

REFLECTIONS ON THE PSALMS



JACK KELLEY

Reflections on The Psalms

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Introduction	10
Psalm 1	11
Psalm 2	13
Psalm 3	15
Psalm 4	17
Psalm 5	19
Psalm 6	21
Psalm 7	23
Psalm 8	25
Psalm 9	27
Psalm 10	29
Psalm 11	31
Psalm 12	33
Psalm 13	35
Psalm 14	37

Psalm 15	39
Psalm 16	41
Psalm 17	43
Psalm 18:1-19	45
Psalm 18:20-50	47
Psalm 19:1-6	49
Psalm 19:7-14	50
Psalm 20	52
Psalm 21	54
Psalm 22	56
Psalm 23	59
Psalm 24	60
Psalm 25	61
Psalm 26	63
Psalm 27	65
Psalm 28	67
Psalm 29	69
Psalm 30	71

Psalm 31	73
Psalm 32	75
Psalm 33	77
Psalm 34	79
Psalm 35	81
Psalm 36	84
Psalm 37:1-27	86
Psalm 37:28-40	88
Psalm 38	90
Psalm 39	92
Psalm 40	94
Psalm 41	96
Psalm 42	98
Psalm 43	100
Psalm 44	102
Psalm 45	104
Psalm 46	106
Psalm 47	108

Psalm 48	110
Psalm 49	112
Psalm 50	115
Psalm 51	117
Psalm 52	119
Psalm 53	121
Psalm 54	123
Psalm 55	124
Psalm 56	127
Psalm 57	129
Psalm 58	131
Psalm 59	132
Psalm 60	134
Psalm 61	136
Psalm 62	138
Psalm 63	141
Psalm 64	143
Psalm 65	145

Psalm 66	147
Psalm 67	149
Psalm 68	151
Psalm 69	154
Psalm 70	157
Psalm 71	158
Psalm 72	161
Psalm 73	163
Psalm 74	166
Psalm 75	168
Psalm 76	170
Psalm 77	172
Psalm 78	174
Psalm 79	178
Psalm 80	180
Psalm 81	182
Psalm 82	184
Psalm 83	186

Psalm 84	188
Psalm 85	190
Psalm 86	192
Psalm 87	194
Psalm 88	196
Psalm 89	198
Psalm 90	201
Psalm 91	203
Psalm 92	206
Psalm 93	208
Psalm 94	209
Psalm 95	212
Psalm 96	214
Psalm 97	217
Psalm 98	219
Psalm 99	221
Psalm 100	223
Psalm 101	225

Psalm 102	227
Psalm 103	229
Psalm 104	231
Psalm 105	234
Psalm 106	237
Psalm 107	240
Psalm 108	242
Psalm 109	244
Psalm 110	247
Psalm 111	249
Psalm 112	250
Psalm 113	252
Psalm 114	254
Psalm 115	256
Psalm 116	258
Psalm 117	260
Psalm 118	262
Psalm 119: 1-40	265

Psalm 119:41-88	267
Psalm 119:89-136	270
Psalm 119:137-176, Conclusion	273
Psalm 120	275
Psalm 121	277
Psalm 122	279
Psalm 123	281
Psalm 124	282
Psalm 125	283
Psalm 126	285
Psalm 127	287
Psalm 128	288
Psalm 129	290
Psalm 130	292
Psalm 131	294
Psalm 132	295
Psalm 133	297
Psalm 134	298

Psalm 135	299
Psalm 136	301
Psalm 137	303
Psalm 138	305
Psalm 139	308
Psalm 140	310
Psalm 141	312
Psalm 142	314
Psalm 143	316
Psalm 144	318
Psalm 145	320
Psalm 146	323
Psalm 147	325
Psalm 148	327
Psalm 149	329
Psalm 150	331
About the Author	333

Introduction

What you are about to read is not a commentary on the Psalms. I made no attempt to interpret them or reveal new levels of understanding. Instead, it's a collection of thoughts I wrote down over a period of several years as I read through the Psalms. Some are recollections from my own experience, others are ideas I gleaned from various books and articles I've read, and still others are just the thoughts that came into my mind as I thought about what I was reading.

My original purpose in writing this series was to give visitors to the website a brief middle of the week meditation. I wanted each one to be practical and uplifting, in the hope of adding substance to our faith. For that reason, they are not meant to be read at one sitting or even in a structured way. They are designed to provide a break in our routine, to be taken one at a time followed by a few quiet moments of consideration. Being in e-book format they can go where you go, to be enjoyed any time you have a few minutes, over coffee, while waiting for an appointment, or just because you want a few minutes with the Lord. Download them to your tablet or phone and they will be ready when you are.

Psalm 1

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the Day of Judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

The Bible promises a long, prosperous and healthy life for those who follow the ways of the Lord. There's an intrinsic value in doing this from which even non-believers benefit. But believers tend to gravitate toward one of two extremes where God's Law is concerned, and both are wrong.

The first is the legalist, who thinks that by being "righteous" he's earning favor with God, and the second sees God's grace as a license that relieves him of the consequences of his behavior, no matter how sinful.

The Legalist misses out on the joy of his salvation, grinding through a life of "have-tos" and "don'ts". He doesn't enjoy the freedom purchased for him at the cross, his behavior constrained by a narrow set of rules he himself has devised, never realizing that he dwells in a prison of his own making.

His counterpart, we'll call him the permissive, spends most of the time out of fellowship with God, not understanding that his un-confessed sins are a source of guilt that drives a wedge between the Lord and him. This failure to acknowledge his behavior as sin and confess makes him fair game for an enemy who delights in tormenting him, and his life becomes an example to be avoided in the eyes of those around him.

One is focused only on what he must do to earn God's favor, and the other only on what God should do for him. Neither understands that our behavior good or evil cannot affect God. Our sins only hurt us and those around us; just as our good deeds only benefit us and them. (**Job 35:6-8**)

But our relationship with God is vastly enriched when we voluntarily act in a manner pleasing to Him, not out of an effort to earn a blessing we hope to get, but as a way of saying thanks for the blessings we've

already received. And like everything else where the Lord's concerned, we're judged on motive, not result. He doesn't expect perfection; He's just looking for an attitude of gratitude.

Psalm 2

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters."

The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in His anger and terrifies them in His wrath, saying, "I have installed My King on Zion, my Holy Hill."

I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your father. Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."

Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for His wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.

Because of the language employed, we think about armed rebellion here. But what about civil or social or spiritual rebellion? Haven't our leaders on earth waged these kinds of warfare as well? Think of the laws written to insure freedom of religion, that are now interpreted as guaranteeing freedom from religion. What about the public schools who ban even silent prayer, courts who prohibit a display of God's Law, and officials who are trying to remove the words "under God" from our Pledge of Allegiance? And that's just in the US, that bastion of personal freedom. Are not these also attempts by the rulers of this world to break the ties between man and his Creator?

It's said that as the bonds between God and man are broken, the bonds between man and man can fare no better. We certainly see the truth of that observation. Lying, cheating, stealing and defrauding often seem the order of the day. But remember God laughs at these puny attempts at rebellion as we laugh at a two year old, who thinks if his eyes are covered so he can't see us, then we can't see him either.

The Lord scoffs at our Godless leaders now, but soon He will rebuke them. You see, they don't make the rules, He does. He's installed His King over the earth. They can't impeach Him and He's not going to resign.

One thousand years before the first Christmas, David "saw" through the eye of inspiration as the Father gave His Son the authority to become sole heir to Planet Earth. He'll rule the nations as one who oversees his

personal property, brooking no interference and accepting no criticism. The first will indeed become last, as the Kings of the Earth are warned to serve Him with the fear reserved for one who, in the blink of an eye can be stirred to wrath. Is this the “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild” we were taught about in Sunday School? I think not. This is not the Lamb of God, but the Lion of Judah.

Once before, mankind committed a grievous error by failing to recognize Who they were dealing with, and it's destined to happen again. The Jews wanted the Lion of Judah to throw off the Roman yoke, a Warrior King Who would defeat Israel's enemies. But refusing to admit the sin problem that first required the sacrificial Lamb, they rejected Him.

The mainline Church looks for the Lamb of God; that sandal shod social worker Who walked the paths of the Galilee, patting little children on the head and telling everyone to turn the other cheek. Forgetting that he's promised to return like a roaring Lion with the armies of Heaven, to defeat His enemies and take possession of that which He's purchased, they fail to see the signs of His coming.

At the end of the age, when the sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky, all the nations of the Earth will mourn (**Matt 24:30**). For those who've rejected Him, it will be a sad day indeed when the Lord returns, but for we who believe, it will be the culmination of history, the beginning of Heaven on Earth. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.

Psalm 3

O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, “God will not deliver him.” But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill.

I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side. Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.

How often it feels like the world is mobilized against us. People cut us off on the freeway, steal our parking place at work, take credit for our efforts, and in general build themselves up by putting us down, trying to destroy our self-esteem in the process.

There are four sources from which we gain self-esteem. Three are doomed to failure because they depend on the fickle nature of this world, but one works wonders.

The first is appearance. Some rely on that alone, feeling good about themselves because they look good to others. But all too soon they grow old and their looks fade. Even spending thousands of dollars on plastic surgery can't help and they often wind up looking like pitiful caricatures of their former selves.

Others gain their self-esteem from performance. But one day they find they can't perform anymore. Age or poor health or even the obsolescence of their skill renders them incapable. These are the ones who have problems with retirement. No longer able to perform they cease to feel useful. Some go back to work, some become a burden to their families, and some simply die. Having worked all their lives to enjoy their retirement, they wind up feeling miserable and useless.

Still others rely on progressively greater achievements to bolster their self-esteem. But again, age and infirmity undercut their ability with the same result as their performance oriented counterparts above.

It's the fourth source of self-esteem that David speaks about in **Psalm 3**; the only one that can't fail. No matter what hand the world deals us, we have a Creator Who loves us unconditionally. We're the highest and best example of His Creative Power; His work of art (**Eph 2:10**). He is the reason we can hold our heads up high, no matter what. He lifts us up when others put us down. He provides for us, He sustains us. He gave His life for us. And one day soon, He will take vengeance on our enemies. “I will make them come and

fall down at your feet, and acknowledge that I have loved you,” He promises (**Rev 3:9**). He’ll wipe every tear from our eyes, and for us there will be no more death or crying or mourning or pain. And then He will take us to dwell with Him forever in a place of unimaginable bliss, while those who rejected Him and oppressed us spend eternity in torment and pain.

When we lie down, our sleep is sweet, for the Lord is our confidence. He’s a shield about us, our glory, the lifter of our head. He’s the source of our self-esteem.

Psalm 4

Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer. How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD will hear when I call to him. In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD.

Many are asking, “Who can show us any good?” Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD. You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound. I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Lots of people I meet seem successful by world standards, but spiritually haven’t a clue. With their big houses, their SUVs, and their barn full of toys, I’m sure they laugh at us behind our backs for living a simpler life and following our faith. But I wonder if they realize that they’ve traded an eternity of deprivation for a few years of personal comfort while we’ll dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Who’s the winner here? And how about the fact that there’s never as much satisfaction in having stuff as there is in getting it? Like someone said, “It’s better to want things you don’t have than to have things you don’t want.” Are they really as successful as their possessions lead us to believe, or do they need to keep getting more things to keep themselves feeling good?

I’ve found that even believers miss the point of the Lord’s abundant life promises. We weren’t put on earth solely for the self-centered pursuit of pleasure that so many seem to be almost compulsive about. While He does promise us an abundant life, the Lord also admonished us not to store up treasure here. He said we should store up treasure in Heaven instead. And Paul confirmed that, saying we’d be made rich in every way so that we could be generous on every occasion. **(2 Cor. 9:11)** (Many of us like the first half of that promise, but ignore the second half. We forget that the reason that we’ll be made rich is so that we can be generous.)

I’m convinced that the Lord’s promise of an abundant life is literal and that the way to access it is through generous giving. Like many of the Lord’s promises, it’s counter intuitive to our thinking. Is it really possible that we can get more of what we want by giving away more of what we have?

The answer is yes, because two things happen when we begin giving more generously. The first is that the Lord becomes more generous with us. That shouldn’t surprise us because He promised us that the measure we use in giving is the measure He’ll use in blessing. **(Luke 6:38)**

And the second is that we'll get such a rush from giving, that we'll actually begin to resent having to use money for any other purpose, so we'll start cleaning up our financial lives to free up more. The end result? Instead of spending money we don't have to buy things we don't need, winding up enslaved by our possessions, we'll be passing along money the Lord sends us, experiencing the true and lasting joy of giving, and achieving financial freedom in the process.

There's just one catch. It takes faith. We have to begin this process by giving before we receive. And when the Lord returns what we've given, as He will, we have to give it away again, and again. Little by little we see that He's returning more, allowing us to give more and so it goes. If we ever stop, so does He. But as long as we keep giving in faith our lives will grow richer and richer in every way. That's the abundant life.

Psalm 5

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.

But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple. Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies-make straight your way before me.

Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit. Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.

But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.

Years ago I acquired the habit of daily prayer while driving to work. Each morning I thanked the Lord for the blessings of yesterday, asked forgiveness for the sins I had committed and thanked Him for granting it, and prayed for safety for my family and for guidance for the day. The twenty minutes or so it took to get to my office was just long enough and since I went to work early traffic was light and there were few distractions. I arrived at work feeling energized and ready to meet the day. It seemed that my morning prayer time gave me a spiritual cleansing, just like my daily shower had made me physically clean.

Then I affiliated with a group whose office was only five minutes from home. Not enough time for prayer. Within a few days I knew something was wrong. I just didn't feel the same. By getting up a few minutes earlier I was able to take a short walk before going to work and used that time for my prayers. Immediately I felt better.

Sure I know that all my sins, past, present and future, were forgiven at the cross. And believing in eternal security, I know I can't lose the salvation that was purchased for me there. But I also know that **1 John 1:9** was written to believers years after the resurrection.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

This verse has been called the Christian's bar of soap with good reason. Our unconfessed sins can't make God change His mind about saving us, but it can and does hinder our current relationship with Him. David was right, the Lord is not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with Him the wicked cannot dwell. That has never changed, but here's what has. David had to go through an elaborate ritual that included slaughtering a lamb every time he sinned. Our Lamb was slain once for all time. And because God is faithful to the promise He made to His Son, forgiveness is ours just for the asking. Once we ask, we're immediately purified from all unrighteousness; we again become as holy as God is, our relationship is restored to intimacy and we are blessed. *For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.*

As it was with our salvation, so it is with our relationship. It's free for the asking, but we have to ask. David wrote that he chose the mornings to ask. Believe me, it's a great way to start each day.

Psalm 6

O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long? Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love. No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave?

I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes.

Away from me, all you who do evil, for the LORD has heard my weeping. The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer. All my enemies will be ashamed and dismayed; they will turn back in sudden disgrace.

Some believers, often with the “help” of well-meaning friends, equate illness or infirmity with discipline. They’re encouraged to believe that the Lord caused their illness. Either some sin of theirs displeased Him and He’s punishing them, or He’s made them sick to teach them some “godly” lesson. I guess they think that even though He loved us enough to die for us while we still hated Him, once we come to Him in love He’ll make us suffer.

There are simple explanations for our sickness. Some are ill as a consequence of their unhealthy lifestyle. Attributing their sickness to God helps them avoid having to accept responsibility for their own behavior. They tried to beat the cause and effect rule and they failed. Others subconsciously enjoy the attention their illness brings. They’re afraid if they weren’t ill, people would ignore them altogether, and that’s worse than being sick. But for most it’s just because illness came into the world with sin and is therefore a part of our existence. It strikes both the faithful and the unfaithful

This randomness is Satan’s way of making people blame God for the bad things that happen in their lives. Like Job we cry out to God, “Why me?” We don’t realize that this world is a dark and evil place, currently under the control of God’s sworn enemy. (**1 John 5:19**) When we align ourselves with God we become aliens behind enemy lines. It’s only by His grace that we aren’t all stricken with devastating illness immediately.

The Bible never says we’ll be immune from sickness and disease. Instead it commands us to pray for each other for healing (**James 5:14-16**). The Lord describes Himself as “The God Who Heals You” (**Exodus 15:26**) and Isaiah 53:4-5 says that by His stripes we are healed.

As our Lord explained to His disciples, *"In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart for I have overcome the world."* (**John 16:33**) For some believers that promise comes true with immediate healing from illness. For others it comes true in the grace to endure until the healing comes.

A missionary friend of ours had suffered silently for several months with a pain in her shoulder. Pain killers helped but only temporarily. Finally she asked for prayer to be healed. After the prayer her arm felt better but wasn't quite 100%. Instead of complaining that she hadn't been healed she prayed, "Lord, Your word says that the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well (**James 5:15**). Therefore I choose to believe I'm healed. If I have to experience this pain for a little while longer until my healing is complete, that's something I'm happy to do for You. After all look how You suffered for me." Within a few days all the pain was gone for good. The Lord had heard her cry for mercy and accepted her prayer. Her faith had healed her.

Psalm 7

O LORD my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me, or they will tear me like a lion and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me.

O LORD my God, if I have done this and there is guilt on my hands- if I have done evil to him who is at peace with me or without cause have robbed my foe- then let my enemy pursue and overtake me; let him trample my life to the ground and make me sleep in the dust.

Arise, O LORD, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies. Awake, my God; decree justice. Let the assembled peoples gather around you. Rule over them from on high; let the LORD judge the peoples.

Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High. O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.

My shield is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day. If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows.

He who is pregnant with evil and conceives trouble gives birth to disillusionment. He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made. The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head. I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

Being wrongly accused and unjustly persecuted is one of the worst feelings we encounter in life. It strikes at the very core of our self-esteem because it shows that our accuser has no sense of justice or fairness, and no regard for our rights as a fellow human being. A plot built on this theme is sure to grab our emotions in a book or movie, and in real life much hatred and violence stems from an attempt to relieve the frustration brought on by feelings of persecution.

If you're of a majority race in a free society you probably don't experience much of this, but when you do, you quickly become indignant. You cry out like David, "If I've done anything to deserve this, I'll gladly pay the penalty. Show me the evidence. If not, leave me alone!"

One day soon the rules will abruptly change and those of us who've enjoyed the freedom to follow our faith and live in peace will suddenly find ourselves subject to intense persecution. Already in the USA we're beginning to see that nearly every religious belief is being tolerated and even encouraged, except ours. And unless we start now to resist this trend, our way of life may soon be at risk. And one day soon the choice for Christians will be to deny the faith or die.

Over three thousand people in the world are waking to that choice today. It doesn't seem like a lot, but the number is growing and will soon skyrocket. As the forces of evil continue to gain strength and numbers in their pursuit of world dominance, they'll focus like a laser on people of faith as the obstacle to their objectives. Those who refuse to renounce their faith will be denied the most basic of human rights, and will be hunted like animals.

If you're free to follow your faith, to worship publicly, pray or read your Bible in the open, take a moment right now to thank God for the privilege, and pray for the millions for whom such actions constitute a crime punishable by death. Don't take your freedoms for granted. It's the first step toward losing them.

Psalm 8

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

One of the biggest paradigm shifts I ever made as a new believer was to go from being so all-important in my own mind, to seeing myself as so insignificant when compared to God.

As a non-believer it was all about me; what I had accomplished, and what still greater things I could do if I just decided to. I was obsessed with the acquisition of the material trappings that would validate my high opinion of myself. My pride puffed me up like a blowfish, trying to make me look so much bigger than I really was.

It took a huge fall for the Lord to get me to see myself as I really am, an ant standing before the world's ultimate giant; helpless and hopeless, worthless and useless. I remembered the words of the 12 spies that Moses sent ahead into the Promised Land. When describing the indigenous people they lamented, "*We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes and we looked the same to them.*" (**Numbers 13:33**) Believe me, when I stood before the Throne of God for the first time, I could relate. The more you know about God, the bigger He gets and the smaller you become.

Then I read **Psalm 8** and realized that King David had the same problem. That fearless warrior, whom God described as "a man after my own heart" also experienced the insignificance of man in the presence of his Creator.

But then the Lord reminded him, as he reminds us, that though we've been made a little lower than the angels, we've been placed in charge of His creation and crowned with glory and honor.

There's a sense in which this Psalm was really written with The Son of Man, the Messiah, in view rather than all sons of mankind. You can translate the phrase "a little lower" as "for a little while lower" and as He said to His disciples, "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me."

The writer of **Hebrews** seems to agree in **Chapter 2:5-9**, his commentary on Psalm 8. But then he goes on to remind us that the suffering of the Son of Man brought glory and honor to all the sons of mankind who believe, for He is not ashamed to call us his brothers. And as He has been elevated above the angels, so are you and I. *For God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6-7).*

You and I are God's workmanship, literally His work of art, the highest and finest example of His creative capability, co-heirs with His Son Who has been given the ends of the Earth as His possession, co-regents with Him to Whom all authority in Heaven and on Earth has been granted.

So I've come full circle. It is all about me. Only now I see that I'm the undeserving recipient of a love I have no right to expect and blessings I have no ability to measure. This love has elevated me to the highest heights of creation. How does the song go? "You put me high upon a pedestal, so high that I could almost see eternity." The same is true of you.

No longer do I take pride in what the power of my mind and the strength of my arm have accomplished. Now I am humbled to see what the Creator of the Universe has done for me. And like King David I wonder, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" And like him, I sing my praise saying, "*O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*"

Psalm 9

I will praise you, O LORD , with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

I will praise you, O LORD , with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

My enemies turn back; they stumble and perish before you. For you have upheld my right and my cause; you have sat on your throne, judging righteously. You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; you have blotted out their name for ever and ever. Endless ruin has overtaken the enemy, you have uprooted their cities; even the memory of them has perished.

The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice.

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you. Sing praises to the LORD, enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done. For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cry of the afflicted.

O LORD , see how my enemies persecute me! Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death that I may declare your praises in the gates of the Daughter of Zion and there rejoice in your salvation.

The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug; their feet are caught in the net they have hidden. The LORD is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands. The wicked return to the grave, all the nations that forget God. But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish.

Arise, O LORD , let not man triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence. Strike them with terror, O LORD ; let the nations know they are but men.

Among the ancient people who contended with Israel, very few remain. The Ammonites, the Moabites, the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Edomites, the Philistines; gone. Banished from the earth forever. "I will bless those who bless you," the LORD said to Abraham, "And curse those who curse you." Can you point to the verse that contains the expiration date for that promise?

Today Israel exists once more. Battered and bruised, paying the penalty for abandoning her God, but here just the same. Her land, her language, her heritage all intact. And once again the nations seem determined to test God's resolve where Israel is concerned.

Her enemies have surrounded her and threaten on every side. Her people live lives of fear and uncertainty, for no nation is strong enough to defeat enemies so numerous and powerful. But unseen in the Spiritual realm angels surround her, permitting attacks only serious enough to gain her attention and cause her to see the futility of going it alone, as her God, with tears in His eyes and love in His heart, beckons her return. He longs for the day when his people will finally say:

"Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth." (**Hosea 6:1-3**)

On that day the Lord will initiate a series of action steps that will result in world wide praise and thanksgiving as He takes possession of that which He has purchased. The mountains and hills will burst into song and the trees of the fields will clap their hands, (**Isaiah 55:12**) and all the peoples on earth will be blessed (**Genesis 12:3**).

Psalm 10

Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. 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."

His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue. He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims. He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net. His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength. He says to himself, "God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees."

Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"?

But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out. The LORD is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.

Complaining about the unfair treatment I had received from an unscrupulous businessman, I told a friend how I wished I could do something to get even for the way the man had taken advantage of me. When my friend asked if this person was a believer, I responded that I didn't think so. "Well then," my friend replied, "He's already going to rot in Hell forever. What more would you do to him?"

I'm pretty good at devising evil schemes to get even with people who've done me wrong, but the Lord is better. In **Micah 2:1-3** He accused the leaders of Israel of lying on their beds at night devising schemes to

defraud their subjects which they carried out the next morning simply because they could. “Therefore,” He said. “I’m planning disaster against you.” He did, and it was worse than anything they had done to their countrymen.

Our problem is that we want Him to take revenge right now to give us closure. Like impatient children, we don’t want to wait till some unspecified future time. We want it done now. But He tells us to leave it to Him and move on. He knows the damage anger does to us; how it eats away our insides, ruins our health, steals our joy and in general winds up hurting us more than our intended victim. That’s why he tells us not to let the sun go down on our anger. **(Ephes. 4:26)** We’re to give it to Him in prayer, keep praying till it’s gone, and ask Him to forgive us for ever having it. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, He said. **(Matt. 5:44)** That’s how we rise above it, restoring our fellowship and regaining our victory.

With the Lord revenge is a matter of faith, just like salvation. He’s promised to save us, and in faith we’re depending on Him to do that. But He’s also promised just as clearly to take vengeance on our enemies, **(Hebr. 10:30)** so we’re justified in having faith that He’ll do that as well.

If we can trust our eternal destiny to Him, believing He has the power and the desire to bring us into His presence to dwell with Him forever, can’t we also trust Him to take vengeance on our enemies? He’s promised to make them bow down before us before he throws them into a burning lake of fire where they’ll have eternity to contemplate the way they mistreated us while they writhe in agony. Like my friend said, “What more would you do to them?”

Psalm 11

In the LORD I take refuge. How then can you say to me: “Flee like a bird to your mountain. For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them. The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence his soul hates.

On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot. For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.

There was a time in history when evil people rejoiced over cloudy days, thinking that God couldn't look down from Heaven and see what they did because of the cloud cover. Now we laugh at this kind of thinking, realizing how immature it is.

Today the world seems to think that if there is a God He isn't watching at all, or if He is He doesn't care what happens. Also immature.

God is in His Heaven, and He is watching. He sees all the “good” and all the evil, and has promised that in His time He'll make amends for the injustice we endure. For we know He has said, *“It is mine to avenge; I will repay.”* (**Hebrews 10:30**)

But beyond that, He's actively involved in our daily lives, to the extent that we permit it of course. Sadly, for many of us the running conversation we have with him frequently consists largely of asking for this and that as if it's His job to go before us, clearing away any obstacle in our path. We ask Him to help find our keys, or a parking space, and perform a host of other tasks more appropriate for our butler than our Creator. Oddly enough He complies, often without thanks or even acknowledgment as if any relationship with us is better than none.

And His effort in our physical world is only the tip of the iceberg. In the unseen spiritual realm who can say how many attacks are thwarted and how many dangers averted by His constant vigilance? Don't forget that once we're saved, we become aliens behind enemy lines. But even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil for He is with us.

And how many times through our thoughtless sinfulness do we give the enemy targets of opportunity that require massive realignments of the spiritual forces arrayed on our behalf, often on a second's notice? We have no way of knowing.

We do know that we have an enemy who sought our eternal souls and failed, but has vowed to make our lives as miserable as possible while he can.

And we know that we have a Lord Who is our champion, our protector. He's a shield about us, a constant source of strength in times of trouble, and He loves us so much He can't take His eyes off us.

Psalm 12

Help, LORD, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men. Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception. May the LORD cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue that says, "We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips -who is our master?"

"Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the LORD.

"I will protect them from those who malign them." And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.

O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever. The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men.

Listening to the politicians, celebrity lawyers and news commentators, you'd think David wrote this psalm this morning. It truly seems the Godly are no more. But Lord has taken steps to protect us from the lies and deception thrown at us every day. He's told us how things will turn out in the end. It's a big advantage we have over those of David's day.

And beyond that, He's included signposts so we can tell how close we are to the day when He'll arise to protect us from those who malign us. He said that when we begin to see signs of the fulfillment of end time prophecy to look up, for our redemption draws near. (**Luke 21:28**) And to give us a feel for the timing, He said that those whose lives were just beginning at that time would still be alive at their conclusion. (**Matt. 24:34**)

In 1948 the people of Israel emerged from the concentration camps to become a nation again, and the first of the signs was fulfilled. All end times prophecies will likely come to pass within the span of a normal lifetime, about 70 years, from that momentous date (**Psalm 90:10**). Members of the Terminal Generation are alive today. You're probably one of them.

So let the heathen rage! Their flattery and deceptions are themselves a sign that the end is near, as they set the stage for the one who will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. (**2 Thes. 2:4**) Every increase in the audacity and magnitude of lies by today's leaders brings the world closer to a time when this leader's lies can be blindly accepted as truth.

But at the same time, we who believe are brought closer to the day when the One Who is Truth comes to retrieve His own and hide us away while He punishes the world for its rebellion.

“Don’t be distracted by what you see,” Paul cautioned us, “That’s only temporary. Focus instead on what you can’t see, because it’s what you can’t see that’s eternal.” **(2 Cor. 4:18)** Good advice. Amen.

Psalm 13

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long
will my enemy triumph over me?

Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my
enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for
he has been good to me.

Sometimes it seems we're so alone. The trials and tribulations of our lives close around us like darkness
and we wonder how we'll make it through. Where is the Lord? Why doesn't He answer? Doesn't He see the
trouble that's brewing?

Of course He does, and having seen the end from the beginning, He knows how it's going to turn out. And
not only that, He knows how the resolution of our current situation fits into the big picture of our lives, what
we'll be called upon to endure and how it compares with what others are called upon to endure. In short
He has perspective we'll never have. Sure He could make everything go away with the snap of a finger, but
would we learn anything? Wouldn't we just wind up in an even bigger pickle down the road, having missed
the lessons of our current one?

It's not that He orchestrated the situation to teach us something, mind you, that's our fault. But He saw it
coming, knows how it's going to end, and is working to turn the lemons we've produced into lemonade.

And besides, His word tells us, the trials we're facing are only those common to men. (**1 Corinth. 10:13**) It
may be the biggest problem we've ever had, but others have faced that and worse and lived to tell about it.

"In this world, you will have tribulation" He said, *"But take heart, for I have overcome the world."* (**John 16:33**)
And because He has, we will. With the strength of our faith, we can rise above our current crisis and receive
the grace to endure.

And unlike our unsaved neighbors, we know that this too shall pass. One day soon He will put a stop to all
this and we'll begin our Great Adventure. No more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of
things will have passed away.

If we, with the eye of faith, can learn to see what He, with the Eye of Creation has seen and prepared for those who love Him, we can rejoice with the saints of the past at the nearness of His Presence and learn for ourselves their sustaining affirmation. "Maximum trial; maximum Grace."

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **(Phil 4:4-7)** Amen.

Psalm 14

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.

The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Will evildoers never learn—those who devour my people as men eat bread and who do not call on the LORD?

There they are, overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous. You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge.

Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad

The heart is the seat of emotion, where the head is the seat of intellect. The fool denies God in his heart because even a fool cannot deny God with his head. The evidence is too overwhelming. The only way mankind can be convinced of the absence of God is to be kept ignorant of this massive body of evidence. So ignorant that the thought either never occurs to him, or if it does, it's dismissed as an obsolete legend; a fairy tale as it were.

All through school I was taught one explanation for the origin of earth and mankind; Evolution. It was so pervasive and conclusive in our textbooks and our teachers' discussions that it never occurred to me to seek another answer. It was presented as fact, and that's all there was to it. Even in my church, a mainline protestant denomination, no presentation of God as our Creator was ever put forth to challenge the concept of evolution, and to this day I don't know what my pastors believed on this subject.

But to anyone who takes the time to do even a little research, the existence of God quickly becomes so obvious that one wonders how it was ever missed. No cover-up of this proportion could ever have succeeded by accident; it's the product of a massive conspiracy between educators and theologians engineered and managed by Satan himself.

In **Romans 1** Paul claims that all anyone has to do to see evidence of a Creator is look at the creation. But in my opinion the quickest way to prove God's existence is to begin studying Bible prophecy. Just take a handful of Old Testament prophecies concerning the first coming of Jesus (there are over 300 of them and all were a matter of public record at least 150 years before His birth), and apply any legitimate standard you want: forensic logic, statistical analysis, rules of evidence, you name it.

Even a person of modest intellect will quickly be persuaded. God exists, He is Who He says He is, and He has done all that He claims to have done. No blind faith is required, no rush of emotion, no hocus-pocus; just cold hard logic. In fact it takes a whole lot more blind faith and a stubborn willingness to believe in spite of the facts to accept evolution as your explanation for the beginning of life.

Prophecy is the way God validates His word. No other so-called holy writings offer this proof. Only He has consistently told His people what He was going to do and then did it to prove Himself to them.

Once you see that His track record for fulfilling prophecy is without error or blemish, you'll know beyond all shadow of doubt that you can trust Him too. Trust Him to save you from the penalty due you for your sins; trust Him to return like He promised to take you to be with Him forever, and trust Him to guide you through the remainder of your uncertain and undefined life on earth in the meantime.

Psalm 15

LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

Not long after I had become a Christian instead of just being the church goer I'd been all my life, I paid a visit to my mom. She was living in Florida at the time, enjoying the final years of her life. During our last conversation before I had to leave, I asked her if she was sure she would go to Heaven when she died.

"Well, I've tried to live a good life," she replied, "And I go to church as often as I can." Of course she was sadly mistaken about what qualified her, but it was a typical answer for someone who spent her life in a main line protestant church.

Though she was very hard of hearing, I tried explaining to her that salvation isn't behavior driven, it's decision driven. You can't earn your way to Heaven, you can only decide to let the One Who can, do it for you.

In the Psalm above King David explained the requirements, in case you're trying to make it on your own. First the overview: Your walk must be blameless and your actions righteous. Then he added a few examples, but the list is by no means exhaustive.

Later the Lord Jesus filled in some more of the blanks. If the worst you ever do you is disobey only one of God's laws, and only do that in your mind, you've failed. And in his epistle the Lord's brother James added, *"If you're guilty of one, you're guilty of all."* (**James 2:10**)

So what's the solution? How do we achieve the righteousness God requires as entrance to His Holy Hill? **Romans 4:3-5** says, *"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."*

Made righteous, justified, by our faith. The Greek word for justified literally means, "to be regarded as innocent." Not that we are innocent, mind you. We're just looked upon that way.

But isn't there some work that He requires of us? When they asked him, *"What must we do to do the works*

God requires?" Jesus answered, *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."* (**John 6:28-29**)
It turns out that having faith is the only thing you can do that isn't considered work.

I honestly can't tell you for sure that my mom got it. A lifetime of thinking is hard to change with one conversation, and shortly after that her mind lost its connection with reality, so that's the last intelligent conversation we ever had. But for the rest of her life I prayed that she did. I'll find out for sure when I get to Heaven. In the mean time, I'm trusting another of God's promises.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (**Isaiah 55:10-11**) Amen.

Psalm 16

Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.

I said to the LORD, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.” As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips.

LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.

I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is 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 grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Our Founding Fathers defined freedom of religion as the freedom to worship God in any way we desire. This was a repudiation of forced membership in the Church of England with its pagan ritual and dead orthodoxy. It was not intended to prohibit or even limit a citizen’s public expression of faith in God. But in the fifties an attack on school prayer was based on the interpretation that freedom of religion included freedom from religion, and that has since been expanded into a prohibition against almost every public form of Christian religious activity.

Lately it seems clear that freedom from religion will soon apply only to Christianity, as other religions publicize their beliefs, promote their views, and even teach their doctrines in our public schools, with official approval.

But even though He’s been kicked out of our schools and public venues, our Lord is always with us. He’s given us unlimited free “anytime” minutes, He’s never too busy to answer, and we never need an appointment. For all the times we ask for and receive His guidance or assistance, there are countless others when He intervenes preemptively without our awareness, over-ruling the agendas of evil, beating back attacks against us, clearing the way before us and then acting as our rear guard. He wraps His Holy Spirit around us like a shield, fending off the fiery darts of the wicked one. (**Ephe. 6:16**)

In short He loves us so much He can't keep His eyes off us, searching to and fro through out the world for ways to show Himself strong to us (**2 Chron. 16:9**). He's the author of all our victories, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the One to Whom all praise, honor, and glory are due.

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you." (**Isaiah 43:10-12**)

Maybe they'll succeed in taking Him out of our public lives but they'll never get Him out of our hearts. And that's really the only place that counts. Amen.

Psalm 17

Hear, O LORD, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer- it does not rise from deceitful lips.*

May my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right. Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin.

As for the deeds of men- by the word of your lips I have kept myself from the ways of the violent. My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped. I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes.

Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who assail me, from my mortal enemies who surround me. They close up their callous hearts, and their mouths speak with arrogance. They have tracked me down, they now surround me, with eyes alert, to throw me to the ground. They are like a lion hungry for prey, like a great lion crouching in cover.

Rise up, O LORD, confront them, bring them down; rescue me from the wicked by your sword. O LORD, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life. You still the hunger of those you cherish; their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children. And I-in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.

David's life wasn't all that different from our own. As a believer on a mission from God, he was surrounded by enemies and needed constant reminders that he would be taken care of; that he would prevail over those dedicated to his defeat.

The biggest difference is that David's enemies were physical, tangible beings with swords and spears while ours are often spiritual, invisible beings who work through others and whose weapons are words and feelings like anger, jealousy or prejudice.

But from this Psalm we can see that the defense is the same. Stay clean and pure from sin, and call on the Name of the Lord. David, being a man on the run, couldn't stop everything and rush to the Tabernacle to sacrifice a lamb every time he sinned, so the Lord must have taught him how to ask for forgiveness the way we do. That's probably how he knew to write in **Psalm 51:16-17**;

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Somehow David learned that God is more interested in our internal motivation than in our external actions. With Him it's always been a matter of the heart. Having confessed and being restored to righteousness, David was able to ask God to protect and defend him, just as we are. And having poured out his heart, David received the assurance he needed even as he prayed. In his final thought before going to sleep, David showed that he knew God had heard him and would handle things, and that when he awoke he would be satisfied. *And I-in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.*

"I cast all my cares upon You," the song goes. "I lay all of my burdens down at Your feet. And anytime I don't know what else to do, I cast all my cares upon You." Great advice. It worked for David, and it works for us. Let this be your prayer.

Psalm 18:1-19

I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help.

From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears. The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because he was angry. Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind.

He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him- the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies, great bolts of lightning and routed them. The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.

Reading this we think, "Why doesn't the Lord vanquish my enemies this way?" Well as a matter of fact, He does. We just can't see it. In the Old Testament, everything was external and physical. Since the cross it's become internal and spiritual, but the battle still rages. Now instead of fighting Saul's forces like David was, we fight against an invisible enemy, many times more powerful. *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph.6:12).*

Our enemy was at first determined that we would never be saved, but the Lord defeated him. Now he's determined that we'll never live a victorious life, but again and again the Lord defeats him. And just like Saul kept coming after David, so will our enemy keep pursuing us. But as in David's case, each attack brings another victory. Like him we can always count on two things, battles and victories.

As Arthur W. Pink wrote, we've received a fourfold salvation: we're saved from the penalty, the power, the presence and most importantly the pleasure of sin. And even if we stumble from time to time, as we certainly do, the conviction of the Holy Spirit siphons off any of the pleasure we might have temporarily enjoyed from sinning, and we humbly and remorsefully seek forgiveness. As soon as we ask, we're forgiven.

In the heavenlies, the thunder rolls, the lightning flashes, and the sound of clashing swords echoes all around as the Lord sends His Holy Warriors in our defense. But all we hear is His gentle loving voice. "I forgive you." Another victory. Amen.

Psalm 18:20-50

The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me for I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not done evil by turning from my God. All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin.

The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty. You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light. With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.

As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.

For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great. You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn.

I pursued my enemies and overtook them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. I crushed them so that they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet. You armed me with strength for battle; you made my adversaries bow at my feet. You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes. They cried for help, but there was no one to save them- to the LORD, but he did not answer. I beat them as fine as dust borne on the wind; I poured them out like mud in the streets. You have delivered me from the attacks of the people; you have made me the head of nations; people I did not know are subject to me. As soon as they hear me, they obey me; foreigners cringe before me. They all lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds.

The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior! He is the God who avenges me, who subdues nations under me, who saves me from my enemies. You exalted me above

my foes; from violent men you rescued me. Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O LORD; I will sing praises to your name. He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever.

David could count on the Lord's protection because he kept himself free from sin. "To the faithful, You show yourself faithful," he said. The Lord rewarded him according to his righteousness, making him strong and swift and confident.

So it is with us. We can count on the Lord to give us victory as a reward for our righteousness, too. *For if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).* Confessing we are forgiven, and being forgiven we are restored to fellowship, once again made just as righteous as He is. *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21)*

Unconfessed sin puts a gap in our defenses, lowers our shield. Our enemy exploits our weakened defenses and mounts an attack. Confessing restores us and the attack is repelled. So it will be all of our lives, for we are aliens behind enemy lines. And though our enemy surrounds us, the Lord is a shield for all who take refuge in Him. It is He who arms us with strength and makes our way perfect.

And one day soon He'll put an end to all of this, taking back what's been stolen from Him and elevating us to the status of Kings. And like they did with David, people we don't even know will bow down before us. *I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. (Rev. 3:9)* And like David, we will praise Him among the nations. Amen.

Psalm 19:1-6

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.

In **Romans 1:18-20**, Paul gives us the simple test to prove there's a Creator. Look at the creation. It couldn't have come to be in any other way. Even some of the staunchest advocates of evolution agree that something had to jump start the process. The so-called Big Bang wasn't enough. There had to be an external accelerator, "tweaking" things at just the right moment. So there's an almost frantic effort to find some natural cause that helped things along so they don't have to admit that, "it was God Who made us and not we ourselves."

But David had something even more specific in mind in **Psalm 19**. Looking at the heavens may convince you that there's a God but it won't necessarily lead you to Jesus. Not unless you know the Hebrew names of the 12 constellations of the Zodiac, that is. You see, David knew that from the earliest times God had written His Gospel in the stars. According to Hebrew tradition, Adam, Seth, and Enoch first named these 12 constellations for just this purpose. We know them today by their Babylonian names, a perversion begun just after the Great Flood that has survived to this day as astrology. It's likely that the Tower of Babel was an observatory devoted to the study of astrology. It was a capital offense to consult the stars in Biblical Israel, but today no self respecting newspaper would be without a daily column devoted to this blasphemy from the past.

Psalm 19 describes one of the earliest manifestations of God's Grace and that's why Satan worked so hard to pervert it. In order for the ancients to avoid losing hope altogether during those endless generations when the promised Redeemer didn't come, and lacking the written Scriptures we're blessed with, God literally wrote His gospel across the sky. That way every young boy could learn the Plan of Redemption as his earthly father taught him the names of the stars during those long nights in open country watching their flocks.

You see, even though the Redeemer was close to 4000 years away, they only had to believe He was coming to die for their sins in order to be saved. (Just like we only have to believe He came to die for ours.) And soon this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (**Matt 24:14**) This time he'll use the miracle of satellite communications. But either way, it's written in the stars. Amen.

Psalm 19:7-14

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

No doubt about it. The Law of the Lord is perfect. It's the key to a long and blissful life, and even those who don't believe in its supernatural origin are blessed by obedience to its tenets. Now if we could just keep the law well enough to earn our place in God's family. Problem is, our sin nature is so pervasive, we don't even know how often we're breaking it.

"Who can discern his errors?" David asked. Who is honest enough, objective enough, observant enough to note his every sin? No one. That's why David asked the Lord to forgive his hidden faults, those sins he wasn't even aware of committing. And who has the strength of character, the patience, the presence of mind to keep himself from ever committing a willful sin? Again, no one. That's why David asked for the Lord's help in preventing him from consciously sinning.

So if the Lord forgives the sins we're unaware of, and prevents us from committing the ones we are aware of, then we'll be innocent of transgression. Sounds like He's got the bigger part of the job.

But He went us one better. Knowing we can't keep from sinning no matter how much help we get, He gave His life for us, in advance, so we could be assured of His forgiveness. He did this without condition and without hesitation. We need only ask and we'll receive it. Any time, every time, all the time. *For if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9).

So keep the Law as best as you can because it was never repealed. Not because you need to earn your way with Him, but because *"in keeping it there is great reward."* And always remember this. On those occasions

when you can't seem to get it right, He's got you covered. *He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.* (**Colossians 2:13-14**) I underlined the word "all" in my Bible.

Psalm 20

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. We will shout for joy when you are victorious and will lift up our banners in the name of our God. May the LORD grant all your requests.

Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he answers him from his holy heaven with the saving 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. O LORD, save the king! Answer us when we call!

Most people aren't very good at praying for others, and some aren't even good at praying for themselves. But if you've ever been prayed for at church or in a small group or Bible study, you know how great it feels.

Having a bunch of believers standing around you with their hands on your head or shoulders while they intercede with the Creator of the Universe on your behalf brings a sense of peace and assurance unlike any other. It feels so good because for those few minutes, you, the people praying for you, and God are all of one mind. That's the way it should be all the time, but sadly, most of us are too pre-occupied with our own problems to wonder about the Lord's will for us, let alone give much thought to others.

So how does one make that kind of prayer happen? I know people who just wade into a group, round up some folks and ask for prayer. That works pretty well as long as you don't wind up with someone who doesn't think you should get what you're asking for. The whole idea is to be of one mind, so the people praying for you should agree with what you're asking. Jesus said, *"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven."* (**Matt. 18:18-20**)

A better way is to form a small prayer group. That way you all get to know one another well enough to pray for each other. Embarrassed about sharing a problem? If your prayer group knows you well enough they'll be more likely to trust you, and you them. And remember, the Lord knows what you want before you ask, and He's the only one who matters. You don't have to let your prayer group become a gossip mill.

Don't know if what you want is in the Lord's will for you? Ask your friends to ask the Lord to make His will clear to them and you. Keep in mind, you're not asking for your group's opinions. You're asking them to ask the Lord for His, and again He already knows what you want, so you don't need to inform him in your prayer.

Do this and you'll discover that just the act of praying brings the peace you seek, often well in advance of the problem's resolution. There's something about a group of believers bringing their concerns to the Lord that energizes all of them; the one needing help and the ones praying. Your mind will be cleared and your creative imagination will be freed to find the best way, the Lord's way, to your solution.

Listen to the words of the Lord's brother James. *"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective".* **(James 5:13-16)**

Psalm 21

O LORD, the king rejoices in your strength. How great is his joy in the victories you give! You have granted him the desire of his heart and have not withheld the request of his lips.

You welcomed him with rich blessings and placed a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked you for life, and you gave it to him- length of days, forever and ever. Through the victories you gave, his glory is great; you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty.

Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence. For the king trusts in the LORD; through the unfailing love of the Most High he will not be shaken.

Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies; your right hand will seize your foes. At the time of your appearing you will make them like a fiery furnace. In his wrath the LORD will swallow them up, and his fire will consume them. You will destroy their descendants from the earth, their posterity from mankind. Though they plot evil against you and devise wicked schemes, they cannot succeed; for you will make them turn their backs when you aim at them with drawn bow. Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength; we will sing and praise your might.

Victories in this world, eternal life in the presence of the Lord, vengeance upon our enemies, what more could anyone ask?

It's said that we determine the enjoyment we derive from any situation by mentally comparing the expectation we formed going in with the experience we have coming out. Going to McDonald's for a burger, we expect a certain level of quality and service. When we get what we expect we feel OK. On those rare occasions when our experience exceeds our expectation we're delighted, and when it fails to live up to what we expected we're disappointed. It's all done in a flash by our sub-conscious, but that's the way it works.

Obviously, we wouldn't be happy with a gourmet restaurant that served us a McDonald's type burger because our expectations of a gourmet dinner would be different. And likewise, if we were used to diving into dumpsters for whatever leftover scraps we could find to eat and came up with a fresh Big Mac one time, we'd be overjoyed. So like I said, our joy comes from a comparison between our expectation and our experience.

Why are we talking about this? In **Psalm 21** and other places, we're given glimpses of life in the Kingdom; blessings without number, endless joy, peace, security, freedom, and happiness. Our enemies will be vanquished and required to admit in our presence that we were right and they were wrong. They'll suffer the

consequences of their behavior, while we enjoy the rewards of ours. Satan will be restrained, unable to tempt or afflict us, while we'll be in the presence of the Lord as His co-regent, sharing in His inheritance.

Pretty high expectations. It's going to take a lot to maintain our enjoyment. And while every successful company on earth knows that the best way to assure customer satisfaction is to under promise and over perform, the Lord has made no attempt to moderate our expectations regarding His Kingdom.

In fact the opposite is true. Listen to Paul's claim: *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"* (1 Cor. 2:9)

Not only is there no attempt to under-promise, we're told that what's in store for us is beyond our comprehension, exceeding even our ability to imagine it. And remember, this joy we'll experience will last for eternity. Every day and in every way, it'll just get better and better. Forever.

No wonder he also told us when we get discouraged to *"fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."* (2 Cor 4:18)

This unimaginable joy will soon be our portion every moment of every day. The more we learn about it, the higher our expectations become, and yet we're told that at our best, our sin infested minds can't even begin to conjure up what God is about to send our way. But what little we do see gives us hope, and helps maintain a more optimistic outlook in those bleak moments of our lives. It lets us say, "I can put up with this, in exchange for that." Good advice, Paul, thanks.

Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him-

may your hearts live forever! 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 to a people yet unborn- for he has done it.

What an incredible psalm! 1000 years before the actual event, the Lord had David tell us what it's like to be crucified. And to make sure we get the point, He had David open with the Lord's first words from the cross and close with His last. (You have to read both **Psalm 22:31** and **John 19:30** in the Greek to see the last one. The Greek word is *tetelesti*, and it can mean it is finished, he has done it, or my favorite, paid in full.)

Psalm 22 is also the one most frequently quoted in the New Testament. It's filled to overflowing with references to events at the cross and beyond; events the writers used to demonstrate the Lord's fulfillment of prophecy. You see, it isn't the miracles that make our Lord unique and worthy of our trust. Others, both before and after the Lord's earthly ministry have performed great miracles. It's the fact that nearly every important detail of His life was foretold, hundreds and even thousands of years before His birth. He is the One Who was promised, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.

Counting **Psalm 22** there are over 300 Old Testament prophecies, all of them a matter of public record hundreds of years before the fact, predicting the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. The abundance and specificity of these prophecies demolish any notion of chance, exceed the requirements of statistical analysis, and prove more conclusively than any other fact of history that Jesus is the Son of God. In fact there is more hard evidence to prove that He is Who He claims to be, than there is that you are who you claim to be.

This is the unique and truly beautiful thing about the Bible. It stands alone among the so-called Holy Writings of the world, in its self-validating ability. Only the Bible tells the future with 100% accuracy. Our Lord knew we would be skeptical, unbelieving children. So early on, He began telling us things in advance of their occurrence so when what He said came true, we would be willing to believe Him. In this way we can be assured that our faith is justified. By now He has a track record nearly 6000 years long. He has simply never lied about things. Ever. Hear it from His own lips.

I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from

a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do. (**Isa 46:10-11**)

As one who has studied Bible Prophecy and World History side by side I can tell you that it doesn't require much faith at all to believe the Bible. The evidence in fulfilled prophecy is just too overwhelming. But don't take my word for this, try it for yourself. Then you'll know why you believe, and like me you'll conclude that if the Lord has never lied to you yet, chances are pretty good that He never will. It's called adding substance to your faith. It converts emotion to logic, adds knowledge to zeal, and makes your faith unshakable. Someday soon that kind of faith might well come in handy.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Our Lord is like the good shepherd who defends his flock from the ravenous wolves lurking in the shadows. Given any opportunity they'll strike, but He fends them off with sling and arrow. Have you ever heard of a sheep attacking an enemy or even defending itself from attack? Neither have I. I don't think they can. Their enemies are just too powerful for them. And did you know that sheep are prone to wandering? That's why they need shepherds, and believe me it's a full time job. But in spite of the shepherd's best efforts the sheep do wander off from time to time, get themselves in trouble and have to be rescued.

We'd think it ludicrous for the sheep to blame the shepherd, but that's the way we, who are sheep, treat the Lord our Shepherd. We wander off, get into trouble and have to be rescued. "Why did You let me do this Lord?" we complain, blaming Him. Unlike sheep who have no freedom of choice and no ability to learn from their mistakes, we are supposed to get smarter through our experience. We're supposed to know how powerful our enemy is and how helpless we are, and depend on our Lord for protection. That includes listening to Him when he alerts us of impending danger, or warns us not to wander.

But with the patience of a shepherd, He rounds us up, dusts us off, binds up our wounds, and gently sets us down among the flock again, knowing that soon we'll forget the folly of wandering and off we'll go, and He'll have to do it all over again. His mercies are new every morning, His patience never ending, His love never failing. Good thing, huh?

Psalm 24

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty- he is the King of glory.

Psalms 22, 23, & 24 are often called the Shepherd Psalm Trilogy. **Psalm 22** tells of the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the flock and is a summary of what He did. It begins with the Lord's first words from the cross and ends with His last. Its focus is humanity.

Psalm 23 portrays the Great Shepherd, a title from **Hebrews 13:20**, Who protects His flock. It's what He's doing now. It begins with our pledge of allegiance to Him and ends with the rapture. Its focus is the Church.

Psalm 24 describes the Chief Shepherd, so named in **1 Peter 5:4**, Who rewards His flock. It explains what He's going to do. It begins with the God of Jacob establishing His ownership of Planet Earth and ends with the Messiah in Jerusalem. Its focus is Israel.

The three Psalms form a unique picture of the Mission of the Messiah. (For more detail on **Psalms 22-24** read The Shepherd Psalm Trilogy) Written by King David over 1000 years before the first Christmas to show those things that must come to pass, it's perhaps the best example anywhere in Scripture of how our Book is different from any other of the so-called holy writings. Only the Bible is self-validating, telling us things that will happen before they do with 100% accuracy, so we'll know we can trust what it says.

"I am the LORD, and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain.' I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right." (Isaiah 45:18b-19) Better believe it.

Psalm 25

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame, but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse.*

Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD.

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.

My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins. See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me! Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you. Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles!

My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare. Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins. See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me! Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you. Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles!

There's never a yesterday with the Lord. His mercies are new every morning (**Lament 3:22-23**). No matter how much we messed things up in the past, each day we're given a fresh start. Each time we confess the slate is wiped clean and all things are made new. That makes it a good idea to confess each morning.

Sometime back a debate with members of a Christian news group demonstrated how some folks apply these truths only to themselves. Demanding that God extend mercy to them, they insist on His justice for everyone else.

The debate reminded me of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector from **Luke 18:9-14**. As the two men went into the Temple to pray, the Pharisee, full of self-righteousness, began to thank God that he was not like other men, and certainly not like the tax collector beside him. He then reminded God of all his good works.

The tax collector, on the other hand, cried out for mercy, asking forgiveness for his sins. Jesus told His listeners that it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee who went home justified (regarded as though innocent) that day.

My e-mail debaters had picked out a hand full of verses they were using to rationalize drumming sinners out of the church. When I asked if even they would be left when the excommunications were finished, they sent me some verses on forgiveness, applying them only to themselves of course. Turns out they were only railing against certain other kinds of sinners, not like them. And they had already decided that everyone who disagreed with their view was beyond forgiveness.

But the truth is that all sin leads to death, there's no degree of heinousness. Yes, we're called to obedience and every mature believer understands that. Plus there's great blessing in keeping the commandments. But the day we're perfected is the day we'll stop sinning and not until. (Thank the Lord that He already sees us that way, instead of the way we currently are.) The homosexual, the drunk, the adulterer, the thief or the gossip who drops to his knees before the cross and receives salvation, and then stumbles back into his old ways for a time will be forgiven and restored to righteousness every time he sincerely asks, just like you and me (**1 John 1:9**), and is no worse a sinner than we are. We're told to extend him the same forgiveness we receive and to look upon him with pity and compassion saying, "There but for the grace of God go I."

Psalm 26

Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind, for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth.

I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O LORD, proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds. I love the house where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells.

Do not take away my soul along with sinners, my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands are wicked schemes, whose right hands are full of bribes. But I lead a blameless life; redeem me and be merciful to me. My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the LORD.

Wow! How would you like to be able to make that kind of claim for yourself? Funny thing is, I'm convinced that back then there were folks who could honestly describe themselves that way. I'm not sure how many could today, what with the encroachment of all the "news" and entertainment media into our lives. Not to mention the stress of living, the growing general rudeness of the population and the pervasive secularism of our society.

I'd lay odds that those believers who rightly see themselves as the best of us in our time would have a hard time competing with the average Israelite of King David's day, where blameless behavior is concerned. 3000 years ago, there were much fewer distractions, and it was a lot easier to get away from the ones they had. Of course, no matter how good they were, it wasn't enough to meet God's standards.

Thank God for what He's done for us to correct our deficiencies. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. (2 Cor 5:17-19)*

Because of the cross, and God's freedom from the constraints of time, He doesn't see us the way we are, but the way we will have become when we're perfected. So even now we can enter the Throne Room with freedom and confidence, as Paul put it. (**Ephes. 3:12**)

Here's the way I imagine it. When we approach the Throne of God, our Lord Jesus steps between us and our Father. As God turns His gaze upon us, He looks through the image of His Son and sees only that portion of us that conforms to it, the perfect part. *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.* (**Rom.8:29**) As one commentator has said, "He looks at us through Christ colored glasses."

While David had only his past to commend him, we have our future as well. We never have to fear losing our position with Him. The work at the cross was sufficient. When we slip, we confess and are forgiven (**1 John 1:9**) and purified once again from all unrighteousness.

So you see, you can claim a blameless life, just like David. *For God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (**2 Cor 5:21**) Have a perfect day.

Psalm 27

The LORD is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life- of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior. Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence. I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

A few years ago I retired ahead of schedule. It was a simple decision. My job was eliminated when the company I worked for was sold, and at my age finding another one like it didn't seem very likely. I wasn't financially ready for retirement, and our ministry wasn't ready to support me, but after much prayer and family discussion, we felt led to devote full time effort to the ministry even though it would risk depleting our moderate resources, trusting the Lord to bring us enough to live on.

Having been self employed for most of my life, my income stream has always fluctuated, and I learned to live with that uncertainty. Often, especially at the beginning, I would begin a month not knowing from what source my income for that month would arrive. By the end of the month I'd always have made enough to pay our bills and sometimes a little extra.

You'd think I would have been OK returning to that financially uncertain lifestyle. But a few years earlier a former client had offered me a full time position and, having logged nearly 2 million air miles in the previous decade, I took it. For the first time in my adult life I was home every night and had a steady paycheck, and I got lulled into a false sense of security.

The salary I agreed to work for showed up in my account each payday, and slowly my attitude shifted from reliance on the Lord to reliance on the company. The reality was that my job could have disappeared at any given time, but it didn't take much effort to ignore that.

Suddenly I was back trusting the Lord, living month to month, and passages like this Psalm became very precious. My enemies aren't humans dressed up as warriors and brandishing weapons like David's were, but they're real just the same. And they're just like yours. They're the doubts that creep unbidden into our minds, and like enemy soldiers infiltrating the battle lines, their job is to weaken our resolve and promote chaos. They attack our faith, sowing seeds of discouragement and despair.

Our counter attack (not merely a defense) is to keep our eyes on Jesus, to gaze upon His beauty and seek Him in His temple. The desire of our enemy is that we should give up, but our prayer to the Lord, Who has always been our helper, is that He would sustain us.

We choose to remain confident that we'll see the goodness of the Lord, though our sin contaminated minds are sometimes racked with doubt. We take heart, stay strong in our faith, and wait for the Lord. Doing so we discover again that He is faithful and true, the one we can neither leave nor lose, the Author and Perfecter of our faith.

Psalm 28

To you I call, O LORD my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit. Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.

Do not drag me away with the wicked, with those who do evil, who speak cordially with their neighbors but harbor malice in their hearts. Repay them for their deeds and for their evil work; repay them for what their hands have done and bring back upon them what they deserve. Since they show no regard for the works of the LORD and what his hands have done, he will tear them down and never build them up again.

Praise be to the LORD, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song. The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one. Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever.

A friend was in a big hurry to get into LA from his mountain home. It had already been a hectic morning and now he was late for an important appointment. He saw the police car as he rounded a corner but had no time to slow down before being summoned to pull over. Frustrated and upset with himself, he proceeded to blow his one chance to talk the patrolman out of writing him a ticket. Finally, out of total disgust with his terrible reaction to the situation, he asked if the officer was born again.

"No," replied the officer, handing my friend his speeding ticket, "Why do you ask?"

"Good," my friend huffed, glaring at his ticket, "That means you're in worse trouble than I am."

No matter how bad things get, we always have one incredible silver lining. At the end of our worst day ever, we can say with certainty that God still loves us, will use the events of our miserable day to formulate a future blessing for us, and will one day soon snatch us away to eternal bliss. It helps us keep things in perspective.

The unbeliever can't say that. Even with the reality of his eternal destiny hidden from his eyes, (if he truly understood what was waiting for him he'd be on his knees in a heartbeat) he has no assurance that things will ever improve.

For this reason alone, Christians should be the most positive, enthusiastic, and excited people on the face of the planet. “Blessed are the meek,” Jesus said, “For they shall inherit the Earth.” In researching the word “meek” I stumbled upon my favorite paraphrase of that verse. “Blessed are those who’ve been given everything, for they don’t have to sweat anything.”

Paul was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, falsely accused, unjustly imprisoned, and eventually beheaded for his faith. And yet he could say, “*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*”. (**Romans 8:18**) And the early Christians, while being torn apart by voracious animals, burned alive, or tortured in unspeakable ways, rejoiced at being chosen to suffer for the Lord’s sake.

Most of us won’t be called upon to endure such tests. But the next time you feel as if you’re carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders, consider another statement of Paul’s. *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* (**2 Cor 4:17-19**) Whatever is happening to you right now is temporary, but the promises you’ve been given are eternal. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full on His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace. Have a blessed day.

Psalm 29

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.

This psalm is devoted to the Glory of God, His power and majesty. At the sound of His voice, huge trees snap into pieces, lightning flashes, and the mountains and deserts shake.

But have you ever noticed His hand in the little things as well? Say you're late for a meeting, the location is crowded and not a parking place in sight. You shoot up a quick prayer and suddenly a car pulls out ahead leaving you a space. Or a person with whom you've had contentious dealings suddenly has a complete change of heart toward you following your prayers. A file re-appears after you mistakenly deleted it. Or, having to shut the computer down after it locked up with a file still open and thinking you had lost hours of work, you re-boot only to find it still there. All these things have happened for me. Just because I asked.

George Mueller was a pastor from Bristol, England over 100 years ago. He wrote an autobiography about his experiences with God in a faith ministry. After being installed as a congregation's pastor he eliminated the collection in favor of boxes in the back of the church where people could voluntarily put their tithes and offerings. He wouldn't permit the church's elders to publicize their needs for fear of causing parishioners to give for the wrong motives. They prayed for the things they needed and waited for the Lord to prompt the people to give. The elders were skeptical at first, but soon learned that the Lord always provided the money to meet their needs. He started first one then a whole network of orphanages without any seed money or reserves, trusting fully on God for their daily provision. He told of numerous occasions where bread and milk

needed for breakfast miraculously arrived on their doorsteps just as the children were coming down the stairs to eat.

Yes, our God is an awesome God, great in majesty and mighty in power. But He also wants to be there for us in the little things. James, the brother of Jesus, told us, *"You do not have, because you do not ask God."* (**James 4:2**). Want a better week? Try being less independent and becoming more dependent upon Him. Start asking Him for the little stuff. A word of advice when you do. Carry a little notebook around to record all the prayers He answers, otherwise you won't be able to remember them all.

Psalm 30

I will exalt you, O LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me. O LORD, you brought me up from the grave; you spared me from going down into the pit.

Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken." O LORD, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed. To you, O LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: "What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my help."

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.

Tradition holds that King David wrote this psalm for use in dedicating the Temple, and in fact it's chanted even today during the Feast of Hanukkah, commemorating the Temple's re-dedication after being cleansed from its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes in 168BC. Commentators believe that David was speaking both to and for Israel, and that his use of the first person is meant to symbolize Israel crying out to God.

If so, then this psalm is particularly meaningful when viewed in the context of the Maccabean Revolt. Israel was as good as dead, and Syrian idolatry had become so pervasive that a statue of Zeus was actually erected in the Holy place. God's Holy Temple was being converted into a pagan worship center! But the Lord heard the cry of one man's heart and multiplied it into a mighty rebellion. The enemy that had overpowered and oppressed them was expelled, and the desecrated Temple was cleansed and re-dedicated. He turned their wailing into dancing, their sackcloth into joy.

That which was external, physical, and national in the Old Testament becomes internal, spiritual and personal in the New. *"You are the Temple of the Holy Spirit,"* Paul exclaimed.(1 Cor. 6:19) And today when the secularism and neo paganism of our society begins to pollute the sanctity of our lives, we too can cry out to God, *"What gain is there in my destruction? Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me; O LORD, be my*

help!" And just as He did for the Israelites, He will do for us. Our enemy will be expelled, and our desecrated Temple cleansed, for *if we confess our sins He is just and faithful and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (**1 John 1:9**) Then will our wailing be turned to dancing and our sackcloth to joy! Our hearts will sing to Him and we'll give thanks forever!

Psalm 31

In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.

Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth. I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the LORD. I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.

Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak. Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors; I am a dread to my friends- those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. For I hear the slander of many; there is terror on every side; they conspire against me and plot to take my life.

But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love. Let me not be put to shame, O LORD, for I have cried out to you; but let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave. Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.

How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you. In the shelter of your presence you hide them from the intrigues of men; in your dwelling you keep them safe from accusing tongues.

Praise be to the LORD, for he showed his wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city. In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called

to you for help. Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

Bill (not his real name) had committed a terrible sin, a public one that scandalized the whole congregation. Some were mad at him and didn't hesitate to let him know. But to many more it was as if he had died. He noticed how they pretended not to see him in the supermarket, suddenly altering their course to avoid him in a way that would have been comical had it not been so tragic. When he wrote them all a letter of apology asking for their forgiveness, most didn't even bother to respond. He was reminded of the comment a former friend had made about Christians going through the field after the battle is over, bayoneting the wounded. Were it not for his children he would have simply disappeared, to begin anew somewhere else, anywhere else.

But when he asked God for mercy he received it. The moment he confessed he was forgiven, purified from all his unrighteousness. (**1 John 1:9**) It's a promise from Heaven that was written in blood on a wooden cross nearly 2000 years ago. And to prove it, he spent the next few years watching as the Lord turned the lemons he had produced into the sweetest lemonade.

There's nothing you can do or say to surprise the Lord. There's no sin you can commit that will put you outside the boundary of His forgiveness. He saw every detail of your life before it began and nailed all your sins to that cross in Judea. His death canceled the penalty due you, (**Col. 2:13-15**) and His resurrection reserved your place in Heaven. All you had to do is ask for and receive your pardon to make it so.

If the events of your life parallel those of the sinner described above, take heart. The Lord had this psalm written for you. He died for your sins too, and longs to hear your confession so He can restore you to fellowship. While you're praying, ask Him to forgive those who haven't forgiven you.

If the events of your life don't parallel his, chances are pretty good that you need to ask the Lord to forgive you for not forgiving the one in your life who is described above, and then ask Him to help you forgive as you've been forgiven. You'll feel a tremendous burden being lifted from your shoulders. If neither of these situations fits you, then thank the Lord for the mercy He's shown you thus far, and ask Him to help prepare you for the time when one of these situations will fit.

Psalm 32

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"- and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

For a Christian, being out of fellowship with the Lord can be a scary thing. It interrupts the flow of blessings from God, and puts us out in the world all by ourselves. When we're in fellowship, we're invisible to our enemy, hidden in Christ. But when we're out of fellowship, we're aliens behind enemy lines with a big target painted on our backs that glows in the dark.

It's caused by neglecting (or refusing) to confess our sins. And that's a crazy thing, because the Bible clearly says that the minute we confess, we're forgiven and our sins forgotten. It's usually either our fear or our self-justification that prevents us, but the Lord doesn't care whose fault it was, or who started it, and He's not trying to make us admit our guilt so He can discipline us.

In **Genesis 3** we see the first sin committed and the first attempt to avoid confession. "It was the woman you gave me," said Adam, blaming Eve. "The devil made me do it," said Eve, blaming the serpent. But the Lord wasn't trying to figure out how the sin had been committed or who had started it. He already knew what had

happened. He was simply looking for a confession so He could extend forgiveness. When He didn't get it, He had to exclude them from His presence.

It's the same with us. We're not told to confess so the Lord can be informed of our behavior and mete out the appropriate punishment. He's already been informed and He's already exacted the punishment. He's simply looking for a confession so He can extend forgiveness. There's no reason in the world for us to be less than candid, or to offer up some excuse, no matter how convincing. He already knows more about the situation than we ever will, and He's already committed Himself to forgive us every time we ask. There's simply no down side.

"Confession is good for the soul." We've all heard that, and it's really true. Confession brings forgiveness and purification from all unrighteousness. It relieves guilt and restores fellowship, resuming the interrupted flow of blessing. For as long as we're on Earth, it's the most beneficial of all the provisions of the Everlasting Covenant. "If you'll die for them, I'll forgive them," the Father had promised the Son. "If you'll forgive them, I'll die for them," the Son replied. They were talking about you and your sins. The penalty has been established, the price has been paid, and justice has been served. You're forgiven.

Psalm 33

Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance. From Heaven the LORD looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth- he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.

No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.

We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.

I love the story of the test pilot whose experimental plane suddenly stopped flying at 30 thousand feet. His immediate prayer was, "OK Lord, it's going to take both of us to get out of this one. How about you get us safely back on the ground, and then I'll taxi us back into the hangar?"

Isn't it comforting to know that no matter how large and complex our problems become, we have Someone Who is equal to the task of solving them?

It's also ironic how our difficulties are mostly caused by our own demand for self-determination, but as soon as they get too big for us to handle we run to the Lord for a solution. Of course He saw this coming and has waited patiently for us to realize what a mess we've created and return to Him for deliverance.

Neither mighty teams of associates, nor personal ability, nor the strength of man's most powerful technology can deliver us. But the Lord, who has been watching all along, is there as soon as we call to help fix things.

He won't impose His solution on us, His respect for our sovereignty is too great for that. But as soon as we call He's there, ready willing and able to do as much as we'll allow. Thank Him for being bigger than any problem you can create, and know that when you next leave the house, He's going before you, your help and your shield. All you have to do is call.

Psalm 34

I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.

I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.

Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.

I've never had the law gunning for me, or wallowed in the cesspool of addiction, but I've been in some pretty good scrapes in my life, mostly financial. In fact it was the sudden loss of a huge chunk of money that brought me to the Lord in the first place, twenty some years ago. And I can say that all my efforts toward rescuing myself from that mess produced exactly nothing. Things went much faster and much better when I gave my

problems to the Lord and focused instead on pleasing Him. He did rescue me, and for the most part, the anguish I suffered was the result of my fear of the unknown. I don't know what FDR's insight was when at the outset of WW2 he advised America, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." But I do know that his advice applies to every believer.

Like most folks, I have two problems trusting the Lord. First I've been taught all my life to take charge and make things happen. "If it is to be, it's up to me," I learned to believe. Turning my life over to someone else, even the Lord, wasn't easy. And second, I know I'm a sinner, not worthy of God's blessings. And even though I know all about His grace, it's still hard to believe He'll bless me when all I deserve is punishment.

But our God has seen the end from the beginning and has promised never to leave us or forsake us, even to the end of the age. He knew all about my sinfulness when He agreed to take me as His own. In spite of that knowledge, He has agreed to watch over me and protect me as long as I continue to confess my sins and strive to live in a way that pleases Him. My fear is just an emotion I let the devil use to torment me. So's yours.

*In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps, says **Proverbs 16:9**.* I must confess that the life I live now is nothing like the one I planned for myself. Oh, I have all the comforts we come to associate with successful living, but they didn't come from the material wealth I planned to acquire when I started out. I didn't achieve that goal, though I can't say that it's caused me to suffer any. In fact, I compare pretty favorably with Bill Gates in the things that really matter. My bed is as comfortable as his, my home as warm in the morning when I awaken, and my car as safe and reliable. The lights come on when I flip the switch, I can eat as many meals during the day as I wish, and my food is every bit as nutritious as his. I too have a loving wife and am blessed with beautiful intelligent children.

None of this has come as a result of my own effort. As a matter of fact I, like Job, had to be pretty much divested of all the fruits of my own production to humble me enough to turn to the Lord. When I did He restored me, and ever since He's given me income when I need it, a house to replace the one I had to sell, food when I'm hungry and drink to quench my thirst. And in the bargain He threw in an insatiable thirst for His Word.

I guess you could say I'm living proof that **Psalms 34** is true. If you've given Him permission to run your life, then you know this from your own experience, and don't need me to confirm it. If you've only given Him your heart, but not your life, then you have a truly rewarding adventure awaiting you. Why not begin now? "You have nothing to fear but fear itself."

Psalm 35

Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take up shield and buckler; arise and come to my aid. Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation."

May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame; may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay. May they be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away; may their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them. Since they hid their net for me without cause and without cause dug a pit for me, may ruin overtake them by surprise- may the net they hid entangle them, may they fall into the pit, to their ruin.

Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD and delight in his salvation. My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, O LORD ? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them."

Ruthless witnesses come forward; they question me on things I know nothing about. They repay me evil for good and leave my soul forlorn. Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother. But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee; attackers gathered against me when I was unaware. They slandered me without ceasing. Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked; they gnashed their teeth at me.

O Lord, how long will you look on? Rescue my life from their ravages, my precious life from these lions. I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among throngs of people I will praise you. Let not those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause; let not those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye. They do not speak peaceably, but devise false accusations against those who live quietly in the land. They gape at me and say, "Aha! Aha! With our own eyes we have seen it."

O LORD , you have seen this; be not silent. Do not be far from me, O Lord. Awake, and rise to my defense! Contend for me, my God and Lord. Vindicate me in your righteousness, O LORD

my God; do not let them gloat over me. Do not let them think, “Aha, just what we wanted!” or say, “We have swallowed him up.”

May all who gloat over my distress be put to shame and confusion; may all who exalt themselves over me be clothed with shame and disgrace. May those who delight in my vindication shout for joy and gladness; may they always say, “The LORD be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant.” My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long.

She was having an awful day. It seemed like everything had gone wrong from the moment she woke up in that funk she sometimes found herself in. Even those things she was typically good at turned out bad. Each time it happened she berated herself. “What’s wrong with you today,” she asked herself, “Can’t you do anything right anymore?”

Her co-workers began to notice, overhearing some of her self-criticism. “Why are you so down on yourself?” one asked. “If any of us talked to you that way, you’d have a fit.”

I believe many things that are external and physical in the Old Testament become internal and spiritual in the New. David’s enemies were obviously external and physical. They attacked him with real weapons, slandered his name, bore false witness, and tried everything they could think of to defeat him.

Thankfully, most of us don’t experience such attacks today. The enemy we face is internal and spiritual. The weapons are words, hurled at us on the battlefield of self worth. And who is our primary antagonist? We are! Without thinking, we allow the enemy to invade our minds and use our own thoughts, words, and opinions as weapons to attack us. If we took the time to document the negative thoughts we express toward ourselves on those bad days, we’d be appalled! Talk about lies and slander. It’s a good thing no one can hear us, right? Wrong. Our sub-conscious hears every thought, and unable to distinguish fact from fiction, uses all of them to ratchet down our opinion of ourselves. It’s our enemy’s sworn mission to defeat us, and he’ll use every weapon at his disposal. One of his most effective ones is our mind.

Most people don’t pay much attention to what they say about themselves in the privacy of their own minds. And even if they do, they aren’t aware of the damage they’re causing. We would never talk to our children the way we talk to ourselves, because we know the adverse effect it would have on them. Yet we don’t afford ourselves the same courtesy.

Using thoughts the enemy places in our minds, we convince ourselves we can’t do something, just because we’ve never tried it. We tell our selves something won’t work, simply because we’re frustrated and unfocused. We deny talent, skill and potential, even to do those things we’ve done successfully in the past. All the time our sub-conscious is listening, and adjusting downward the self worth of one of the highest examples of God’s creative capability.

With a potential that's beyond scientific quantification we let ourselves be talked into accepting minimum standards or less, mindlessly repeating the words of our sworn enemy while ignoring the promises of our beloved Creator. David asked the Lord to contend against his enemies and defeat them, and to vindicate him in the process. Next time you catch yourself putting yourself down, recognize where those thoughts really originated and ask God to do the same for you.

Psalm 36

An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes.

For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin. The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. Even on his bed he plots evil; he commits himself to a sinful course and does not reject what is wrong.

Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart. May the foot of the proud not come against me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. See how the evildoers lie fallen- thrown down, not able to rise!

Humans have a great talent for self-deception. The one described in the first paragraph above is typical of so many today. If you're in the business world you see people like this all the time. Maybe you even work for one. It's a huge challenge to have to be in the world interacting with people like this and resist adopting some of their ways. It's so easy to let your language become a little rougher, to shave a little off your integrity, and wander just over the line into that gray area that's not really wrong but not really right either.

Praise the Lord for reminding us that His love is everywhere. No matter what your station in life, adhering to His ways in the pursuit of your goals will bring you abundance and a "river of delights." In the shadow of His wings you'll find refuge from the storm. It's good to remember as we set out on each new day that there's a God Who is righteous and just and filled with unfailing love. In return for exchanging the ways of the world for His way, He'll reward us handsomely, both in this world and the next.

And someday if it seems like you're in danger of missing out because you chose the straight and narrow, while someone playing fast and loose with the rules seems likely to scoop up all the marbles, remember Paul's words to the men of Athens: *In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all*

people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31). There's an inescapable day coming when an unchallengeable judge will set the record straight. And the proof is in an irrefutable fact; the resurrection. If you believe that, you've already joined the winning team.

Psalm 37:1-27

Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret-it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.

A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace. The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming. The wicked draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose ways are upright. But their swords will pierce their own hearts, and their bows will be broken. Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked; for the power of the wicked will be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous.

The days of the blameless are known to the LORD, and their inheritance will endure forever. In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty. But the wicked will perish: The LORD's enemies will be like the beauty of the fields, they will vanish-vanish like smoke. The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously; those the LORD blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off. If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand. I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed. (1-27)

"The Lord must love poor people," Abe Lincoln said, "Because He sure made a lot of them." Somehow it's come to be accepted in some circles that Christians shouldn't prosper. Quotes like "Money is the root of all

evil” and “It’s harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle,” are bandied about to underscore this view.

The first one is a misquote. It should read, “*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*” (1 Tim 6:10) and the second is like it in that it alludes to the effect that the love of money has on people. In both cases it’s the motive for achieving wealth that’s in focus, not the wealth itself.

If you believe that the Bible is an integrated message system incapable of self-contradiction, then these verses should cause you to stop and think. “*I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly*” (John 10:10) “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. (Luke 6:38) “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.” (2 Cor. 9:11) These cannot be reconciled with the notion that believers are meant to be people of modest means.

But they can be reconciled with Psalm 37 and taken together can show us the real problem. Verse 4 especially is a cause and effect statement that summarizes the whole Psalm. *Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.* We all want to be given the desires of our heart, but are we first delighting ourselves in the Lord?

If not, the issue is one of priorities. First things first. Delight yourself in the Lord. The Hebrew word means to be happy about or make merry over. It also means to let yourself be pampered. Here’s the best way I’ve found to make that happen. Begin demonstrating your sincere gratitude for what He’s done for you by giving generously (and anonymously) to support His work. Not because He needs your money, but because you need to improve in the way you express your gratitude. Do it in a spirit of happiness, making merry over sharing what He’s given you. *The Lord loves a cheerful giver* (2 Cor. 9:7).

And as for the desires of your heart, I recommend giving the Lord permission to erase your list and letting Him place in your heart the things He wants you to desire. Then you concentrate on the cause (delight in the Lord) and let Him handle the effect (desires of your heart). Let Him pamper you with the things He knows you’ll love. Based on the verses I quoted above, I can guarantee you won’t be disappointed. *You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion* (2 Cor. 9:11).

Psalm 37:28-40

Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever. For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. They will be protected forever, but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off; the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever. The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just. The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip.

The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, seeking their very lives; but the LORD will not leave them in their power or let them be condemned when brought to trial. Wait for the LORD and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it. I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree in its native soil, but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found.

Consider the blameless, observe the upright; there is a future for the man of peace. But all sinners will be destroyed; the future of the wicked will be cut off. The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.

There are great rewards in being honest. First, you only have to remember one version of events. Second you save an incredible amount of energy that would otherwise be spent worrying that you'll be caught. That energy can be put to productive use. And third, even in this age of Grace, the Lord finds extra blessings to shower on those whose ways are pleasing to Him. It's rarely discussed in the Church today, but God's laws never expired, nor were they revoked. Our Lord's death paid the penalty for our violations, but didn't render the law obsolete. There's still great blessing to be found in obeying His Laws because now we do it out of gratitude, not in a futile attempt to earn His favor. The Old Testament said, "Obey the Lord or face condemnation." The New Testament says, "Obey the Lord because you've escaped condemnation." It's an attitude of gratitude that drives us today, and what better way to demonstrate our gratitude than to behave in a way that pleases our Benefactor?

"When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies live at peace with him," **Prov. 16:7** promises. A reward for righteousness is peace. Peace at home and peace in the workplace. You can experience this peace today. Forgive those who've wronged you. Ask forgiveness from those you've

wronged. Make a valiant effort to live in a way that pleases God, and when you fall short seek forgiveness from Him. He'll always grant it without delay and without condition. You won't have to wait till you're all done and cleaned up to begin feeling this peace. The moment you ask forgiveness, you'll notice the weight being lifted off your shoulders.

In the Old Testament the traditional Hebrew greeting was, "Shalom," peace. In the New Testament the Greek word Charis was added. Grace. The greeting became, "Charis Shalom," Grace and Peace. Because of the grace of God that takes away all our sins, we can have the peace of God in a way never before possible. It's there for the taking, what are you waiting for?

Psalm 38

O LORD , do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.

My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.

All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes. My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away.

Those who seek my life set their traps, those who would harm me talk of my ruin; all day long they plot deception. I am like a deaf man, who cannot hear, like a mute, who cannot open his mouth; I have become like a man who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply. I wait for you, O LORD you will answer, O Lord my God. For I said, "Do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me when my foot slips."

For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me. I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.

Many are those who are my vigorous enemies; those who hate me without reason are numerous.

Those who repay my good with evil slander me when I pursue what is good.

O LORD , do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior.

Do you know that the Lord cannot punish you for your sins as He did to sinners in the Old Testament? They got leprosy, poisonous snakes bit them, a plague struck them and their livestock, or the Earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up. But because of the cross, where He punished His Son for all your sins, you are free. Don't get me wrong, you won't necessarily escape the earthly consequences of your behavior. If you rob a convenience store and get caught, you'll probably go to jail, Christian or not. But you don't have to worry about your name being erased from the Lamb's Book of Life. Your place in Heaven is secure.

So why do we feel the way David described himself above when we commit a grievous sin? Well, there are two reasons. We may be feeling the conviction of the Holy Spirit urging us to confess so we can be forgiven. If we've already confessed then we're already forgiven (**1 John 1:9**) and the feelings we're experiencing are caused by guilt. And that comes from another source altogether. Guilt is Satan's tool for driving a wedge between us and the Lord.

A sure way to know which we're feeling is to see which direction we're headed. If we're running toward the cross, it's conviction and if we're running away, it's guilt. When the Lord asked Adam if he'd eaten the forbidden fruit, He wasn't looking for information, He was looking for confession. He already knew what had happened. Adam's guilt caused him to run and hide, and to cover himself. His unwillingness to confess (he blamed Eve) caused the estrangement Satan was hoping for and Adam had to leave the Garden.

Would human history have been different had Adam simply confessed? We'll have to ask Him about that. But will your life be different if you simply confess your sins and then rebuke the devil for trying to drive a wedge between you and your Lord? You bet it will. Confession restores fellowship and is the antidote for guilt. *Because there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1)* there is no place for guilt in the mind of the believer who has confessed. Ask forgiveness from the Lord and those you've wronged. (He will forgive you. They may not, but that's their problem.) *Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)* Have a guilt free day.

Psalm 39

I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence." But when I was silent and still, not even saying anything good, my anguish increased. My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue;

"Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere hand breadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath.

Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it. "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools. I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this. Remove your scourge from me; I am overcome by the blow of your hand. You rebuke and discipline men for their sin; you consume their wealth like a moth- each man is but a breath.

"Hear my prayer, O LORD, listen to my cry for help; be not deaf to my weeping. For I dwell with you as an alien, a stranger, as all my fathers were. Look away from me, that I may rejoice again before I depart and am no more."

So overcome with his all pervasive sin nature, David begged the Lord to look away from him so he could enjoy at least one moment's peace during his life on earth without the Holy Spirit pointing out his sinful behavior. He wanted to know how long his life would last so he would know how long he would go on disappointing himself and the Lord. Even when he kept his mouth shut his thoughts betrayed his sinfulness. Such was the state of man before the cross.

But then God sent His Son and everything changed. *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation ... (Col. 1:21-22).* It no longer matters how badly you messed up yesterday, your future with Him is secure. All you have to do is confess and you're forgiven, immediately and unconditionally, and purified from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

As David so clearly demonstrates, guilt is one of the most debilitating emotions we feel. Reading **Psalm 39**, you can almost feel the weight he was carrying. Only forgiveness brings relief. Our Lord's death has reconciled you to your Father in Heaven and pre-paid the penalty for all your sins. The law of double jeopardy now exempts you from God's punishment and guarantees your forgiveness. *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1)* No condemnation from God and no self-condemnation of the type David was feeling. No more guilt, the burden gone. *If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36)* It's one more thing to be thankful for.

Psalm 40

I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD

Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare.

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced. Burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come- it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.

Do not withhold your mercy from me, O LORD; may your love and your truth always protect me. For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.

Be pleased, O LORD, to save me; O LORD, come quickly to help me. May all who seek to take my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" be appalled at their own shame. But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, "The LORD be exalted!" Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay.

What an amazing piece of writing! If ever the words of man were inspired by God, it has to be here. It opens with a joyous song of praise filled with the kind of symbolism that makes it sound more like something from the New Testament than the Old. Reminds me of the words to that old Edward Mote hymn, "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."

Then right in the middle David launches into a declaration that could only have come from the mouth of the Messiah Himself. And in it He reveals the Mission of the Messiah so succinctly that especially in the Hebrew it's impossible to miss.

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced. Burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come- it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." (**Psalms 40:6-8**)

It's so well written that one word out of the entire declaration is all that's needed to understand what Jesus accomplished for us. In Hebrew the word is "ratsown," we translate it "will" in verse 8. It literally means "a voluntary favor" and comes from a root meaning "to satisfy" as in a debt. As a favor to His Father, Jesus volunteered to give His life in payment of our debt.

But taken as a whole these three verses convey an even greater wealth of theological treasure. Let's start at the beginning. Sacrifice and offering were never intended to wipe away man's sin, only to put it aside until the real remedy could be applied. (**Rom. 3:20**) The act of piercing one's ears in David's culture meant voluntarily enslaving one's self to another for life. (**Exodus 21:5-6**) In the New Testament it's called becoming a bond-servant. Jesus wasn't forced to die for us, He did so voluntarily, to satisfy our debt of sin. And then so we wouldn't miss the meaning He had Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel and all the others prophesy about it in advance before He performed it on the cross. Discovering this is one of the great benefits of studying Old Testament prophecy.

No matter what troubles beset us, no matter what difficulties we face, we are secure in the knowledge that we are victorious, and those who seek our downfall will be turned back in disgrace. We belong to a God Who loves us so much that He died for us so we could have eternal life with Him. Because of this we are always justified in saying, "*The LORD be exalted*" for He is our help and our deliverer.

Psalm 41

Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble. The LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness.

I said, "O LORD, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you." My enemies say of me in malice, "When will he die and his name perish?" Whenever one comes to see me, he speaks falsely, while his heart gathers slander; then he goes out and spreads it abroad. All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst for me, saying, "A vile disease has beset him; he will never get up from the place where he lies." Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

But you, O LORD, have mercy on me; raise me up, that I may repay them. I know that you are pleased with me, for my enemy does not triumph over me. In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever. Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.

David was seriously ill. His detractors visited him, exchanged pleasantries and prayers for a speedy recovery, and then went out and spread gossip about him saying he'd never survive. David knew to pray for his own healing, and knew that the Lord hadn't abandoned him. He knew this because even in his weakened state, his enemies hadn't been able to defeat him. David's prayer for healing was answered, and he recovered and went on to become Israel's most beloved king.

A few hundred years later, Israel was on the brink of defeat, only days away from surrender to the Babylonian armies. All the surrounding nations were shouting for joy at Israel's impending demise, but the Lord said, *"For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* (**Jere. 29:11**)

After they were carried off to Babylon they did prosper, so much so that 70 years later when it was time to return, most elected to stay put. Those who did come back rebuilt the nation, the Holy City and the Temple. When they got bogged down, lost sight of their priorities, and again faced defeat at the hand of their enemies, the Lord sent Haggai to tell them, *"From this day on I will bless you."* (**Hag. 2:19**)

Later Jesus told them and us, *“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.”* **(Matt 6:31-34)**

Times are tough and getting tougher. Some observers are already saying 2011 and 2012 will be called “the years from hell.” But the lesson is clear. No matter how down and dirty things get, we have a right to be hopeful. We have the lessons of history to remind us that our God will never leave us or forsake us. And we have the Word of the Lord advising us to keep our eyes on Him, seeking His Kingdom and His righteousness, and He’ll take care of the rest. Don’t worry, be happy.

Psalm 42

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”

These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?” My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?”

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

If you’ve been a believer for any length of time, you’ve experienced God’s love in specific and tangible ways. You can recall times when He has obviously intervened on your behalf in some event or circumstance. You know He’s answered your prayers. And looking back, you have to admit that He’s been there through all the difficult times you’ve experienced, lending you strength and giving you hope.

Funny how easy it is to forget these things. When they happened they were clear, even intense, but somehow with the passage of time they became hazy, out of focus. Our mind calls for new proof when we encounter new problems, unwilling to accept the view that He’s the same yesterday, today, and forever. (**Hebr. 13:8**)

The Psalm above describes David’s spirit in conversation with his soul. As his soul cries out, “Where are you God?” his spirit reminds him of God’s presence in his past, and says, “As it has been, so it will be.”

When we have doubts, it's our soul (mind, will, and emotion) that expresses them. And it's natural. Any new thing to which the Lord calls us will create doubt in our minds because we have no experience on which to build belief. Our response to this doubt should be to ask God to remind us of all the examples of His faithfulness in our past. His Spirit, speaking to ours, will bring them to mind as He tells us, "As it has been, so it will be." Our belief is in Him, not ourselves.

Our Lord doesn't abandon us. He always finishes what He begins, never leaving us in the lurch. In fact, the more impossible something seems to us, the more committed He'll be to see it through. And when all's said and done we'll be prompted to remember, "*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,*" says the *LORD Almighty*, (**Zech 4:6**) and give Him the credit He's due.

Psalm 43

Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Our Creator originally designed us to behave on the basis of His Revealed Word. It's our Manufacturer's operating system, if you will. After the Fall a competitive operating system called the flesh or sin nature was "installed" in all of Adam's progeny. It was developed by Satan and is opposed to God's Word. Before we were saved, the sin nature was our default system. But as believers we have the option of choosing which operating system to access on a daily basis. Somehow, David knew this and asked God for help in switching systems. He knew that once this was accomplished his spirit would be linked to God's, and his feelings of oppression and rejection would become joy and delight.

There's a good example of this in **John 16:22**. The night before His crucifixion the Lord told His disciples they would soon feel grief because it would appear that they had lost Him. But then they would see Him again and from that time forward no one would be able to take away their joy.

Before the cross, they hadn't received the Holy Spirit and relied primarily on their feelings to govern their behavior. As they watched Him die, they felt grief. But the night of His Resurrection, Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit and from that time forward they had a choice. Never again could someone steal their joy without their active cooperation.

When we allow our sin nature to call the shots we become disconnected from God, and will inevitably experience feelings of sadness, rejection, and even oppression. But when we choose to once again let God's Revealed Word govern our behavior, we're re-connected to Him and He makes our joy complete.

Switching metaphors, some make the mistake of thinking they can store up God's energy. They speak of going to Church or a weekend retreat to get their "batteries recharged." But in an appliance metaphor, we're actually of the plug-in variety. As soon as we're disconnected from the Lord, we cease functioning properly. Think of yourself as a toaster, not a flashlight, and you'll get the idea.

Pray without ceasing. Read His Word every day. It'll help you to select the right operating system and keep you plugged in too.

Psalm 44

We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish. It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them.

You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. Through you we push back our enemies; through your name we trample our foes. I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever. *Selah*

But now you have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. You made us retreat before the enemy, and our adversaries have plundered us. You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations. You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale. You have made us a reproach to our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. You have made us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us.

My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered with shame at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me, because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.

All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant. Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness.

If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart? Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love.

And elderly farm couple was driving along a country road in their battered old pickup, when a shiny new convertible swooped past them. The two young people in the convertible were seated so close together, her head on his shoulder and his right arm holding her tight, they almost looked like one. The old woman looked across the bench seat to her husband of 40 years and said dreamily, "Remember back when we used to sit that close together?" The old man replied, "I've never moved."

Sometimes it feels like we're out there all alone. Our God, Who once felt so close to us now seems so far away. It's a dark hour. Where is He? Why doesn't He respond?

He created us for a love relationship with Him. It's the only thing He needs from us, and He needs it so badly that He gave His life to make it possible. His love is the one thing we can count on in this world. His mercies are new every morning. There's no way, having gone to such extremes to redeem us that He would ever abandon us. *"And surely I am with you always,"* He said, *"To the very end of the age."* (**Matt. 28:20**)

When Peter, having gotten out of the boat and begun walking on the water, began to sink, he cried out, "Lord! Save me!" Immediately the Lord was at his side, holding him up, bringing him back to the boat. There's no place you can go where He cannot rescue you the minute you ask.

If you feel so far away, maybe you're the one who's moved. Try confessing your sins and then ask Him if you've somehow taken the wrong fork in a road you were going down together. Spend more time reading your Bible, praying. You'll find him again.

And when you do, and recall how close the two of you used to be, you'll hear Him gently say, "I've never moved."

Psalm 45

My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.

You are the most excellent of men and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever. Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds. Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet.

Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad. Daughters of kings are among your honored women; at your right hand is the royal bride in gold of Ophir.

Listen, O daughter, consider and give ear: Forget your people and your father's house. The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord. The Daughter of Tyre will come with a gift, men of wealth will seek your favor.

All glorious is the princess within her chamber; her gown is interwoven with gold. In embroidered garments she is led to the king; her virgin companions follow her and are brought to you. They are led in with joy and gladness; they enter the palace of the king.

Your sons will take the place of your fathers; you will make them princes throughout the land. I will perpetuate your memory through all generations; therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.

This Psalm is so obviously written to celebrate the wedding of the Messiah King to His bride the Church that it's hard to find anything worthwhile to add. But for what they're worth, here are a few tidbits you may have missed.

For those of you looking for additional proof that the Messiah has been viewed as Deity right from the start, check out the 3rd paragraph above. Speaking to the Messiah, the writer says, *"Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom,"* and then follows with *"You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."*

In all three cases in this passage, the Hebrew word translated "God" is "Elohim." With one exception (**Psalm 82**), this word is used only of Deity. The Messiah-King is called God just as His Father is called God. The writer of Hebrews quoted this passage, saying that its author was God the Father and that He was addressing His Son as God. (**Hebr. 1:8-9**) What greater authority could there be in confirming the deity of Jesus?

And since the bride represents the Church, we're told to forget the past and look only to the future. The King is enthralled with our beauty; we're to honor Him for He is our Lord. On this matter, Paul admonished us to follow his example. *But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.* (**Phil. 3:13-14**) The past belongs to this world, our citizenship is in Heaven where a glorious eternity awaits us.

Reading this Psalm is a great antidote for discouragement. The end is in sight. The battle has been fought, the winners declared, and the Day of Victory appointed. All that stands between us and the greatest wedding celebration ever, is a little time. And you know what? No matter what happens today, we'll be closer when we go to bed tonight than when we woke up this morning. Maranatha!

Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at the break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

The first lines of this Psalm have always had a calming effect on me. They were among my first adult memory verses. Every time I face difficulty or uncertainty, they spring automatically into my mind and I am strengthened. It's a promise God has made to us, the promise of a haven of peace in a world of turmoil.

The writer of Hebrews used a nautical analogy to bring the same point home. He wrote, *“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.”* (Hebr.6:19-20) In the time before harbors could be dredged to accommodate large ships, sailors of these ships had to anchor outside the harbor and transfer passengers and goods to small boats to get them ashore. Because wind and currents would work to tear a ship loose from its moorings in open seas, there was always a danger that they'd find themselves cast adrift. To prevent this, they attached their anchors to long lines and then rowed them into the harbor where they set the anchor in calm waters unaffected by winds and currents. Though the waves rolled and the wind blew out where the ships were, the anchors remained firmly set beneath the quiet waters of the harbor, keeping the ship secure.

In **Hebrews 6** the writer explains the security afforded to one who trusts solely in the Lord's completed work on the cross. Using this nautical analogy, he pictures the anchor of our soul planted firmly in the Holy of Holies. Protected from the winds of controversy and the currents of deceit, our blessed hope is secure,

anchored in the Throne Room of the Creator by our Lord Jesus, Who sprinkled His blood there on our behalf. Let the storms rage, let the waves crash. *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Hallelujah!*

Psalm 47

Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth! He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.

God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted.

It's hard to remember that everything that happens to us is "Father filtered" and permitted only for our benefit. *For God is working everything together for the good of those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)*

The preceding is a literal translation. Your Bible might read a little differently, but Paul's intention was to show that God is actively involved in our lives, watching over us and only allowing things that will ultimately benefit us to occur in our lives. The catch is in the word we translate as love. Of the four Greek words Paul could have used for love, he chose *agapeo*, the one that describes being completely given over to the object of one's affection, regardless of circumstance or outcome. It's not enough just to know who God is. The promise only applies to those who actually know Him and love Him on a personal level.

Lots of folks who claim to know who God is often blame Him when things go wrong in their lives. They don't realize that what they're experiencing is often the logical and predictable consequence of their own willful behavior, undertaken without a thought about His will for them.

But those of us who have given our hearts to Him can take comfort in the fact that at this very moment God is on His throne watching over even the most minute details of our lives. He's orchestrating them in a way that even those things that bring pain and discomfort and seemingly contain no value for us at all are somehow working together for our benefit. We can't always see how, but we know it's true and that someday soon we will see and understand.

And on that day, when the physical is brought into congruence with the spiritual, we'll also see the nobles of the nations bow down and acknowledge Him as King of the whole Earth. We'll see this because we'll be there, seated beside Him.

Until then we can take heart in the certain knowledge that this is already true in Heaven, for (God) *raised him (Jesus) from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. (Ephes. 1:20-21)* And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. **(Ephes. 2:6-7)** Notice the words raised and seated are in the past tense. It's a done deal. Have a regal day.

Psalm 48

Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress.

When the kings joined forces, when they advanced together, they saw her and were astounded; they fled in terror. Trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor. You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD Almighty, in the city of our God: God makes her secure forever.

Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness. Mount Zion rejoices, the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments. Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels that you may tell of them to the next generation. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

There is a city set aside for us, a Holy and beautiful city that also has the name Jerusalem. Abraham dreamed about it (**Hebr. 11:10**) but John saw it (**Rev. 21:10-27**) and described it for us.

“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

“The city shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

“The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 1400 miles in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 200 feet thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone.”

“The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.”

“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

This is the home of the redeemed, the “Heaven” where all believers will dwell with the Lord forever. The Lord has spent nearly 2000 years preparing and perfecting it for us. **(John 14:1-3)** I don’t believe it ever descends fully to Earth but hovers above it like a giant low orbit satellite. (If it did ever come to rest on Earth it would require a foot print equivalent to all the land in Norway, Sweden, Finland, England, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy combined, and would rise into the sky a distance equal to 4500 times the height of the world’s tallest building!) Those who calculate these things estimate that we’ll each have a mansion about 10,000 square feet in size to call our own in this new city.

Without vehicular aid we’ll travel at the speed of thought to any point in history anywhere in the universe, soaking up knowledge, insight, and perspective as we go. Possessing minds and bodies released from the corruption of our former sin nature we’ll be scientist, explorer, adventurer, athlete and artist all rolled into one. Every day of our eternal existence will be filled with the joy of discovery, the excitement of being, and the expectation of an endless string of even greater tomorrows. Gone forever the stress, disappointment, and uncertainty we face today, we’ll finally be free.

This was Abraham’s dream, this is the believer’s destiny, and ours is the blessed generation that will see it come to pass!

Psalm 49

Hear this, all you peoples; listen, all who live in this world, both low and high, rich and poor alike: My mouth will speak words of wisdom; the utterance from my heart will give understanding. I will turn my ear to a proverb; with the harp I will expound my riddle:

Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me- those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him- the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough- that he should live on forever and not see decay.

For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others. Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves. But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings.

Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.

Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him. Though while he lived he counted himself blessed- and men praise you when you prosper- he will join the generation of his fathers, who will never see the light of life. A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish.

We're taught to envy the rich. In our society today wealth is taken as a sign of intelligence or good fortune. In the past it's been seen as evidence of righteousness. There's no question that wealth can make one's life a lot easier. I think it was the legendary entertainer Sophie Tucker who once said, "I've been rich and I've been poor. Rich is better."

Henry David Thoreau wrote, "There are two paths to financial independence. Increase your means or decrease your wants." The best strategy is a combination of the two, but most seem to focus only on the first one.

My last stint in the business world brought me a fairly large guaranteed salary. For nearly four years it showed up automatically in my account every two weeks. It was the first time in my life I had ever experienced such a thing, having always been self employed until then. I took the job to help fund the start up of this website ministry, but it soon took the best of my time and energy.

After I returned to full time ministry, I realized the extent to which I had come to depend on that job for my security. And though it was nice to have, I now consider it to have been a distraction rather than a means to achieving my goals. It's been said that the last great obstacle to success in any venture is a loss of purpose, and the false sense of security prompted by a guaranteed income caused me to put my real goal on the back burner. Loss of purpose, loss of urgency.

Back in ministry I now depend on the Lord, and am struggling to make up for lost time. When I read passages like the Psalm above I'm thankful that my wife implemented Thoreau's advice when we began talking about leaving the business world for good. Over a relatively short period of time, she single handedly decreased our wants to a point where our living expenses are now only about 1/3 of what they used to be.

It's not that the Lord couldn't have provided for us at the former level. But we discovered we didn't need that much to live happily, and not having to expend so much time and energy to fund our lifestyle gives us more to devote to ministry. And we've found after a few years of "the simple life" that it's been the most blessed of them all.

Eternity is a long time, and we're all going to live through all of it. Compared to eternity the 70 or so years we spend here is little more than the blink of an eye. **Psalm 49** was written to remind us that man's rules of the game for this life are way different than God's rules for the next one. And the more we focus on "winning" here the more we risk setting ourselves up to lose there. No amount of money is sufficient to purchase your salvation, and with out that, even though you've named lands after yourself, you'll dwell in the grave forever. *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? (Mark 8:36)*

It turns out that God's most important rule of the game works well for both this life and the next one. It's tucked away in a seldom featured passage of 2nd Corinthians.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (**2 Cor. 4:16-18**)

Whether you're rich or poor, everything you have or see around you will disappear. It's all temporary and could be gone with the next beat of your heart. You'll enter the next world, the permanent one, with none of it. I've never seen a U-Haul following a hearse into the cemetery.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (**Matt. 6:19-21**)

The way you store up treasures in Heaven is to use a portion of the abundance He's given you here to further the work of His Kingdom here. After you've done your share to help support the congregation you attend, take a look at the para-church ministries around you. They're often the place where the rubber really meets the road, and a small investment there can pay big dividends. It's true, you can't take it with you, but this way you can send it up ahead.

Treasure on Earth stays on Earth and is gone with your last heartbeat. Treasure in Heaven awaits in Heaven and remains for eternity.

Psalm 50

The Mighty One, God, the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets. From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth. Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before him, and around him a tempest rages. He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people: “Gather to me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for God himself is judge.

“Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God. I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

But to the wicked, God says: “What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother’s son. These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face.

“Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue: He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.”

“Be fearful of nothing, pray about everything, and be thankful for anything.” That’s a friend’s paraphrase of **Philippians 4:6** and it’s advice I always turn to when things are getting scary. If **Romans 8:28** is true and God is working everything together for our good, then we really don’t have anything to be afraid of by following His will for our lives. By submitting everything to prayer we stay in touch and receive the guidance we need

along the way. By giving thanks for anything we receive, no matter how small, we demonstrate our gratitude to the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and train ourselves to be more aware of the numerous times He intercedes on our behalf every day.

In the Psalm the Lord asks, “Do you think I need these things I ask you to sacrifice to me? Do I eat the meat or drink the blood?” Of course He doesn’t. They were commanded to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving every time He blessed them so they could see how much He gave them, not because He had need of anything. That way they’d have the faith to ask for His help when they really needed it.

Let’s face it, if you have someone in your life who is always ready to help, who even gives gifts spontaneously just because it pleases him to do so, won’t you likely turn to him for help when you really need it? No one gives you more than the Lord, and if you train yourself to look for His gifts and thank Him for every one, you’ll find two good things happening. First you’ll be amazed at how much He does for you, and second you’ll find that your faith to ask in expectation of receiving grows by leaps and bounds. Who knows, maybe one day you’ll even have enough faith to believe this promise from the Lord.

I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.
(Mark 11:23-24)

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts, you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. 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. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.

Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

King David had accidentally seen Bathsheba bathing on her rooftop and was immediately smitten. Only one problem. She was married to a man serving in the army. David conspired with the man's Commanding Officer to have him isolated at a point where the enemy forces were strong. When the enemy attacked, the man was killed and David took the newly widowed Bathsheba as his wife.

How could God permit such a thing and continue to bless David's reign as King? Certainly not because David reminded God that he'd been born with a sin nature and couldn't help himself. Nor was it because David promised to be good from then on and to teach people to stop sinning in exchange for his forgiveness. He knew David couldn't be good and He had other more credible teachers among His people.

God forgave David because David asked Him to. He asked with such profound regret that at one point tradition says he even went into the Holy of Holies, placed his hand on the Ark of the Covenant expecting to be killed. He'd seen that happen to one of his soldiers who had instinctively reached out to keep the Ark from falling off its cart. (**1 Chron. 13:7-10**) No one but specially designated members of the tribe of Levi could touch the Ark, and that soldier wasn't one of them. Neither was David.

But God didn't kill David, He forgave him. It was a dramatic demonstration of His grace and proved that David was correct when he said, *"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."*

It's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (**Hebr. 10:4**) They only held the sins in abeyance until the Perfect Sacrifice was made. And then only if the Lord saw sincerity in the heart of the one presenting them. Like everything else with God, it's not the action but the motive in the heart of the one performing it that counts.

You've probably never committed such a great and public sin as David's. But remember, in the Lord's eyes there's no degree of sinfulness. We must understand that all sin is mortal and requires confession from the heart. Confess early and often. Confess sincerely and passionately. Ask the Lord to grant you a willing spirit to sustain you. Then your sacrifices of praise will be offered in righteousness, pleasing to the Lord.

Psalm 52

Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God? Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth

You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue! Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living.

The righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at him, saying, "Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!"

But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints.

I remember watching as a popular movie star bragged in front of a national TV audience that she had been paid \$20 million for one week's work as the voice of a cartoon character. She was a guest on a talk show whose hostess is reportedly worth several billion dollars and whose personal income approaches \$1 million per working day!

I couldn't help thinking that either one of those women could support our ministry and many others like it for the rest of their lives with out even noticing. I don't know what they do with their money; perhaps they're heavily involved in the Lord's work, using their considerable wealth to further His Kingdom. If so, they'll reap eternal rewards that will put their current fortunes to shame.

But if not, all the money they can gather up will fall woefully short of the price required for their lives. If they've rejected the Lord's free offer of salvation, they'll find themselves unable to pay the price required to purchase it on their own, no matter how much wealth they acquire.

I believe it was Karl Marx who said, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." He believed that religion was invented by the wealthy to help keep the poor in their place. The idea was that they would tolerate their lives of deprivation and willingly spend their energies enriching others as long as they believed that they would be made rich themselves in another life.

We know better. We know that in this life God, the giver of every good and perfect gift, will attend to our needs and bless us as He sees fit, if only we'll let him. And then, as a reward for our faith, He'll grant us eternal blessings beyond comprehension in the next one. He will do this irrespective of our merit. In fact Karl Marx could have received all these blessings himself, had he only asked.

I'll admit to being jealous upon hearing that someone who added no value at all to the quality of life on earth should be compensated so outrageously, while it seems that many who labor diligently for the Lord barely survive. But then I realized that I was looking at things through a worldly perspective. I have everything I need and the Lord has promised that I always will. If someone gave me \$20 million for a week's work, I'd give the tithe and a lot more to the Lord, but then I'd probably spend the rest on things that would ultimately distract me from ministry, not help me stay focused. It's what the Lord meant when He said, *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."* (**Matt 6:24**)

In **Psalm 37** the Lord compared successful but evil people to the grass that soon withers away into nothing. In this one the faithful are compared to an olive tree. Olive trees are almost impossible to kill. You can cut them down, burn their wood, and dig up the trunks, but soon a little shoot will come out of the ground and the tree is off and growing again. It's believed that some of the olive trees present in the Garden of Gethsemane today witnessed the arrest and capture of Jesus.

Given the choice of being a blade of grass that withers and dies, or an olive tree that lives forever I'll choose the olive tree, especially since I know where I'll be living.

Psalm 53

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good. God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Will the evildoers never learn- those who devour my people as men eat bread and who do not call on God? There they were, overwhelmed with dread, where there was nothing to dread. God scattered the bones of those who attacked you; you put them to shame, for God despised them. Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." Only a fool can say that. But even a fool can't say it logically, from his head, because there's too much evidence to the contrary. He has to say it emotionally, from his heart. (Of the 593 times the Hebrew word *leb* appears in the Old Testament, it's translated heart, as the seat of emotion, 508 times.) Foolish opinions based on emotion don't need to be true.

In what other religion can you find an unblemished record of first predicting and then performing major interventions in the history of man as a god's way of proving himself to his followers?

This method of validation is called predictive prophecy, and because of it, evidence of our God's existence is so overwhelming that when He speaks of the unbelief of His people He uses a word that really means disobedient. That means He sees unbelief as being a refusal to believe, as unwillingness rather than inability.

Listen to His own words from **Isaiah 42:8-9**

"I am the LORD ; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you."

And from **Isaiah 44:6-8**

"This is what the LORD says- Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let

him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come- yes, let him foretell what will come.

Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."

This is His proof; first predicting and then performing, and frankly He's done it so many times that you can't blame Him for saying, "Enough discussion! I've proved Myself to you well beyond any reasonable doubt. Now are you going to believe me or not?"

I recently conducted a very rough analysis of just 7 of the most widely believed prophecies concerning the First Coming from a total of over 300. The probability of Jesus fulfilling them coincidentally is about 1 in 9 with 45 zeros after it. The point is that He's proven who He is with greater certainty than we can prove who we are.

"Be still and know that I am God," He tells us. (**Psalm 46:10**) He doesn't say "Hope that I am God", or even "Believe that I am God", but "Know that I am God." He wouldn't command this of us unless it was possible. The proof He offers us consists of Him predicting and then performing. We call it prophecy, and it fills more of the Bible than any other topic, so that we can know that He is God.

Psalm 54

Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might. Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth. Strangers are attacking me; ruthless men seek my life- men without regard for God. Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me. Let evil recoil on those who slander me; in your faithfulness destroy them. I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you; I will praise your name, O LORD, for it is good. For he has delivered me from all my troubles, and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.

In a recent study on the Book of Job, the instructor claimed it was Job's righteousness that made him a desirable target for Satan. He was setting too good an example, and the enemy needed to take him down. But that opinion leaves the impression that Satan can have access to anyone he wants, and that's not true. The fact is that Job's righteousness, a quality that even God admired, had a negative side. Because he was human he was a sinner, and even though God called him the most righteous man on Earth, Job wasn't perfect. He had become self-righteous, and that's the sin that gave Satan his opening. Job didn't confess it because he didn't acknowledge it, and that failure put him out of fellowship with God and made him a legitimate target for the enemy.

This is not meant to scare anyone out of serving the Lord. Speaking of the relative power of the Lord and Satan, John wrote, *"The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"* (1 John 4:4). (Remember, Job didn't have the benefit of the indwelling Holy Spirit to convict him of his sins.) It's simply a reminder that our enemy is strong and deserves our respect. If you're serving the Lord and having any impact at all you're going to become a target sooner or later. So stay prayed up, and stay in fellowship by confessing early and often. Look upon the skirmishes you face every now and then as evidence that you're doing some good, and as reminders to stay alert and mind your defenses. Remember, this is war.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. (Ephes. 6:10-13)

Psalm 55

Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger. My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me.

I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest- I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm."

Confuse the wicked, O Lord, confound their speech, for I see violence and strife in the city. Day and night they prowl about on its walls; malice and abuse are within it. Destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies never leave its streets.

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.

Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave, for evil finds lodging among them. But I call to God, and the LORD saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me. God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them and afflict them- men who never change their ways and have no fear of God.

My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant. His speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords. Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall. But you, O God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of corruption; bloodthirsty and deceitful men will not live out half their days.

But as for me, I trust in you.

David was writing about Saul when he complained that it was a former friend who had betrayed him with words as smooth as butter while his heart was filled with thoughts of war. He was also writing prophetically of the relationship between Jesus and Judas. Prophecies from Psalms and Zechariah show how the Lord felt about His betrayal.

*Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. (Psalm 41:9) If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body' (lit. your hands)?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'** (**Zech. 13:6**) In the end, it was those closest to Him who betrayed Him.

It seems like history is replete with stories of betrayal by close friends. I know that the deepest wounds I received during my time in pastoral ministry were inflicted by those closest to me. Jesus told His disciples that there would come a time when those who persecuted them would think they were performing a service for God (**John 16:2**) and that one day people's enemies would come from among their own households. (**Matt 10:36**). Betrayal seems to be a characteristic of God's children. Here's why.

Satan will try anything to destroy relationships, especially those built around a love for the Lord. That's why church fights are always among the worst. And since we're all sinners there's always a way he can get to us. Maybe we're jealous of a friend's accomplishments or envious of his possessions or his position. Our enemy will use these unconfessed sins to gain access to our minds and plant seemingly well-intentioned but destructive ideas there.

These ideas can manifest themselves as gossip, insubordination, rebellion, and so on. He used Saul's mental condition to make him think David was trying to kill him so he could get Saul to try and kill David, God's anointed. Saul thought he was putting down an uprising and acting in self-defense.

Judas was trying to arrange a meeting between the chief priests and Jesus. He became convinced that there was simply a communication problem between them, a problem that could be resolved with some face-to-face discussion and negotiation. He was devastated to learn that through them Satan had tricked him into handing Jesus over to be executed.

Believers are among the enemy's best assistants because they think they can't be used this way. They believe every inspiration they get has to be from the Lord, even when it conflicts with scripture and the advice of wise counselors.

To avoid being used as such a tool, stay in fellowship. Confess early and often. Look for independent confirmation before you act on what you believe to be a message from God, for *by the testimony of two or three witnesses a thing shall be established.* (**Deut. 19:15**) Bring any idea you have to the leadership and ask them to pray with you to confirm God's will in the matter.

Remember, any work undertaken at the hand of the Lord will produce manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit within the body: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. **(Galatians 5:22-23)** He is not the author of confusion or contention. Those things come from an entirely different source.

Psalm 56

Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack. My slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride.

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me? All day long they twist my words; they are always plotting to harm me. They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps, eager to take my life.

On no account let them escape; in your anger, O God, bring down the nations. Record my lament; list my tears on your scroll – are they not in your record? Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I will know that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise- in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

I am under vows to you, O God; I will present my thank offerings to you. For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

If your goal is to help advance the Kingdom through personal ministry, you'll get resistance, especially at the beginning. Peter, someone who had more cause to understand this than most everyone else, said that the devil is like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. (**1 Peter 5:8**) The folks he's most interested in are those who're giving him the worst time. If he can frustrate and torment them enough, he hopes they'll give up and go away.

Usually we're the most vulnerable to this kind of attack in the early stages of our ministry (and remember, according to **2 Cor. 1:3-5** we're all called into ministry). At the beginning we might not be as secure in our calling, and are more likely to misinterpret resistance by Satan as disapproval by God.

"Does God really want me to do this?" we ask. "Maybe I've read the signs wrong." We forget that the Egyptians' initial reaction to Moses' arrival on the scene was to make the plight of the Israelites worse, turning them against Moses even as he labored to deliver them.

Ask any number of influential ministries about the early days and you'll hear the same story over and over again. At the beginning there were huge battles that ended in small victories. As time went by the battles became smaller and the victories larger. While the variations on this theme are as numerous as are the

ministries involved, there are two constants in all their stories. There were always battles and there were always victories. The faith of those involved was being tested by the enemy and in the process strengthened by the Lord so they'd be ready for the greater opportunities He had prepared in advance for them.

Let's hear from Peter again: *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self control; and to self control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-8)*

How long does this testing period last? Only as long as it takes to prepare you for the blessing the Lord has in store for you. It seems like the greater your eventual blessing, the greater your initial battles. But two things are certain; it won't be forever and the victory is already ours. *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you, James tells us (James 4:7).* Once Satan is convinced you're not going away, then he will. He has better things to do than fight a losing battle.

Psalm 57

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; God sends his love and his faithfulness.

I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts- men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.

They spread a net for my feet- I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path- but they have fallen into it themselves.

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.

The Apostle Paul had this same idea in mind when he wrote to the Church at Philippi. *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:4-7)* Nothing makes our enemies more frustrated than our refusal to let them get us down. In what are surely the first words ever written on positive thinking, Paul continued with advice on how to maintain our joy in the face of adversity. *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Phil. 4:8-9)*

In this and other places Paul taught that even though we can't always control the circumstances of our lives, we can control our reaction to them. And by focusing our thoughts on the good things in our lives, especially the blessings of God, we can mitigate the discouragement and other emotional damage that experiencing

difficult times might otherwise do to us. The reason is that with all the enormous power of the human brain, there is one limitation. At the conscious level our minds can only process one thought at a time. Somehow Paul knew that if he could persuade us to fill our minds with pure, noble, praiseworthy thoughts, then we'd be unable to focus on our unpleasant circumstances, and would be better equipped to endure them.

Following his advice proves to be especially effective first thing in the morning. David, being a musician, sang his praises to God. Others read the Scriptures or listen to worship music. I spend time in prayers of thanksgiving. If you've never done this, or have unwittingly stopped, you'll be pleasantly surprised when you take it up. It really helps get the day off to a good start and provides an anchor for our faith during those times when the winds of controversy threaten to blow us off course.

Psalm 58

Do you rulers indeed speak justly? Do you judge uprightly among men? No, in your heart you devise injustice, and your hands mete out violence on the earth. Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. Their venom is like the venom of a snake, like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears, that will not heed the tune of the charmer, however skillful the enchanter may be

Break the teeth in their mouths, O God; tear out, O LORD, the fangs of the lions! Let them vanish like water that flows away; when they draw the bow, let their arrows be blunted. Like a slug melting away as it moves along, like a stillborn child, may they not see the sun.

Before your pots can feel the heat of the thorns- whether they be green or dry-the wicked will be swept away. The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. Then men will say, "Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth."

A day is coming soon when all the corrupt and ungodly leaders will be swept from office, when a person's character will again be an indicator of his destiny. It will be a day when law and justice are synonymous terms again and when an innocent person will have no fear of the authorities.

But before that can happen, the complacency and indifference of the people will have to be rooted out. And that will take a catastrophic intervention by God Himself.

So how big will God's wake-up call have to be? Pretty big, I'm afraid. According to the Lord Jesus it will be unequalled from the beginning of the world until now and never to be equaled again. (**Matt. 24:21**) On average, over a million people will die every day during that time and even then multitudes will refuse to see what (or Who) is coming.

Yes, one day soon God will intervene catastrophically to judge the world's complacency and indifference to sin. He has to do this in order to restore us to the conditions of blessing He's always intended for us. In the mean time take heart, for the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from trials, while holding the unrighteous for the Day of Judgment. (**2 Peter 2:9**) Then men will say, *"Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth."*

Psalm 59

Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men. See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, O LORD. I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight! O LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, rouse Yourself to punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked traitors.

They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. See what they spew from their mouths- they spew out swords from their lips, and they say, "Who can hear us?" But you, O LORD, laugh at them; you scoff at all those nations.

O my Strength, I watch for you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God. God will go before me and will let me gloat over those who slander me. But do not kill them, O Lord our shield, or my people will forget. In your might make them wander about, and bring them down. For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter, consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more. Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob.

They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied. But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

David was coming to the right place to be delivered from evildoers. His best efforts at trying to be reasonable with Saul had been rebuffed. His kindness was always mistaken for weakness. While David dealt honestly and openly, Saul traded in lies and trickery. Saul had all the earthly power, position and influence and did his best to keep David on the outside looking in.

But David had the Lord, the Ultimate Champion for the underdog. The Lord protected, provisioned, and preserved him, all the while turning the lemons Saul threw at David into lemonade. Through all the torment and abuse God was making David into Israel's most beloved King and beginning a dynasty that would culminate in the Messiah Himself!

At the end of the Book of Genesis as Joseph was forgiving his brothers for all they had done to him he said, "What you intended for evil, God intended for good." (**Genesis 50:20**) And so it was. The people of Egypt had been saved from the great famine, Jacob's family was reunited and given the finest land in all of Egypt, and next to Pharaoh Joseph was the most powerful man in the world. None of this could have happened if the brothers hadn't sold Joseph into slavery. Similar stories can be told about Samson, Esther, Daniel and a host of others.

But the ultimate example came 2000 years after Joseph, when God sent His only Son into the world, and His own people rejected Him and put Him to death. But what they intended for evil God intended for good, because through His death the world was saved, God's family is being reunited and returned to the Promised Land, and the Son of God is King over the whole Earth, second only to God in power and authority. It could never have happened if His people hadn't rejected their Messiah.

And so it is with you. When evildoers pursue you and the powers of this world seem to be lined up against you remember, what they intend for evil God intends for good. For God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. (**Romans 8:28**) *I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.*

Psalm 60

You have rejected us, O God, and burst forth upon us; you have been angry-now restore us!
You have shaken the land and torn it open; mend its fractures, for it is quaking. You have shown
your people desperate times; you have given us wine that makes us stagger. But for those who
fear you, you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow.

Save us and help us with your right hand that those you love may be delivered. God has spoken
from his sanctuary: "In triumph I will parcel out Shechem and measure off the Valley of Succoth.
Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter.

Moab is my washbasin, upon Edom I toss my sandal; over Philistia I shout in triumph." Who will
bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? Is it not you, O God, you who have
rejected us and no longer go out with our armies? Give us aid against the enemy, for the help
of man is worthless. With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.

I once headed up a ministry governed by a board of trustees. Whenever a decision that required choosing a
course of action confronted us, I would always ask them to go away and pray. At the next meeting (we met
weekly) we would vote and if the vote was unanimous, we would act. If not, we would wait. In this way we
felt we had the Lord's direction in whatever we did.

From time to time new members would come on the board, and this simple method of decision-making was
always the hardest thing for them to understand. Some were successful businessmen who had become so
by being good decision makers. They wanted to discuss and persuade. I remember one in particular who
used to the lobbying technique, going to other board members outside the meeting to build a consensus for
his desires before coming in to vote.

I explained things this way: As smart as they all were and as much as I valued their perspective, it wasn't
their opinions I wanted. I was after God's opinion and I found the best way to get it was to wait until through
prayer all seven of us had independently come to the same conclusion.

As we followed this process the Lord blessed our decisions, and soon the new trustees learned the wisdom
in our method.

I know many ministries operate differently and am not trying to persuade anyone to my point of view on this.
But I also know how much extra strength I derived from being certain we were going in a direction confirmed

by the Lord. It was especially helpful when the resistance was at its most intense.

Without question the input of wise counselors is valuable, but to know the Lord's opinion gives us an incalculable advantage in persevering against our enemy. Next time you're puzzled about the direction you should take, instead of asking friends for their opinions, ask them to join you in seeking God's opinion. For then, like David, you can pray in confidence, *Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.*

Psalm 61

Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.

For you have heard my vows, O God; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name. Increase the days of the king's life, his years for many generations. May he be enthroned in God's presence forever; appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him. Then will I ever sing praise to your name and fulfill my vows day after day.

It's when we're under a lot of stress that we most desire the sanctuary our faith in God can provide. David felt this way and asked God to take him to a refuge he could not reach on his own, a "rock higher than I".

The advantage we have over David is that we're told how to find such a place whenever we need it. Paul put the instructions in his letter to the Philippians, who were facing daily persecution of a life threatening nature.

"Rejoice in the Lord always," he wrote, "I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:4-7)

The peace that transcends all understanding is truly a place we cannot reach on our own. It's an inner quiet that sustains us in spite of circumstances, conditions, or what other people say, think, or do. But by rejoicing in every situation, even the ones causing the intolerable stress in our lives, we can get there. A friend paraphrased this passage to help me remember the instructions. "Be fearful of nothing, pray about everything, and be thankful for anything." Well said.

But Paul gave further instructions. "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." (Phil.4 :8-9)

With all due respect to Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, Paul discovered the Power of Positive Thinking. Somehow he knew that with all the potential God has invested in the human mind, there's one gigantic limitation. At the

conscious level we can only think one thought at a time. That means that by concentrating on the true, noble, pure, and right things in our world, we'll be unable to scare ourselves into believing that the catastrophic consequences we've conjured up will actually come to pass. We'll remember that God has promised to work all things together for our good, (**Romans 8:28**) and experience a strengthening of our faith instead of descending into the vortex of our fears. Fear and faith cannot exist in the same mind at the same time.

Focusing on the positive also helps us overpower another of our enemy's weapons, the debilitating emotion we call worry. Research has proven that for the average person 40% of the time spent worrying is spent on things with such a low probability of happening, they're not worth considering. Another 30% is spent on things that have already happened and there's nothing we can do to reverse them. 12% more on things that are irrelevant; it doesn't matter whether they happen or not. 10% of our worrying time involves things that aren't our responsibility, and finally only 8% of our worrying time is spent on things that are real and also our responsibility to correct.

But by the time we get to those, most of us are so exhausted from worrying about the things we can't control, we're too weak to fix the things we can. Following Paul's advice on positive thinking helps us avoid this trap, too. Good man, that Paul.

Psalm 62

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down— this leaning wall, this tottering fence? They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse.

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation;

he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

Lowborn men are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie; if weighed on a balance, they are nothing;

together they are only a breath. Do not trust in extortion or take pride in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.

God is strong and God is loving. What more could you ask of one Who's sworn to protect you. "And surely I am with you always," Jesus promised, *"Even to the end of the age."* (**Matt 28:20**) He's also faithful, patient, forgiving, and the list goes on.

"Let not your hearts be troubled," He told His disciples. *"You trust in God. Trust also in me."* (**John 14:1**) He was speaking to us as well. He's trustworthy.

“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (**Romans 8:31-32**)

Good question, Paul. Who can overrule God’s decisions or rescind His actions? No one can thwart His plan.

Our obstacles are right there in front of us, only too obvious, so Paul advised us to fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. *For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* (**2 Cor. 4:18**) To allow the tangible, physical things of this world, or the countering activities of our enemies to stop us is to yield to the temporary things while ignoring the permanent ones.

“What you do reveals what you believe,” wrote Henry T. Blackaby in his book, *Experiencing God*. “If you’re living a fearful anxiety-filled life, you’re proving your lack of confidence in God’s protection, regardless of what you say.”

When I was a young Sales Manager, a friend taught me, “Look at what a person pays conscious attention to, and you’ll learn what his sub-conscious intentions are.” No beginning sales people would ever consciously admit that they intended to fail in their new careers, but by watching their behavior I learned that I could accurately predict whether that would be the outcome. I saw that it always came down to one factor. Were they pro-active or reactive in performing their jobs?

Selling involves performing a series of learned activities in their proper sequence, and successful sales people quickly formed the habit of doing that (which allowed them to be proactive in dealing with their customers) while failures didn’t (which forced them to be reactive). It wasn’t that the failures couldn’t form this habit, but that they didn’t. It was that simple. The logic was overwhelming.

By learning the sequence so well they could follow it by habit, my successful sales people found they could be better listeners and could pick up on signals that buyers always transmit, indicating their readiness to buy or revealing their true objections. Since the next step in the sequence automatically came to mind, they were free to concentrate on what their customers were saying.

Over and over I watched others fail by skipping steps or taking them out of sequence as they worked with their customers. They had been taught the steps and their proper sequence but hadn’t practiced enough to make them into habits. Some didn’t believe it was that important, while others thought they were smart enough to “wing it.”

In the heat of the moment they often got confused and were forced into a reactive mode. Trying to remember what they were supposed to say made it impossible for them to listen to what their customers were saying and caused them to miss important buying signals. It wasn’t aptitude, intelligence, or education that determined the outcome. It was simply a matter of forming the right habits or not.

So it is with living the victorious life. If you haven't formed the habit of trusting God in everything, and in believing what He said, you'll get confused in the heat of an enemy attack. The things of this world will fill your mind, forcing the truth of God's Word into the background. Remember you can only think one thought at a time.

To defend against these attacks, take the time to learn God's promises so well that they'll automatically come to mind in times of need. It's critically important. You're not smart enough to "wing it" when you're up against Satan. *My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*

Psalm 63

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary 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. My soul will be 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. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth. They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals. But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God's name will praise him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

According to **Proverbs 23:7** the beliefs that dominate our thoughts not only reflect who we are but help to shape and mold us into the person we become. James Allen's timeless classic "As a Man Thinketh" is based on the passage. In it he contends that our thoughts literally make us what we are.

I prefer a more modern illustration I first heard from Pastor Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel. "We become like the god we worship," he said. For example, if the desire for certain possessions so dominates our thoughts that they become like objects of worship, we become materialistic. Preoccupation with wealth can make us greedy or even dishonest. Obsession with self leads to narcissism and selfishness. A passion for food and drink can result in gluttony. The list goes on. Without any conscious effort on our part, we'll adopt the characteristics of the thoughts that dominate our minds.

So it follows then, that as we fill our minds with thoughts of the Lord, we become more like Him. Without any real effort at change, we'll begin acting more like He would. This is what Paul described as the fruit of the Spirit in his letter to the Galatians. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are promised to the one whose thoughts are focused on the Lord. (**Galatians 5:22-23**) Not to mention the Crown of Righteousness that all who have longed for His return will receive in His Kingdom. (**2 Tim. 4:8**)

The human mind is like a garden. If we don't care what grows in our garden, it doesn't matter what gets planted. Weeds will grow by themselves. But if we want delicious fruit and vegetables we have to root up the weeds, and then plant, fertilize, water, and cultivate plants of our choosing. And not just for a day, but for the entire growing season.

So it is with our minds. To fulfill Paul's admonition in **Ephesians 4:22-23** to *put off your old self which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires and be made new in the attitudes of your mind* we have to root up the old thoughts, and then plant, fertilize, water, and cultivate new ones. We do this by consciously replacing our old worldly thoughts with new spiritual ones, by reading scripture, listening to Christian music, and praying. And not just for a day, but for our entire lives. As we do we become more and more like the God we worship.

This is why the Lord told the Israelites to spend time discussing His Commandments. *"Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk upon the road, when you lie down and when you get up," He said. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and upon your gates. (Deut. 6:7-9)* He wanted them to become more like Him.

This is also why David composed poems to the Lord, sang His praises, and thought about Him constantly. He was a man after God's own heart. How about you?

Psalm 64

Hear me, O God, as I voice my complaint; protect my life from the threat of the enemy. Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked, from that noisy crowd of evildoers. They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows. They shoot from ambush at the innocent man; they shoot at him suddenly, without fear. They encourage each other in evil plans, they talk about hiding their snares; they say, "Who will see them?" They plot injustice and say, "We have devised a perfect plan!"

Surely the mind and heart of man are cunning. But God will shoot them with arrows; suddenly they will be struck down. He will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin; all who see them will shake their heads in scorn. All mankind will fear; they will proclaim the works of God and ponder what he has done.

Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him; let all the upright in heart praise him!

At the end of the Millennium, the unsaved dead will rise to face their judgment before God. Those who have insisted on being judged on the merits of their own works will finally get their wish. I don't believe the Lord will judge them by His standards. I think he'll judge them by theirs, and they'll still come up short.

One Sunday our pastor spoke about the invisible lines we draw as boundaries for our behavior. We convince ourselves that if we don't cross those lines then we haven't sinned. For example, there are lots of folks who seem to think that it's perfectly OK to lie, cheat, and steal in their business or professional lives as long as they're in church every Sunday. Or who obey the Lord's commandment to love one another publicly but secretly harbor such envy, anger, or resentment toward acquaintances and even family members that you would wonder how they contain it. And how many marriages do you think are barely tolerated for the sake of public appearance while the emotion the parties most frequently express toward one another in private is contempt? How about the parents who frequently drink to excess, but are quick to remind their children of the dire circumstances that await them if they're caught experimenting with marijuana?

A well known speaker once opened his remarks to a squeaky-clean upscale protestant congregation by saying, "If I knew what sinners you all are I wouldn't be here speaking to you." After a pause while their faces registered the shock they all felt, he continued, "And if you knew what a sinner I am you wouldn't be here

listening.” Because they can’t read our minds or see very far into our private lives we can fool those around us into thinking that we’re a lot better than we really are. Eventually we can even fool ourselves.

But God, Who knows the intents of our hearts and the hidden motives behind our actions is not fooled. Woe to those hapless folks who think they’ve pulled the wool over His eyes. *He will turn their own tongues against them and bring them to ruin.* He doesn’t need to apply His standards in judging them. He knows that they, like us, don’t even live up to their own.

And please remember that. The only difference between them and us is that we’ve allowed the Blood of Jesus to wash us clean. By that single decision we’re made perfect in God’s sight and exempt from the end times judgments. He’s so pleased that we’ve accepted His remedy for our sin problem that He’s chosen from that day forward to always see us as we will be after He’s perfected us in the Kingdom, not as we are now. *Let the righteous rejoice in the LORD and take refuge in him; let all the upright in heart praise him!*

Psalm 65

Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled. O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come. When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.

You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.

Those living far away fear your wonders; where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy. You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops. You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing.

If we ever stopped to consider all the things that have to happen in the universe every day just so we can survive, we'd find ourselves spending the whole day praising God. Minute changes in the composition of our air or water, gravitational force, magnetic pole alignment, temperature range, orbit around the Sun, rotation speed, etc. would render the earth unfit for human habitation and cause our immediate demise. Who keeps all these things in their delicate state of balance?

On top of that there are spiritual forces at loose here with mischief on their minds. These demonic spirits are not above harming or even killing us as part of their daily attempt to steal us from our God. They're also the ones who brought disease and pestilence into our world. Our question shouldn't be, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" but rather, "How does anyone escape?" Who fends off these constant attacks against us?

"Jesus is the answer," as the old saying goes. He really is. From the smallest detail to the largest obstacle, if you look for the One holding everything together, you'll find Him.

Consider this passage:

He is the (visible) image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (**Colossians 1:15-17**)

Or how about this one:

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (**Hebrews 1:3**)

He's the glue holding everything together, and the Bible tells us that one day He's going to stop doing it.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. (**2 Peter 3:10**)

This means that we have two great reasons to be glad we follow Jesus.

- 1) Like a shepherd protects his sheep, the Lord has promised to protect us, so long as we remain in fellowship with Him. During our time on Earth we have nothing to fear. In addition to holding everything together, He brings us to quiet places amid the turmoil of our lives, restoring and refreshing us and showing us favor even when our enemies confront us from every side. No matter what the problem He's always there with a ready solution. All we have to do is let Him implement it. As Moses told the Israelites on the shore of the Red Sea, *"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today."* (**Exodus 14:13**)
- 2) *Having turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath,* (**1 Thes. 1:9-10**) we have no fear of the catastrophe that will come on the Earth when He stops holding things together. *For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (**1 Thes 5:9**)

It's true Lord. *Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple.*

Psalm 66

Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name.”

Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man’s behalf! He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot—come, let us rejoice in him. He rules forever by his power, his eyes watch the nations—let not the rebellious rise up against him.

Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard; he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping. For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.

I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you- vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble. I will sacrifice fat animals to you and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats.

Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!

There are two situations when I feel really close to God. The first is when I’ve got a big problem, a problem only He can solve. I’m right there praying constantly. And the second is when it’s become obvious that He’s solved it. I shout and sing my praise, and tell anyone who’ll listen what He’s done for me. But why is my realization that He’s solved the problem cause for such celebration? Shouldn’t I have known that He would?

I remember hearing a pastor tell a story of his early days when there was no money for food. He prayed and prayed for help, his prayers becoming more urgent and more anguished as the situation deteriorated. Then one day when it seemed like things couldn’t get any worse and no help was coming, a man who had owed him \$400 for a long time showed up unexpectedly at his door and gave him the money.

On his knees and in tears the pastor thanked God for rescuing him in his hour of need. “I promised to always help you,” the Lord replied. “And I’ve done so countless times. Why do you always wait for proof before thanking me?”

Good question. In **Matt. 28:18-20** Jesus informed His disciples that all authority in heaven and on Earth had been given to Him. Then He told them to go and make disciples of all nations. Finally He assured them that He would always be with them, even to the very end of the Age.

Do you realize He couldn’t have been talking only to them? First of all, they had no way of personally discipling all the nations. Thomas apparently got the farthest from home, probably winding up in eastern India near Madras, but the rest stuck pretty much to the area around the Eastern Mediterranean. And second, they wouldn’t need His protection to the End of the Age. They’d all be with Him in Heaven within 60 years or so.

So He had to be talking beyond them all the way to us, upon whom the very end of the age has come. Throughout the Church Age, all who would become disciples of Jesus would receive the protection and comfort of the One to Whom all authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given.

So why do we even have problems, then? A popular Christian song says, “If I’d never had a problem, I wouldn’t know that He can solve them.” When’s the proper time to thank Him for solving yours? A well known TV preacher always ends his prayers of supplication by saying, “We count these things as accomplished, according to the promise of Your Word.”

One advantage of having problems is that we can learn to trust in Him. As we do, His participation in our lives becomes so obvious that soon we realize the proper time to thank Him is when we ask for help. The abundant life He promised us (**John 10:10**) isn’t necessarily filled with all the luxuries of this world. It’s filled with the absolute assurance that as we put our life in His hands, we literally divest ourselves of all our cares and concerns. We ask and we receive, and our joy is complete. (**John 16:24**)

Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.

May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.

Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.

An attitude of gratitude, that's what David's asking of us. We get it by reminding God of all the blessings He's given us (not because He needs reminding but because we do), giving Him credit for even the smallest things. When we demonstrate an attitude of gratitude, we show Him we're aware of the constant stream of blessing that flows out of a relationship with Him. In the bargain we also strengthen our defenses against attacks of fear, anger, disappointment or self-pity because we know all the good things He has in store, no matter how uncertain the times.

Start by looking a little more deeply into all those events you normally chalk up to luck or chance or being in the right place at the right time and you'll discover it's the Lord, blessing you. Once you train yourself to notice, you'll begin seeing Him everywhere in everything, and you'll find it's true. He really is working everything together for the good of those who love Him. (**Rom. 8:28**)

Since we receive so many blessings from God, this attitude of gratitude will soon become our normal demeanor. We'll find we spend more time being grateful than almost anything else. And according to the Psalm this will bring even greater blessings, more things to be grateful for.

This was always the idea behind tithing, by the way. When the Lord admonished the Israelites to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, He said the effect of their obedience would be blessing so great that they wouldn't have room to store it all. (**Malachi 3:10**) He knew that by measuring their harvest to calculate their tithe, they would realize just how much He had given them, and that this would produce an attitude of gratitude among them. The gratitude would in turn trigger even greater blessings. Things would keep spiraling up until they literally wouldn't have room to store it all.

It's one of God's laws of cause and effect. As long as it's from an attitude of gratitude, giving begets blessing which begets more giving, then greater blessing and so on. *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* (**Luke 6:38**)

And it's not just a financial law. It works in all areas. Someone once compared the world around us to a mirror, in that it reflects back the image we project into it. For example, approach the world like the Grinch who Stole Christmas and you'll find that it's a sorry, surly place. But light up the world around you with a smile, and you'll soon see smiles coming back at you. Don't worry about having to fake it, after just a few days of training yourself to notice and document your blessings, you'll find you can't help but smile.

Psalm 68

May God arise, may his enemies be scattered; may his foes flee before him. As smoke is blown away by the wind, may you blow them away; as wax melts before the fire, may the wicked perish before God.

But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful. Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds—his name is the LORD—and rejoice before him. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

When you went out before your people, O God, when you marched through the wasteland, the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. You gave abundant showers, O God; you refreshed your weary inheritance. Your people settled in it, and from your bounty, O God, you provided for the poor.

The Lord announced the word, and great was the company of those who proclaimed it: “Kings and armies flee in haste; in the camps men divide the plunder. Even while you sleep among the campfires, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its feathers with shining gold.”

When the Almighty scattered the kings in the land, it was like snow fallen on Zalmon. The mountains of Bashan are majestic mountains; rugged are the mountains of Bashan. Why gaze in envy, O rugged mountains, at the mountain where God chooses to reign, where the LORD himself will dwell forever?

The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary. When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious— that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.

Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death. Surely God will crush the heads of his enemies, the hairy crowns of those who go on in their sins. The Lord says, “I will bring

them from Bashan; I will bring them from the depths of the sea, that you may plunge your feet in the blood of your foes, while the tongues of your dogs have their share.”

Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. In front are the singers, after them the musicians; with them are the maidens playing tambourines.

Praise God in the great congregation; praise the LORD in the assembly of Israel. There is the little tribe of Benjamin, leading them, there the great throng of Judah's princes, and there, the princes of Zebulun and of Naphtali. Summon your power, O God ; show us your strength, O God, as you have done before. Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings will bring you gifts. Rebuke the beast among the reeds, the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations. Humbled, may it bring bars of silver. Scatter the nations who delight in war. Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will submit herself to God.

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord, to him who rides the ancient skies above, who thunders with mighty voice. Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the skies. You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Praise be to God!

In this Age of Grace, some believers long for visible signs of the Lords' power and majesty. They read with envy of days gone by when the Lord sent fire from Heaven to devour the enemies of His people in their sight. And seeing no new evidence of His existence, the scoffers sneer, “Where is the promise of His coming?” not realizing that His Grace extends over them even as they continue in their doubt.

We all want mercy for ourselves and justice for everyone else. When the Lord and His disciples were making their last journey to Jerusalem together, they passed through a Samaritan town and were denied hospitality. Indignant at the insult, James and John asked the Lord for permission to call for fire from heaven to destroy the town. **(Luke 9:54)** These same two had earlier sent their mother to ask Jesus to seat them on either side of Him on His Heavenly Throne. **(Matt. 20:20-21)** Sounds just like us doesn't it?

What we don't seem to understand is that it's either one or the other. During the Age of the Law it was all justice. People were put to death for working on the Sabbath, or having sex outside of marriage, or just taking the Lord's name in vain. When the King or High Priest was evil, the whole nation suffered. The sins of the fathers were visited upon the children and multiplied unto death.

Now it's all mercy. The cross took care of the sin problem for God, and the Age of Grace began. Now people are forgiven their sins just for asking. Justice having been served, God can no more withhold the full measure

of His merciful love now, than He could show it before. Even that person who persecutes you so unmercifully can receive the same forgiveness as you, and might even occupy the mansion next to yours in Heaven one day. Never mind that he or she sinned right up to the last moment, while you labored diligently for the Lord all your life. God loves all His children and doesn't want any to perish, but for all to come to repentance. Look at the price He paid to make it possible.

Mercy ends with the close of the Age of Grace when the Lord, in His second greatest act of mercy ever, whisks the Church away in the Rapture. Then it's back to justice. As you look down from your place of eternal bliss and watch while those who were left behind get what they deserve (what you deserve) I think you'll agree. Grace is better.

Psalm 69

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God.

Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me. I am forced to restore what I did not steal.

You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you. May those who hope in you not be disgraced because of me, O Lord, the LORD Almighty; may those who seek you not be put to shame because of me, O God of Israel.

For I endure scorn for your sake, and shame covers my face. I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother's sons; for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.

When I weep and fast, I must endure scorn; when I put on sackcloth, people make sport of me. Those who sit at the gate mock me, and I am the song of the drunkards. But I pray to you, O LORD, in the time of your favor; in your great love, O God, answer me with your sure salvation.

Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters. Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, O LORD, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me.

Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble. Come near and rescue me; redeem me because of my foes. You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed; all my enemies are before you. Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none. They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them. May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents. For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt. Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous. I am in pain and distress; may your salvation, O God, protect me.,

I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hoofs. The poor will see and be glad—you who seek God, may your hearts live!

The LORD hears the needy and does not despise his captive people. Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them, for God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah. Then people will settle there and possess it; the children of his servants will inherit it, and those who love his name will dwell there.

In the New Testament, two psalms are quoted far more often than all the others. The first is **Psalm 22**, King David's account of the crucifixion, and second only to it comes this one, **Psalm 69**.

As you can see, it too is laced with Messianic prophecy, telling how Jesus was a stranger to His half-brothers, how He endured the insults and scorn unbelievers heaped upon God while the sins of man were heaped upon Him, how the very people He came to save mocked him and humiliated Him, how at the cross they offered to drug Him with gall to lessen the pain (He refused it), and how at the end they gave Him wine vinegar for His thirst.

Some see this sponge of wine vinegar as the final cup of the Passover meal he had shared with His disciples the night before. According to this view, the cup He raised when He said, "This is My blood shed for the remission of sin," was the third cup of the Passover, the Cup of Redemption.

The four cups of the Passover are representative of God's fourfold promise to the Israelites, found in **Exodus 6:6-7** *"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. (Cup 1. Sanctification) I will free you from being slaves to them,* (Cup 2, Deliverance) and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. (Cup 3, Redemption) I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. (Cup 4, Acceptance) Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.*

If this view is accurate, then as He sucked the sour wine from the sponge they lifted up to Him just before He died, He was saying, “I will take you as my own people and I will be your God.” According to John, who was an eyewitness to the event, Jesus asked for the drink knowing that all was accomplished, and to fulfill Scripture. (**John 19:28-30**) From that day forward, anyone who looked to the cross and accepted His death there as payment for their sins became one of His people as He had become their God. The Scripture He fulfilled was **Exodus 6:6-7**.

In this way Jesus announced the arrival of Phase One of His Kingdom, called the invisible Kingdom by some, that would be in the world but not of the world. Otherwise He had misled His disciples the previous evening when He said he wouldn’t drink of the fruit of the vine again till He drank it anew in the Kingdom. (**Matt. 26:29**)

And to underscore the importance of this announcement, The Father ripped the 40 foot tall Temple veil (actually a thick tapestry) from top to bottom signifying that the way to the Throne of God was now open to all. The sin problem that had required God to keep His distance had been solved forever.

But don’t overlook another important message from **Psalms 69**. When you and I get a problem, we pray for the Lord to deliver us, as if suffering some inconvenience for our faith is more than should be expected of us. Speaking through David, the Lord prayed that in His hour of trial He wouldn’t bring shame to those who put their hope in God. Then He promised to praise God’s name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving. Why? Because this would please Him.

Think about it. Jesus warned us we’d have tribulation in this world. (**John 16:33**) Next time you’re experiencing some, instead of begging the Father to deliver you, try praying that as you go through it your actions won’t bring shame to those who put their hope in God. Then give your praise to Him, because you know that even in this, He’s working everything together for your good (**Romans 8:28**).

Psalm 70

Hasten, O God, to save me; O LORD, come quickly to help me. May those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion; may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. May those who say to me, “Aha! Aha!” turn back because of their shame.

But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, “Let God be exalted!” Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay.

Back when fax machines were the hottest things in the written communications world, we used to call these “fax prayers,” a quick message to the Lord informing Him of our immediate need. As if he needed informing. Today I guess they’d be called e-mails, or text messages. It’s the kind of prayer Peter instinctively cried out when he was sinking while trying to walk on water. “Lord! Save me!”

My guess is that David found himself surrounded by enemies and more to admit His own distress than to inform the Lord, he made an urgent plea for help. In a way, it demonstrates our faith when we do this, not just our helplessness. When we’re in deep trouble, we don’t go to someone we don’t believe can rescue us, nor to someone whose ability we’re not sure of, but to the one we feel is most able.

Someone once remarked, “If you want to know a person’s true feelings, watch what he does when you catch him off guard.” When we’re surprised by some looming disaster and instinctively call for help, whom do we seek? Is it the Lord? If so we can at least take comfort in the knowledge that our claimed reliance on Him is grounded in truth.

But sadly, many of us are members of what I call “The Church of Last Resort.” That means we’ll try every human means at our disposal to affect our own rescue, and then if all else fails we’ll start praying as a last resort. We say it’s because we don’t want to bother the Lord with every little thing, but the truth is we’re just too self-reliant. We don’t like to think of our selves as being dependent, even on the Lord. It’s a put down to our self-esteem, as if by resorting to prayer we’re being forced to admit we aren’t equal to the task of solving our own problems.

But every now and then, something comes out of the blue and catches us totally flat footed. Then all bets are off, all illusions of self-reliance shattered, and like Peter we cry out, “Lord! Save me!” And He does, for His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Psalm 71

In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame. Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me. Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men. For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth. From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you. I have become like a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long.

Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone. For my enemies speak against me; those who wait to kill me conspire together. They say, "God has forsaken him; pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him." Be not far from me, O God; come quickly, O my God, to help me.

May my accusers perish in shame; may those who want to harm me be covered with scorn and disgrace. But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure.

I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone. Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Who, O God, is like you? Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again. I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praise to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel.

My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you— I, whom you have redeemed. My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long, for those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion.

Although there's no Biblical precedent for such ideas, some believers expect that since they've come to the Lord, they should never experience difficulty again. Others assume that if a believer is going through turmoil, it must be because of some punishment the Lord is dishing out, and therefore he's getting what he deserves.

As for the first, the operative verse is **John 16:33** "*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" I don't believe the Lord was speaking only to His disciples here, but through them to us. The world we live in is an evil place, under the control of the evil one. (**1 John 5:19**) No believer is automatically immune from accident or illness, injustice or persecution. What we are promised is that we can be healed from our infirmities (**Isaiah 53:4-5**), that Jesus is continuously interceding for us to help us through difficult times (**Romans 8:34**), and that if things get too bad He'll show us the way out (**1 Cor. 10:13**).

For example, it would have been an easy thing for the Lord to have protected Paul from the beatings he took in almost every city he visited, and as we're told in **2 Cor. 12** Paul repeatedly asked for just that. But the Lord knew that by supernaturally healing Paul after each beating, his testimony would be that much more powerful, and so He said, "*My grace is sufficient for you*" (**2 Cor. 12:9**) and healed him each time he was injured. For Paul that settled the issue, and he was at peace with it.

And as for the second, we can't be punished for past sins because *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!* (**2 Cor. 5:17**) Concerning the present and future ones, *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (**2 Cor. 5:21**) Having paid the price for all our sins, past, present and future, God now views us as being as righteous as He is. When we sin, we simply confess and He Who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (**1 John 1:9**) It's as if we've never sinned.

But in quoting **Proverbs 3:11-12** the writer of Hebrews said, *the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.* (**Hebr. 12:6**) Is this in conflict with the 2nd Corinthians passages? I believe Paul authored both letters, so if there is a conflict it either means Paul changed his mind or was talking about two different things.

Turns out it's the latter. In **2nd Corinthians 5** Paul was addressing the security of our salvation. After you're saved, there's no sin you can commit that will disqualify you, because the cross permits God to see you now as you will be after He's perfected you, as sinless as He is, no longer subject to punishment. In **Hebrews 12** he's talking about the Holy Spirit working to improve the quality of your life here on Earth.

The primary meaning of the Greek word translated discipline here is "to train", and it's from a root that means "child." It refers to the education of children. The word translated punish also describes a father training his children, and while in the Bible it's most often used to describe the brutal beating Jesus took at the hands of the Roman soldiers, there's no Biblical basis for comparing that to the training of our children. More likely,

the Holy Spirit chose the word to show us that this too was a case of a Father chastising His Son, intended to teach by example the kind of punishment we deserve for our sins against God.

In any case, the conclusion of the statement is found in verse 11:

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (**Hebr. 12:11**)

In both John's gospel and the Letter to the Hebrews the Lord's stated purpose is to bring peace to the believer's heart. Jesus promised us the peace that comes from knowing that "this too shall pass," and that we'll emerge victoriously because our Lord has overcome the evil of this world. The Letter to the Hebrews shows that the training we receive at the hands of the Lord is also meant to bring us peace.

Between these two promises we've covered both the coincidental hardships we endure and the specific training the Lord provides, and the intended result in both cases is peace. If you're going through a difficult time, pray for the peace that was promised you. If you know someone else who is, pray that they'll find their peace. Above all, follow Paul's advice to the Philippians. Be fearful of nothing, pray about everything, and be thankful for anything. *And the peace of God, that surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.* (**Phil. 4:4-7**)

Psalm 72

Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor. He will endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more.

He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. Long may he live!

May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field. May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse.

This prayer of David's evokes images that can only be Messianic in their fulfillment. Jesus alone has the capacity to rule in justice with righteousness. Only He can endure through all the generations, and only He can bring endless peace and prosperity to His people. And we can only imagine what that will be like.

If you've ever endured persecution, been at the mercy of an unjust person or system, or been hated just because you look different, or hold different beliefs, then you know how debilitating it is. Imagine the sense of freedom that will come from knowing that it can never happen to you again. Imagine the release of energy and creativity it will bring you.

If you've worked all your life just to support yourself and your family, and awaken each Monday morning with that hollow feeling that comes from knowing that even a minor interruption in the cash flow could be devastating, then you know how it feels to be enslaved. Imagine the burden being lifted from your heart on the day you realize you'll never again toil in vain.

If accident or illness has made pain your constant companion and every movement brings a reminder that good health, something so many take for granted, is gone for life, imagine how you'll feel the morning you wake up and discover that not only is the pain gone, but its weakening effects have been reversed and you feel as if you'll live healthy forever, because you will.

If you've become addicted to drugs, alcohol, sex, money, or any one of a hundred other things that this world has to offer and realize that your life is no longer your own but is now ruled by a force so powerful that only death can bring release, imagine the moment when you first notice its hold over you has finally been broken.

If demonic oppression has covered your life with a dark cloud of hopelessness and desperation, and you find yourself going to bed wishing it was morning and waking up wishing it was evening, imagine the bright new dawn of optimism and enthusiasm.

If the loss of a loved one, either through death or the end of a relationship, has you drowning in a sea of grief, imagine the day when that overwhelming sense of loss is gone for good.

Jesus said, *"I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full."* (**John 10:10**) In His first visit He paid our price of admission into the abundant life. On the eve of doing so, He said, *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world*."* (**John 16:33**) Even though the world's an evil place fraught with fear and disappointment, injustice and uncertainty, we can have hope in a better day.

This time He'll bring us His Kingdom and when He does He'll say, *"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* (**Rev.21:3-4**)

How will that feel? We can only imagine, *for no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him — but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.* (**1 Cor. 2:9-10**) Next time you have a few quiet moments, ask Him to reveal it to you. When He does, "The things of Earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His Glory and Grace," and you'll never look at life in the same way again.

Psalm 73

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.

Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice; in their arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, "How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?" This is what the wicked are like— always carefree, they increase in wealth.

Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.

When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

I believe it was Robin Leach who hosted a TV show in the US a few years back called “The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.” One of his tag lines was, “The rich are very different from you and me.” He’s right, they are. Many have lived lives of privilege and comfort, free from much of the stress you and I cope with. They relax more and have more time and capability to pursue diversionary activities. As a result they tend to be happier and healthier than the rest of us. As David wrote above, *“They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.”* Money and health are a lot alike. You only worry about them to the extent you don’t have them.

It’s easy to envy the rich until you remember that most people find the Lord in the midst of great strife. Someone who’s never faced an insurmountable problem has never had to look beyond himself for answers. And let’s face it, money can be at least a temporary solution for many of life’s problems.

While I have met a number of wealthy Christians, the Lord was right when He said, *“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”* (Mark. 10:25) I’ve heard teachers try to allegorize this passage away, but I think the Lord was talking about an ordinary needle, pure and simple. Try threading a camel through the eye of a common needle and you’ll see how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom. Here’s why.

When a rich young man asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus told him to obey the commandments. When the man said he had always done that, Jesus commended him and said all he had left to do was sell everything he had, give to the poor, and follow Him. At that the young man went away dejected. (Mark 10:17-22)

I don’t believe you can interpret this passage as a blanket commandment to sell all you have and give to the poor. I believe Jesus was showing the young man that his unwillingness to liquidate his assets was a sign that in his heart he worshiped his wealth more than the Lord. The lifestyle is so seductive that retaining it becomes a person’s number one desire.

As a result, those who focus all their energy on gaining worldly wealth knowingly or unknowingly trade an eternity of enormous blessing that could otherwise be theirs for the 80 years or so that they’ll spend here in relative comfort. And the tragedy is that it didn’t have to happen. They could have had both. As I said above, the Lord doesn’t require His followers to be poor.

When He brought His people into the Promised Land, He said, *“There should be no poor among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the LORD your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today.”* (Deut 15:4-5)

Earlier He had warned them, **“When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you*.*

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.

If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God. **(Deut 8:10-20)**

The problem with many of the rich and famous is that they’ve done exactly what the Lord warned the Israelites not to do. They’ve forgotten Him, taking personal credit for their success instead. In their hearts they’ve worshiped their wealth and fame instead of the One who gave it to them and as a result will be destroyed for their ingratitude. They look around now and call themselves life’s winners, but soon they’ll see that they’re actually its biggest losers. They could have had everything just by acknowledging the Lord who blessed them. Instead they’ll wind up with nothing. Don’t envy them, pity them. Then pray for them.

Psalm 74

Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture? Remember the people you purchased of old, the tribe of your inheritance, whom you redeemed— Mount Zion, where you dwelt.

Turn your steps toward these everlasting ruins, all this destruction the enemy has brought on the sanctuary. Your foes roared in the place where you met with us; they set up their standards as signs. They behaved like men wielding axes to cut through a thicket of trees. They smashed all the carved paneling with their axes and hatchets. They burned your sanctuary to the ground; they defiled the dwelling place of your Name. They said in their hearts, “We will crush them completely!” They burned every place where God was worshiped in the land.

We are given no miraculous signs; no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be. How long will the enemy mock you, O God? Will the foe revile your name forever? Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the folds of your garment and destroy them!

But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth. It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert. It was you who opened up springs and streams; you dried up the ever flowing rivers. The day is yours, and yours also the night; you established the sun and moon. It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; you made both summer and winter.

Remember how the enemy has mocked you, O LORD, how foolish people have reviled your name. Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts; do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever. Have regard for your covenant, because haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land. Do not let the oppressed retreat in disgrace; may the poor and needy praise your name.

Rise up, O God, and defend your cause; remember how fools mock you all day long. Do not ignore the clamor of your adversaries, the uproar of your enemies, which rises continually.

Wouldn't it be nice if divine retribution were a little timelier? In my life I've accumulated a few people who seem to have been appointed by Satan himself to torment me. Not that they would acknowledge this, or even be aware of it. I'm sure they believe that what they're doing is right, and that any informed observer would agree. Being Christians they probably think they're doing the Lord's work. (**John 16:2**)

Sometimes after one of their attacks, I've wished the Lord would set them straight as in His promise from **Rev. 3:9**, *"I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you."* But then the Lord reminds me that He doesn't do things like that to me when I'm in the wrong, so why should I expect Him to do it to them?

Well meaning friends tell me that I should view attacks from Satan as evidence that I'm having an impact in the world. Attacks like this are kind of a left-handed compliment, they say, the enemy's acknowledgement that I'm causing him some heartburn. He's busy enough so that it's easy to stay under his radar if you don't make waves. Getting his attention is a sign you're relevant. Others repeat an axiom I've often used myself. "Living well is the best revenge." In other words, stay above it. Live your life as though nothing they can do can ever steal your joy. Use your anger to energize your success. It's like heaping burning coals on their heads. (**Romans 12:20**)

The hard part about all the above is that none of it brings any immediate sense of closure. It's like everything's left hanging until some unknown day in the future when the Lord makes it right again.

And then two friends independently gave me identical advice that settles things, in my mind at least. They said, "Remember, only the offended party has the privilege of climbing up on the cross with Jesus."

It's the testimony of two witnesses, and I'm OK with that. Now I can get closure. After all, the cross is where the real victory is. *"No servant is greater than his master,"* Jesus told us, *"If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."* (**John 15:20**)

Next time someone gets you in his sights, look to the cross. There's always room for one more, and think of the company you'll be in.

Psalm 75

We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks, for your Name is near; men tell of your wonderful deeds.

You say, "I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge uprightly. When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm. To the arrogant I say, 'Boast no more,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horns. Do not lift your horns against heaven; do not speak with outstretched neck.'"

No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another. In the hand of the LORD is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.

As for me, I will declare this forever; I will sing praise to the God of Jacob. I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up.

I've been a believer for over thirty years and right from the beginning have had a powerful (some have called it excessive) interest in the End Times. Because of this, I've tended to view current events through the lens of prophecy, with one eye on the news and the other on the writings of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and others. From my studies I've concluded that for several decades now, most of the major players have been on stage and most of the pre-conditions met for events of the End of the Age to come crashing down upon us with alarming suddenness. *While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.* (1 Thes. 5:3)

Several times, I've watched the world march right up to the very brink of destruction, only to draw back at the last minute. The paths have been varied, sometimes military, sometimes moral, sometimes political, but each time just as it seemed like we had gone too far, that events had taken on a life of their own, somehow tensions were eased, positions reversed, and cooler heads prevailed.

Of course, each time this has happened the nay-sayers have had a field day. It's just like Peter said they would. *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."* (2 Peter 3:3-4)

He went on to say that they deliberately ignore the fact the God does intervene in human affairs, sometimes to slow things down and sometimes to accelerate them.

This psalm makes a couple of things clear about that. First, when you look at the world and can't understand why it doesn't just fly out of control altogether, remember His promise. *When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm.* And second, when all the prophecies are lined up for fulfillment and all the TV preachers are shouting that the end is surely near, God says, *"I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge uprightly."*

Make no mistake, the prophecies will be fulfilled, but at a time of His choosing. (I've often said that the only sure way to interpret prophecy is to wait for the event to happen, read the prophecy related to it, and say, "Oh, so that's what that meant.")

How much worse can the world get? Why is He taking so long to wrap things up? Let's ask Peter. *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* (**2 Peter 3:8-9**)

He's waiting for as many as will to come to Him and be saved. Like the mother hen who waits anxiously at the door of the coop till all her chicks are safely inside, like the parents who can't go to sleep at night till all their kids are home and in bed, He doesn't want any of His children to be left behind. Does He get what He wants? Sadly, no. Having given us the final decision, He must watch as one day those who've refused His offer of pardon condemn themselves to eternal punishment.

But in the meantime the door's still open, so thank Him for waiting till you came into the family. Thank Him for the 175,000 new believers who will come to Him today. In your desire for the kingdom to come quickly, thank Him for His patience, it's a measure of His love.

Psalm 76

In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel. His tent is in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion. There he broke the flashing arrows, the shields and the swords, the weapons of war.

You are resplendent with light, more majestic than mountains rich with game. Valiant men lie plundered, they sleep their last sleep; not one of the warriors can lift his hands. At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both horse and chariot lie still. You alone are to be feared. Who can stand before you when you are angry?

From heaven you pronounced judgment, and the land feared and was quiet- when you, O God, rose up to judge, to save all the afflicted of the land. Surely your wrath against men brings you praise, and the survivors of your wrath are restrained.

Make vows to the LORD your God and fulfill them; let all the neighboring lands bring gifts to the One to be feared. He breaks the spirit of rulers; he is feared by the kings of the earth.

In this age of Grace we've gotten pretty familiar with the Lord. And familiarity breeds contempt, they say. In our case it makes Him appear smaller than He really is. That pabulum we were all fed about Gentle Jesus, the "sandal-shod social worker" who walked the shores of Galilee patting little kids on the head and telling everybody to turn the other cheek was OK for starters. But we need to remember that He's also the Creator of the universe with unimaginable power. A generation of liberal theology has made some of us forget all about that power.

When Assyrian King Sennacherib brought his armies to Mt. Scopus and threatened Jerusalem with war, he woke up on the morning of the battle to discover that 185,000 of his soldiers had been killed overnight. (**2 Kings 19:35**) When's the last time you saw a battlefield strewn with dead enemy soldiers who had been arrayed against you, slain by the power of God and nothing more? I guarantee you Sennacherib had great respect for God's power that morning.

In the Old Testament it was His power that people saw most. In the New Testament it's His love. The problem most Jews and Christians share is that they've only read half the book, so they've only seen one facet of His personality.

For the Jews, God is a powerful warrior Who doesn't suffer fools lightly, so "keep your distance." That attitude deprives them of the intimacy He wants to have with them. For us, it's OK to crawl up on Daddy's lap for comfort but can He really defeat our enemies? Many of us aren't sure so we don't even ask.

The only solution, of course, is to read both halves of the Book. It's the one way to really get to know the Author. When you're done, go out and ask for something really big. And when you get it remember, it was His Love that made Him want to give it to you, and it was His power that made Him able. Without both, He wouldn't be God.

Psalm 77

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 my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, 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 mused and my spirit inquired: "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor 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 of the right hand of the Most High." I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so 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. The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed. The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Most people seem to have trouble transposing God's faithfulness in past times to the present. "Sure He's saved me before," we think, "But how do I know he will this time? Maybe He's tired of dragging my sorry self out of the fire. Maybe I've finally gone too far and He's going to sit this one out to teach me a lesson."

We think this way because we impute our motives to His behavior. Knowing we're fed up with our behavior, we assume He is too, and that He'll do to us what we'd do in His place. Not understanding the limitless reaches of His Grace, we think that each transgression of ours could be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

In **Matthew 18:21** Peter asked how many times we should forgive each other. "Up to seven times, Lord?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven." If that's the standard for us, what do you suppose God's standard is?

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23) This means that every morning God erases the past and we start with a clean slate. No matter how badly we missed the mark yesterday, today is a new beginning. And not just for a week or month or even a year, but for all our lives.

In ancient times a lamb was placed on the altar every morning to burn all day. This protected the Israelites from being struck down for the unintentional sins they committed during the day. At sundown a new lamb replaced the one that had burned all day. This one burned all night to protect them until morning. And so it went every morning and every evening. As long as there was a Temple and as long as the priests were faithful the people were OK. But since the protection was only retro-active and only covered unintentional sin they still had a tremendous exposure.

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for His enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Hebr. 10:12-14)

With the death of Jesus our protection extended both ways along the time line and included intentional sin as well. His one sacrifice has made us perfect forever in God's sight, even as we are still being made Holy. The cross allows God to see us now as we will be after He's made us immortal and incorruptible. All we have to do when we sin is confess and we are automatically forgiven. And more than that, our sins are immediately forgotten. We are purified from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Our Father loves us so much, He wanted every barrier to the full expression of His love for us torn down. Jesus accomplished that on the cross, except for one. The one remaining is the one we've erected. It's made of pride and guilt and the false belief that His love for us is conditioned upon our performance. Only we can tear that one down. But once we do we can experience the full meaning of **Lamentations 3:22-23**. His compassions never fail. Not for seven times or even seventy times seven, they are new every morning.

Psalm 78

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old- what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.

Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. They would not be like their forefathers— a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.

The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle; they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law. They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them. He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan.

He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall. He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas; he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.

But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the desert against the Most High. They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the desert? When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us food? Can he supply meat for his people?"

When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance. Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; he rained down manna for

the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. Men ate the bread of angels; He sent them all the food they could eat.

He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power. He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore. He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents. They ate till they had more than enough, for he had given them what they craved.

But before they turned from the food they craved, even while it was still in their mouths, God's anger rose against them; he put to death the sturdiest among them, cutting down the young men of Israel.

In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe. So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror. Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again. They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant.

Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.

How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland! Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power— the day he redeemed them from the oppressor, the day he displayed his miraculous signs in Egypt, his wonders in the region of Zoan. He turned their rivers to blood; they could not drink from their streams. He sent swarms of flies that devoured them, and frogs that devastated them. He gave their crops to the grasshopper, their produce to the locust. He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamore-figs with sleet. He gave over their cattle to the hail, their livestock to bolts of lightning. He unleashed against them his hot anger, his wrath, indignation and hostility— a band of destroying angels. He prepared a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death but gave them over to the plague. He struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, the firstfruits of manhood in the tents of Ham.

But he brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert. He guided them safely, so they were unafraid; but the sea engulfed their enemies. Thus he brought them

to the border of his holy land, to the hill country his right hand had taken. He drove out nations before them and allotted their lands to them as an inheritance; he settled the tribes of Israel in their homes.

But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep his statutes. Like their fathers they were disloyal and faithless, as unreliable as a faulty bow. They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols. When God heard them, he was very angry; he rejected Israel completely. He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men. He sent the ark of his might into captivity, his splendor into the hands of the enemy. He gave his people over to the sword; he was very angry with his inheritance. Fire consumed their young men, and their maidens had no wedding songs; their priests were put to the sword, and their widows could not weep.

Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, as a man wakes from the stupor of wine. He beat back his enemies; he put them to everlasting shame. Then he rejected the tents of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loved. He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever. He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.

You can change the direction of an entire nation within the span of a single generation. You need only change the curricula at the teaching level. What teachers impart to the students they encounter will determine the direction of the nation when those students begin to live out what they've learned. Here are a couple of dramatic examples, one ancient and one contemporary.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. (**Judges 2:10-12**)

The author is speaking of the children of the men and women who accompanied Joshua across the Jordan to possess the Promised Land, only one generation after the conquest. It ushered in the lowest point in Israel's history.

In the early 1900's The German School of Higher Criticism's "Documentary Hypothesis" disputed the authorship of the five books of Moses. It claimed they were actually produced about 400 BC by several groups

of men who were writing stories about Israel's past that had previously been handed down orally. They mounted similar attacks against the authenticity of Daniel and other books of the Bible as well. The goal was to present the Bible as a work of human, not divine, origin.

The introduction of this error into the major seminaries of the US gave rise to the modern rationalism of the 1950's that within a single generation turned most major denominations away from a literal interpretation of the Bible. Having denied its supernatural origins, they then denied its Author's supernatural power. By making Him small enough to fit in their minds, they made Him too small to solve their daily problems, let alone insure their salvation, and deprived their shrinking membership of its eternal destiny. This, more than anything else, has led the US into its "post-Christian" era.

In the first instance, parents neglected to teach their children of the miraculous power of the One Who freed them from their bondage in Egypt. In the second, a lie was introduced into the education process. In both cases the outcome was disastrous.

The point is this. The one who controls the content of the education process controls the destiny of its students. Who determines what your children are learning? Between grades K-12 they'll experience about 14,000 hours of classroom instruction. During that time they'll also spend nearly 19,000 hours in front of a TV. But even if they attend church faithfully, they'll only get 520 hours of Christian Education. If current trends continue, the combined 33,000 hours of TV and school will indoctrinate them into a worldview that's increasingly hostile to the one we espouse. How can a mere 520 hours of Sunday School possibly equip them to resist?

It's time to employ two secret weapons you already possess; your influence over them and your computer. A half hour spent a couple of times a week informally discussing one of the Bible's Children's Stories will teach them about God's love like nothing else can. Don't know enough about the stories to have a discussion? Go to the directory called Children's Stories for Adults on our right hand menu bar and pick one. They're free for the taking. Your kids will get a powerful defense against the lies they're being taught. The unexpected bonus is how much better you'll get to know the Lord, too.

Psalm 79

O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth. They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead. We are objects of reproach to our neighbors, of scorn and derision to those around us.

How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire? Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name; for they have devoured Jacob and destroyed his homeland.

Do not hold against us the sins of the fathers; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need. Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake.

Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Before our eyes, make known among the nations that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants. May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm preserve those condemned to die.

Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the reproach they have hurled at you, O Lord. Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

Wouldn't it be nice if the Lord would avenge wrongs done against us in real time? Well in a way that does happen. A pastor friend of mine told me of a recent situation that illustrates the point.

A couple had been the focus of controversy some years previously and had left his congregation over it. Recently they came back, asking for forgiveness and restoration. Almost everyone immediately received them with open arms, but there was one small group of holdouts that was determined not to forgive and restore them. Little by little the couple won most of them over too, and it seemed as if the restoration would be complete.

Then came a Sunday when the couple received a few moments of attention during the service in connection with a ministry they're involved in. One of the holdouts strongly criticized the pastor for permitting this, saying

it had ruined her Sunday worship. As it happens, this person hadn't become a member of the congregation until a year or two after the controversy, but she was a friend of someone who was, and had "heard all about it."

So for several years now this person has been upset and angry over a situation she had no part in, and just the reminder of it was enough to destroy her weekly time with the Lord. She was still angry enough the next day to send off a scathing letter to the pastor, and who knows when or if she'll ever get over it?

My question is, who's being afflicted here? Yes, the pastor was disappointed that a member of his flock isn't getting his message of forgiveness. And yes this person will try to get the other holdouts all spun up again. But isn't she the real victim here? It's her heart that's becoming calloused and hardened, it's her spirit that's being quenched, and it's her fellowship with the Lord that's being interrupted. The couple she's so upset with doesn't even know her, and if they do find out how she feels, they'll just pity her. I mean, to invest all that negative energy in something that didn't even concern her seems to be such a waste.

So, did the Lord send down fire from heaven to consume her for attacking that couple? Well, not directly. But has her failure to obey His commandment to forgive given the devil a foothold in her mind that he can use to rob her of her joy? And will he use it to contaminate other areas of her life as well? Absolutely. We've all met folks whose anger has so completely soured them that even former friends no longer come around.

She's allowed herself to become the target of a tactic that all predators seem to know intuitively. Cut the weak ones out of the flock and then attack them. If she doesn't learn how to forgive as she's been forgiven, she'll find herself estranged from God and be fair game for her enemy.

If you're harboring similar feelings of anger toward someone, justified or not, ask God right now to forgive you and to help you forgive the other person. The pain and suffering you're causing yourself, and the spiritual danger you're placing your self in simply isn't worth it.

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. (Ephesians 4:26-27)

Psalm 80

Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us. Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

O LORD God Almighty, how long will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people? You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful. You have made us a source of contention to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us. Restore us, O God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River. Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Boars from the forest ravage it and the creatures of the field feed on it.

Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish. Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

“Seeing is believing,” the scoffers love to say. It’s man’s most consistent response to God. From Moses on Mt. Sinai to the Jewish leaders at the foot of the cross, it was always the same. Show me.

When Moses had received the second set of tablets containing the 10 Commandments (remember, he had smashed the first set when he saw the Israelites partying at the foot of the mountain) and had spent a total of 80 days on the mountain with the Lord, he couldn’t stand it any more. “Show me your glory,” He said. And from that day on, everyone has wanted to see the proof that God exists. It’s as if seeing Him is what makes Him real.

After miracles without number and the specific fulfillment of over 300 Old Testament prophecies, the Jews had said, "Show us a sign." Finally, as they watched Him die, it was, "Come down from the cross and we'll believe you."

And it wasn't only the non-believers. Phillip, having spent three years at the Lord's side, still asked to see God. And Thomas said, "I won't believe unless I see," after the disciples told him about the resurrection. Two thousand years later we're still asking God to prove Himself to us as a condition of our faith. Save me, restore me, deliver me, heal me, bless me, and then I'll believe. Show me a sign.

But from God's view they've left out the first step. With Him it's, "Believing is seeing," first and then "Seeing is believing" later. Or as one author put it, "When you believe you'll see, and when you see you'll believe." Seeing is meant to be the confirmation of the belief that already exists, not its source. "Faith comes through hearing," Paul wrote, (**Rom 10:17**) and, "We live by faith not by sight." (**2 Cor. 5:7**)

If the Jews had believed the message of their own prophets they would have seen that Jesus was their Messiah and that God's redemptive plan was being fulfilled right before their eyes. Then they would have understood why He couldn't come down off the cross, even though it was well within His power to do so, and thanked God for the incredible privilege of being there to witness His work of redemption.

If Phillip had believed that Jesus was God become man, he would have known he was looking at Him even as he asked, and would have been awestruck at his proximity to his Creator. And if Thomas had believed what Jesus had taught him he wouldn't have asked for proof of His resurrection. He would have been expecting it and would have kicked himself for not being there when Jesus appeared while begging for another chance to see Him.

How many times has God shown Himself to us, and yet we still ask for signs that He's with us. If we really believed His promise that *He's working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose*, (**Rom. 8:28**) wouldn't we expect to be carried through even our most difficult times and be blessed in the midst of them? And wouldn't our faith be strengthened every time it happened?

Asking God for a sign as a condition of belief is like asking a stove for heat as a condition of providing fuel. It's putting the cart before the horse and exposes our lack of faith. If we received all the signs we seek, we wouldn't need any faith, and that would defeat God's whole purpose for our lives.

"Because you have seen me you have believed," Jesus told Thomas, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* (**John 20:29**)

Psalm 81

Sing for joy to God our strength; shout aloud to the God of Jacob! Begin the music, strike the tambourine, play the melodious harp and lyre. Sound the ram's horn at the New Moon, and when the moon is full, on the day of our Feast; this is a decree for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob.

He established it as a statute for Joseph when he went out against Egypt, where we heard a language we did not understand. He says, "I removed the burden from their shoulders; their hands were set free from the basket. In your distress you called and I rescued you, I answered you out of a thundercloud; I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

"Hear, O my people, and I will warn you— if you would but listen to me, O Israel! You shall have no foreign god among you; you shall not bow down to an alien god. I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

"But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices." If my people would but listen to me, if Israel would follow my ways, how quickly would I subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes! Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him, and their punishment would last forever. But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

The more we're beset by negative circumstances, the harder we look for ways to prove to ourselves that we're still in control of our lives. For example when it seems like just about everything's conspiring to defeat us and we can't find any escape from the oppression we feel, we may become obsessed with ordering spouses, children, even family pets around in a desperate attempt to find something, anything that will obey our commands. Resistance is the typical response to this, which only makes matters worse. Even our dog knows we're not in charge.

That's usually when the Lord says something like, "Submit to Me and I'll make all this go away." Great! Just what we needed, one more part of our life we can't control. But He only wants us to see that the more we try to control things, the less control we'll really have. So in desperation we yield our life to His control again, and things suddenly start working better. People respond more favorably and events start going our way

again. The oppression disappears and a feeling of freedom returns. Paul called this the peace of God that transcends all understanding (**Phil. 4:7**).

What we're experiencing is the fulfillment of His promise to work everything together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. (**Rom. 8:28**) It's a clear and specific promise but it bears a closer look. The Greek word translated love in the passage is *agapeo*. It means to be totally given over to the object of one's affection. And the last phrase is just as important. It's His purpose, not ours. So what is His purpose, and can we totally give ourselves over to it?

"I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly," He said. (**John 10:10**) And in the Sermon on the Mount He promised that if we'd make seeking His Kingdom our top priority, He'd take care of everything else in our lives. (**Matt. 6:25-33**) So part of His purpose is to provide us an abundant life here on earth. Is there more?

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephes. 2:6-7) His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephes. 3:10-11).

That's the rest of it. Through ages yet to come, we're to stand as living examples of the full measure of God's grace. It goes well beyond the unmerited favor of forgiveness, and includes not just an abundant life here but an eternity of unimagined blessings in multiple ages yet to be revealed. No other group in all of creation has been or will be so honored. When they want to learn just how loving and generous God can be, they'll look at us.

Simply stated, His purpose is to bless our socks off now and forever more. What He asks in return is that we willingly yield control of our lives to Him so He can do it. Sound like a fair exchange?

Psalm 82

God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the “gods”: “How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

“They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

“I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’ But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler.” Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.

There’s a lot of talk these days about activist judges re-interpreting the law of the land according to their own particular biases. By their rulings judges can actually “legislate from the bench” changing the intent of laws to conform with their own views, which are often anti-Christian, and creating precedents for future legal findings.

But they aren’t the only source of problems believers face in the public sector. School boards, city councils and other governing bodies are also getting into the act, often assuming that if something even hints at upholding traditional Christian principles it must be wrong and therefore prohibited. Take the case of a Seattle area 6th grader whose application for re-enrollment in a Charter School was denied simply because he questioned the wisdom of having a homosexual teacher assigned to teach 6th grade sex education classes.

This isn’t the religious freedom promised in our constitution; it’s the repression of a particular religion. Many of you from outside the US have dealt with this all your lives, but in America we’re still not used to it.

In **Psalm 82** we’re reminded that this problem is nothing new, it’s been around almost since the beginning. The Hebrew word translated gods here means rulers or judges, that’s why it’s spelled in the lower case. It shows God chastising these rulers and judges for defending the unjust and the wicked while ignoring the rights of the poor and oppressed. He reminds them that they neither know nor understand anything, walking about in darkness while the foundations of the Earth shake at the scandal of their unjust rulings.

“You think you’re so powerful, but you’ll die like mere men,” He says. Implicit in this statement is that when they do, they’ll have to face the Judge (God with a capital G) Who judges them, and give account for their

actions. *"To whom much is given, much will be required,"* Jesus said (**Luke 12:48**). This warning applies specifically to those who've been given authority over others.

Like many Christians in the public eye I've been subjected to unjust treatment, some of it down right mean spirited. (If you've ever stood up to defend your faith, you've no doubt endured your share, too.) And when it happens, it so offends my sense of fairness that I don't think I could stand it if it wasn't for promises like this one.

But I know that the Lord has documented every incident of mistreatment suffered by His own and will avenge all of them. Because of this I'm free to seek His mercy for those who've wronged me, instead of poisoning my mind with thoughts of personal revenge. This puts me on His side instead of the Devil's, releases me from the bondage of my anger and restores the joy of my salvation. *In this world you'll have trouble,* He said, **"But take heart, for I've overcome the world.** (**John 16:33**) Thank You, Lord.

Psalm 83

O God, do not keep silent; be not quiet, O God, be not still. See how your enemies are astir, how your foes rear their heads. With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish.

"Come," they say, "let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more."

With one mind they plot together; they form an alliance against you- the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, of Moab and the Hagrites, Gebal, Ammon and Amalek, Philistia, with the people of Tyre. Even Assyria has joined them to lend strength to the descendants of Lot.

Do to them as you did to Midian, as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon, who perished at Endor and became like refuse on the ground. Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, who said, "Let us take possession of the pasturelands of God."

Make them like tumbleweed, O my God, like chaff before the wind. As fire consumes the forest or a flame sets the mountains ablaze, so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm. Cover their faces with shame so that men will seek your name, O LORD. May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace.

Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD-that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.

This psalm speaks of the nations who border on Israel. At various times, they've tried to defeat the Jewish people and drive them from the Land God gave them. Although all their attempts in the past have been unsuccessful, it looks like they're getting ready to try again. They still haven't learned the painful lesson that comes from defying God's promise to Abraham. "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you." Once again Israel will defeat them, a testimony to the power of a promise from God.

Has God made promises to you? *"Surely I am with you always,"* He said, ***"Even to the end of the age"* (**Matt 28:20**). *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what*

you will wear. But seek first His Kingdom and His Righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well (Matt. 6:25, 33). I tell you the truth it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away the Counselor will not come to you, but if I go I will send Him to you (John 16:7). And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:3). Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth (Rev. 3:10)."

Each one of these is straight from the Lord's mouth to our ears. Each is as clear as His promise to Abraham. "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday today and forever," we're told (**Hebrews 13:8**). God's promise to Abraham carried no expiration date. Over 4,000 years later, nations who curse the descendants of Abraham still risk the wrath of God.

And it's the same with His promises to us. As a shepherd's first priority is protecting His sheep, so the Lord's first priority is protecting us. It's a sacred trust, placed with Him upon His descent to Earth.

"I have come down from Heaven not to do my own will," He said, "But the will of Him Who sent me. And this is the will of Him Who sent me; that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I shall raise him up at the last day." (**John 6:37-40**)

Oh Lord, let the disposition of these ancient nations who sought to defy your promise to your chosen people serve to strengthen our faith in your promises to us today.

Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young— a place near your altar, O LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty; listen to me, O God of Jacob. Look upon our shield, O God; look with favor on your anointed one. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

The Valley of Baca (valley of tears) is a place near Bethel where the Angel of the Lord told Israel that since they hadn't obeyed His command to wipe out all the indigenous people after conquering the promised land, He was no longer going to insure their victory over them. From then on the Canaanites would be a "thorn in your flesh" and their gods a snare for the Israelites. The people responded with weeping and wailing, hence the name. Later the phrase took on symbolic meaning as well, a journey through the Valley of Baca standing for periods of sorrow and regret in a person's life.

But the psalmist wrote that those whose strength is in the Lord would find joy even in the valley of tears, making it a place of springs. Those who seek Him go from strength to strength until they stand before Him.

Maybe this is where Paul got his inspiration when he wrote to the Philippians, commanding them to be joyful always. It was during a time of great persecution for them, and for him as well, but he admonished them to *rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your*

requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:4-7)

He reminded them that He was suffering too, and that Jesus had suffered more than all of them, and that they should look upon their suffering for Christ as something that had been granted them, almost like a privilege.

It sure is a different perspective from what the world would have us embrace. It sees persecution as something to be fought against, something to wail long and loud about, to struggle with to the bitter end. We have rights, after all.

But for us it's different. As a friend once told me when I was complaining about the persecution I was suffering, "Only the offended party has the right to climb up on the cross with Jesus."

The Spirit in me replied, "I'm OK with that," and immediately I felt better. After He suffered the maximum penalty for me, couldn't I go through this little thing for Him? Of course I could. And as soon as I made that decision, things started changing. What had been a mess of lemons started looking more and more like lemonade to me. I began to see the silver lining, not just the dark cloud, and God's promise that He's working everything together for my good came back to mind. Then came that peace He promised, and finally the blessing that always follows adherence to His word.

Now I'm not saying it's fair or that we should look for opportunities to be persecuted, but because we're believers it's likely to happen sooner or later and when it does we can turn to Psalm 84 and Paul's letter to the Philippians for comfort. It's water to a thirsty soul.

Psalm 85

You showed favor to your land, O LORD; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger. Restore us again, O God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.

I will listen to what God the LORD will say; he promises peace to his people, his saints— but let them not return to folly. Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.

Here's the secret to solving all your problems. When your faithfulness springs forth from the Earth, God's righteousness looks down from Heaven. The Lord gives what is good and your efforts are blessed. Do you see that there's only one variable here, and it's you? So give yourself a quick check up. Does your faithfulness spring forth from the Earth? If not, that's the first place to focus your efforts.

Our pastor had us all laughing Sunday morning when he asked how our employers would like it if we only showed up for work for an hour or so one day every other week. And yet, he said, that's the kind of inconsistency we show the Lord. He wasn't just talking about attending services, either. Some of the most faithful church attendees I know don't give the Lord a thought during the week. In a paraphrase of **Philippians 1:22** the pastor had Paul saying, "As long as I'm alive on Earth, I'll be working for the Lord." Can any of us say that?

But what is the work the Lord requires of us? To go out like Paul, sacrificing everything to advance the gospel? Well, He does call some to do that, and when He does He gives them a Damascus Road experience and an extra dose of faith to sustain them. To the rest of us He says to believe in the one He has sent! (**John 6:28-29**) It means to trust Him with our lives, to rely on Him fully.

He came so that we could have life and have it abundantly, but many of us won't let Him give it to us. We're too busy trying to get all we can on our own, because we think that's the only way to get it. We agree to trust Him for our eternal salvation, but not to help us choose a career, or find a house, or buy a car. Why not? Didn't David say, *"Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."* (**Psalms 37:4**)

If we really believe that He wants us to have an abundant life why are we so reluctant to seek His direction on these things? Why don't we go to Him first when we need money, or a favor? Or pray and wait for His solution to emerge when we have a problem?

I'll give you two good reasons. First it's hard for someone who's been taught all his life to be self-reliant to begin trusting someone else, even God. Especially when he doesn't see anyone else around him doing it either. Self-reliant people want to solve their own problems and they want all the credit when it works out. Relying on the Lord means we have to give Him the credit.

We've all heard the story of the man working on the roof of his house. Suddenly he slipped on a loose shingle and began sliding toward the edge.

"Lord! Save me!" he cried out.

Just then his belt caught on a protruding nail and he stopped sliding. "Never mind Lord," he sighed, relieved. "I've saved myself." Sound like anyone you know?

And second, we're afraid we won't like His solution because we've heard that He only gives His people things to stretch them and mold them, things that make them do stuff that's hard or embarrassing.

Yeah, He does things like that sometimes but there are lots of other times when He just blesses their socks off. And when He does give them the stretching, molding things, He always includes even greater blessings with them.

Some of us need to look back at those times when we've given Him control of our lives and evaluate how well it worked. If you're like me, you'll be forced to admit that He's done pretty well at it. So He's passed the probationary period. Maybe it's safe to put Him on full time.

"If you, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children," He said, *"How much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him?"* (**Matt. 7:11**) Good question. Why don't you try Him and find out?

Psalm 86

Hear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Guard my life, for I am devoted to you. You are my God; save your servant who trusts in you. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you. Hear my prayer, O LORD; listen to my cry for mercy. In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me. Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord; no deeds can compare with yours.

All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths of the grave.

The arrogant are attacking me, O God; a band of ruthless men seeks my life— men without regard for you. But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. Turn to me and have mercy on me; grant your strength to your servant and save the son of your maidservant.

Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame, for you, O LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

Have you noticed that even people who don't believe in God are beginning to wonder if the increase in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters means that we're nearing the end of the age?

I forget where I first heard that we all have a God shaped hole in our hearts and spend all our lives trying to fill it. In times like this the effort becomes more urgent as thinking people everywhere seek to understand the meaning of it all.

We're not like the ancients with their plethora of pagan gods. Statues of wood and stone, planets, trees, birds and animals, you name it they worshiped it, because man intrinsically knows there's someone greater than himself, someone who preceded him and produced him.

Today our gods are science, money, material possessions, ourselves, even random chance, and we worship them just like our ancestors worshiped theirs because that innate knowledge of something greater, that God-shaped hole, is still there.

All the behaviors that stemmed from the worship of gods back then are still evident in humankind today as man continues in his effort to find something, anything, to fill that hole in his heart.

But apart from our Creator Himself residing in our hearts nothing else will do. For among all these “gods” there is none like Him, no deeds can compare with His.

“I am God and there is no other.” He had Isaiah make this declaration on seven different occasions within the span of seven chapters. **(Isaiah 42:28)** And, *“There were no gods before me and there will be none after me.”* **(Isaiah 43:10)**

To prove Himself to us He said, *“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to come.”* **(Isaiah 46:10)** He said that no other so-called god could make this claim **(Isaiah 44:6-8)** and indeed none has.

Any comparison of prophecy to history will clearly reveal the presence of God. Many great and learned men, C.S. Lewis, Simon Greenleaf, and Josh MacDowell among them, have set out to prove once and for all that there is no God. The outcome of each investigation was the opposite, and each investigator became a believer and devoted the remainder of his life to spreading the word.

The Lord told us more about the times in which we live than any other in the long history of man. In answer to questions about the signs of His coming and of the End of the Age, He said there would be wars and rumors of wars, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famine and pestilence, and anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. He said that the frequency and intensity of these things would increase more and more as time grew short.

In the last few years, we’ve had more killer storms and earthquakes in the world than any time prior. The outbreak of famine and disease has experts warning that millions could soon die, the winds of war are blowing strong in the middle East, and another major terrorist strike in the US is called inevitable.

David asked for a sign of God’s goodness that his enemies would see and be put to shame, and today such a sign is about to manifest itself. For Jesus promised us, *“When all these things begin to happen, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”* **(Luke 21:28)** So get ready for the Rapture. It’s the sign of His goodness in an age gone irretrievably bad. For *the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.* **(2 Peter 2:9)**

Psalm 87

He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: “I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush and will say, ‘This one was born in Zion.’”

Indeed, of Zion it will be said, “This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High Himself will establish her.” The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: “This one was born in Zion.” As they make music they will sing, “All my fountains are in you.”

Christians and Jews, the people of God, are vilified in many parts of the world today. Even though Bob Dylan advised against it, people still criticize what they don’t understand. (I guess the times they weren’t a-changin’ after all.)

But Dylan was right about one thing in his classic protest song. “The first ones now will later be last.” People who don’t know our Creator don’t understand that this world, the one we can see, is temporary, of no more significance than a single grain of sand on the endless shores of eternity. Its only purpose is to provide us an opportunity to learn of His love for us and accept His pardon, purchased at the cross.

It’s the unseen world that’s permanent. And there, things will be different. All the illusory gains so fiercely fought for and achieved in this life will only have served to blind unbelievers to the real riches of the next, where blessings without number and wealth without measure await those who have acknowledged Him.

At that time, those of Rahab (Egypt) a type of the world, and Babylon, Philistia, and Cush, models of the people of God’s enemy, will bow before the Lord and His Bride before entering their eternity of shame and deprivation. *For at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, (Phil. 2:10-11).* And He’s promised us, *“I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.” (Rev 3:9)*

Not that we’re to be deprived here while we await the Kingdom promised us. Concerning our material comforts He said, *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:33)* But it’s clear that our priorities are to be different from those of the unbelieving world.* We

fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* (2 Cor. 4:18) And our reward for this is the effortless acquisition of all we've ever dreamed of and more.

So what's the best advice I can give you today? Well, it's not from one of Bob Dylan's songs but from one of David's. *Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.* (Psalm 37:4)

Psalm 88

O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave. I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care.

You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. Your wrath lies heavily upon me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you.

Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction? Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your terrors and am in despair. Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me. All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me.

You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend.

I have never been so powerfully impacted as I was on the day when I first stood in the dungeon beneath the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest of Israel between 18-37 AD. I'd been bringing tour groups to Israel for several years, but a major renovation project had kept the site closed each time.

As we descended into the dungeon Freddie, our Palestinian guide, quietly took one of our number aside. When we were all crowded into the small room at the bottom of a steep stairwell some 15 feet below ground level, he informed us that the stairs had been added later. On the night of His arrest Jesus had been lowered by rope into this tiny room, also used as a cistern. He spent the night there, alone in the dark. At sunrise He would be taken to Pilate, and from there to Golgotha.

As we stood there crowded together, Freddie suddenly shut off the lights, plunging the room into total darkness. Then he had the person he had taken aside read **Psalm 88** to us through the opening at the top of the dungeon. The shocked silence quickly gave away to unabashed weeping as we all experienced a little of what our Lord must have felt that night, the total isolation and despair of an unjustly condemned man.

Imagine that if you can. Innocent of any crime but already condemned to death. Nothing to look forward to but the torture they called a trial, scheduled for first light, and the agonizingly slow and painful death that would follow. The water in the bottom of the cistern prevents even the temporary respite that might come from sitting against the wall for a few minutes of fitful sleep. Nothing to do but stand in the cold water and wait, trying to prevent thoughts of what's to come from driving you into hysteria. Who among us can even fathom such a thing?

If you're a mere human with no hope of escape, as they thought He was, it would be bad enough. But suppose you're the Son of God, with powers unimagined by your captors. Suppose you know that with a snap of your fingers you could be free, those who have imprisoned you suddenly bound without hope instead. What force would possibly be strong enough to hold you there, knowing what lies ahead?

It sounds so insufficient to say it, because we've never felt that force, but it was His love for us. *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends,"* He said. (**John 15:13**)

In those days the word friends applied to participants in a covenant relationship and the word love meant to be unconditionally given over to the object of one's affection. It's a love that hardly anyone has ever felt. Our self-centeredness makes it all but impossible.

Even Peter, after spending three years at the Lord's side and experiencing first hand all the incredible events of His ministry, couldn't muster up such a love for his Lord. At his restoration after the resurrection, he had to resort to the use of a conditional form of the word when asked, "Peter, do you love Me?" He knew the human weakness all too well, and his own failure when it had finally come time to stand and deliver.

Yet this is the way our Lord loves you and me. He, *for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebr. 12:2)* He, *being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6-8)*

And what was the joy set before Him? The chance to spend eternity with you and me. That's love!

Psalm 89

I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself. You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.'"

The heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness too, in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings? In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him.

LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them. You crushed Rahab (Egypt) like one of the slain; with your strong arm you scattered your enemies. The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it. You created the north and the south; Tabor and Hermon sing for joy at your name. Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness. For you are their glory and strength, and by your favor you exalt our horn. Indeed, our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

Once you spoke in a vision, to your faithful people you said: "I have bestowed strength on a warrior; I have exalted a young man from among the people. I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him. My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him. No enemy will subject him to tribute; no wicked man will oppress him. I will crush his foes before him and strike down his adversaries. My faithful love will be with him, and through my name his horn will be exalted. I will set his hand over the sea, his right hand over the rivers. He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior.' I will also appoint him my

firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.

“If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness— and I will not lie to David- that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.”

But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been very angry with your anointed one. 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. All who pass by have plundered him; he has become the scorn of his neighbors. You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice. You have turned back the edge of his sword and have not supported him in battle. You have put an end to his splendor and cast his throne to the ground. You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with a mantle of shame.

How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? Remember how fleeting is my life. For what futility you have created all men! What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?

O Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David? Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations, the taunts with which your enemies have mocked, O LORD, with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one. Praise be to the LORD forever! Amen and Amen.

Some of us think that because we're God's people we shouldn't have to suffer, and when we do we cry, "Where are you Lord? Why have you let this happen to me?" It's an indication of the weakness of our faith and the deficiency in our understanding.

Psalms 89 was written around the time of the Babylon conquest, and actually accuses God of breaking His promise by allowing Israel to be defeated. Not a word is spoken of the 150 years of patient pleading by the Lord, trying to get them to reverse their plunge into idolatry. Not a single reference to the urgent warnings of

at least four prophets in their midst, nor to the fact that as far back as Moses, they had been informed of the consequences of their current behavior. No. As a general rule, if trouble befalls man, he immediately thinks that God has lied to him and abandoned him through no fault of his own.

Of course, with 2600 years of hindsight we know that God didn't lie to them and didn't abandon them. Right up front He had Jeremiah tell them that they were going to be disciplined for a period of 70 years, and after that they'd be restored to their land. (**Jere. 25:8-11 & 29:10-14**) And that's exactly what happened. Through Isaiah He had already told them that this would happen twice in their history, (**Isa. 11:11**) and through Amos that after the second one they would never be uprooted again. (**Amos 9:14-15**) The 70-year Babylonian captivity was their first, and the 2000-year Diaspora following the Roman conquest was the second.

Then He had Ezekiel tell them that because of their disobedience, the office of King was being vacated until the One to Whom it rightfully belonged came to claim it. (**Ezek. 21:25-27**) And that happened, too. (**Luke 1:32-33**) He has never broken a promise nor will He ever.

Yet when something happens to us, we still accuse Him. Even after 4000 years of unblemished performance in the Old Testament and the Lord's personal promise in the New (*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* **Matt 28:20**) we always think to accuse Him first instead of asking, as the psalmist should have asked, "Where have I gone astray?"

It never occurs to us that some unconfessed sin of ours might have interrupted our fellowship with God, and temporarily stopped the flow of blessings. We're still His, but maybe the relationship's been strained by our headstrong insistence that our anger, or envy, or lust, or you name it, is justified and doesn't require confession. He's promised to forgive us and restore us to righteousness every time we confess (**1 John 1:9**), but if we're too stubborn to do it, or too blind to see our own sin, then everything stops till we fix things. If we claim to be without sin, we're liars (**1 John 1:8**) so the best thing to do is confess early and often, regardless of whether we think our behavior is justified or not. We'll be happier and so will the Lord. It brings Him no pleasure to withhold blessings from us, but while we're out of fellowship He has no choice.

In the relationship between God and man, God is the faithful One. You can always count on Him. Good thing, too. You've staked your eternal destiny on Him.

Psalm 90

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn men back to dust, saying, “Return to dust, O sons of men.”

For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning—though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered. We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.

All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. The length of our days is seventy years— or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Relent, O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.

May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands.

Meaningful work. It's the goal of every employee. So often, whether as an employer interviewing job applicants or a consultant on a fact finding mission for a new client, I was reminded that simply earning a wage isn't good enough for most folks. No, what we all want beyond income is meaningful work, a job where what we do makes an impact, not just a living. Life is already too full of trouble and sorrow to have to endure a meaningless job on top of everything else. And in ministry, I've seen the most dramatic examples of this; bright, talented people walking away from well paying jobs to serve as missionaries just so they can feel like they've made a difference.

Take the case of Kevin and Patti. He was in the marketing department for a major consumer products company and she sold real estate. They weren't rich, but were doing pretty well for themselves, and had just put the finishing touches on converting the house they'd bought into the home of their dreams.

Then they decided to sell everything and walked away from their jobs to start a church that featured a free breakfast program for grade school kids in one of the worst slums of Mexico. They lived in a 3rd floor walk-up apartment they remodeled themselves, home schooled their two girls, and made do on a missionary's wage, which was far less than they were used to. They began devoting each morning to giving 60-100 kids the only nutritional meal they would get all day, all of it funded by contributions. Later they expanded it to include a kindergarten program as well. Both continue to this day

"The need was there, we heard the Lord telling us to go, so we went," they said.

Shortly after arriving in Mexico, Samantha and I were privileged to join them for a morning. The sense of fulfillment on their faces as they basked in the love of those kids was a sight to behold, and I swear I could hear the Lord saying, *"Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me."* (**Matt 18:5**)

Kevin and Patti committed several years to this project, and had a difficult time turning it over to their successors when their time was up. Do you think they'll ever be the same as they were before? And how about the kids they've fed and put on the road to a good education? Who can imagine what the Lord will do through them? That's meaningful work.

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (**John 6:28-29**)

Kevin and Patti began by believing in Him for their salvation. Then, out of gratitude for that, they began believing in Him for the work of their hands.

As believers, we're all in ministry. You may not be called to drop everything and become a missionary in a foreign land, but you just might be the best one in the whole world to bring comfort to a next-door neighbor or an associate on the job. To find out what meaningful work the Lord has in mind for you, try making that last verse of **Psalm 90** your prayer. *"May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands."*

Psalm 91

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. If you make the Most High your dwelling- even the LORD, who is my refuge- then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Tsunamis, earthquakes, killer storms, pandemic, wars, the list goes on. Seems like there isn't a single form of disaster that hasn't either already struck or soon will. Even non-believers are beginning to ask if this is the end if the world.

Yet in the midst of this it's been estimated that an average of 175, 000 new believers are born again somewhere in the world every day. Most of them in third world places like China, India, and Africa.

Here's the lesson in this. The less sophisticated in the world are seeing these events as perhaps their last chance to accept the Lord's offer of pardon while there's time, while the more cynical see only the impending judgment and wonder if it's finally upon us.

Illustrations of God's protective nature, like **Psalm 91** above, have been around for thousands of years. And in most of the world you wouldn't have to ask very many people before coming across a reasonable answer to the question, "What did Jesus do on the cross?" It's common knowledge that God loves us and wants to save us from judgment.

So how could otherwise intelligent people not respond to the call of this God Who is patient, *not wanting any to perish but everyone to come to repentance?* (**2 Peter 3:9**)

The answer is simple, but it's at the heart of everything that's wrong with our world. *If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* (**2 Corinthians 4:3-4**)

Neither believers nor unbelievers seem to understand the spiritual nature of the battle for men's souls. Each viewpoint tries to persuade the other with evidence supporting its position, not realizing that the issue isn't one of logic or even emotion. It's a spiritual matter.

The unimpeachable evidence of God's existence has been around since the beginning of time. (**Romans 1:18-20**) And His track record of first predicting and then performing (we call it prophecy) is so impressive that in the Bible's Greek text, the word for unbelief also means disobedient. If mere evidence was enough, a simple study of one chapter in the Book of Daniel would be sufficient to convince even the most skeptical. In **Daniel 11** there are 135 historically proven fulfilled prophecies in the span of the first 35 verses.

Bob Dylan was right. "You're gonna have to serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody." Unbelievers aren't stupid any more than believers are brilliant. The faith we have to believe is a gift from God (**Ephes. 2:8-9**) just as the blindness of unbelievers is a curse of the devil, and that's all there is to it. Everyone who has ever lived winds up in one camp or the other.

But contrary to the Calvinist's view, the destiny of unbelievers isn't sealed. As long as they're still drawing breath, there's hope. We've just got to understand the nature of the battle and choose the right weapons. And the most effective one is prayer. In fact there are many who believe that everyone who is saved got that way through the prayers of someone who cared enough to intercede for them.

If you've already handed your loved ones all the books and tracts, dragged them to hear evangelists, confronted them with the gospel, and argued the rightness of your position, try praying. Pray without ceasing. Beg your Father in Heaven for their souls just like you used to beg your earthly father for something you didn't think you could live without. Be obnoxious about it now, just as you were then. It's the most effective thing you can do.

Heed the parable of the persistent widow. *In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'*

"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that

she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!"

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (**Luke 18:2-8**)

Having done everything in your earthly power, do you have the faith to put the outcome in the Lord's hands?

Psalm 92

It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim 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, O LORD; I sing for joy at the works of your hands. How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!

The senseless man does not know, fools do not understand, that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be forever destroyed. But you, O LORD, are exalted forever. For surely your enemies, O LORD, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered. You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox; fine oils have been poured upon me. My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries; my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

Having lived for years in a resort town where incomes are way above average and the display of material wealth is almost an obsession, I've concluded that man's earthly perspective is one of his more serious problems. Created as an eternal being, he puts all his time and energy into the 70 years or so that begins with birth, virtually ignoring the endless span of his life that begins with death. And the sad fact is that if he took the time to think about it, he'd learn that one simple decision would change everything. Forever.

The world teaches us that we didn't come from anywhere, our lives have no purpose, and we're not going anywhere when they're over. Best to get all we can while we can. We learn to envy those around us who've become "successful" and are living "the good life" because that's all we know.

But the Bible teaches an eternal perspective. It tells us not to be so consumed with the things of this world, but "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" and the things we need to thrive here will be given us as well. (**Matt. 6:33**) It tells us not to focus on things that are seen, which are temporary, but on things that are unseen, which are eternal. (**2 Cor. 4:18**) Its pages abound with warnings on the folly of the obsessive quest for wealth. (**Luke 12:16-21** for example)

If obeyed faithfully, the Lord's laws promise prosperity for all, (**Deut. 15:4-5**) but accumulating excessive wealth pretty much requires that they be violated. And an obsession with wealth for its own sake can be a short cut to the devil's playground.

Our Creator has promised that we'll live forever. If we focus our lives on seeking Him, He'll make sure we live comfortably and securely here, and enjoy an eternity of unimaginable bliss when we go to be with Him. The other alternative is to strive and sweat and push and fight to get all we can on our own in the 70 years or so we're here, and then spend eternity regretting that we didn't choose plan A.

"Delight yourself in the Lord," King David wrote, *"And He'll give you the desires of your heart."* (**Psalm 37:4**) To me that means that He'll place in your heart those things He would have you desire, and then He'll turn those desires into reality.

In other words, if you ask the One who created you to determine what it takes to make you happy instead of letting the advertising industry do it, and then let Him get it for you instead of trying to get it on your own, everything will work to your everlasting benefit, and you'll just be along for the ride of your life. Your eternal life.

Psalm 93

The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity. The seas have lifted up, O LORD, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea— the LORD on high is mighty. Your statutes stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days, O LORD.

Remember this old adage? “In this world nothing is certain except death and taxes.” Sounds like something Will Rogers or Mark Twain might have said but actually it was Benjamin Franklin. Don’t forget, America’s War of Independence started over taxes, and Franklin was right in the thick of it. But that’s another story.

It’s a good thing Ben added the caveat “in this world” because in the universe the most immutable fact of all is the one that opens **Psalm 93**. *The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength.*

But as current news reports indicate, there’s more in the air than just the snowflakes that bring a white Christmas to many parts of the world. There’s also a real flurry of denial. Seems like some folks just don’t like it that Christmas is a celebration of the fact that God came to Earth as a babe in a manger and grew up to become the Man who died to save us from our sins.

Like the ostrich that buries its head in the sand, or the two year old who covers her eyes thinking that way she can’t be seen, these anti-Christians think that if they deny the fact loudly enough it’ll cease to be true. That’s why they mount ever more aggressive campaigns to secularize the season even in the “Christian” West, banning manger scenes, carol singing, and even Christmas trees in our public venues.

Of course in many parts of the world, penalties for public celebration by Christians are much more severe than the mere violation of civil laws, something we in the West would do well to remember. Millions of believers in Africa, China, and India would love to simply speak His name out loud without fear of serious, even life threatening repercussions.

But Christmas is our time to shout it from the rooftops, and whether we accept December 25 as the Lord’s actual birth date or not, those of us who still can should fight with all our strength to retain the right to do so, if only in a show of solidarity with those who can’t. No greater truth has ever come into the world. Joy to the world, the Lord has come! Let Earth receive her King!

Psalm 94

How long will the wicked, O LORD, how long will the wicked be jubilant? They pour out arrogant words; all the evildoers are full of boasting. They crush your people, O LORD; they oppress your inheritance. They slay the widow and the alien; they murder the fatherless. They say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob pays no heed."

Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise? Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches man lack knowledge?

The LORD knows the thoughts of man; he knows that they are futile. Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law; you grant him relief from days of trouble, till a pit is dug for the wicked. For the LORD will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance. Judgment will again be founded on righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it.

Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evildoers? Unless the LORD had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, "My foot is slipping," your love, O LORD, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.

Can a corrupt throne be allied with you — one that brings on misery by its decrees? They band together against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death.

But the LORD has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge. He will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the LORD our God will destroy them.

Your physical body is a gift from God. He created it, equipped it, set its workings in motion, and then gave it to you. Exercise it and its strength increases. Nurture it and it will heal itself of accident and illness to a remarkable degree. But if you don't, its strength diminishes, its endurance decreases, its muscles atrophy, until it's almost useless. Ignore it long enough and it'll die.

Faith is the same way. God gave you enough to be saved (**Ephes. 2:8-9**). Then He equipped you with the Holy Spirit and set you in motion anew. Exercise your faith and its strength increases. Follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and you'll be carried through even the most trying circumstances. Learn the lessons from your experience and you'll find your faith strengthened to a remarkable degree. But ignore it and it'll die. All except that part He gave you in the beginning. The part that got you saved. That can't die because it was a gift from Him.

The difference between the one with unshakeable faith and the one who cringes in fear at each new attack is a matter of exercise. You see, for many of us it doesn't take much faith to get through this life. We're pretty much self reliant, doing what we need to do to get by in our own strength. So we don't have to exercise our faith regularly. And because of that, it's not very strong. When the enemy strikes, we find we're not as prepared as we should be, and wind up cowering instead of standing tall.

But for one reason or another, some decide to abandon their self-made security and "step out in faith." My friends Vilbert and Shantha, from India, adopted four Moslem orphan children all at once so they could raise them in the ways of the Lord. They already had three of their own, and didn't have a lot of extra money or room, but went ahead on faith. Then they decided to start a Christian Vacation Bible School to help their adopted kids learn more about the Lord. As a result, these four and hundreds of other kids are now believers and many of their parents are too.

Daniel and Heidi brought the concept of Christian daycare to a country that's never heard of it, in an effort to keep poor families together. They bought a building and began remodeling, learning as they went and depending on the Lord for sustenance. Today they have 60 kids enrolled, employ 13 local men and women, and are about to open a church and a medical clinic in their community.

DJ and Lynette agreed to take over a failing Mexican orphanage. They had no money, didn't speak Spanish, and had never run an orphanage, but felt the Lord calling them. Today they have a model facility, housing and educating over 100 kids who now have a future.

Each of these couples decided to exercise their faith. And they all found that as they did, it grew stronger. They now take in stride things that would have flattened them just a short time ago. (How'd you like to wake up one morning with dozens of hungry mouths to feed and find the cupboards bare?)

But you don't have to do something that dramatic to exercise your faith. You can simply decide today to delegate one little part of your life to the Lord to manage for you. Pick a part you're not doing very well with so there won't be a big temptation to take it back. For example, if you know you've been looking for love in all the wrong places, try going to some places where the Lord would feel OK going with you, and let Him introduce you to some of His friends. Then watch what He does when you give Him the chance.

If you've been looking around you at all, you know that things are going to get a lot worse in this world before they get better. Begin now to exercise your faith more consistently. It'll prepare you for the time coming soon when you'll really need it.

Unless the LORD had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, "My foot is slipping," your love, O LORD, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.

Psalm 95

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.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, “They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.” So I declared on oath in my anger, “They shall never enter my rest.”

One of the greatest reasons to praise the Lord is that He has agreed to be our God. That’s something to think about, you know. He didn’t have to do it. We don’t have anything He needs. There’s no favor He owes us, nor any outstanding obligation that binds Him to us. He lacks nothing that only we can supply, and our leaving Him would result in no loss of stature to Him. He did it out of love.

When God gave Moses the four promises memorialized in the Four Cups of the Passover, He said, *“I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.”* (**Exodus 6:6-7**)

Jesus made similar promises to His Church. In the Sermon on the Mount He told us not to worry about what we’d eat or drink or wear, promising that if we sought His Kingdom, He’d provide these things as well. He was taking us out from under the yoke of the world.

When He went to the cross, He freed us from our slavery to sin. When He walked out of the Tomb, He proved that He had redeemed us to life with a mighty act of judgment over death.

When He said ask and you’ll receive, seek and you’ll find, knock and the door will be opened, He was agreeing to take us as His own people and be the God of all who seek Him.

That means so much more than just pardoning us for our sins. It means agreeing to accept responsibility for meeting all our needs during this life, and guaranteeing a place for us in His Kingdom in the next one. It means that wherever we go and whatever we do, he'll be right there with us, protecting us from harm, working things out for our benefit, and pouring on generous doses of blessing along the way. Not just now and then, or when it suits His purpose, or is convenient for Him, but always and forever.

If you've trusted Him for your salvation, but haven't fully yielded your life to Him, you're missing out on a huge part of the blessing He promised you. *For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. (2 Cor. 1:20)*

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 96

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.

There are many humans alive today who will mourn when they witness the Lord's return, because they'll be forced to admit that it's too late for them. Having ignored all the opportunities they were given to learn the truth, they'll find themselves on the wrong side of the religion debate at the final bell.

Not so the creation. There's no rebellious spirit there. The psalm above is one of several places in the Bible that describe the creation actually bursting forth in song at the Lord's return. The creation was subjected to bondage at the fall of man, and as Paul wrote in **Romans 8:19-22** has been groaning as in the pain of childbirth right up to the present time, waiting in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. Because that's when everything gets made right again.

Think about it. Storms and earthquakes are getting more frequent and more intense with each passing year. Do you think God created the earth this way? Can what you know about the character of God be reconciled with these events? Why couldn't He have given us predictable weather with a constant supply of peaceful sunny days?

Well, He did. It never rained on Earth before the flood. There were no storms. Animals frozen in the tundra with undigested tropical vegetation in their stomachs give evidence of a world wide tropical climate in the past. It suggests that the Earth once stood vertical on its axis instead of the 23.5 degree tilt we now have. It's that tilt that causes seasons and makes some parts of the world too hot while others are too cold.

And consider our calendar. Couldn't the same God who created the intricate mechanism of your eye, for example, have placed the Earth in an orbit around the Sun that didn't require a periodic adjustment of the calendar? Ours is approximately 365.25 days and requires the addition of an extra day every four years except for the years that begin a new century. Couldn't God have made everything come out even?

Well, He did. Originally the Earth had a 360 day orbit with 12 months of 30 days each. Everything worked out perfectly, as you would expect of God. And then something happened that added $5\frac{1}{4}$ days to our orbit and threw all the calendars of Earth out of kilter.

I could go on with this and talk about the coming magnetic polar reversal, or the equatorial bulge, or other things that point to a less than perfect creation. But I think you get the point that something happened to the creation, something that marred its perfection and made it less hospitable to man than was intended. And that something is sin.

When sin entered the world everything changed, and all of it for the worse. Some of the changes were immediate, like the introduction of thorns and thistles, sickness and death. Some were progressive, like the shortening of man's life span from nearly 1,000 years before the flood to our current 70-80 years. Some were cataclysmic, like the separation of land into the continents, and some were subtle, like the removal of the water vapor canopy that once protected the inhabitants of Earth from harmful cosmic rays.

Sin changed Planet Earth from an absolutely ideal, utopian environment for man to dwell in, where everything and everyone existed in perfect harmony with the will of God, into a writhing, groaning weed and disease infested place that periodically unleashes its frustration in an outpouring of devastation and destruction.

One day soon, that's all going to change, as God begins putting things back the way they were in preparation for His Kingdom. Listen as John explains it.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and

true.” (Rev. 21:1-5)

You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:12) And with your own eyes you’ll see the wonder of God’s creation, finally freed from bondage, looking just the way it did when God first gave it to Adam. Perfect. Like Job said, “How my heart yearns within me!”

Psalm 97

The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side. His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols— worship him, all you gods!

Zion hears and rejoices and the villages of Judah are glad because of your judgments, O LORD. For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. Rejoice in the LORD, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name.

It's nice to remember, amidst the trials and tribulations of this world, that the Lord reigns and that righteousness and justice are the foundations of His throne. We could use a whole lot more of both right about now what with the news of major earthquakes, fires or storms, or some outlandish new threat to world peace.

Those of us in the Church should be especially comforted that His hand restrains evil, and I include all the natural and man-made threats to our health and safety above as being by-products of evil. It can only go so far. And if you think it's going too far, that just means that we should lift up our heads for our redemption draws near (**Luke 21:28**)

One day soon, when all who will respond to His call have done so, He will say, "Enough!" and in an instant the righteous will be spirited away to the place prepared for them. We will praise His Holy Name, thanking Him for guarding our lives and for delivering us from the hand of the Wicked One.

And how do we know we belong to "The Righteous"? *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:17,21)*

How can this be? God, Who knows the end from the beginning, has looked forward in time to the day when you stand before Him and are finally made perfect, totally conformed to the image and likeness of His Son. As part of the blessing you received by asking Jesus into your heart, He chose from that day on to see you only as you'll be then, not as you are now.

And if you sin between now and then? *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9) Immediately upon confession, we're forgiven, the sin forgotten and we're pure once again, as righteous as He is. The law of double jeopardy protects us from accusation.

Here's how it works. In Roman times, when someone was convicted of a crime, the law he had broken and its penalty were written on a parchment and nailed to his prison cell door. When his sentence was served, the jailer wrote the Greek word "Tetelesti" across the parchment, signifying that he had paid his debt to society in full, and gave it to him. If he was ever accused of that crime again, he could produce the parchment showing the penalty had been paid, and the charges were dropped. Double jeopardy was forbidden.

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (**Colossians 2:14-15**)

The penalty for your sins is death. When Jesus went to the cross, the spirit world saw a parchment with all the sins of your life written upon it nailed to the cross with Him. His last word before dying was "Tetelesti." In **John 19:30** It's translated "It is finished." But legally it means, "Paid in full." He was saying that His death paid in full the penalty for all your sins. *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* (**Romans 8:1**) You needn't fear confessing any sin, because the parchment listing all the sins of your life has been marked Tetelesti, paid in full. You're as righteous as God is. Double jeopardy is forbidden.

Psalm 98

Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn— shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, Let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

Many Bible commentators, when writing about the End of the Age, stop at the Lord's return at the end of the Great Tribulation. This psalm is obviously written about the time beginning immediately afterward. Here's how things will go according to the Lord's own account.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (**Matt. 24:31-34,41**)

Those who were left on Earth after the Rapture and have survived the subsequent seven years of judgments will know exactly what's coming. He's arrived to establish phase two of His Kingdom, the time Christians

know as the Millennium, a thousand years of peace. Finally Isaiah's prophecy, echoed in the message of the angelic choir over Bethlehem, will be coming true.

Israel will once again be Earth's favored nation, allowed to live in peace in the land promised to Abraham so long ago, never again to be uprooted. And as has happened so often in the past when God's people are in their land and at peace with Him, the creation itself will blossom and flourish with such energy and exuberance that it will actually break forth in unrestrained praise. The sky will be at its bluest, the grass at its greenest, the weather always perfect. And peace on earth, good will toward men will be the song in everyone's heart.

The streets will be filled with the happy sound of children playing. Young men and women will dream confidently of a future filled with promise, and the elderly will bask in the contentment of a life well lived. The sound of weeping and crying will be heard no more. Peace will reign on Planet Earth, and in the sky above the New Jerusalem, home of the redeemed, will bear testimony that the ends of the Earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Why can't we have that now? Because there are three major obstacles to this utopian ideal that currently prevent it. First and foremost is Satan, the enemy of peace, whose personal war with God has infected and nearly destroyed all of mankind. He'll be defeated, bound in chains for the duration of the 1000 year Kingdom.

The second is the debilitating effect of man's divided will. At the Kingdom's establishment every surviving non-believer will be removed from the Earth. Finally, there will be only one will on Earth, God's will. Our centuries long prayer, *"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven"* will have been answered.

And third, our King, who has been gone these last 2000 years will have returned to personally establish and rule over His Kingdom on Earth. *Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:7)*

If you long for peace on Earth, and who doesn't, then pray for the Lord's return. It's our best hope, our only hope. Come Lord Jesus.

Psalm 99

The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake. Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations. Let them praise your great and awesome name— he is holy. The King is mighty, he loves justice— you have established equity; in Jacob you have done what is just and right. Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.

Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel was among those who called on his name; they called on the LORD and he answered them. He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud; they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them. O LORD our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds. Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.

Some non-believers say they won't ever give their lives to the Lord because they think He'll make them give up everything they enjoy. Some believers think that having been saved by grace they can now do anything they please. Both are wrong.

Regarding the first, the Lord came to free us from bondage, not plunge us further into it. *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* (**John 10:10**) It's man's way that has the effect of exchanging the bondage of sin for the bondage of religion. The Bible argues persistently against it. *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.* (**Col. 2:8**) *Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings.* (**Col. 2:20-22**) Man's religion strives to make costly again that which the Lord gave His life to make free. It's become the greatest obstacle to salvation.

And second, having freed us, if He now asks that we behave in a manner that pleases Him, is that too much? *You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.* (**1 Cor 6:20**) The motivation for a believer's changed behavior is gratitude for what we've been given, not the fear of what we could lose. *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father.*" (**Romans 8:15**)

And the basis for our gratitude is substantial. Our God hasn't just forgiven us, He's adopted us. *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs*

of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:16-17) Having shared in Christ's sufferings (allowed them to cleanse us from our sins) we now qualify to share in His glory.

What is His glory? What's His inheritance? Look at what His Father gave Him. '*You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.*' (**Psalm 2:7-8**)

And how do we share in it? "*You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth*" (**Rev 5:9-10**)

What non-believers will never understand until they've experienced it is that believers haven't given up anything. On the contrary, we've gained an immeasurable treasure. When we change our behavior out of gratitude, we don't feel deprived. We feel blessed to have been freed from the bondage of our self-destructive ways, elevated from ruffian to royalty, from prisoner to prince and princess. On our way to becoming Kings and Priests. Thank you Lord

Psalm 100

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.

As I write this, I'm wondering how many of you, like me, had to memorize Psalm 100 as a child in Sunday School. It's difficult for me to even read the NIV translation because I learned it from the King James. *"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing."* It seems like no other passage in scripture so clearly and concisely describes our proper attitude toward God. I'll bet millions of us can still recite it.

Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. The phrase sheep of His pasture also means He's become our shepherd, responsible for our health and welfare. In **John 6:39** He promised never to lose a single one of us, but to raise us all up at the last day. It's paralleled in the promise of the 4th cup of the Passover, the Cup of Acceptance. *"I will take you as my own people and I will be your God."*

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. Our part is to adopt that viewpoint for all the events of our life and look for the blessings they invariably bring. *"Be joyful always,"* Paul wrote the Church in Thessalonica. *"Rejoice in all things,"* he told the Philippians. It's obvious he was familiar with **Psalm 100**.

There's no weasel clause here, and no conditional obedience on our part is acceptable. Regardless of situation or circumstance, we're to make a joyful noise unto the Lord, because He's promised that He's working everything together for the good of those who love Him. (**Romans 8:28**) Even those things that don't look so good up front always contain a blessing as we look back, if only we'll see it.

As a management consultant I often helped clients improve their customer service levels. Invariably, I used a formula we developed for creating joy. It compares the expectation that customers form before going into a business with the experience they have while there. The more their experience exceeds their expectation the happier they are.

Because we don't expect a gourmet burger and white glove service going into McDonald's, for instance, we can have a satisfying dining experience there. Their advertising has taught us to expect a certain type of experience and as long as their delivery meets or exceeds it, we're happy.

But getting McDonald's level of food and service at a fine dining restaurant would be unacceptable. The expectations for that kind of experience are much different. The two things we have to do to insure customer satisfaction, I told my clients, is to use advertising to create an expectation before they come in, and then make sure their experience exceeds it while they're there.

Being a Christian is the same. If we haven't been taught what to expect, there's no way we can evaluate the experience. Hence there are relatively few truly joyful Christians.

If I could tell Christians only one thing about their walk with the Lord it would be this. You can expect two things when you decide to go to work for Jesus. Battles and Victories! This idea is summed up neatly in one verse in John's Gospel. *"In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world."* (**John 16:33**) When you stop to think about it, the two are joined at the hip. You can't experience a victory without first going into battle! And when you make the Lord your Commanding General and follow His plan, every battle ends in victory. It's as certain as day following night. That's what the Book of Joshua is all about.

When we learn to expect a battle we won't be surprised to find ourselves in one. And every time we yield command to Him, the Lord's victory will always exceed our expectations. Even though we might not ever learn to look forward to the battles, we'll never cease to be amazed at the victories. And then we'll rejoice in all things, and making a joyful noise unto the Lord will be an every day occurrence. *For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.* Hallelujah!

Psalm 101

I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will sing praise. I will be careful to lead a blameless life— when will you come to me? I will walk in my house with blameless heart. I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me.

Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence; whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure. My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he whose walk is blameless will minister to me.

No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence. Every morning I will put to silence all the wicked in the land; I will cut off every evildoer from the city of the LORD.

Talk about an attitude of gratitude! David really captured the idea here. This Psalm recalls the early days of our relationship with the Lord. First came the love and unbridled praise as we began to comprehend what the Lord has done for us. And then, overflowing with gratitude, we started consciously modifying our behavior, doing that which we knew would please Him and avoiding that which wouldn't.

Not because we were trying to impress Him, we know that can't be done. Not because we were trying to earn any favor or position. We'd already been granted both. Not from fear of loss. He gave us everything before we'd done anything. But out of a pure and simple desire to please Him, to show how much we appreciated all He's done for us. It was a response to love.

Where many Christians use the phrase "What would Jesus do?" primarily to influence the behavior of others, we began to ask ourselves the question, in a concerted effort to improve our own behavior and more nearly emulate our Lord.

Prompted by the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit, we delved into the Bible, soon discovering exactly what the Lord saved us from, the destiny we were busily crafting for ourselves when He came along. *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. (Ephesians 2:1-3)* Our

reaction to that passage was comparable to the feeling of having been yanked at the last second from the path of an out of control semi, and our level of gratitude soared even higher.

Having learned what we've been saved from, a little more study revealed what we've been saved for. *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)* What's that? We've been seated with Christ in the Heavenly realms? And in God's view this is already done? Why? To be the shining example for countless future generations of humanity, of the incomparable riches of God's grace. He's never done anything as great as what He's done for the church and never will again. We're his crowning achievement.

How does one express the kind of gratitude that the knowledge of these things evokes? We don't have anything He needs so we can't repay Him. There's no favor we can return. Our Spirit driven response from the early days is even more appropriate today. We can try to behave in a way that pleases Him. Words alone can't do it, the gift is too enormous. It takes action. Action prompted by an attitude of gratitude.

Psalm 102

Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry for help come to you. Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly. For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers. My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones. I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins. I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof.

All day long my enemies taunt me; those who rail against me use my name as a curse. For I eat ashes as my food and mingle my drink with tears because of your great wrath, for you have taken me up and thrown me aside. My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass.

But you, O LORD, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations. You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come. For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity.

The nations will fear the name of the LORD, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory. For the LORD will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory. He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea.

Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the LORD: "The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death."

So the name of the LORD will be declared in Zion and his praise in Jerusalem when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the LORD. In the course of my life he broke my strength; he cut short my days. So I said: "Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of my days; your years go on through all generations.

In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing

you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end. The children of your servants will live in your presence; their descendants will be established before you.”

No matter what else happens in your life, you can be sure of one thing. *Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever.* (**Hebr.13:8**) Whether you live to a ripe old age or die young, enjoy good health or battle sickness, live a life of privilege or poverty, bask in the bright glow of worldly fame or drift through the gray haze of anonymity, His promise to you remains the same. *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.* (**John 14:1-3**)

As acclaimed cartoonist Mark Newgarden observed, “We all die alone.” Sure, people can be at our bedside holding our hands and praying, but I’ve watched enough people die to know that at the moment our life on Earth ends, no one there will be able to share the experience with us. The journey from here to eternity begins with the shedding of all our earthly accoutrements, and at least for the short term that includes relationships as well. No one from here accompanies us on our walk toward the light.

How comforting it will be at that moment to know that all of God’s promises are true.

“This too shall pass,” the proverb tells us. No matter what your earthly situation or circumstance, it’s only temporary, and you know not when it will end. *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”* Jesus said. (**Matt.24:35**) *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.** (**John 11:25-26**)

So don’t allow the good to manipulate you, or the bad to intimidate you. Trust in the Lord, rejoice in all things, give thanks always. Learn, like Paul, *the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.* And what is this secret? *I can do everything through him who gives me strength* (**Phil. 4:12-13**). For the Lord is good, His compassions are new every morning, and His mercy endures forever.

Psalm 103

Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits- who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children- with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, O my soul.

As first revealed by theologian D. L. Cooper, the Golden Rule of Bible Interpretation is this. "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studies in the light of related passages, and axiomatic and fundamental truths indicate clearly otherwise. God in revealing His Word neither intends nor permits the reader to be confused. He wants His children to understand."

If ever a passage of Scripture deserved to be interpreted in this manner, it's **Psalm 103**. The message is clear, and appears to have neither national nor chronological limitations. God forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases. He redeems our life from the pit and crowns us with love and compassion. He satisfies our desires with good things so that our youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The context of these verses is so "New Testament" that there's no way to sustain a claim that David wrote this to Israel alone or for a time long past, and we need to believe that it means exactly what it says. In fact it would be hard to find a better, more concise description of what the Lord has done for us anywhere in the New Testament, and here it is tucked away in the Psalms.

And there's absolutely no compelling reason to interpret those words any other way than literally either. It's a timeless promise from the Lord Who loves us, and for the most part the rest of **Psalm 103** lists the reasons why we should receive it just as David wrote it.

This is another example of the truth of **Hebrews 13:8**. *"Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever."* From before the foundation of the world when He agreed to die for us (**1 Peter 1:20**), to the time "when time shall be no more" He is never changing. His promises are clear and His word is good.

That's the nature of the God we worship, and for us "that's a good thing". We're staking our eternal destiny on His promise that even after we've died and it's too late to change anything, He'll still be there to fulfill every commitment He's ever made to us. We are so blessed to have a God Who both promises and performs. As He told Isaiah, *"What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do."* (**Isaiah 46:11**)

Psalm 104

Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.

You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight; they flowed over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the place you assigned for them. You set a boundary they cannot cross; never again will they cover the earth.

He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches.

He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate — bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart.

The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine trees. The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the coney. The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down.

You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening.

How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number— living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works- he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.

I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD. But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more. Praise the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD.

Everywhere you look you see evidence of God's role as the Author of Creation. From the mountains and the skies that shout it, to the plants and flowers that sing it, to the birds and bees that whisper it. No amount of random selection could have resulted in such intricacy, such attention to the smallest detail. If you could hold a hummingbird in your hand and inspect it carefully, you'd be overwhelmed at the beauty of its construction. And how about a bumblebee? Aerodynamically unsuited for flight, its wings are too small to hold its body aloft. And yet they do, because God ordained it.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. (Psalm 19:1-3) All of creation cooperates to bring us the message of Grand Design, and there can be nothing more confirming of this than a walk along a beach or through a field of wild flowers or over a mountain trail. It reminds us once again of the power and majesty of the One to whom we pay homage, teaching us that surely He's capable of managing our little lives.

This is why whenever our problems threaten to overwhelm us, we gain such comfort from "communing with nature." It allows the self-evident truth of our Creator-God's existence to permeate our souls, whether we consciously admit it or not, putting our circumstances into perspective. Often solutions pop suddenly into our minds as our spirit re-connects with God's and our own creativity is stimulated.

We often say that stepping back from our immediate situation gives us the perspective we need to think things through, or see them more clearly, but I'm convinced that removing ourselves from the static that

routinely fills our heads allows us to hear the Voice that was there all along, giving us the answer we were too pre-occupied to hear.

So why wait for a crisis to take yourself somewhere quiet so you can hear the Voice of God? Why not make it a routine part of your life? You'll be happier and more productive, your life will be more peaceful, and you'll become even more certain that the Bible's creation account had to have been written by the only eye-witness, explaining exactly how He did it. *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)*

Psalm 105

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced, O descendants of Abraham his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones.

He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, 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.”

When they were but few in number, few indeed, and strangers in it, they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another. He allowed no one to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings: “Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.”

He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food; and he sent a man before them— Joseph, sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true. The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free. He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed, to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom.

Then Israel entered Egypt; Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham. The LORD made his people very fruitful; he made them too numerous for their foes, whose hearts he turned to hate his people, to conspire against his servants. He sent Moses his servant, and Aaron, whom he had chosen.

They performed his miraculous signs among them, his wonders in the land of Ham. He sent darkness and made the land dark — for had they not rebelled against his words? He turned their waters into blood, causing their fish to die. Their land teemed with frogs, which went up into the bedrooms of their rulers. He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, and gnats throughout their country. He turned their rain into hail, with lightning throughout their land; he struck down their

vines and fig trees and shattered the trees of their country. He spoke, and the locusts came, grasshoppers without number; they ate up every green thing in their land, ate up the produce of their soil. Then he struck down all the firstborn in their land, the firstfruits of all their manhood.

He brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold, and from among their tribes no one faltered. Egypt was glad when they left, because dread of Israel had fallen on them. He spread out a cloud as a covering, and a fire to give light at night. They asked, and he brought them quail and satisfied them with the bread of heaven. He opened the rock, and water gushed out; like a river it flowed in the desert. 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; he gave them the lands of the nations, and they fell heir to what others had toiled for- that they might keep his precepts and observe his laws. Praise the LORD.

Psalm 105 recounts the way of our God, first promising and then performing with 100% precision. Choosing a people who did nothing to deserve it, He called them His own. He defended them against their enemies, delivered them from slavery in Egypt, sheltered, fed and clothed them while they wandered in the wilderness, and with mighty acts of judgment brought them to the Promised Land, a place of peace and plenty. He elevated them to be the premier people on Earth and dwelt among them as their God.

Why is the ancient history of another people important to us? Because He's done the same thing in building His Church. Put into an earthly context, God chose Israel to be His wife and together they bore a Son, the Messiah. And then His Son selected a wife for Himself just as His Father had done.

He chose us, a people who have done nothing to deserve it, and called us His own. He defends us against our enemies, delivers us from our slavery to sin, shelters, feeds and clothes us while we wander on the Earth. (Just as Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, the church has wandered on Earth for 40 jubilees, which are 50 year periods of time). Soon, with mighty acts of judgment, He'll bring us into His Kingdom, an eternity of peace and plenty. He'll elevate us to be the premier people in the Universe and dwell among us as our God.

Most likely, we still have a little time before that happens so the following example should help us keep things in perspective. A few years ago we took our then 7 year old son Ben on his first visit to Disneyland. While there we went next door to California Adventures and rode their roller coaster, the California Screamer. It was an incredible ride, shooting us out of a catapult into a twisting, turning course that included 2 consecutive loops and a corkscrew.

When the ride was over, Ben came running toward me with his arms out and the biggest smile I'd ever seen on his face. I thought he was smiling because he had really enjoyed it, but his first words as he hugged me

convinced me otherwise. "It's over!" he exclaimed.

For the church, this next little while might very well be quite similar to Ben's experience on the California Screamer, lots of scary ups and downs, loop-de-loops and corkscrews. But because the history of the Jewish people serves as our example of God's love, we can rest assured that soon we'll be safely back on solid ground in His Eternal Kingdom, and with huge smiles on our faces we'll run into the loving arms of our Father exclaiming, "It's over!"

Psalm 106

Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD or fully declare his praise? Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right.

Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people, come to my aid when you save them, that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may share in the joy of your nation and join your inheritance in giving praise.

We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly. When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.

Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known. He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert. He saved them from the hand of the foe; from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them. The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived.

Then they believed his promises and sang his praise. But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel. In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wasteland they put God to the test. So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them. In the camp they grew envious of Moses and of Aaron, who was consecrated to the LORD. The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan; it buried the company of Abiram. Fire blazed among their followers; a flame consumed the wicked.

At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an idol cast from metal. They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass. They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt, miracles in the land of Ham and awesome deeds by the Red Sea. So he said he would destroy them— had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them.

Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe his promise. They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the LORD. So he swore to them with uplifted hand that he would

make them fall in the desert, make their descendants fall among the nations and scatter them throughout the lands.

They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods; they provoked the LORD to anger by their wicked deeds, and a plague broke out among them. But Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was checked. This was credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come.

By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and trouble came to Moses because of them; for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips. They did not destroy the peoples as the LORD had commanded them, but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs. They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons. They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was desecrated by their blood. They defiled themselves by what they did; by their deeds they prostituted themselves.

Therefore the LORD was angry with his people and abhorred his inheritance. He handed them over to the nations, and their foes ruled over them. Their enemies oppressed them and subjected them to their power. Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin. But he took note of their distress when he heard their cry; for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented. He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive.

Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the LORD.

How great is God's love for His people. The Old Testament shouts that fact from nearly every page. Though Israel disobeyed time after time, incurring God's wrath in the process, He always forgave them and restored them, knowing that sooner or later they'd rebel again.

It gave Him no pleasure to punish them, but His righteousness demanded that every sin be addressed. He couldn't over look a single one. He ordained the sacrifice to set aside their sins so He could live among them, but they even perverted that, turning what began as an act of worship into something He detested.

Man's heart being incurably wicked, he always found a way to pervert God's law. No matter what God did to demonstrate the advantages of being faithful, man always rebelled.

Finally it was time to do what He always knew He'd have to do. You see, man's disobedience wasn't a surprise to God. And His various attempts at co-existence with man weren't experiments conducted in the hope that He'd eventually discover a way that would work. No. They were all made to teach man what God had known from the foundation of the world. There's no way for sinful man to live a life acceptable to a righteous God.

We're not sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners. It's an integral part of our fallen nature, as natural to us as breathing. And even if we can restrain ourselves for a time from acting on our evil thoughts, we can't keep from thinking them. And to God, who knows what lies hidden in our hearts, that's just as bad. So all of our sins, past, present, and future had to be dealt with in one horrendous act of judgment. He had to eliminate the sin problem for good. Otherwise we'd just sin and be lost again, like Israel did over and over.

But what kind of punishment could satisfy God's righteousness yet leave us alive to receive the love He longed to express to us? If the punishment we deserved was levied against us, we'd all die.

The only solution was for Him to punish Himself in our place, once and for all time, in the greatest demonstration of love ever seen. Only God could love us enough to do it. So He did.

Psalm 107

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say this— those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.

Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains, for they had rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High. So he subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom and broke away their chains. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, for he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron.

Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.

Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep. For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They

were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men. Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.

He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, and fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there. He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs; there he brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle. They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest; he blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased, and he did not let their herds diminish. Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow; he who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste. But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks. The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths. Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD.

The psalm is long but the message is short. No matter what your circumstance, whether you were merely unfortunate or whether you brought it on yourself, whether you suffer at the hands of an enemy or your wounds are self-inflicted, whether you rebelled or simply lost your way, if you humble yourself and seek the Lord you will find Him and He will rescue you. He'll turn your desert into flowing springs, your wilderness into a garden, your poverty into prosperity, your sickness into health, your sorrow into joy. He'll put a smile on your face, a twinkle in your eye, and a song in your heart. He'll rebuild your life and restore your soul and refresh your spirit.

You may not see how He could possibly do this. You may think you're beyond hope, past the furthest point of redemption. But if you cry out to Him He will save you. How do I know this? Because He did all these things for me.

Psalm 108

My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with all my soul. Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.

I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and let your glory be over all the earth. Save us, and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered.

God has spoken from his sanctuary: "In triumph I will parcel out Shechem and measure off the Valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine, Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter. Moab is my washbasin, upon Edom I toss my sandal; over Philistia I shout in triumph."

Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? Is it not you, O God, you who have rejected us and no longer go out with our armies? Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.

A number of years ago, the board of a ministry I headed up was struggling with a difficult decision. One of the members, frustrated with the direction the discussion was going, looked at me and said, "Well, if you want my opinion ..." I interrupted her because she had inadvertently hit upon the very reason we were all so frustrated.

"With utmost respect," I told her, "I don't want your opinion." Looking around the room I continued, "Nor do I want any one else's. I didn't invite any of you on to this board because I needed your opinions. Human opinions are free for the asking, and usually worth what they cost, and I happen to think my own are as good as anyone's. I invited all of you on to this board because I believed you could help me discover God's opinion."

"As much as I love you all, your opinions aren't valuable to me in this matter. The value you provide is your demonstrated ability to go to prayer and find out what God wants, because His is the only opinion that counts with me. The reason we're all so frustrated is that we're trying to resolve this issue in our own strength. Let's give it to Him." We did and soon had the answer.

We never made any snap decisions at those meetings. We discussed the opportunities presented to us and took them to prayer. If, after praying about them independently, we all came to the next meeting with the same answer we assumed we had God's opinion and took action. If not we didn't. There was no such thing as majority rule on that board. We never did anything until the vote was unanimous.

When they first came on to the board, some were uncomfortable with this approach because it denied them the influence they sought. Others because it didn't let them use their persuasive skills to build a consensus between meetings, predetermining the outcome of the vote. But after seeing the results, they came to appreciate the way we did things.

We bought equipment, implemented programs, supported ministries, planted a church and consistently met the spiritual needs of our people. In ten years, we never borrowed any money and never had to ask for a dime to fund a budget that grew to be \$250,000 annually.

God was the head of that ministry. We were His stewards. Sometimes we waited a while for Him to make His preferences known, but we never missed an opportunity while waiting. And while we never had any extra money lying around, we always had enough to do the things He led us toward.

Whether you're entrusted with stewardship over an organization, a family, or just your own life, David's prayer is a good one. *Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.*

Psalm 109

O God, whom I praise, do not remain silent, for wicked and deceitful men have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken against me with lying tongues. With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause. In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship.

Appoint an evil man (the evil one) to oppose him; let an accuser (the Accuser, Satan) stand at his right hand. When he is tried, let him be found guilty, and may his prayers condemn him. May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership. May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes. May a creditor seize all he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor. May no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his fatherless children. May his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation.

May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD; may the sin of his mother never be blotted out. May their sins always remain before the LORD, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth.

For he never thought of doing a kindness, but hounded to death the poor and the needy and the brokenhearted. He loved to pronounce a curse— may it come on him; he found no pleasure in blessing— may it be far from him. He wore cursing as his garment; it entered into his body like water, into his bones like oil. May it be like a cloak wrapped about him, like a belt tied forever around him. May this be the LORD's payment to my accusers, to those who speak evil of me.

But you, O Sovereign LORD, deal well with me for your name's sake; out of the goodness of your love, deliver me. For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. I fade away like an evening shadow; I am shaken off like a locust. My knees give way from fasting; my body is thin and gaunt. I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they shake their heads. Help me, O LORD my God; save me in accordance with your love.

Let them know that it is your hand, that you, O LORD, have done it. They may curse, but you will bless; when they attack they will be put to shame, but your servant will rejoice. My accusers will be clothed with disgrace and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.

With my mouth I will greatly extol the LORD; in the great throng I will praise him. For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him.

Wow! I don't know who David was upset with but somebody must have really done him wrong. This is one of the strongest prayers of imprecation anywhere in Scripture. (For that reason, some translators prefer the alternates I put in parenthesis.) For the other guy's sake, I hope the Lord took this with a grain of salt.

I've been this angry a time or two and I'm sure you have too. For me it's usually when I'm being treated unfairly, like the time about 15 years ago when I got into trouble with the bank that had financed an office building I owned. I had bitten off a lot more than I could chew on that deal and was in way over my head, but they loaned me the money anyway. The mortgage was huge and it was all I could do to stay current. I'm not exaggerating when I say that sometimes my own paycheck went toward that payment.

After three years of struggling but always being on time, things were so tight that I let the taxes go in arrears to avoid being late on the mortgage. When the bank found out they immediately put me in default and called the loan due and payable in full. Then they wrote to my tenants demanding that they pay their rent directly to the bank. I couldn't believe it, nor could I change their minds. All that sacrificing to fulfill my obligation to them and this is the thanks I got?

Of course they had the legal right to do it, I had violated one of the loan covenants. Adding insult to injury, they scheduled a hearing to put their own trustee in charge of the building knowing I was about to leave for Israel with a tour group I was leading. I'd be out of the country. It was just plain mean, and left me feeling really betrayed.

Later I found out that they were in trouble and had to clean up their act fast. My loan was risky and made them look bad to the auditors, so it had to be resolved. They had been looking for a chance to foreclose and sell the building to get my loan off their books, and as soon as I gave them that chance they jumped.

"It's just business," their lawyer said. "Nothing personal." Well it sure felt personal. I wound up losing the building and a whole lot of hard earned money. It took me years to recover. For a while I prayed prayers just like David's, but then the Lord told me that I had to forgive them if I ever wanted to get over my anger. It was a while before I could do that, but eventually I actually wound up praying that the Lord would save those bankers and their lawyer, asking Him to forgive not only their sins against me, but all of their sins.

When the Lord saw that I was sincere, He began blessing me, delivering me from my anger. He restored me financially and taught me valuable lessons about grace and forgiveness. And while I wouldn't want to repeat that experience, I can honestly say that I profited from it.

The bank sold the building for a big loss, and the guy who bought it later abandoned it, having lost even more than I did on it. The bank itself was subsequently sold and its local office demolished to make way for a movie theater. Proof positive that the Lord answers prayers, even those like David's, once you get right with Him.

Psalm 110

The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth. He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

Melchizedek was the King of Salem (later called Jerusalem) and a Priest of the Most High God. (**Genesis 14:18**) Never has there been another like him on Earth. The name means “King of Righteousness” leading some to believe that it was really a title, and that he was actually Shem, a son of Noah. Being one of only eight people who survived the Great Flood, Shem achieved the longevity of pre-flood humans and outlived eight of the next nine generations of patriarchs including Abraham, so the two could well have met. And it certainly makes sense that Shem would have been a revered figure, the only link they had to the pre-flood world and with first hand knowledge of their Creator to boot.

When Israel was organized as a nation in the Promised Land, God forbade anyone from the Royal family (Judah) from serving as a priest, and anyone from the priestly line of Levi to become a King. But in **Zechariah 6** He had the High Priest Joshua act out a prophecy. Instructing that a crown be made and placed on Joshua's head, the Lord said,

“Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.” (**Zech 6:12-13**)

Whenever the word Branch appears capitalized in Scripture, it refers to the Messiah. It happens four times, each a foreshadowing of one of the Gospels. He's called a King from David's line in **Jeremiah 23:5**, pointing to Matthew where Jesus is presented as the Lion of Judah, Israel's Davidic King. In **Zechariah 3:8** He's God's servant, as Mark would later depict Him. In **Zechariah 6:12** He's a man, looking forward to Luke's portrayal of Jesus as “The Son of Man” and in **Isaiah 4:2** He's Lord as He is in John's gospel.

Priests didn't rule, they didn't sit on thrones, and they didn't wear crowns. Only Kings did that. Zechariah's prophecy previews the offices of Priest and King combined in one person, the Messiah. And the two words translated LORD and Lord in verse one of **Psalm 110** are meant to show the Father conferring this royal

priesthood on the Son, as Jesus Himself hinted in **Matthew 22:41-45**. **Isaiah 60:6** tells of Him receiving gifts of gold and frankincense in the Millennium, symbolic of these two offices. (The additional gift of myrrh at His birth symbolized His church-age role as Prophet.)

There's neither mention of Melchizedek's ancestors nor his descendants in Scripture, so the writer of Hebrews describes Him as eternal, referring to **Psalms 110** as he does. **Hebrews 7** suggests Melchizedek as at least a type of Jesus. Because of this, some actually see in Melchizedek an Old Testament appearance of our Lord.

However you see Melchizedek, it's important to know that our Lord Jesus will not be alone in this royal priesthood. In **1 Peter 2:9** the church is called *a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*. Mere priests were not considered royalty. And in **Revelation 5:10** (KJV) the newly raptured church praises God for making us kings and priests.

Whatever your station in life today, you are appointed to royalty, with all that entails. Will it include wealth, power and privilege? We can only apply earthly standards in guessing. But however it's defined in Heaven, it'll be yours and the experience will surpass your wildest imagination. Hang in there. You don't have long to wait.

Psalm 111

Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever.

He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate. He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations. The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness. He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever— holy and awesome is his name. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

In the Hebrew language **Psalm 111** is an acrostic poem. Starting with the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet, aleph, each half line begins with the next letter and continues in order for all of its 22 letters. It's an obvious hymn of praise to the Lord that probably took a considerable amount of time to compose.

These days many Christians spend very little time praising the Lord. In the Churches I've attended I always see people coming in late, as if the praise and worship time is a kind of grace period that doesn't really count. If they don't praise Him on Sunday when it's a scheduled event, I wonder how much private time they devote to it during the week.

Most parents have felt a bit of frustration now and then at the way our kids take the lifestyle we provide them with for granted. I wonder how the Lord feels about our indifference toward the things He provides for us. I'm sure He understands that we have no way of knowing the effort that's required to fend off spiritual attacks against us. Most of that takes place beyond our awareness. But what about the things He does for us that are obvious? Little things that make our lives easier, and even big things that are great blessings are often passed off as luck, or circumstance, or even ignored altogether.

Some of this is human nature and some of it is due to the fact that all our lives we've been taught to credit anything and anyone but God. I challenge you break this trend. Start giving thanks for every good thing that occurs each day, no matter how small, even if it feels a little silly to do it. I promise that three good things will happen. One, you'll be surprised at how many there are once you start looking for them. Two, you'll begin to experience the joy of the Lord more consistently in your life. And three, others will offer positive comments on the change in you.

Psalm 112

Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.

Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever. He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.

He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be lifted high in honor. The wicked man will see and be vexed, he will gnash his teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

Because God is working everything together for the good of those who love Him (**Romans 8:28**) believers need never fear bad news. Even those things that initially seem bad will in retrospect have contained great blessings.

I'm not talking about the logical consequences of illegal, immoral or just plain foolish behavior. A Christian who robs a convenience store should not be surprised to discover the police at his door with a few questions they've come to ask. And one who invests in a too-good-to-be-true financial scheme should not be disappointed if the Lord fails to cover his losses.

And although God is great at turning the lemons we hand Him into lemonade, we should not necessarily expect deliverance from the effects of our self destructive behavior. For example, a Christian and life long smoker contracts lung cancer. While in the hospital the grace with which he endures this lethal attack upon his person inspires others to ask about the source of his strength. As a result of the conversations that follow, several are brought to a saving faith before the smoker succumbs. Did God give the man cancer just so He could get a few hospital workers saved? Of course not. But knowing beforehand the consequences of his life of smoking, the Lord invested him with an extra measure of grace to endure them, so that when the disease came He could be glorified through it.

We who've been washed in the Blood and have thereby imputed to ourselves the righteousness of God needn't fear even the future I've described above. If our hypothetical cancer victim could come back for a

visit, he would enthusiastically assure us that while the wisdom of his behavioral choice was questionable, the result of his early departure from this dark and dying world was a blessing beyond measure. To a believer, death is the perfect healing after all.

As soon as we train ourselves to give no consideration to the potential outcomes of our life's trials and resolve to leave them all in the Lord's hands, we'll see verses 7 and 8 coming true in our lives. We'll have no fear of bad news, our hearts will be steadfast, trusting in the Lord, and in the end we'll look in triumph on our foes.

The abrupt and unforeseen elimination of our job will result in a great opportunity for service, or a chance to simplify our lives, or both. A catastrophic injury or illness will provide a chance to re-order our priorities. The sudden loss of our financial security will lead to freedom from the bondage of our materialistic lives. A friend's betrayal will cause us to rely only on the Lord and receive the great blessings that result.

I think Paul said it best. *"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him Who gives me strength."*
(Phil. 4:12-13)

Psalm 113

Praise the LORD. Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore. From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised. The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens.

Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes, with the princes of their people. He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD.

Why should we praise the Lord, no matter what? Well, first because He's working everything together for our good (**Romans 8:28**). Paul also told us, *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I say it again: Rejoice!"* (**Phil 4:4**) He was writing to the Philippians, who were suffering terrible persecution. Paul knew that rejoicing is the key to internal peace regardless of external circumstances (**Phil 4:7**). And James said, *"Count it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds."* (**James 1:2**) They knew God's character and his ways.

Second, there seems to be a law of reciprocity at work between us and the Lord. If we don't judge we won't be judged. If we don't condemn we won't be condemned. If we forgive we'll be forgiven. If we give generously, the Lord will be generous toward us. (**Luke 6:37-38**) And if we praise the Lord, He'll make sure we have something to praise Him for. He makes our world mirror the attitude of our heart and reflect it back to us.

He said that He came so we could have life and have it abundantly (**John 10:10**) but unless we're sincerely grateful for what we've already received, and have learned to be content in our current situation, we're unlikely to receive more. This is why the so-called prosperity gospel is flawed. Rather than promote an attitude of gratitude based on what we've already been given, it creates an attitude of greed, based on the expectation of more.

Now and then people write to me complaining that they've already done everything they're supposed to do, prayer, fasting, Bible study, tithing, etc, but God is not doing His part. Invariably one thing is lacking. They're not thankful for what they already have. In some cases they're actually a little bit angry with God for not giving them more. They don't realize that God didn't have to give us anything, and therefore our ingratitude for the blessings He's showered down upon us anyway is tragic.

If you're thinking that God hasn't done enough for you lately, start today to change your attitude. Make a list of all the blessings you can remember receiving and then praise Him for them. As He brings more to your mind, praise Him for them too, and keep going until it becomes a habit. And don't be stingy about it. *You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. (Deut. 8:17-18)*

Praise the LORD. Praise, O servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore. From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised.

Psalm 114

When Israel came out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue, Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion. The sea looked and fled, the Jordan turned back; the mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs. Why was it, O sea, that you fled, O Jordan, that you turned back, you mountains, that you skipped like rams, you hills, like lambs? Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool, the hard rock into springs of water.

At least part of the Creation understands the power of God, and trembles at His presence. The Earth does. And even the demons believe – and shudder. (**James 2:19**) It's really only man who holds Him in disdain.

Strange thing is, man's received the most. We've been given dominion over the Creation, free run of the planet. We buy and sell the land as if it was our own, pocketing the profit without so much as a fair-thee-well. We use its resources like there's no tomorrow, assuming there will always be more, and are blessed by its abundant harvests. God provides the air we breathe, the water we drink, the materials for the clothes we wear and the homes we build. His light energizes us by day and His darkness rejuvenates us by night.

If the mix of elements in our atmosphere was changed by only a few percentage points, we'd immediately die. The same goes for a few days without the Sun. Our lives here are so fragile that it's only by the grace of God that we survive. For these reasons alone we owe Him our undying gratitude.

But He's done so much more. When Satan tricked our first parents out of their land, and all their progeny out of our inheritance, God provided for our redemption, and Earth's too. And He didn't just make us even again. He set aside riches impossible to measure and blessings too numerous to count, all payable to us just for accepting His offer of pardon for our sins.

The sad thing is that every man intuitively knows this. That's why when Jesus described the day of His Second Coming, He said, *"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory."* (**Matt 24:30**)

Nations don't mourn, but the people who populate them do. They'll mourn because they'll realize that they waited too long. That little piece of truth that's lodged in every man's heart, ignored for too long, will finally be made obvious before their very eyes, and it will be too late. We're saved by faith, after all, and no faith is required to accept the obvious.

But you've accepted in faith what you have not seen, and it has changed your eternal destiny. It's a promise made by One Who cannot lie, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Lord and our Savior. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life* (**John 3:16**). In choosing to believe that you've accomplished the over arching purpose of your life, and you'll be rewarded forever.

Psalm 115

Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.

Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?" Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases him.

But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

O house of Israel, trust in the LORD-he is their help and shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD-He is their help and shield. You who fear him, trust in the LORD- he is their help and shield.

The LORD remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron, he will bless those who fear the LORD-small and great alike. May the LORD make you increase, both you and your children. May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to man. It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to silence; it is we who extol the LORD, both now and forevermore. Praise the LORD.

Man made gods routinely fail their makers. They may have the form of godliness, but none of them function. They have the semblance but not the substance. When the chips are down they really can't do anything.

But we who know we're God made men will never be disappointed. When we love Him we discover he's loving. When we place our faith in Him we see that He's faithful. When we trust Him we find Him to be trustworthy.

Like the Psalmist wrote, we all become like the gods we worship. Those who worship man made gods will become like them, helpless and worthless, fit only for the fires of judgment. Meanwhile, we who worship our Creator become more like Him, more loving, more faithful, more trustworthy, and are destined to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Not because we're better but because He is. It's His Holy Spirit dwelling within us, conforming us to the image and likeness of His Son that does it. He offered His righteousness so we could attain ours.

But more than that, He provides for us and protects us along the way. He's a constant source of strength in times of need. He's the giver of every good and perfect gift, the Author of all our victories. He's our Creator, our Savior, our Redeemer. Our Lord and our God.

The last sentence in **Psalm 115** is translated Praise the Lord. In Hebrew it's Hallelu Yah. Hallelujah.

Psalm 116

I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the LORD: “O LORD, save me!” The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The LORD protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me.

Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living. I believed; therefore I said, “I am greatly afflicted.” And in my dismay I said, “All men are liars.”

How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints. O LORD, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant; you have freed me from my chains. I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the LORD—in your midst, O Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD.

How can we repay the Lord for all his goodness to us? He doesn't need anything we have. We can't buy Him a gift or give Him money. We can't perform some special project for Him like washing His car or painting His front porch.

Someone once asked the Prophet Micah what he should bring to the Lord. Burnt offerings? Thousands of rams? Ten thousand rivers of oil? How about a first-born son? Micah's reply was as simple as it was accurate. *“Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.”* (**Micah 6:6-8**) He's not interested in what we bring so much as how we live.

“Act justly.” Treat people honestly. Don't take advantage. Stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves. Tell the truth, even when it's not popular.

“Love mercy.” Celebrate when someone gets a break. Thank the Lord for saving people who don’t deserve it, even if you don’t particularly like them. Even if they’re your enemy.

“Walk humbly with your God.” Recognize who the Senior Partner is in your relationship. Consult Him about everything. Get permission before acting. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude. Be fearful of nothing, pray about everything, be thankful for anything.

Remember, we are the body of Christ. And it’s not just true in the spiritual sense. During the age of the Church, we literally are His eyes and ears, His arms and hands. When He wants to help someone out, He uses us. When they need comforting, it’s our arms He wraps around them. When they’re down and can’t get up, it’s our hand He reaches out with. When they cry out to Him against persecution and injustice, it’s our ears He hears with. When He’s looking for someone to bless, it’s our eyes He sees with. When He wants to wipe the tears from their eyes, it’s our hand that holds the cloth. Through us He feeds the poor, comforts the sick, shelters the homeless, defends the cause of the fatherless, pleads the case of the widow, and so on.

“Whatever you do for the least of these, my brothers,” He said, *“You do for me.”* (**Matt. 25:40**)

I guess we can give Him something after all.

Psalm 117

Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD.

There will come a time soon when this psalm's command will be obeyed. All the nations of the Earth will praise the Lord. Actually, nations don't praise anyone, it's the people in them who do, and that's what the psalmist had in mind. He's calling everyone to praise the Lord, no matter who they are or where they come from.

Before that can happen, some really momentous events have to take place. Never in recorded history has the entire family of man voluntarily praised the Lord as one. Great judgments will be necessary to rid the Earth of those who insist upon denying the Lord, and millions of people will be swept away in these judgments.

But not a single one of them will be able to cry foul. Every one of them from the first one to die with denial on his or her lips to the last will have had a face-to-face encounter with the Truth. Everyone will have received at least one bona fide offer of pardon. Every one will have heard the gospel, and everyone will have consciously rejected it. As they stand before the Great White Throne every one of them will once again relive each time when the offer was presented to them and will recall in detail the brush-off responses they gave. No one will ever be able to say, "I never knew."

How do I know this? It's because I know my Lord. Through His creation, He has made His presence obvious to even the most casual observer (**Romans 1:20**). The heavens declare His glory, the night time sky proclaims His work (**Psalms 19:1-4**). He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes would not perish but have everlasting life (**John 3:16**). He said that whoever asks receives, whoever seeks will find, to whoever knocks the door will be opened. (**Matt. 7:7-8**) He doesn't want anyone to perish but for everyone to come to repentance. (**1 Peter 3:9**)

He's gone to such extremes to make the path to salvation clear to anyone who will walk it because He loves us too much to overlook anyone.

He'll try and try to get your attention, calling you first with blessings and if that doesn't work, with hardship. He'll bring person after person across your path with the story of His love. At the beginning of man's existence, He wrote it in the stars so that every father could tell the story to his son as they lay gazing up into the heavens while tending their sheep in some far away pastureland. He's written it into countless books, not to mention His own, which He's had translated into all the languages of the world. He's broadcast it from one end of the

heavens to the other on the radio, satellite TV, and the internet. Missionaries without number have carried His message of love to the deepest jungles, the highest mountains, the most inaccessible valleys.

One of the things that will amaze us most when we come into His presence and know as we are known is the extreme measures He's taken to make sure that not one, not one, of his children has been left to wander alone, never hearing His call to come home.

But as it has been in every generation, many in this one will ignore the call and continue on their own way, the way of destruction. As you give thanks today, give thanks that you're not one of them. And as you pray, pray that even one more would finally hear His voice and respond, before it's too late.

Psalm 118

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let Israel say: "His love endures forever." Let the house of Aaron say: "His love endures forever." Let those who fear the LORD say: "His love endures forever."

In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and he answered by setting me free. The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.

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.

All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off. They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the LORD I cut them off. They swarmed around me like bees, but they died out as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off. I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me.

The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The LORD's right hand has done mighty things! The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things!"

I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. Open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.

The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give you thanks;

you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Psalm 118 was a national hymn of praise in Israel. Parts of it came to be reserved for the Messiah's entrance into Jerusalem. That's why the Pharisees admonished Jesus to rebuke His followers when they spontaneously started singing it on that first Palm Sunday (**Luke 19:39**). The people were doing God's will and Jesus set the Pharisees straight.

"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (**Luke 19:40**) This day had been identified to them 483 years earlier as the one where He would present Himself to Israel as their Messiah. Then He told them the city would be utterly destroyed because they didn't recognize the time of God's coming to them (**Luke 19:44**)

By tradition Jesus and His Disciples also sang part of it at the end of their Passover meal. Within a the 24 hour day just beginning, Jesus would be betrayed, arrested, tried, beaten, condemned, executed, and buried. And yet He led them in singing, *"This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."*

He could do so because this was the day He would pay the price for His bride. The writer of Hebrews would later say, *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (**Hebr. 12:2**) The joy set before Him was the privilege of taking your hand in marriage. He considered it a fair exchange for His life.

Psalm 118 is also the last in a series of Hallel Psalms. Hallel means praise. Hallelujah is Hebrew for "Praise the Lord". Strangely, although it's one of the Church's most popular exclamations and is used 24 times in the Old Testament, it only appears 4 times in the New Testament and all 4 are in **Rev. 19:1-8**. They're shouted by a great multitude in Heaven as the Lord prepares for His triumphal return to Earth with His Bride.

Of course the Church will be part of that multitude, and sometimes I like to imagine how we'll all sound. Think of it. The angels, the Old Testament saints, the Tribulation martyrs, and the Church all shouting as with one mighty voice, "Hallelujah!"

Maybe it's the power released in that shout that will rend the fabric of heaven, allowing the Lord to be visible on Earth, riding a white horse and accompanied by the armies of Heaven on their white horses. While His robe will look as if it's been dipped in blood, ours will all be white and clean. This is perhaps the most obvious sign that though we're the victors, the battle has been His. Requiring nothing more than the power of His

Word, he'll strike down the nations gathered against Him and will finally take possession of that which He purchased at the cross. The usurper will be taken to prison in chains and the other two members of his Satanic trinity will be cast into the Lake of fire. (Editor Note: it would be helpful to the readers if the other two members were identified, maybe in parentheses. Are we talking about the AC and false prophet here?)

On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern (Dead) sea and half to the western (Mediterranean) sea, in summer and in winter. The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name. (Zechariah 14:3-4,6-9) Hallelujah, indeed.

Psalm 119: 1-40

' Aleph

Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways. You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed* Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.

b Beth

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

g Gimel

Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me. My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times. You rebuke the arrogant, who are cursed and who stray from your commands. Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes. Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.

d Daleth

I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word. I recounted my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees. Let me understand the teaching of your precepts;

then I will meditate on your wonders. My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word. Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me through your law. I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws. I hold fast to your statutes, O LORD; do not let me be put to shame. I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

h He

Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared. Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good. How I long for your precepts! Preserve my life in your righteousness.

Psalm 119 is the longest of all the Psalms with 176 verses. That makes it the longest chapter in the Bible as well. It's an acrostic poem which means that each of its stanzas begins with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet starting with the aleph and continuing in order through the tau. Within a stanza each verse begins with the same letter. Stanzas are titled with the letter they feature. Every one of the psalm's verses mentions the Word of the Lord. Because of its length I'm going to separate it into four parts.

It's been said that the laver or wash basin that stood between the Altar and the Temple represents God's word. It was the only piece of furniture that had no specified dimensions. (There's no limit to what you can take from God's word.) King Solomon made it 15 feet across and had it mounted upon the life sized statues of 12 oxen. Before the priests could approach the Holy Place they had to wash in it. In the New Testament the Lord makes us holy by washing us through the water of His word. (**Ephesians 5:26**) This wash basin was sometimes called The Sea (**2 Chron.4:2**) because it was a model of the Glassy Sea before God's throne. (**Rev. 4:6**) That means the Glassy Sea represents God's word as well. Here on Earth we're immersed in His Word. In Heaven we stand on it.

Psalm 119:41-88

Note: Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem which means that each of its stanzas begins with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet starting with the aleph and continuing in order through the tau. In Hebrew, each verse in a stanza begins with the letter by which the stanza is titled. Also, every one of the psalm's 176 verses mentions the Word of the Lord. This time we'll look at Waw through Kaph.

w Waw

May your unfailing love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise; then I will answer the one who taunts me, for I trust in your word. Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws. I will always obey your law, for ever and ever. I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts. 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. I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees.

z Zayin

Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. The arrogant mock me without restraint, but I do not turn from your law. I remember your ancient laws, O LORD, and I find comfort in them. Indignation grips me because of the wicked, who have forsaken your law. Your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge. In the night I remember your name, O LORD, and I will keep your law. This has been my practice: I obey your precepts.

x Heth

You are my portion, O LORD; I have promised to obey your words. I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise. I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes. I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands. Though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law. At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws. I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts. The earth is filled with your love, O LORD; teach me your decrees.

X Teth

Do good to your servant according to your word, O LORD. Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees. Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart. Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

y Yodh

Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands. May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word. I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me. May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant. Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight. May the arrogant be put to shame for wronging me without cause; but I will meditate on your precepts. May those who fear you turn to me, those who understand your statutes. May my heart be blameless toward your decrees, that I may not be put to shame.

k Kaph

My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word. My eyes fail, looking for your promise; I say, "When will you comfort me?" Though I am like a wineskin in the smoke, I do not forget your decrees. How long must your servant wait? When will you punish my persecutors? The arrogant dig pitfalls for me, contrary to your law. All your commands are trustworthy; help me, for men persecute me without cause. They almost wiped me from the earth, but I have not forsaken your precepts. Preserve my life according to your love, and I will obey the statutes of your mouth.

God's unchanging moral character is the source of our comfort, the basis for our security. When He makes a promise we know He'll keep it. Our faith in Him is justified because of this. We won't know for sure until after it's too late whether He's kept His promise to save us. But we believe Him when He says He will because of His character. We confidently stake our eternal destiny on His promise that when we leave this life, He'll receive us into the next one, having made us holy and pure.

We couldn't risk this if He had shown any evidence of being arbitrary or capricious, or if anywhere in history there was a case of Him failing to do what He promised. The way He has differentiated Himself from all the others who have claimed to be God is through making promises and then fulfilling them, without fail. It's Who He is. Who He'll always be.

Psalm 119:89-136

Note: Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem which means that each of its stanzas begins with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet starting with the aleph and continuing in order through the tau. In Hebrew, each verse in a stanza begins with the letter by which the stanza is titled. Also, every one of the psalm's 176 verses mentions the Word of the Lord. This time we'll look at Lamedh through Pe.

I Lamedh

Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you.

If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life. Save me, for I am yours; I have sought out your precepts. The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will ponder your statutes. To all perfection I see a limit; but your commands are boundless.

m Mem

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

n Nun

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws. I have suffered much; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your word. Accept, O LORD, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws. Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your law. The wicked have set a snare for

me, but I have not strayed from your precepts. Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.

s Samekh

I hate double-minded men, but I love your law. You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word. Away from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commands of my God! Sustain me according to your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed. Uphold me, and I will be delivered; I will always have regard for your decrees. You reject all who stray from your decrees, for their deceitfulness is in vain. All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross; therefore I love your statutes. My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws.

v Ayin

I have done what is righteous and just; do not leave me to my oppressors. Ensure your servant's well-being; let not the arrogant oppress me. My eyes fail, looking for your salvation, looking for your righteous promise. Deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees. I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes. It is time for you to act, O LORD; your law is being broken. Because I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold, and because I consider all your precepts right, I hate every wrong path.

p Pe

Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them. The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands. Turn to me and have mercy on me, as you always do to those who love your name. Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me. Redeem me from the oppression of men, that I may obey your precepts. Make your face shine upon your servant and teach me your decrees. Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.

Christians have polarized over several subjects, but none more so than the Law. "Jesus died to free us from the Law," we say, but the Law was never repealed. No longer slaves to it, we're still called to obedience, out of gratitude now, because it pleases the One Who set us free. Sure we have the freedom to live in a way

that disappoints and embarrasses God, or even offends Him. But is that any way to thank Him? We don't have anything He lacks but in view of His mercy we can offer our whole beings as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. (**Romans 12:1**)

Lord, grant me the strength, the courage, to live by Your Law. Not because I have to, but because I want to. I want to live the life you've redeemed in a manner that pleases you. It's how I can say, "Thank you."

Psalm 119:137-176, Conclusion

Note: Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem which means that each of its stanzas begins with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet starting with the aleph and continuing in order through the tau. In Hebrew, each verse in a stanza begins with the letter by which the stanza is titled. Also, every one of the psalm's 176 verses mentions the Word of the Lord. As we conclude this review of Psalm 119 we'll look at Tsadhe through Tau, the closing stanzas.

c Tsadhe

Righteous are you, O LORD, and your laws are right. The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy. My zeal wears me out, for my enemies ignore your words. Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them. Though I am lowly and despised, I do not forget your precepts. Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true. Trouble and distress have come upon me, but your commands are my delight. Your statutes are forever right; give me understanding that I may live.

q Qoph

I call with all my heart; answer me, O LORD, and I will obey your decrees. I call out to you; save me and I will keep your statutes. I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises. Hear my voice in accordance with your love; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your laws. Those who devise wicked schemes are near, but they are far from your law. Yet you are near, O LORD, and all your commands are true. Long ago I learned from your statutes that you established them to last forever.

r Resh

Look upon my suffering and deliver me, for I have not forgotten your law. Defend my cause and redeem me; preserve my life according to your promise. Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek out your decrees. Your compassion is great, O LORD; preserve my life according to your laws. Many are the foes who persecute me, but I have not turned from your

statutes. I look on the faithless with loathing, for they do not obey your word. See how I love your precepts; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your love. All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.

S Sin and Shin

Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at your word. I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil. I hate and abhor falsehood but I love your law. Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws. Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble. I wait for your salvation, O LORD, and I follow your commands. I obey your statutes, for I love them greatly. I obey your precepts and your statutes, for all my ways are known to you.

t Tau

May my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word. May my supplication come before you; deliver me according to your promise. May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees. May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous. May your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts. I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight. Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me. I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.

We're seeing more and more signs of the world's polarization. There's talk of making films with Christian themes carry ratings that warn of violence or intolerance. Christian web sites are being blocked in the workplace. In some countries the Bible has already been labeled as hate speech. In the USA many believe the Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 has exposed pastors and other Christian leaders to prosecution for teaching what the Bible says about homosexuality. Our President has said that we're not a Christian country. The fastest growing component of organized religion avoids mentioning that we're all sinners who need to be saved. The middle ground is rapidly disappearing as the world chooses up sides.

But above it all stands God's Law, and like gravity we're subject to it even if we deny it. Even those who fight most strongly against God's Law do so with increasing irrationality, as if knowing at some level that it must be true. What this means is that the time is rapidly approaching when the Personification of the Law, the only one ever to keep it, will return to administer it with an iron scepter (**Psalms 2:9**) in a world that has gone mad with rebellion. And when He does, we'll finally have peace. Maranatha!

Psalm 120

I call on the LORD in my distress, and he answers me. Save me, O LORD, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues. What will he do to you, and what more besides, O deceitful tongue? He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows, with burning coals of the broom tree. Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar! Too long have I lived among those who hate peace. I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war.

This psalm is a prayer for deliverance from false accusers. It recounts the words of a man of peace being twisted to create an unfavorable impression in the minds of others. He's surrounded by enemies, and no matter what he says, all they want is war.

I usually try to find some uplifting thought in the Psalm of the week, but with this one it's pretty hard to miss its singular significance. Meshech is a son of Japeth. His descendants are variously known as Russia or Turkey among scholars. Kedar was the 2nd son of Ishmael, from whom Mohammed descended.

Together they represent every nation that exists near Israel today. Their voices regularly accuse Israel falsely in the courts of public opinion, and the more Israel sacrifices to achieve peace, the more bellicose they become. Retaliation brings calls for war, as does retreat. Words of warning and words of conciliation are equally offensive. Response or non-response, action or inaction, it's all the same to them.

Israel is not without error, and is not currently walking with God as a nation. But no nation has ever done more to accommodate its neighbors in an effort to achieve peace while maintaining its own security. The only thing left is to disappear, something they've rightly refused to do.

Will the US give most of its southwest to Mexico because of a claim by some that it was wrongly acquired? Will Turkey give the Kurds their ancestral homeland back due to the fact that France illegally gave it to the Turks as a bribe to keep them from taking Germany's side in WW2? Will Iran keep its hands off Iraq and let the Iraqis determine their own future? Will the world community step in to try and force any of this to happen like they regularly do with Israel?

In the name of peace Israel has offered to carve a "homeland" out of its meager allotment for a historically non-existent people with no claim to it. Much of this is called "occupied territory" but it was originally given to Israel in 1948 and then illegally captured by Jordanian forces who held it until Israel took it back by force in 1967.

And what's the other side's response to this offer? "It's not enough!" It's never enough. Israel has every right to say, *"Too long have I lived among those who hate peace. I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war."*

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you— the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Over the years, I've come to understand the precariousness of our position as believers here on Earth. For example, one morning a few years ago I was carrying a basket of dirty laundry out to our washing machine. Like many modest homes in Mexico, our laundry is outside. At the last minute my then 2 year old came running up, wanting a "ride" in the laundry basket. I picked him up and off we went around the house. I was bouncing him around as we walked and suddenly I tripped over a loose paving stone. Down we went, quick as a flash.

My only thought was to try and land under Aidan so he wouldn't be injured in the fall. I did, coming down with a thud that knocked the wind out of me on the edge of the concrete pad our laundry sits on. I banged up my left arm and leg and jammed the toenail on my left big toe back under the skin of my toe. The way it hurt, I thought I had broken it. Miraculously, Aidan stayed in the laundry basket, and the clothing cushioned his fall. Aside from the scare he emerged unharmed. Soon he was laughing about it and helping his mom patch me up.

While reading this Psalm, I thought of our tumble that day and thanked the Lord again for protecting my son. But why did I fall? Didn't the Lord say that He would not let my foot slip?

"Oh it was just an accident," you say. "Don't make a big deal out of it." But the Lord's promises are either good or they're not. What's going on here?

Here's what I think the problem was. Another missionary had gone off in a direction that had the potential to divide the Christian community here, and I was upset about it. During the shower I had taken just before doing the laundry, I had been doing some venting to myself, and got a little steamed up in more ways than one.

My anger was a sin, and I hadn't asked for forgiveness. In that instant I was out of fellowship, fair game for the enemy's mischief. He couldn't do any serious damage, but he could take advantage of the momentary

gap in my defenses to trip me up. Don't blame him. He's our enemy. That's what he does. It was my fault for letting my guard down.

Just as Job's self-righteousness left him open to attack, so had my anger exposed me. And the ever vigilant enemy saw the opening I had given him. Aidan had no such problem and his angels kept the laundry basket beneath him even though the law of gravity says he should have spilled out on the concrete with me.

God didn't break His promise to me, and neither did my little tumble catch Him asleep at the wheel. My sin put me out of fellowship and left me open to attack. And God, Who is righteous, had to permit me to experience the consequences of my behavior.

We Christians are big on holding the Lord accountable for His promises to us, but when it comes to being Holy as He is Holy, we have a lot to learn. One thing is that staying in fellowship is critical. The way we do that is to invoke **1 John 1:9** when we've sinned. It's the Christian's bar of soap and cleans us up again.* When we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*. If you're like me, you claim that promise frequently. And as soon as you do, the promise of **Psalm 121** becomes operative again.

Psalm 122

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel.

There the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels."

For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you." For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity.

These are trying times again for Jerusalem. Why? Because of all the places on Earth He could have selected, God chose Jerusalem for His eternal home. **(2 Chron. 6:5-6)** And since that time the enemy has known that until he has possession of Jerusalem, he doesn't really have possession of Earth. This is why the final battle for control of Earth will be fought over Jerusalem.

Stop to think about it. Jerusalem has no natural harbor. It isn't situated astride any major trade route. Nor is it a gateway city. It's not a banking or industrial or commercial or medical or hi-tech center. It has no natural resources. While it's too hilly for an airport it doesn't command any strategic high ground. It has nothing at all to commend it except for the fact the God chose it for Himself. And to some that makes it the most coveted piece of real estate on the planet.

Probably for just that reason, God commanded us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, that there would be peace within its walls. He knows well enough how few days like that there have been in its 3000-year history.

When Abraham came there with Isaac to act out the prophecy that God would fulfill in Jesus, he named the place Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide. It became an affirmation. "On the Mount of the Lord it will be provided," the people said. At that time the city was named Salem, Shalom in Hebrew. The City of Peace.

The Holy Blood shed there has brought us peace in the eternal sense, but alas there's been no peace for Jerusalem. Its very existence inspires thoughts of war in the hearts of its enemies. The Lord did provide,

and will do so again. But until then there will be no peace in the City of Peace. Oh, they'll think they've found it a time or two, but like the bumper sticker says, "No Jesus, No Peace." So when you pray for the peace of Jerusalem, you're really praying for the Lord's return. Something He also wants.

Psalm 123

I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven. As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy. Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us, for we have endured much contempt. We have endured much ridicule from the proud, much contempt from the arrogant.

Once in a great while, there comes a time when we find ourselves totally out of control of the events around us. It may be an accident or illness bringing our life to a stand still, or even the sudden and unexpected death of a loved one.

The most helpless I've ever felt was watching as my crying child was carried off to surgery by the nurses, reaching out with his eyes while I stood there unable to do anything. I've seen dads beg the Lord for permission to take their child's place in those circumstances. But at least I could pray. I often wonder what goes through the minds of the non-believers of the world during those times. You and I can look to the Lord for comfort and reassurance when times are tough, but they have to get through them on their own.

Most of the time, they ridicule us from their position of self-sufficiency. They see our religion as a crutch, and scoff at our need for it. But when they've come to the end of their rope, I've heard them crying out to a God they've chosen not to know, as they finally realize that no one's really self-sufficient. That's when I know that I would not want to face tragedy alone.

Paul called himself a bond slave to Jesus Christ. That means he voluntarily dedicated his life to servitude, yielding up total control of His life to the One he called Master. To us he wrote, *"You are not your own. You were bought at a price."* (1 Cor. 6:19-20) When events in my life have spiraled beyond my control, I'm only too happy to acknowledge the rights of the One who bought me with His blood, knowing that He'll assert Himself on my behalf. As King David wrote, *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me."* (Psalm 23:4). It brings a level of comfort that unbelievers can never experience.

Psalm 124

If the LORD had not been on our side – let Israel say – if the LORD had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive; the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away.

Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Most of us aren't aware that some of the things we've accomplished came to be solely because God is on our side. We chalk our successes up to luck or circumstances or our own capabilities, never stopping to consider the possibility that our Lord might have over ruled agendas of evil that had called for our defeat and ordained victory for us instead. The idea that at any given moment angels might be fighting unseen battles on our behalf doesn't occur to us as we go merrily on our way, basking in our own glory, not giving even perfunctory thanks to the God Who works everything together for the good of those who love Him. (**Romans 8:28**)

From little things like parking places suddenly opening up on crowded streets just as we get there, or money arriving from an unexpected source in time to pay an unscheduled bill, to huge things like receiving a full price cash offer on the house we're selling, or landing a job we weren't even looking for that's so much better for us than the one we've come to see as a dead end position, God is the invisible benefactor in our lives. He loves to give good gifts to his children and asks nothing in return.

As we begin to recognize and acknowledge His efforts on our behalf, He provides even more blessings, fulfilling the promise of **Psalm 37:4**, *delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.*

And when we finally understand that every good thing that happens is the thoughtful gift of a loving Father, and begin paying Him the homage that's due Him, even the impossible can seem like an every day occurrence.

Psalm 125

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people both now and forevermore.

The scepter of the wicked will not remain over the land allotted to the righteous, for then the righteous might use their hands to do evil.

Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, to those who are upright in heart. But those who turn to crooked ways the LORD will banish with the evildoers. Peace be upon Israel.

This Psalm has its New Testament counterpart in a verse from **1st Corinthians**. *God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Cor 10:13)* Just as He knew that leaving His people under the influence of their wicked neighbors for too long would cause them to fall into wickedness themselves, so He knows the limits of our ability to resist temptation. Accordingly, He will not stand idly by watching us try to endure more than we're capable of.

There's an old law that said, "A master who knowingly subjects his slave to temptation that exceeds his ability to resist has no recourse when the slave succumbs." The Lord derives no pleasure in watching us fall. That's a lose-lose deal. If the truth be known, He isn't the author of our temptation at all. *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. (James 1:13-14)*

A friend of mine jokingly says, "I can resist anything but temptation." It's our own evil desires that cause us to be tempted, and our enemy knows just which strings to pull and just when to pull them to trigger those desires.

When we were little, our earthly fathers often watched closely as we learned lessons about our capabilities, always ready to step in and help to keep us from injuring ourselves, or becoming so discouraged that we'd stop trying. Just so, the Lord watches as we learn the limits of our ability to resist temptation, and will always have an escape ready to prevent us from exceeding those limits.

Some learn that their ability to resist drunkenness is shattered after one drink and learn to depend on Him to help them say no to the first one. Others realize that one throw of the dice, one puff of a cigarette, one hit off

a joint, or one look at a pornographic picture is one too many, and trust Him to help them turn away before it's too late.

But no matter what the level of our tolerance is, the key to resisting temptation is found in one simple verse, masterfully demonstrated for us by its Author in the Wilderness Temptation. *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* (**James 4:7**) It worked for Him and it'll work for us.

Psalm 126

When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

A lot of people in the US have lost their home, and more are about to. Recent reports show that this national tragedy is far from over, and new records will soon be set.

I know how that feels. There was a point in my life when I was exactly one day from being homeless. Only a year earlier I had been convinced that nothing could keep us from achieving our goal of a one million dollar net worth. (This was back when a million dollars was a lot of money. About a year ago Oprah was making that much every day.) As a result we'd begun living as if we already had it. But not only had I not achieved that goal, everything was gone and we were being ordered out of our house.

That afternoon two remarkable things happened. First, friends of ours who wanted our house had finally been approved for their financing and could close that very day, and the money we'd get from the sale would be sufficient to pay off a creditor in the final stages of foreclosure and give us enough to rent an apartment. And second, the signed closing documents persuaded the creditor to wait the three days necessary for the bank to fund the buyer's loan, and we were off the hook. Our last asset was gone, but at least we had avoided having a foreclosure on our record.

I had one final embarrassing situation to endure. In full view of the neighbors, I had to carry our clothing and stuff two doors down the street to the small apartment we rented. It was in a building we had actually owned a month earlier. You see, I was going to get rich in real estate and had bitten off way more than I could chew when the market turned downward and I was caught. It wasn't a pretty sight. 35 apartments and an office building gone in less than a year.

The million dollars I was so proudly accumulating was coming partly from cash we had invested, but mostly from the benefits of an inflationary spiral in the local housing market. I never did get the paper gains back, but

within the span of two years the Lord had returned all of our cash and enough extra to pay off our remaining creditors. After making a solid down payment we were moving into a new house at a price we could easily afford, and it was far better than the one we had been forced to sell.

So I not only have real empathy for people losing their homes now, I also have some understanding of how the Israelites felt when they were released from the Babylonian captivity and returned to Jerusalem. Like them I too had friends who visited our new home and remarked about what great things the Lord had done for us.

But the greatest thing he did was unseen by the world around us and had nothing to do with houses or money. The greatest thing He did was to decide to do whatever it took to get my attention. Because as I had come to the realization that everything was coming apart and there was nothing I could do to stop it, I had sat there like Job in the ashes of my self made disaster and finally cried out to Him.

And He came and sat down beside me and said, "Are you ready to listen now? Because I want to tell you about something greater than this, greater than anything you've ever imagined." I was and He did and my life was forever changed. I no longer cared about the house or the million dollars, but for the first time in my life I truly felt wealthy because I had seen what's in store for us. He had given me an eternal perspective and It's beyond comprehension.

I hope it didn't take a personal defeat of that magnitude to get you to listen. But whatever it took, I think you'll agree it was worth it.

Psalm 127

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

Speaking of American Christians some one once quipped, "We worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship." Many men fit this mold, especially when it comes to worshipping our work. I know. I was one of them for most of my life. We work from early to late, justifying it by saying that we're trying to provide the best for our families. If the truth be known, we're really meeting our own competitive needs to win at the Game of Life as much as anything else. Our self esteem becomes almost totally derived from what we do.

For the most part, the better standard of life we work to give to our children is something they never asked for. And when they learn that it comes at the expense of a meaningful relationship with their father, it turns into a losing deal for both parent and child. Not realizing that no amount of material possessions will ever substitute for the love they crave from us, they keep asking for more. And being just as ignorant about their true needs, we work even harder to give them more. By the time we identify the problem, it's often too late to correct it.

Children are a blessing given us by the Lord to hold in trust. It's our responsibility to love them, teach them, and by our actions demonstrate God's love for them. It's said that our children will get their lasting impression of what God is like from the relationship they have with their earthly father. First hearing that was like a huge wake up call for me. I didn't like the impression of God I was forming in their minds, and determined to change it. I realized that by being too busy to attend important events in their lives, no matter how much more important I believed my work to be, I was teaching them that God doesn't have time for them either.

To paraphrase former first lady Barbara Bush, "At the end of your life, you won't regret not passing one more test, not winning one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret times not spent with your children." I don't know how many men have expressed regret like that, but I do know how it felt to see the look in my son's eyes when I re-arranged my schedule so I could attend his soccer games. It was such a little thing, but it meant so much to him. And for me it felt like I wasn't just expressing my love for him, but God's love as well.

Psalm 128

Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table.

Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD. May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, and may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel.

There are so many places where we're told that walking in the ways of the Lord will bring peace and prosperity. Our enemies will live at peace with us, (**Prov. 16:7**) wealth will come to us absent the problems it can sometimes bring, (**Prov. 10:22**) and whatever we plan will end in success. (**Prov. 16:3**)

Contrast this with what we've seen and been taught, that the enemy lies in wait for us and as soon as we step out for the Lord he'll attack, that money is the root of all evil, and that planning our lives is a symptom of self-determinism rather than submission to God.

When the Israelites were finally ready to enter the Promised Land, the Lord had them make provision for the poor. One of these was the cancellation of all debt every seven years. *"However,"* He said, *"There should be no poor among you, for in the land I'm giving you I will richly bless you if you follow my commands."* Imagine that. A whole nation without any poor people.

He went on to say that they would lend to other nations but never borrow from anyone. They would rule over others but no one would rule over them. (**Deut. 15:1-6**) These promises came true for Israel and dignitaries traveled from the far corners of the known world just to see with their own eyes the blessings that God had showered down upon them.

These promises carried no expiration date and were not restricted to Israel alone. The USA has experienced similar blessings and it's still true that even those who hate our country prefer to live here than anywhere else. Achieving and maintaining these blessings requires only that we walk in His ways.

And, as the psalm says and history has shown, God also blessed His people on an individual level, even when their country was being disobedient. But one of the problems with the age of grace is that we still expect Him to do all these things for us even though we no longer do our part for Him.

“I’m not going on some works trip,” we say. We don’t realize that a “works trip” is what someone does in an effort to earn their salvation. Walking in His ways is how we demonstrate our gratitude for having been given it.

God has promised to bless us with Eternal Life just for believing that Jesus paid for all our sins with His life. But he has also promised to bless us with peace and prosperity in the here and now for walking in his ways. It has always amazed me that we cling so tightly to the part of His promise that we can’t see and won’t be able to verify until it’s too late, and ignore the part that we could easily prove just by adopting the behavior He suggests.

Psalm 129

They have greatly oppressed me from my youth — let Israel say, they have greatly oppressed me from my youth, but they have not gained the victory over me. Plowmen have plowed my back and made their furrows long. But the LORD is righteous; he has cut me free from the cords of the wicked.

May all who hate Zion be turned back in shame. May they be like grass on the roof, which withers before it can grow; with it the reaper cannot fill his hands, nor the one who gathers fill his arms. May those who pass by not say, “The blessing of the LORD be upon you; we bless you in the name of the LORD.”

Like the olive tree, Israel cannot be destroyed. For three thousand years, Israel’s enemies have come in many forms and at numerous times but the result is always the same. Eventually the enemy is vanquished and Israel remains. Not because of their power but because of God’s promise.

This is a great model of our battle with our enemy. Because of the love our Lord has for us we can always emerge victorious as well. *“I will give you victory over any enemy you choose to engage,”* the Lord told Joshua. (**Joshua 10:25**) *“Resist the devil and he will flee from you,”* He tells us. (**James 4:7**) Because our victory was assured at the cross, we have only to engage our enemy to achieve it.

In my career as a business consultant I would often lead managers of failing companies through a series of exercises designed to stimulate their creativity. I began by asking them to imagine what great accomplishment they would attempt if they knew that success was inevitable. The purpose of the series was to help them see that the solutions to their problems were not external but internal, and could be found by focusing the power of their minds on the possibilities of success instead of the fear of failure. Many companies were saved from possible bankruptcy when their managers realized that in most cases if they changed the way they thought about their problems they could change the outcome.

I learned this principle from one of the greatest behavioral scientists of all times, the Apostle Paul. He said, *“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”* (**Ephesians 4:22-24**) 2000 years ago, he knew that we can change our lives by changing the way we think about them.

When I led those managers through my exercises, I asked them to imagine that they could achieve whatever

they set their minds to. I had to get them to imagine this because we all knew that success is not guaranteed. And some of my clients, in spite of their best efforts, went broke anyway.

But with believers it's not that way. Paul's admonition to us is not based on fantasy because we have one giant advantage in our personal lives that my clients in the business world lacked. We have the promise of the Almighty God, Creator of the Universe, that we can be made new in the attitudes of our minds and therefore can put on a new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

We're no longer slaves to circumstance, or to our background or upbringing, or to the habits and attitudes we've picked up along the paths of our lives. We can be made new in our minds, and in our reality, because we've been given the regenerative power of God's Holy Spirit. It's an *incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.* **(Ephes. 1:19-21)**

Like the olive tree and like Israel, we're indestructible. No spiritual enemy arrayed against us can prevail. We have been promised victory over every enemy we choose to engage. Whether that enemy appears in the form of an addiction, a lifestyle, an emotion or an evil desire, in the power of God we can resist the devil and he will flee from us. Guaranteed

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

The fact of God's forgiveness is as old as the Bible. I'm convinced that if Adam had just confessed when God asked him what he'd done, the world would be a far different place today. Same with Cain. In all the Old Testament's writing about God's wrath and His judgments, it's easy to overlook the fact that all He ever asked us to do is to confess our sins. He gave us the Law, not to make us behave, but to show us that we're sinners. (**Romans 3:20**)

To me the bottom line in defining our relationship with God comes from **Micah 6:8**. *He has shown you O man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.* He could have said, "Do the right thing by one another, be merciful in your treatment of others, and recognize that you're a sinner in need of forgiveness."

In the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (**Luke 18:9-14**) the Lord didn't commend the efforts of the Pharisee, who in all likelihood devoted every waking moment to keeping God's law, but the humility of the tax collector, who knew he couldn't do it.

One of the things that most frustrates God in His dealings with us is our stubborn refusal to admit that we're sinners. We clean ourselves up on the outside, we make a good impression on those around us, sometimes even fool ourselves into thinking that we're better than we are. But in our hearts we're sinners in need of forgiveness. Every one of us.

When we come to the Lord in sincerity, even our most outrageous sins are always forgiven. And this isn't some New Testament advantage, enabled by the cross. It's always been true. Take David's sin with Bathsheba. He took another man's wife and then had the man killed so he could marry her. He went into the Holy of Holies expecting to be punished, knowing he deserved it. He had recently seen a man die for touching the Ark so he put his hand on it, ready to be struck down. Instead he was forgiven, because his heart was humble.

If God kept a record of our behavior, none of us could stand. We would have all pushed the relationship too far by our ongoing sinfulness. But His mercies are new every morning. Each day is a new beginning. No matter how many times we've done it before, if we sincerely confess our sins he is just and faithful to forgive and will purify us from all unrighteousness (**1 John 1:9**) *for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.*

Psalm 131

My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore.

In uncertain times it's a real comfort to know the Lord is watching over us. While others don't know which way to turn, we have the reassurance of knowing that everything that comes our way is "Father filtered". The Bible doesn't promise a life free of difficulty. This is an evil place and bad things happen. Jesus said that we'd have trouble in this world, but he also said to take heart because He has overcome the world. (**John 16: 33**). And Paul wrote that God is working everything together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. (**Romans 8:29**)

But there's something else we can count on, too.

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

Someday when you have an extra few minutes, look up some of the words in this passage to get their literal meanings. When you do, you'll find the word translated hope means to wait upon or look for the Lord, to expect Him. The word for renew is to change, and the one for strength is also translated power. Soar means to go up or ascend, and the word for walk is most often translated go or depart.

One day soon, those who are waiting for the Lord will be changed in an instant, and will have the power to ascend. They will depart this world and be weary no more. Hallelujah!

Psalm 132

O LORD, remember David and all the hardships he endured. He swore an oath to the LORD and made a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob: "I will not enter my house or go to my bed- I will allow no sleep to my eyes, no slumber to my eyelids, till I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."

We heard it in Ephrathah, we came upon it in the fields of Jaar: "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool- arise, O LORD, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests be clothed with righteousness; may your saints sing for joy." For the sake of David your servant, do not reject your anointed one.

The LORD swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: "One of your own descendants I will place on your throne-if your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever."

For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: "This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it- I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor will I satisfy with food. I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints will ever sing for joy." Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one. I will clothe his enemies with shame, but the crown on his head will be resplendent."

Jesus told us not to worry about our life, what we would eat and drink, or what we would wear. He said our most important goal is to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and He would take of all our other needs. (**Matt. 6:25,33**) He could have used David as an example of what He meant. He took David out of the fields as a boy, gave him legendary victories as a young man, and made him Israel's most beloved king. (In Hebrew David means beloved.)

He didn't do this because David was such a shining example of righteousness, but because David was "a man after my own heart." (**Acts 13:22**) More than anything else, David wanted God to love Him. When we want someone to love us, we happily follow where the person leads and try to do what the person wants. That's what David did. His faith in God was beyond any shadow of a doubt. And later, even when David had committed some of mankind's worst sins, he knew that if he asked, God would forgive him (**Psalm 51**), and that he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever (**Psalm 23**).

Paul was the same way. As much as he loved his churches, he made it clear that given the choice he'd rather depart from them and be with the Lord. (**Phil. 1:22-24**)

This is how God wants us to feel, and why he blesses those who feel this way so abundantly. Even though the Church in Ephesus was hard working and doctrinally sound, He chided them because they had forsaken their first love (**Rev. 2:4**). And regardless of what else we do, He promises a special crown to those who long for his appearing (**2 Tim 4:8**).

So it bothers me when I hear believers say, "Not yet, Lord" in reference to the rapture. Sure, their reasons often sound lofty, but I wonder if they know how it makes the Lord feel. I'm the first to admit I have a great life here. It's hard to imagine how I could be more blessed. But given the chance I would leave in a heartbeat, without a backward glance. How about you? Are you ready to go?

Psalm 133

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes.

It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

The average congregation just floats along most of the time. Each Sunday is like the one before, different enough that it can't be called a re-run, but similar enough that it doesn't threaten anyone's sense of security.

But every now and then a congregation will be galvanized into action by some great goal and for a while a careful observer will be able to spot the different gifts of the spirit being put into action. In **1 Cor. 12:12-26** Paul described how the many parts become one body as each individual makes his or her unique contribution to the whole. It doesn't seem to matter to anyone that some functions are more honorable than others, each one is undertaken with a unity of purpose. Even the most ordinary of tasks are accomplished with an eye toward ensuring the overall success of the venture. For that time, at least, good enough is not good enough. Only the best will do. And the finished product is a work of art, exceeding the expectations of the participants, equal in value to far more than the sum of its parts.

I've been blessed to have been involved in several situations like this, and I know many of you have, too. In each case individual effort is contributed with humility and the glory goes to God. In these instances, the Lord shows us the power of unity in the body, and it's like nothing else we ever experience because we know He's in the midst of it.

Psalm 134

Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD who minister by night in the house of the LORD.
Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD. May the LORD, the Maker of heaven
and earth, bless you from Zion.

If the priests working in the Temple needed reminding to praise the Lord, how much more do we? Some of us spend a half hour or so on Sunday mornings praising the Lord and that's it.

Yet the Lord blesses us all day every day. Shouldn't our praise in some way approximate His blessing? And so what if you're in a bad place right now? He's gotten you out of bad places before and will do so again. Besides, you'll soon be in Heaven with Jesus where you'll be blessed forever. Praising the Lord is just the thing you need. Praise The Lord!

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:4-7)

Since you can only think one thought at a time, the time you spend praising the Lord is time you won't be able to spend feeling bad about your situation. The Lord knows the trouble you're in and He knows how He's going to get you out of it. If you start praising Him now, who knows, He might deliver you sooner. So make a "contrary to feelings" choice. Put your favorite praise CD in the player or turn to your Christian radio station and start praising Him. I guarantee you'll soon feel much better. Praise the Lord!

And if you're in a great place, you shouldn't need reminding. You should already be praising Him. It wasn't your brilliance that got you here, but His blessing. There are plenty of brilliant folks in the world who never get anywhere. Look at the path you've taken to get where you are and pick out the unexplained coincidences. Those are where God got involved and decided to remain anonymous. Praise the Lord!

Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD who minister by night in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD. May the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.

Psalm 135

Praise the LORD. Praise the name of the LORD; praise him, you servants of the LORD, you who minister in the house of the LORD, in the courts of the house of our God. Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant. For the LORD has chosen Jacob to be his own, Israel to be his treasured possession.

I know that the LORD is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

He struck down the firstborn of Egypt, the firstborn of men and animals. He sent his signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants. He struck down many nations and killed mighty kings- Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan and all the kings of Canaan- and he gave their land as an inheritance, an inheritance to his people Israel.

Your name, O LORD, endures forever, your renown, O LORD, through all generations. For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants. The idols of the nations are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them

O house of Israel, praise the LORD; O house of Aaron, praise the LORD; O house of Levi, praise the LORD; you who fear him, praise the LORD. Praise be to the LORD from Zion, to him who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the LORD.

The most comforting promise the Lord has made to us is that He'll vindicate us. According to the dictionary, vindicate means "to clear, as from an accusation, imputation, suspicion, or the like." We've been accused from all sides. In the spiritual realm we're steadily accused by Satan (**Rev. 12:10**).

And it's no different in the physical realm. Non-believers accuse of us of being mindless followers of a religion at odds with reality. Their notion that "anything that seems too good to be true probably is" causes some

to gleefully anticipate our devastation upon discovering that we've been duped. In the secular media, we're often portrayed unfairly, even unkindly, because of our beliefs.

In the Church, believers who interpret parts of the Bible differently than we do accuse us of misunderstanding or misapplying Scripture. And if the Lord chooses to grant us an extraordinary blessing, some in our midst may have trouble hiding their suspicion that we've benefited from some kind of foul play, or at least taken unfair advantage. Whether saved or not, suspicion is an automatic reaction for many.

But the Lord promises not only to vindicate us, but to take vengeance on our behalf as well. Beyond the obvious vindication of being welcomed into His Kingdom and then elevated to its highest echelon, (**Ephes. 2:6-7**) He has promised to repay in kind those who've been less than considerate toward us.

It's been this way right from the beginning. In **Genesis 4:15** the Lord promised to take vengeance on any one who harmed Cain. Even though Cain had just murdered his brother and was being disciplined for it, he was still under God's protection, a member of His family. In **Genesis 12:3** He promised to curse anyone who cursed Abraham. In **Deut. 32:35** He said, "*It is mine to avenge, I will repay,*" and repeated the promise in **Romans 12:19** and **Hebrews 10:30**. In **Isaiah 47:6** he explained His judgment of Babylon after giving His people into their hands for punishment (**Jere. 21:8-10**) by pointing out that they'd been excessive in their oppression of the Jews. The Babylonians should have remembered that the Jews were still God's people and treated them with care out of respect for Him. And in **Rev. 3:9** He promised the Church that He would make unbelievers bow down at our feet and acknowledge that He has loved us.

This is why He can call our anger upon being accused or ridiculed a sin, and admonish us to get rid of it. (**Ephes. 4:31**) We're supposed to understand that each and every offense against us is documented and will be repaid in kind. Rather than having to "stuff" our feelings in such instances in an effort to show that we're "good Christians", we've been freed from their destructive effect altogether. Knowing that the Lord will make everything right at the proper time releases us from our petty resentments and diffuses our anger. It brings us the peace that surpasses human understanding and restores our joy. *For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.*

Psalm 136

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever.

to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever. who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever. who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures forever. who made the great lights— His love endures forever. the sun to govern the day, His love endures forever. the moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures forever. to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, His love endures forever. and brought Israel out from among them, His love endures forever. with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; His love endures forever. to him who divided the Red Sea asunder, His love endures forever. and brought Israel through the midst of it, His love endures forever. but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea; His love endures forever. to him who led his people through the desert, His love endures forever. who struck down great kings, His love endures forever. and killed mighty kings— His love endures forever. Sihon king of the Amorites, His love endures forever. and Og king of Bashan— His love endures forever. and gave their land as an inheritance, His love endures forever. an inheritance to his servant Israel; His love endures forever. to the One who remembered us in our low estate, His love endures forever. and freed us from our enemies, His love endures forever. and who gives food to every creature. His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.

In my younger days I was a runner, and even ran a couple of marathons, 26.25 mile endurance runs. After the last one I developed a sharp pain in my right knee and went to a podiatrist who specialized in sports related injuries for a diagnosis. He pointed out a slight deformity in my right lower leg that caused my right foot to point out at a more pronounced angle than my left one and prescribed a pair of orthotics. These are specially formed inserts I wear in my shoes to correct for this difference. He said the problem only presented itself because of the stress of running and suggested that I try brisk walks instead. I took his advice about walking and wore the orthotics. Sure enough, the pain went away and for 20 years I thought nothing more about it.

Then, about 4 years ago my knees started hurting again. Not nearly as bad as before, but noticeably. I thought it was just a sign of aging, so I increased my daily dose of a natural supplement that helps restore deteriorating joints, and asked the Lord to heal me. As long as I took it easy and took the supplement the pain stayed away. But recently it's been getting worse again and I began to consider another trip to the podiatrist,

throwing in more prayers on those mornings when my knees really hurt. Moving into a single story house helped, since I could hardly get down the stairs in the mornings. But taking long walks became a problem and even standing on my feet to deliver an hour long Bible Study caused real pain the next morning.

Out of the blue my wife became convinced that I should try a pair of shoes she had heard about, before doing anything else. I did, but they didn't help. Then she insisted on a different model of the same brand, one that had something called negative heel technology. Since the first pair hadn't helped I was really hesitant but finally agreed. Meanwhile I hobbled around waiting for them to arrive in the mail.

On the day they arrived, I put them on. The instructions said to only wear them for a little while because my feet would need time to get used to them. So I wore them around the house for a few hours before going to bed.

The next morning I awoke to pain free knees. No stiffness or soreness at all. I went around telling everyone how great these shoes are. The only problem is that they're dress shoes, and Sunday is the only time I have occasion to wear dress shoes. Not wanting to go back to the orthotics, I tried wearing slippers and sandals and other shoes I haven't been able to wear for years. No pain, and it's been three weeks now.

Believing that wearing those special shoes for a few hours one night took all the pain away forever was one thing. But there's no way that it can explain why I can suddenly wear any old shoes or even no shoes and still be pain free. I'm convinced that the Lord answered my prayer for healing and getting those shoes was like Elisha's servant telling Naaman the Syrian to wash in the Jordan seven times to cure his leprosy (**2 Kings 5:1-19**). Or like Jesus rubbing mud on the blind man's eyes and telling him to go wash it off. (**John 9:1-7**). They were just something for those being healed, in this case me, to do to supplement our weak faith, to make us think we were really contributing to the process.

Just like Naaman was skeptical about washing in the Jordan and only did it to accommodate his servants, I only agreed to try the shoes to accommodate my wife's suggestion. Naaman didn't think there was anything special about the Jordan's waters and I didn't think a new pair of shoes would do any good for me. Turns out we were both right. It was just something for us to do as an act of faith.

The Lord has healed countless numbers of us over the course of human history and He continues to do so to this day. The fact that we don't give Him the glory anymore, crediting instead the methods He uses, is irrelevant. But I'll bet that there are thousands of you out there with a story similar to mine. Now you have an explanation. And from now on when something like this happens to you, *give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.*

Psalm 137

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill . May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.

Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!"

O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us—he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

Some call it the "act as if" principle. Others advise us to "fake it til you make it". But what they're all referring to is the fact that while you can't control how you feel about your current circumstances, you can control how you respond to them. And if you choose to act like your circumstances are irrelevant to your happiness, your feelings will eventually catch up. That means if you feel sad, you can choose to act like you're happy, and soon you will have cheered yourself up. If you're a smoker and feel like you want a cigarette, you can choose to act like you don't and before long you'll be a non-smoker.

Some years ago I walked into the office of a prospective client during a time of economic down turn. On the wall behind the receptionist's desk was a prominent sign that read, "We heard there was a recession, but we decided not to participate." I don't think it was a coincidence that this company was doing better than its competitors even though they all had similar products and serviced the same market.

Lately these have come to be known as "contrary-to-feelings" choices. But there's nothing new about them. Paul knew all about doing this. So when the Church at Philippi was suffering intense persecution and asked him for help he wrote back,

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present

your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:4-7)

In the midst of persecution they were to rejoice, not just when things were good, but always. He said the way to find true peace, the peace that transcends all understanding is to be anxious about nothing, to thank God for anything, and ask Him to take charge of everything. And Paul wasn't some theologian tucked away in a corner of the Temple, sequestered from the real world. He knew something about enduring persecution.

He also knew that our attitude is a major factor in determining how things affect us. That's why he told the Ephesians to be made new in the attitudes of their minds (**Ephes. 4:23**) in order to live lives more pleasing to God. He knew that attitudes are just habits of thought. If we start thinking differently our attitude will change. When our attitude changes, our actions will soon follow.

We can tell he knew this because He also told the Philippians to focus on good thoughts during their bad times.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (**Phil. 4:8-9**)

He promised that doing these things would bring them peace in spite of their circumstances. It was good advice then and it's good advice now.

Psalm 138

I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; before the “gods” I will sing your praise. I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stouthearted. May all the kings of the earth praise you, O LORD, when they hear the words of your mouth. May they sing of the ways of the LORD, for the glory of the LORD is great. Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me. The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands.

There are two things the Lord honors above all else, His name and His word. For example, when He promised to restore Israel in the last days, He said,

“It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.” (**Ezekiel 36:22-23**)

Israel doesn’t exist again because they proved themselves worthy, but because His name is at stake. They besmirched it, and He had to restore it because He’s made big promises to us as well.

Where His word is concerned He said,

“For this is what the LORD says—he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited—he says:”I am the LORD, and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob’s descendants, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.” (**Isaiah 45:18-19**)

“Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. **(Isaiah 46:8-10)**

For those of you who were taught that the New Testament canceled or superceded the Old, Jesus said,

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” **(Matt. 5:17-18)**

In the idiom of the day, the phrase “the Law and the Prophets” referred to the Old Testament. God’s word is final, infallible, forever.

Why is this so important to us? Well, in the first place it’s because God uses prophecy to validate Himself.

“I foretold the former things long ago,”* He said, “My mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze. Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, ‘My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them.’ You have heard these things; look at them all. Will you not admit them?” **(Isaiah 48:3-6)**

Of all the world’s so-called Holy Books, only the Bible does this. In fact, God uses prophecy as the standard for evaluating anyone’s claim to be God.

“This is what the LORD says— Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come.” **(Isaiah 44:6-7)**

All anyone claiming to be God has to do to prove it is to answer two questions. First, tell us everything that has happened. And second, tell us everything that will happen. God has been doing this very thing for nearly 6000 years now and He’s never been wrong. No one else can make that claim.

So, His word is so important because it's His proof that He is Who He claims to be. You don't have to wonder if there's really a God. Just study His word. You'll find more proof that He's who He claims to be than you can muster up to prove that you're who you claim to be. It doesn't take any faith to believe there's a God. It just takes the application of your God-given intellect in a search for Him. That's why in the New Testament, one of the Greek words translated unbelief also means disobedient. There's simply too much evidence to deny the existence of God, so the people who do so have to remain consciously ignorant of the facts. They have to refuse to know Him.

The second reason this is so important is that we've been asked to stake our eternal destiny on the fact that God is reliable. It's good to know that someone who has asked you to take His word for something so critical values His word so highly, because by the time we find out if He was telling the truth, it'll be too late. But when Paul wrote *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"* in **Romans 10:13** the One standing behind his promise had a 4000 year track record of honesty and integrity, and nothing has happened in the 2000 years following to diminish that record. If anything we have more supporting evidence now than then.

So where your salvation is concerned, God has placed the two things He values most highly on the line, His name and His word. You have every right to feel secure in His hands.

Psalm 139

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you. If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

God knows us better than we know ourselves. Before we’ve taken them He knows our actions and the motives behind them. He knows our thoughts before they’re crystallized, our words before they’re spoken. No matter what we do or where we go, He is there.

It's been said that we have a God who loves us so much He can't take His eyes off us. And an alternate translation of verse 17 reads, "How precious concerning me are your thoughts, O God. How vast is the sum of them." If this is true, He can't stop thinking about us either.

He knew us before we were born and He has seen the day of our death. But He sent His Son so even that would not be the end of our relationship with Him. Speaking of the New Jerusalem, He says, *"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them and be their God."* (**Rev. 21:3**)

It has always been beyond my ability to understand how God could know so much about me and still invite me to live with Him forever. Oh, I know He's going to perfect me first, but based on what He knows about my past, I've got to wonder why He would go to the trouble. What is it that makes Him love us so much? We who have nothing He needs, who have always failed in our dealings with Him.

And yet one day soon He'll send His Son to bring us to the place He's prepared for us in His home. (**John 14:1-3**) There is no logical reason for this, it's purely a manifestation of the incomparable riches of His grace. Paul must have been thinking the same thing when he wrote,

"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. (**Romans 11:35-36**)

Psalm 140

Rescue me, O LORD, from evil men; protect me from men of violence, who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war every day. They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips.

Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; protect me from men of violence who plan to trip my feet. Proud men have hidden a snare for me; they have spread out the cords of their net and have set traps for me along my path.

O LORD, I say to you, "You are my God." Hear, O LORD, my cry for mercy. O Sovereign LORD, my strong deliverer, who shields my head in the day of battle- do not grant the wicked their desires, O LORD; do not let their plans succeed, or they will become proud.

Let the heads of those who surround me be covered with the trouble their lips have caused. Let burning coals fall upon them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise. Let slanderers not be established in the land; may disaster hunt down men of violence. I know that the LORD secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. Surely the righteous will praise your name and the upright will live before you.

Lots of people are writing in these days, wondering if the Lord is going to trigger the Rapture before things get any worse. Of course no one can answer that question. But there are a couple of things we know for sure. One is that He's promised to rescue us from the wrath to come (**1 Thes. 1:10**) which He can do at any time.

There's no question that the so-called birth pangs that lead up to the End Time judgments are getting more frequent and more intense, but I don't think anyone believes they've maxed out. And even when they do, they won't be anywhere near as bad as what will surely follow. And that brings us to the second thing we know for sure. If we'll just seek His Kingdom and His righteousness, He'll see that all our needs are met in the time between now and the Rapture. (**Matt. 6:31-33**)

Seeking His Kingdom requires letting go of ours by not worrying about how things are going to work out for us here and leaving that to Him. His righteousness we're to seek is the one that's imputed to us by faith (**Romans 3:21-24**) not by our futile works. This is what guarantees our needs being met.

As one who has experienced it, I can tell you this is a lot harder than it looks. Because you've been there too, some of you have an idea how hard it was for me to stand there helplessly while He hammered away at the foundations of my kingdom until they crumbled out from under me, but you also know it had to happen before I could begin seeking His. And shedding my carefully crafted facade of self sufficiency to reveal the hopeless, helpless, worthless, and useless sinner I really am was the most painful thing I can ever remember experiencing. But being caught in His loving arms made both worth while. The life He had been waiting to give me, and that I had been so strongly resisting, is better by far than anything I had ever dreamed of.

If you're still clinging to the things of this world, my advice is to surrender now. Don't go kicking and screaming into the kingdom He's prepared for us. But seeing all these things happening around you stand up and lift up your head because your redemption is drawing near. Remember, this is not a surrender into defeat. This is a surrender into victory.

Psalm 141

O LORD, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips. Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies.

Let a righteous man (The Righteous One) strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.

Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers; their rulers will be thrown down from the cliffs, and the wicked will learn that my words were well spoken. They will say, “As one plows and breaks up the earth, so our bones have been scattered at the mouth of the grave.”

But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign LORD; in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death. Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evildoers. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety.

Hebrews 12:5-6 tells us not to make light of the Lord’s discipline and not to lose heart when He rebukes us, because like a good father, He disciplines those He loves. And although the Lord’s discipline may feel uncomfortable at the time, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who’ve been trained by it. (**Hebrews 12:11**)

So how does the Lord discipline His children? First of all we must understand that no matter what we do, He won’t ever kick us out of the family. Like the prodigal son, we never stop being His children.

But there are things that have happened in our lives that, looking back, we can recognize as discipline. It could have been unexpected opposition to something we thought we had the Lord’s go ahead for, or a sudden rash of financial or personal problems in a life that had been running smoothly. Our hindsight tells us it was discipline because it had the effect the writer of Hebrews described. It brought a harvest of righteousness and peace. God’s discipline is always with the intention of drawing us closer.

Also it's always tailored to fit our transgressions and is often swift. For example, I don't have any statistics on this but it seems to me like Christians who do wrong tend to be caught faster and pay bigger penalties than non-believers. This is especially true for high profile believers. I think it's partly because Christians know right from wrong, and feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit when they do wrong. This often brings on a sub-conscious desire to be caught.

But there's more to it than that. The number of times I've counseled adulterers, liars, and thieves, and listened as they told me how someone who shouldn't have been in a position to discover them did, is uncanny. An old friend happens to be dining in the same restaurant in a distant city where two people who shouldn't be together alone are meeting in secret. He shouldn't be there, and normally wouldn't be, but there he is, just at the wrong time.

I always told them that we have a God Who loves us so much, He can't take His eyes off us. He orchestrated their discovery so they would stop misbehaving, and He arranged their discipline so they would repent. Almost always they've taken their licks and come out stronger, better people. Frequently they devote a substantial part of their lives to counseling other believers in similar situations in fulfillment of **2 Cor. 1:3-4**. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*

You see, God knows that the root for the word discipline is disciple, and disciple means student. His discipline is meant as instruction and is always tempered with mercy. Its purpose is restoration. In this as in everything else He's working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. (**Romans 8:28**)

Psalm 142

I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me. Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.

I cry to you, O Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

David wrote this Psalm when he was hiding in a cave from Saul. There was no logical reason for Saul to be hunting for him. It was the paranoia of a deranged man, and therefore something very difficult to defend oneself against. Time after time, David demonstrated his innocence, but Saul was relentless. The oppression David felt was palpable.

There have been two occasions in my life where I have felt such unjustified oppression that I just knew no one would understand. When I tried to explain my situation to close friends, I got those blank stares that told me they didn't believe me. Even my own family said I was over reacting. Finally, I just gave up.

In the days before I knew the Lord, I would have had to suffer in silence while the rage built up inside me like a head of steam with no release valve. But He and I had met prior to these events and so I had a friend I could talk to, someone who understood because He'd been through even worse times and knew how I was feeling. Someone who could get me through the dark times, and deliver me from the rage. Someone who could turn the lemons into lemonade. (In the aftermath of both of these attacks we experienced a dramatic growth in our ministry. He made the righteous gather about me because of His goodness to me.)

The writer to the Hebrews said that this was one reason why Jesus had to become a man. *He had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.* (**Hebrews 2:17-18**)

Isn't that incredible? Even though He created us from nothing and made the Heavens and the Earth for our habitation, our God has been in our shoes. He knows what we're going through and understands, even when no one else does.

To me this means two things. First, He knows how we feel because He's felt the same way. There's no second-guessing from Him, no "Here's what you should have done," just the empathy that can only come from someone who's been there. And second, when it comes to interceding for us, He can understand how we got so angry and how those evil thoughts we harbor were motivated. He can be merciful when we seek forgiveness.

It's easy to get into the mind set that we're all alone in our times of trouble, that nobody cares. But there's always One standing at our side through the darkest of times. He's the one who has promised never to leave us or forsake us, even to the end of the age.

O Lord, Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

Psalm 143

O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief. Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.

The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in darkness like those long dead. So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed. I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done. I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.

Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you.

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble. In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.

Notice how direct David's prayer is here. He didn't feel the need to compose formal and flowery prose when asking God for help. I agree that his worship psalms are beautifully poetic but I think that was more the work of the Holy Spirit. When David needed help, he wasn't afraid to ask in a very straight forward way, as if he was commanding God to step in and make things right, and on David's schedule no less. I don't see this as impertinence on David's part, and I don't think he was being presumptuous. I think it was an indication of his great faith. He expected God to answer his prayers and in the passion of the moment just blurted out what he needed. He obviously didn't think it was necessary to be formal, or tentative, or even polite.

I've noticed this with other great men of God as well. Abraham said, "*Far be it from you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked.*" (**Genesis 18:25**) Moses said, "What will the Egyptians think? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster upon your people."* (**Exodus 32:11-12**) And that perpetual gentleman Daniel said, "*O Lord listen! O Lord forgive! O Lord hear and act!*" (**Daniel 9:20**)

These men were not being disrespectful to God, nor did they see themselves as His equal. But neither did they hesitate to remind Him of promises He had made. In Abraham's case it was His righteousness. With

Moses it was His promise to bring the Jews out of Egypt, and with Daniel it was His promise to bring Israel back after the Babylonian captivity. No, it wasn't impertinence. It was their faith in Him that allowed them to be so bold. They knew He had made a promise and they knew He keeps His promises. Period. End of story.

Often when observing people in prayers for healing or other kinds of help I've noticed how tentative many of us are in approaching God, as if we have no right to ask anything of Him. But by some accounts, the Bible contains over 7,000 promises from God, and what He has promised, He will do. To the Jews He said, *"It's not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I'm going to do these things, but for the sake of My Holy Name"* (**Ezekiel 36:22**). He didn't restore them as a nation because they deserved it, He did it because He said He would. If that's true for them, why wouldn't it be true for us? Why wouldn't He be working everything together for our good? (**Romans 8:28**) Why wouldn't the prayer offered in faith make the sick person well? (**James 5:15**) Why wouldn't all our needs be met if we seek His Kingdom and His Righteousness? (**Matt. 6:25-33**) In fact why wouldn't we be made rich in every way so we can be generous on every occasion? (**2 Cor. 9:11**) Is it because He no longer keeps His promises, or because we no longer expect Him to?

Psalm 144

Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me.

O LORD, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a fleeting shadow. Part your heavens, O LORD, and come down; touch the mountains, so that they smoke. Send forth lightning and scatter the enemies; shoot your arrows and rout them. Reach down your hand from on high; deliver me and rescue me from the mighty waters, from the hands of foreigners whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful.

I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you, to the One who gives victory to kings, who delivers his servant David from the deadly sword. Deliver me and rescue me from the hands of foreigners whose mouths are full of lies, whose right hands are deceitful. Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace. Our barns will be filled with every kind of provision. Our sheep will increase by thousands, by tens of thousands in our fields; our oxen will draw heavy loads. There will be no breaching of walls, no going into captivity, no cry of distress in our streets. Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the LORD.*

In uncertain times it's good to know that while you can't always trust what you hear from our leaders or the mainstream media, you can trust the promises of God. And just like He delivered Israel from the hands of their enemies in David's time, He'll deliver us from the hands of our enemies in our time. No matter what the future brings, we have His promise that these are only light and momentary things that will soon be replaced by an eternal glory that far outweighs them all (**2 Cor. 4:17**). *"You'll have trouble in this world,"* Jesus said, *"But take heart, for I have overcome the world."* (**John 16:33**) And because of that, so will we.

Paul's advice to the Corinthians is even more relevant to us. *"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."* (**2 Cor. 4:18**)

We have to remember that this world is the temporary one. It's the next one that's permanent, and our presence there is already guaranteed (**Ephes. 1:13-14**). We shouldn't be so concerned about what's happening

in the here and now. First, we don't have any control over it. And second, in the grand scheme of things it really doesn't matter. The Lord has promised to rescue us from the wrath to come (**1 Thes. 1:10**) and to meet all our needs in the mean time (**Matt. 6:31-33**). And when He takes us to be with Him, we'll never again have even one sad moment (**Rev. 21:4**). What more could we ask?

Psalm 145

I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you. They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.

The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.

The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.

For most of my career I provided an intangible service to the business community. It was so esoteric that people couldn't tell what it was even when it was described to them. It was variously called consulting, people development, or productivity improvement, but even those descriptors were too vague and general to shed much light. What's more, it was custom tailored to meet the specific needs of each client, so it really had to be experienced to be understood.

To help persuade new clients to use our service, I began using letters of recommendation I had received from past clients in approaching new ones. In these letters clients spoke of the benefits they had enjoyed from the service I provided them. They described how my company had outperformed their expectations of us, how we were thoroughly professional, always meeting our commitments, and how our service had paid for itself many times over. Often these letters were from someone the prospective client knew, either as a friend or competitor, so they carried the added influence of the relationship. They helped give prospective new clients the confidence to put us to work in their companies, even though most of the time they didn't really know what we were going to accomplish for them.

If the Lord ever needed such a letter to convince someone to follow Him, Psalm 145 would serve the purpose well. But I think the Lord had David write it for a different purpose. I think it was written to folks who should know what the Lord can do, because we've seen Him do it ... for us. So while I think this Psalm would make a great letter of recommendation, it was really meant to be a letter of affirmation. After all, it's not non-believers who read the Bible, but believers.

Affirmations have been defined as self-talk, positive statements designed to bring about the desired state of mind. Some are just fantasies. For example, a friend of mine, a tennis buff, used to brag, "I can beat any man in any land, at any game that you can name, for any amount that you can count." Obviously that statement isn't true and never will be, but he claimed that saying it before a match gave him more confidence.

But some are not just fantasy. The Bible contains many affirmations. **Philippians 4:13** is a good example. *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."* **Psalm 37:4** is another. *"Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desire of your heart."* These are legitimate affirmations, statements made in times of doubt that would otherwise be true. In other words, the only variable in the statement is our willingness to believe it. **Psalm 145** is such an affirmation. There's nothing about it that requires a stretch of the imagination to believe. It's a statement that's inherently true and varies only with the faith of the reader. It commends itself to our frequent reading.

When we're on top of the world and nothing can get us down, we don't need affirmations to strengthen us. They're for when we're beaten up and battered down. The Lord anticipated these times and placed powerful affirmations in His word to help us restore our faith to carry on.

When things are at their worst, we have the right to *"Be joyful always,"* (**1 Thes. 5:16**). When we're in the pits we can *"Be made new in the attitudes of our minds."* (**Ephes 4:23**) and *"Rejoice in all things"* (**Phil 4:4**). When we're really disappointed with our selves, we can *"Be confident of this, that He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (**Phil 1:6**) And when we've really embarrassed the Lord by our behavior we can know for certain that *"I am with you always, even to the very end of the age,"* (**Matt. 28:20**) and be persuaded that *"Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (**Romans 8:39**)

Learning and repeating these and other Biblical affirmations gives us the confidence to put Him to work again in our lives, even though most of the time we don't really know what He's going to accomplish through us. For *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, what the Lord has prepared for those who love Him."* (1 Cor 2:8-9) Got the idea?

Psalm 146

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— the LORD, who remains faithful forever.

He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

According to **Psalm 90:10**, the Biblical lifespan is 70-80 years. Some spend this time in a constant dash for all that this world has to offer. They delight in stacking up possessions, awards, trophies, and recognition. Fame and fortune are their goals. We all know people for whom this has become an obsession. They sacrifice relationships, family, and even their health in the quest for more. Frankly, some do very well indeed, acquiring multiple millions in net worth and enjoying a lifestyle that's the envy of most.

But on the day they die it all stops. Gone are their possessions, their bank accounts and their trophies, and as they are called to give account for their lives they'll discover that they're about to be judged according to standards they never paid much attention to. In their quest to become life's winners, they focused exclusively on the rules of this world, chasing their goals with all the energy they had.

Now, they'll discover that they've actually become its biggest losers, because while they lived an enviable life according to world standards, that won't be the case in eternity. In the first 80 years of their eternal existence they'll have gotten all the happiness and joy they will ever receive. Ever. The rest of their eternity will be spent regretting that they didn't pay more attention when the eternal rules were explained to them.

Because they were. The first things they'll be shown after they die are the times when they were confronted with the Gospel and brushed it off. Then they'll realize that they're without excuse and without hope. Not

even by paying over every one of the millions of dollars they acquired in life can they modify even an instant of the eternal regret they'll be starting to feel in death.

The tragedy is that most of these men and women could have had it all, and come out winners in both time and eternity. The Bible doesn't prevent such achievement; in fact it encourages it. But they were too smart for their own good. With out investing a moment's time in research, they rejected the Gospel out of hand, something they would never have done with a new idea on how to make more money.

Although they claimed to be wise they became fools, as Paul put it in **Romans 1:22**, accepting unsubstantiated opinion about things of eternal significance instead of doing their own due diligence in search of the truth. Had they treated one of their financial transactions in such a cavalier fashion, their stockholders would have fired them forth with.

So if their life looks better to you than yours, take heart. Soon their time in the sun will be over forever while yours will be just beginning. And theirs will have lasted only a few years while yours will last through all of eternity. Having followed one of their axioms, you've done first things first, you've sought His Kingdom and His righteousness (**Matt. 6:33**) and now your light and momentary troubles are achieving for you an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (**2 Cor. 4:17**)

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— the LORD, who remains faithful forever.

Psalm 147

Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him! The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel. He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.

Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp. He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call. His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.

Extol the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion, for he strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you. He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat. He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast? He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow. He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the LORD

The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in His unfailing love. In this world, we're taught to be self reliant, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who put their hope in Him. All around that thought the psalmist speaks of the power of the Lord. But in this one sentence he put the essence of his message. *The LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.* He loves to have us depend on Him. We talk about becoming mature in our faith, but He wants us to stay like kids. *"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven",* He said (**Matt. 18:3**). Little children are trusting, naive, and most of all dependent.

We want the same from our children as the Lord wants from us. We love to have them come to us. "Daddy, can you help me?" is music to my ears and I'm never happier than when I'm earning their gratitude. As a father I've never outgrown that, and it saddens me to watch as my children do. Makes me feel like I'm not needed. Do you think God ever feels that way? Is that why He delights in those who put their hope in Him?

I'm convinced this psalm is telling us that our Father in Heaven is a lot like us where His children are concerned. He has enormous power and likes to use it on our behalf. As He told Paul, *"My power is made perfect in weakness."* (2 Cor. 12:8) So stop trying to be so self sufficient. Let Him fortify your house and bless all who dwell within. Let His peace surround you and His bounty sustain you. Praise the Lord.

Psalm 148

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.

Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children.

Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens. He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the LORD.

If water is the universal solvent, then praise has to be the universal remedy. There's nothing that will change your attitude, elevate your mood, take away your painful headache, unbreak your heart or dissolve your fear like praise. The word praise appears 248 times in the Bible. The first time was when Leah had given birth to her 4th son. In her day, birthing four sons was considered to be a sure sign of God's favor. "Now I will praise the Lord," she said, and named him Judah. Judah means praise.

Someone wrote recently to ask me how the early Christian martyrs endured such horrible torture. My research took me to a work called Foxe's Book of Martyrs where I learned that they sang songs of praise while the torturers were doing their worst.

Medical research has shown the healing effects of both laughter and belief in God. Put these emotions together and you have praise. Praising God makes us happy while nourishing our belief. It often creates a mild state of euphoria, assuring us that everything will be OK. Singing songs of praise with other believers heightens that feeling. No matter how dire our circumstances are when we walk in the door on Sunday morning, a few minutes of praising God with our spiritual family seems to put it all into its proper perspective. This too shall pass, we realize, and a burden is lifted off our shoulders. Congregations that unduly restrain or curtail their corporate praise do so to their disadvantage.

So, what's the point? No matter what the situation is, praise the Lord.

"Rejoice in all things," Paul told the Philippians. *"I say it again. Rejoice!"* **(Phil 4:4)** Then he said, *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."* *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*
(Phil. 4:8-9) To experience the Peace of God, praise the God of Peace.

Psalm 149

Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation.

Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the LORD.

Hallelujah is an un-translated word that comes to us straight from the Hebrew. It means, "Praise the Lord." The English meaning is used often enough, and has been the central theme of these last Psalms. But the word Hallelujah appears only four times in the New Testament, all of them in Revelation 19 when Babylon lies in smoking ruins and the armies of Heaven are poised to invade and re-capture Planet Earth.

The Lord Himself will lead them, with a sharp sword to strike down the nations. **(Rev. 19:15)** The fact that John portrays this sword as issuing forth from out of His mouth tells us that it symbolizes His Word. This symbolism originated in **Hebrews 4:12**, which describes His Word as sharper than a double-edged sword exposing the thoughts and attitudes of man's heart. In the final battle men will die because of the thoughts and attitudes of their hearts. His Word will slay them.

He won't bother with making them surrender and then trying to rehabilitate them. He knows that with enough power you can get people to do almost anything. But not even God can make men believe something they refuse to believe.

That's always been the problem with any system of salvation that depends on behavior. In his book "Man's Search For Meaning" Viennese psychiatrist Victor Frankl demonstrated what I mean. During his time in the Nazi concentration camps, he observed how he and his fellow inmates could be systematically deprived of every freedom and dignity except one. While their captors could demand and receive absolute obedience in every action, they could not control the thoughts and attitudes of their prisoners' hearts.

It's the same with religion. "*These people,*" the Lord said of His Chosen, "*Come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*" **(Isaiah 29:13)** With one of the most detailed

religious systems ever devised, and with power He regularly demonstrated, He could demand and receive outward obedience to His Law, but He couldn't prevent them from sinning in their minds. Even when their actions were faultless, their hearts were evil. (**Jeremiah 17:9**)

Of course He knew all of this from the beginning. But He also knew we needed to learn the futility of thinking we can earn our salvation. (That's the great lesson of the Old Testament.) Then He gave us the greatest gift of love ever. Knowing we can't help sinning, He prepaid all the penalties we're racking up by agreeing to die in our place. And that swayed our hearts. It's His kindness that leads us to repentance after all. (**Romans 2:4**) Now we try to behave to please Him. We know that we can never succeed, but that He likes it when we try and blesses us for doing so. And when we fail, His grace is sufficient, and there's peace between us. *Praise the LORD.*

Psalm 150

Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.

Since the early 1900's, there have been numerous studies done in an attempt to quantify the creative capability of the human mind in order to estimate how much of that capability we use. The earliest studies put the average use at 10% of our capability. Then as we've learned more about the brain, that number has progressively gone down, first to 6% then 5 then 3 then 1.5. Not because we've concluded that people are less creative than we originally thought, but because our understanding of the brain's capability has grown. Finally the UCLA Brain research Institute put an end to things a few years ago by stating that, "For all practical purposes the creative capability of the human mind is infinite."

It's been said that if we "put our minds to it" we could become fluent in dozens of languages, master countless skills, and memorize for instant recall all the information in the US Library of Congress. (I can't imagine even wanting to do that one.)

That said, research has also uncovered one limitation. At the conscious level, we can only think one thought at a time. Some of us think we're good at doing two things at once, but if we are it means we've mastered the ability to switch our focus from one to the other and back again very quickly. Still, at any given instant we're only thinking about one of them.

And that explains why Paul advised us to rejoice even in times of trouble, and to concentrate our thinking on praiseworthy things. (**Phil 4:4,8**) Somehow he knew that if we did this it would prevent us from falling into a state of despair over our problems.

Jim and Shirley, a couple of our regular readers, once put it this way .

"Praise in the mouth of God's saints will bind the enemy with cords of iron. One who is praising God cannot be thinking thoughts of fear or doubt. Praise is a STRONG weapon and we pray that each person who calls HIM Father discovers that praise raises us above our circumstance where we can soar above any storm!" Well said.

When we focus all of our conscious effort on praising God, any conflicting thoughts are literally forced out of our minds. Practice this by singing along with your favorite praise music, or by learning to praise Him in prayer, and you'll find renewed strength even in the midst of troubling times. It's a way of taking your mind back from your enemy and restoring your perspective. Resist him, we're told, and he'll flee from us, (**James 4:7**) driven away by our persistent prayers of praise. *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.*

About the Author

Jack Kelley is a former a business man who “grew up” in a main line denomination but 25 years ago experienced a radical conversion to Evangelical Christianity. Since then he has devoted most of his time and energy to studying and teaching the Bible, conducting studies throughout the western US and serving as teacher, counselor, and lay pastor.

Thirteen years ago he and his wife Samantha founded gracethrufaith.com where he has posted all his past and current studies and answers questions about the Bible from followers around the world. His Bible studies and answers to Bible questions have been read by millions of pastors, teachers and students and are regularly used as sermon topics and Sunday School lessons.

He has also written several books including [Children’s Stories of the Bible, The Adult Version](#), [Seven Things You Have To Know To Understand End times Prophecy](#), and [The Redeemer](#). He has also posted numerous [mp3 studies and ebooks](#) which you can download from the site.

Jack and his family currently reside on the Baja Peninsula in Mexico where they serve as volunteer missionaries.

(Jack is not the former USA Today reporter, nor is he the former TV star and game show host.)

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