God's enemies, God wants us to become His friends. He has made it possible for us to become His friends.

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. [Romans 5:10]

Sin and Disobedience (Psalms) 31/05/2020

PSALM 78

Psalm 78 is a record of the sin of the Israelites as they travelled through the desert on their way from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. In the Psalm there is a particular reference to one of the tribes - the tribe of Ephraim. Here are some of the ways the tribe of Ephraim sinned against God.

- The Ephraimites were armed with bows, but they retreated in the day of battle.
- They did not keep their covenant with God and they refused to obey his law
- They forgot what he had done, the amazing things he had shown them.
- They insulted God, saying, "Is God really able to give us food in the wilderness?"

Is it possible that we are sinning against God in a similar way to this tribe who lived so long ago? We are not expected to use bows and arrows in our battles for God, but God has given us gifts and He expects us to use these gifts in our service for Him. If we are not using the gifts God has given us, we are offending Him. Has God given you a gift which he expects you to use in his service? Do we leave this to someone else?

Are we disobedient like the tribe of Ephraim? They refused to obey God's law. We are not expected to follow the ten commandments in the way that they did in the Old Testament. But if we have learned something from God's Word and we disobey it, we are behaving like the tribe of Ephraim.

Are we ungrateful? The tribe of Ephraim had forgotten the amazing things that God had done for them. Are we thankful for the cross - for the sacrifice which Jesus made for us? Do we thank God for the good things he has provided for us? Maybe our family and our friends? Do we thank God for our church elders?

They doubted God's ability to provide for them. They did not think that God would be able to provide food for them in the desert. Of course, he could. God is able to provide anything we ask his for - our faith is often too weak and feeble. If we doubt God, we are grieving him and we are committing a sin. God expects us to trust Him at all times and for everything.

The Ungodly (Psalms) 02/06/2020

My cousin used to say that she always checked the obituaries just to make sure that she had not died! She had a wacky sense of humour - it is a Neilly family characteristic. We all might be just a bit like Nancy - she was glad that her name was not on the list of those who had died. When you saw the title, 'The Ungodly' maybe a thought crossed your mind for a second - "Well that's not me." We don't like to think of ourselves as ungodly. The writers of the Psalms were usually speaking about other people when they were describing the 'ungodly.' In the Psalms generally speaking people are either on God's side or against God. There is no in-between stage.

Psalm 14 portrays the whole human race as 'ungodly'

The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. [Psalm 14: 2 NIV]

Some commentators suggest that this statement is what they call hyperbole or exaggeration. Surely there were some people who were seeking God. The writer is overstating the situation. I take it literally as Paul in his letter to the Romans makes this point about the total depravity or sinfulness of the human race. [See Romans 3:23] We have all sinned and come short of God's standard.

David was only too aware of his sinful condition. In Psalm 51 he speaks about his sinful nature.

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. [Psalm 51:5 NIV]

The Psalms use different names to refer to people who were 'ungodly.' They are referred to as sinners, wicked, mockers, transgressors, and even 'fools' - though this word has a different meaning from the way we use it in the 21st century. It is a description of moral deficiency rather than lack of intelligence. So a fool was someone who was behaving foolishly towards God - he may have been well respected by other people who knew him (or her).

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; [Psalm 14:1 NIV]

This is not necessarily referring to atheists or agnostics. Atheists do not believe in the existence of God but agnostics claim that they do not know if there is a God - they are unsure. In the Old Testament, it was not usual for a Jew to claim that God did not exist. Other nations also had their own gods. The idea that there was no superior being was not common. The 'fool' according to the Bible - and this Psalm illustrates this - does not recognise God in their lives. They are ungodly - they live their lives without God. This attitude leads to a careless attitude to sin.

Another Psalm goes into more detail about this

I have a message from God in my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before their eyes. In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin. The words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful; they fail to act wisely or do good. Even on their beds they plot evil; they commit themselves to a sinful course and do not reject what is wrong. [Psalm 36: 4 NIV]

Notice the features of the ungodly. They have no fear of God or reverence for Him. They live their lives as if he did not exist. They do not take him into account in making decisions about their lives. There is a great deal of self-deception and flattery in their lives. They pretend that they are better than they really are. They are not conscious of sin - they pretend that they are all right. They cannot be trusted - they are deceitful. They have no moral compass - they do not have any sense of evil. They are sinning deliberately - willingly choosing a course of action which is against God.

In Psalm 24 David asks the searching question, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? "

***Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,***

***who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.***

He is recognising that God has high standards of holiness and we need to be clean to enter God's presence. David had committed many sins - he did not have clean hands or a pure heart. He had been deceitful. How could he enter God's presence?

In Psalm 51, he has committed the most serious sin of his life. He asks God for cleansing.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. [Psalm 51: 7 NIV]

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. [Psalm 51:9 NIV]

David is recognising that his sins need to be forgiven and cleansed. Only God can do that. He needs God to intervene in his life. He has appreciated the joy of having his sins forgiven

***Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,***
[Psalm 32:1 - 2 NIV]

If we are trying to be godly by our own efforts, we are doomed to fail.

Word of God (Psalms) 04/06/2020

The Psalms were written centuries before the birth of Jesus and the records of the life of Jesus which we know as the Gospels had still to be written. The letters from the apostles had not been written either. So there was only part of the Old Testament available to the Jewish people and they referred to this as the Torah. This was God's word to them.

I find some of the Old Testament quite hard to read - Leviticus and Numbers, for example. However, the writer of the longest Psalm speaks with great affection for God's Word. He uses different terms to describe it - the law of the Lord; his statutes; his ways; commands; decrees; precepts. He makes some interesting statements about God's Word

- *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* [Psalm 119: 11 NIV] This is just as true for us today as it was then - reading God's word has a positive effect on our behaviour - it challenges us about our sins.
- *Your word is a lamp to walk by, and a light to illuminate my path.* [Psalm 119:105] There are two truths taught in this short verse. The Bible or the Word of God provides detailed guidance for living a life that is well-pleasing to God - this was especially true of the Pentateuch - the first five books of the Bible which provided the Jews with a whole series of laws they were to follow. The New Testament also has passages where there are detailed guidance on how to live the Christian life - e.g. Colossians chapter 3; Ephesians chapters 3 - 6. This is the first part of the statement - "a lamp to walk by" or "a lamp to my feet." [ESV and other translations]. This is where the Word of God keeps us from stumbling. However, the Word of God also provides a light to illuminate our path - to point us in the right direction. God gives us guidance through his Word.

- *You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word.* [Psalm 119:114 NIV] He has placed his complete trust in the promises of God's Word. As Christians we have done just that. Although sceptics and cynics may challenge the authority of the Scriptures, we have trusted in your word and we are depending on it for our future.

The writer speaks about his joy and delight in reading and thinking about the Word of God. It was not a chore to him - he did not read it out of a sense of duty.

- *I rejoice in following your ways as one rejoices in great riches.* [Psalm 119:14 NIV] This is a strong statement to make - do we cherish God's word as much as that or would we prefer the riches?
- *My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.* [Psalm 119: 20] Studying God's word had become a passion for him.
- *I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame, for I delight in your commands because I love them.* [Psalm 119: 46-47 NIV] Are we comfortable speaking to our generation about the message of God's Word?
- *Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.* [Psalm 119:18 NIV] This should be our prayer that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to enable us to see for ourselves the wonderful things in the Word of God.

Prayer

Lord we have a rich treasure in the Bible. Thank you for the Word of God. May we find that it guides our footsteps and keeps us from sinning against you. May we receive guidance from your word. Give us a thrill and an excitement from reading your Word.

Amen

Meditation on God's Word (Psalms) 06/06/2020

My fifth blog almost a year ago was called Feeding the Mind * 19/09/19. It covered very similar ground to today's Day Share. I spoke about our pet dog Ben who devoured his massive plates of dog food really rapidly. By contrast we had a pet rabbit which nibbled all day long. I was making the point that when it comes to feeding on God's word, we should imitate the rabbit rather than the mongrel dog. We should take time to digest God's word - to ruminate - to meditate on small sections of the Bible reflecting and pondering the Word to allow it to produce fruit in our lives. Several times I have read through the whole Bible in a year which involved reading three or four chapters each day. Sometimes I had been too focused on completing my target and the reading had made little or no impact on my spiritual development.

The Psalm writers clearly advocate meditating on the Word of God. The first Psalm speaks about the godly person who "meditates on the Lord's commands day and night." [Psalms 1:2 NET] This makes him or her "blessed" which is more than happiness. It suggests a full experience and appreciation of God's blessings. He or she is compared to a tree planted by flowing streams with a plentiful supply of life-giving water. This godly person produces spiritual fruit - if you like, the 9 fruits of the Holy Spirit.

In Psalm 119 there are many references to meditating on God's Word.

- *I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.* [Psalms 119:15 NIV] Here his meditating leads him to a better understanding of God's purposes.

- *Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees.* [Psalms 119:23 NIV] Despite opposition, he will still meditate on God's Word.
- *Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.* [Psalms 119:97 NIV] Here it is the daytime activity of the psalmist. He is infatuated with God's Word. (In Psalm 4, it is a night-time occupation.)
- *I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.* [Psalms 119:99 NIV] This is an interesting comment - meditating on God's Word brings deeper insight and he has overtaken his teachers.
- *Cause me to understand the way of your precepts, that I may meditate on your wonderful deeds.* [Psalms 119:27 NIV] It is good to meditate on God's wonderful deeds. This produces worship and thanksgiving.

The following hymn is really relevant to this topic. When the hymn writer is instructing us to 'Be still,' this is the equivalent of meditating on God's Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to minister to us.

Speak, Lord, in the stillness
while I wait on Thee;
hushed my heart to listen
in expectancy.

Speak, O blessed Master,
in this quiet hour;
let me see your face, Lord,
feel your touch of power.

For the words You speak, Lord,
they are life indeed;
living bread from heaven,
now on my spirit feed!

All to You is yielded,
I am not my own;
blissful, glad surrender,
I am yours alone.

Fill me with the knowledge
of your glorious will;
all your own good pleasure
in your child fulfill.
[Mission Praise 608 adapted]

Israel's History - Lesson to the Nations (Psalms) 08/06/2020

The nation of Israel had a very dramatic history. It can be summed up in a few sentences. God chose them as his own people and he did amazing things for them. The Jews or Israel however proved unfaithful to God - sinning repeatedly and forsaking their God. Despite their unfaithfulness, God remained faithful to them and did not give them up.

There are several Psalms which detail the history of the nation. Psalm 78, for example, is a long Psalm which covers this subject in detail.

The greatest display of God's power was the Exodus - the time when God rescued his own people from a life of slavery and exploitation at the hands of the Egyptians. This great event was celebrated in the Psalms.

The Lord took them out of Egypt but they had to cross the Red Sea. The all-powerful God made sure that they did not get their feet wet but the Egyptian army with their horses and chariots were drowned. The nation of Israel were miraculously sustained during the long wanderings in the desert - especially the provision of 'food from heaven' known as 'manna.'

The purpose of these history lessons was to "*tell the next generation the **praiseworthy deeds** of the Lord, his power, and the **wonders** he has done.*" [Psalm 78:4 NIV] Each generation was to pass this on to the next.

Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. [Psalm 78:7 NIV]

Sadly, Israel did not learn lessons from God's goodness to them. They stopped trusting this powerful God and lack of faith produced sin and disobedience. This is the same with us - if we begin to doubt God, we will soon be sinning against Him. The old hymn puts it like this.

*Trust and obey
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus
But to trust and obey.*

Psalm 78 highlights the pattern of sin and disobedience. They soon forgot about the amazing deliverance from Egypt and they longed for the food that they had eaten in Egypt which was not available to them in the desert. They despised the food that God had given them.

But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the wilderness against the Most High. They wilfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God; they said, "Can God really spread a table in the wilderness? True, he struck the rock, and water gushed out, streams flowed abundantly, but can he also give us bread? Can he supply meat for his people?" When the Lord heard them, he was furious; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance. [Psalm 78:17-20 NIV]

Their greatest sin was unbelief. They refused to trust God - even though they had personally witnessed the power of God at work. God had to punish them (and several young men died tragically) but this only changed their behaviour for a very short time and they went back to their old ways.

In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe. [Psalm 78: 32 NIV]

God's dealings with the nation of Israel was a lesson to future generations and the history would be recounted many times through the centuries. It was also a lesson to the surrounding nations. God had singled out Israel for special attention and no other nation experienced God's power in such a way. His deliverance of His people was a powerful lesson to Egypt and there were other nations who experienced at first-hand how powerful was Israel's God - compared to their man-made gods. [See

Psalms 135:8 - 12] When they were driven from their land and were exiled to Babylon, the writer of Psalm 79 says pitifully

We are objects of contempt to our neighbours, of scorn and derision to those around us. [Psalm 79: 4 NIV]

There are some simple lessons to learn from this study.

- God is still as powerful and he was at the time of the Exodus.
- If we are Christians, he has delivered us from the power of Satan - who has enslaved more people throughout the centuries than Pharaoh ever did.
- He is deeply hurt by our unbelief and lack of faith.
- In the same way as other nations were observing God's dealing with the nation of Israel, so other people are watching our lives. If we are living for God, this is a great witness to our neighbours. If we have let God down, sadly this is a bad witness to our neighbours.

The Coming Messiah (Psalms) 10/06/2020

In his gospel Luke records the conversation which took place between Jesus after he had risen from the dead and two dejected and despondent disciples who were on their way from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. They did not realise that it was Jesus but he explained from the Old Testament that it was essential for the Messiah to suffer such a death as crucifixion in order to enter into his glory. There is a very interesting comment in verse 27

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. [Luke 24:27 ESV]

The Psalms are not specifically mentioned but they were definitely included under the banner of 'all the Scriptures.' Further down the same chapter there is a more specific reference to the Psalms. Jesus is speaking to all of his disciples in the upper room.

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." [Luke 24:44 ESV]

So we have the authority of the Son of God himself to interpret the Psalms as speaking about Jesus.

Many Psalms are quoted in the New Testament and are applied to Jesus. The following psalms are all applied to Christ by New Testament writers - Psalm 2; Psalm 16; Psalm 22; Psalm 69; Psalm 110, Psalm 118. However, there are also many Psalms which are described as royal Psalms. They celebrate one of the kings of Israel and Christians frequently apply these Psalms to the Lord Jesus, the one who is David's descendant but He is David's greater Son and the King of Kings. David's son, Solomon was a great king and he established a great kingdom. However, even before his death it was evident that there were serious weaknesses in this kingdom - and after the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided into two kingdoms - 10 tribes in the north known as Israel and 2 tribes in the south known as Judah. Although there were some good kings of both kingdoms, generally speaking the notion of kingship was associated with failure. Many years later, the magi from the east asked the well-known question, "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" Praise the Lord. Jesus' kingdom will never fail and will last eternally. He is the ultimate fulfilment of the promises made to David.

It is important to stress that there are two levels of interpretation of the Psalms - there is its primary interpretation as it was originally written in its setting. However, the New Testament writers clearly apply many of the Psalms to Jesus and they are very helpful to us to appreciate truths about the person and work of our Lord.

On the 20th of June we are hoping to look at one Psalm [Psalm 22] which was written many years before the birth of Christ but it describes details about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus - sufferings related to crucifixion - and yet crucifixion was not invented until hundreds of years later.

To finish today's devotional, I would like to look at one example of a royal psalm which was initially written about King Solomon but it applies more aptly to Jesus.

May he endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. May he be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more. May he rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. [Psalm 72: 5-8 NIV]

Solomon was a powerful ruler but his reign ended when he died. He did extend the borders of the nation of Israel but he never ruled from sea to sea or to the ends of the earth. Our King Jesus will indeed do this.

I will be satisfied (Psalms) 12/06/2020

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. [Psalms 23:6 NIV]

This is a verse from the best known and most popular psalm - Psalm 23. David, the writer of this Psalm makes a distinction between the rest of his life on earth - where he looks forward to enjoying God's blessings of goodness and love - and life after death. He looks forward to life beyond this earth where he speaks about dwelling in the 'house of the Lord.' One key element then from this future prospect is **the presence of the Lord** which is clearly associated with the temple or the 'house of the Lord.'

Psalm 17 is a lament but it ends in a note of triumph with the writer, most likely David, looking forward to a future after death when he will enjoy eternal fellowship in God's presence.

As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness. [Psalm 17: 15 NIV]

Another translation gives a slightly different rendering of the verse.

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness. [Psalm 17: 15 ESV]

Notice that the writer is looking forward to enjoying God's presence and seeing God. He is making clear that this experience is not for everyone. This truth is more clearly explained in the New Testament. He speaks about seeing the face of God in righteousness - which is also elaborated in the New Testament. When the writer says 'When I awake' he is speaking of death as a sleep from which we awaken and this metaphor is also used in the New Testament - See 1 Corinthians 15:6; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13, 14,15. The writer exclaims 'I shall be satisfied' but this is not because he will

see his enemies getting their just deserts - it is because he will see God's likeness. The New Testament is a helpful commentary on this verse - John, the apostle, speaks about 'being like him.'

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [1 John 3:2 ESV]

The Old Testament is less specific about the after-life than the New Testament. However, there are frequent references to *sheol* - the abode of the dead. Here is one such reference to this realm of the dead in Psalm 16.

*Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because **you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead**, [this is a translation of the word *sheol*] nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life; **you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.***
[Psalms 16:9-11 NIV]

This is a difficult passage to interpret and I am not going to spend too long on it. However, in broad terms, there is a hint at future resurrection - a promise of life after death and this is described as 'eternal pleasures at your right hand.' It is a happy prospect - because there is a clear certainty of enjoying God's presence - that is what we look forward to as Christians. The teachings of Paul in the New Testament provides us with far more detail than we are given in this Psalm - but there is a hopeful note sounded and the promise of a bodily resurrection.

Psalm 49 looks at the other side of the coin - what about those who are trusting in their wealth or social status to guarantee them a future blessing after death.

- Wealth and prosperity in this life do not guarantee future blessings beyond the grave.
- Wealth cannot purchase redemption or salvation.
- The rich person 'will take nothing with him when he dies; his wealth will not follow him to the grave.'
- This is the bleak outlook for the unbeliever in contrast with the assurance which the writers of the Psalms have of living eternally with the Lord. Those who are trusting in the Lord have the assurance 'that they should live on forever and not see decay.'

I would like to finish today's Day Share by sharing an old hymn which speaks about future blessings for the Christian. It is based on the theme of Psalm 17:15. Notice the reference to 'waking' and 'being satisfied.'

1. When I shall wake in that fair morn of morns,
After whose dawning never night returns,
And with whose glory day eternal burns,
I shall be satisfied, be satisfied!

Chorus

*I shall be satisfied, I shall be satisfied
When I shall wake in that fair morn of morns
I shall be satisfied, I shall be satisfied,
When I shall wake in that fair morn of morns.*

2. When I shall see Thy glory face to face,
When in Thine arms Thou wilt Thy child embrace,
When Thou shalt open all Thy stores of grace,
I shall be satisfied, be satisfied! [Chorus]

3. When I shall meet with those that I have loved,

Clasp in my eager arms the long removed,
And find how faithful Thou to me hast proved,
I shall be satisfied, be satisfied! [Chorus]

4. When I shall gaze upon the face of Him
Who for me died, with eye no longer dim,
And praise Him with the everlasting hymn,
I shall be satisfied, be satisfied! [Chorus]

This is a really old hymn that takes me back to my boyhood days in Bethany Hall Stevenston. It is from a hymn book called Sacred Songs and Solos by Ira D Sankey. I am singing it to myself as I am writing it this morning!