



Psalms

Book 1

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Through the Word is a 501c3 nonprofit ministry dedicated to equipping people around the world to read the Bible, understand it, apply it, and make it a habit. We provide simple yet powerful tools via the web and mobile apps that lead users on a journey to understand the entire Bible, one chapter at a time. TTW combines clear, balanced, and relatable teaching with direct accessibility. Our purpose is God's calling: to make disciples, equip the saints, and preach the word. (Mat. 28:19, Eph. 4:12, 2 Tim, 4:2)

Understand the Bible in 10- minutes a day with clear and concise plans for every book and audio guides for every chapter of the Bible.

“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” Acts 8:30b- 31a

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Psalms Book 1 | Introduction

Welcome, my friends, to the Book of Psalms. My name is Kris Langham and this is the most beloved book in the Bible, and for good reason. The Psalms are the music. What a film score and soundtrack are to an epic movie so are the Psalms to the Bible's grand story.

The way Rocky's theme puts you back in the fight and Indiana Jones stirs your heart to adventure so the Psalms stir up themes, stories, and faith from God's Word. Where the Bible has heart, the Psalms give it rhythm. Where the Bible brings understanding, the Psalms add feeling. Emotions are expressed in the Psalms like nowhere else in the Bible.

Here you'll find some of your favorite verses. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." "As the deer pants for the water brooks so my soul pants for you, O Lord." "My God, why have you forsaken me?" That last one is surprising. I thought God never forsakes us. That's true. But that doesn't mean you won't *feel* that way sometimes. And music gives voice to our feelings. We express our emotions and process our struggles right or wrong, faithful or doubting, clear or confused through music, and the Psalms help us bring all of that to God.

Have you ever seen the way music can bring a person out of themselves? A guarded heart learns to dance, cry, scream, and shout for joy. And consider this reality. As we read, pray and sing these words, we are joined in chorus by believers around the world and across time in every generation for the last three millennia. That's a staggering thought. And to honor that connection, we're bringing several voices to take turns in this series.

First up is our dear friend and Bible teacher, Melanie Hurlbut.

Melanie, what are the Psalms? What's their purpose and message for us?

Well, the Book of Psalms is Israel's prayer book, a compilation of 150 songs, prayers, and poems written for life in the gap. The gap between who they are and who they're called to be. David, for example, credited with writing almost half of the Psalms, lived much of his life in this gap. There are many years between when he's first anointed king by Samuel and when he becomes king of all Israel. He's struggling to do the right thing when everyone and everything around him is going very wrong. So David's psalms teach us to pray and worship with him as we live through that kind of dissonance, struggling to hold on to God, His plans and His promises, and see them come to fruition not just for ourselves, but for His people and His world.

In this way, much like the Lord's Prayer in the New Testament, the Psalms connect us to God. They make us partners with Him in His promise to bring his kingdom into our mixed up and messy world.

Thanks, Melanie. Peyton Jones is also with us. Peyton, what makes the Psalms powerful?

Well, Kris, we all know that music is a powerful force, a gift from God to move the heart and awaken the senses. Sometimes it taps directly to the emotions like adrenaline. Other times, the words grab hold of our reason and wrestle with us, strengthened by the rhythm and repetition. Music has empowered movements, spiritual revivals, justice and civil rights movements, rebellions

against tyranny and oppression. Let freedom ring. The Psalms are musical and that music opens our hearts and helps us process our emotions.

Emotions come in many genres and so does music. Just as music today is rock, country, goth, punk, hip hop, classical, and many more, so the Psalter takes us on a journey through praise, lament, thanksgiving, royal psalms, wisdom psalms, and psalms of confidence with many crossovers. By the way, Psalter is another word for the whole book of Psalms. As you read the Psalms, remember that here emotions come before logic, and they give us a pattern of talking to God that frees the emotions to be expressed and redeemed.

You only talk to someone the way David talks to God when you wildly and completely trust them. There's a freedom here that we don't see much in Christian music, a freedom to come to God with the fullness of our emotions and the fullness of ourselves. Yet those same wild emotions are tamed and redeemed as the Psalms anchor them to the solid rock of God's nature and God's covenant. The Lord is my rock and my refuge. So that's the power.

Now, Melanie, what about the historical context for the Psalms? When I think about modern music, I see a powerful connection between music and history. Sixties. Seventies. Eighties. The music expresses and reflects our hearts and our happenings. So what was happening when the Psalms were written and compiled?

Well, individual psalms were written over hundreds of years, largely for temple worship. Each psalm reflects its own time, but likely the compilation was made in the 400s BC after the exile. Put yourself in that time with God's people,

holding on to God's promises of king and kingdom after a time when all that appeared to fall apart and restoration is barely beginning. These psalms express their hearts and connected them back to those who originally received the promises. Yet the Book of Psalms isn't a songbook. After the exile, it was intentionally organized like a poetic Torah into five books, each ending with a doxology of praise.

Psalms 1 and 2 introduce the Psalter, underscoring the need for a righteous human being, then zooming in on Yahweh's promised Davidic son to carry out God's purposes for Israel. The Psalter ends with five amazing victory psalms celebrating God's triumph throughout the earth. In between in the gap, each book moves us from the glory of David as anointed king, through to the anguish of Israel's exile and the failure of the Davidic line.

Psalm 89 says it well. "You have sworn in your holiness and will not lie to David that his line will continue forever. But you've rejected, spurned your anointed one. You've defiled his crown in the dust. David's line has gone to dust in the same way as Adam's. The Lord alone is left to fulfill his covenant promises of life to Israel and the nations." In this way, the Psalms gather us up. All our struggles, our loss, our failure into the human struggle and into God's promise to bring His Messiah to reshape His people and establish His glorious kingdom throughout the earth.

Powerful stuff. Thank you, Melanie. Thank you, Peyton. And for you listening, the following are some vital keys to reading the Psalms well.

Key number 1: respect the genre. This is poetry, so read in the genre. Psalms and epistles are not the same. Can you imagine reading lyrics to a song as if someone wrote you that in a letter? It's weird.

And do not read the Bible as an encyclopedia of theological truths. It's not. Not a single book in the Bible is written as systematic theology. God did not choose that. Key number 2: respect the poet. Let them be human and they'll help you embrace your own humanity. Key number 3: respect the poet's feelings. Let them feel their feelings, and they will help you experience and process your feelings. Key number 4: respect the poet's process. The Psalms often do not end where they begin, and that's powerful. Some begin with hard questions and hurt feelings, yet heal through the process. So process with them. Pay attention to what changed and why. And key number 5: read the Psalms musically.

Now this one is tricky because even though I said that the Psalms are the music of the Bible, technically that's not quite true. We don't have the original music. The lyrics were preserved, but the music was lost. Lyrics without music are missing something. But these lyrics were written for music. Many psalms open with musical instruction in the header, but many of those musical words are tough to translate so that gives us the opportunity to fill in the gap in our minds and hearts.

To help you do that, we'll sometimes share a song or artist that we connect to a psalm to give you a sense of how it feels to us. However, we do not vouch for the character nor the doctrine of any musician noted. We've done no background checks for that matter. David's life was far from purity, yet the Holy Spirit took hold of his voice and ordained the words time and again. We might even reference secular artists. Don't read too much into that.

And one last note here in the Psalms, and especially for shorter ones, I encourage you to read the whole psalm before and after the audio guide.

In the Through the Word app, you can adjust the settings to Bible, Guide, Bible. And that's it. Time to dive in. Melanie, Peyton, and I are ready to roll. We'll see you on the journey.

Psalm 1 | Two Paths, Two Destinations

Welcome, my friends, to Psalm 1. We stand on blessed ground at one of the most beloved songs in the history of the world. We stand at a crossroads for the Psalter opens with a rather uncommon psalm with two paths.

Psalm 1 is not praise nor is it lament or even prayer. It is a wisdom psalm, an observation with insight meant for instruction. Put the words to music, and I hear a folk song, the sort of tune that carries profound wisdom and great simplicity passed down for generations and sung with a voice that bears insight and integrity.

I found stirring renditions of Psalm 1 by sons of Korah and Poor Bishop Hooper. Saint Jerome called Psalm 1 the divine preface to the Psalter, ordained by the Spirit to prepare us for what's ahead. We stand now at the trailhead of a grand journey, and our guide calls us to look and consider the way ahead. For right from the start, two paths diverge, and to help us choose the right path, he calls our attention to those who tread upon each of them to see their walk and consider their destination.

We begin at verse 1 "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on His law day and night." The psalm opens, and the Psalter with it, with "blessed." It's a rich word in Hebrew, chock full of meaning and feeling. A bright and joyous word. Blessed can be loosely translated "how happy," but it also carries the sense of receiving a gift from God. It's the sort of happiness that comes when you get the perfect gift, better yet, when you recognize your whole life as a gift.

The word is plural here as in “so blessed.” Just look at how happy that guy is. Now the psalm opens with “blessed,” then describes all that the Blessed One does not do. Odd but clever. The psalmist is catching our eyes looking down the wrong path, heading us off. The Blessed One, you won’t find him walking with the wicked, standing with sinners, or sitting with mockers. Now it doesn’t say the blessed man avoids the very presence of sinners. Rather, this man simply does not walk in step with.

The Hebrew there indicates he doesn’t take their advice, doesn’t march to their drum. Now look further down the road and notice the poetic brilliance of verse 1. Three parallel phrases progress in steps down the wicked path. Walk, stand, sit. Walking is listening, coming alongside. Standing is acceptance, fitting in. The Hebrew word also means statue, fixed in place. The sinner stands obstinate. Finally, sitting is entrenched. In Israel, sitting was the posture of the teacher. The mocker sits as if he is professor to all who pass, ridiculing the godly and scoffing their wisdom. Blessed is that rare one who does not. Theirs is another path.

Verse 2. “But whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on His law day and night.” Delight is a great word similar to joy, but with more wonder in the eyes like a kid holding a sparkler for the first time. Delight captures the attention, lightens the heart, and fascinates the mind. And delight is always taken in something: a hobby or interest, a beautiful curiosity about something. We all have them.

I love numbers. I add, subtract and multiply for pure fun. Once when playing scorekeeper for a card game, I asked if anyone else got a little rush of joy when numbers add up to an answer. They looked at me like I enjoyed the

taste of sand, but I love it. Now the very useful thing about delight is that it is a stunningly effective path to learning and discovery—perhaps the most effective. Rote memorization and enforced homework work, but they're not nearly as effective. Give a child a love for reading, and he's set. Teach her the joy of numbers and she's unstoppable. Here at the outset of Psalms, the poet is not commanding us to enforce Bible study drills. He's inviting us to delight in God's Word.

I know it says law, but the Hebrew word for law is Torah. Its root meaning is instruction, but its broader meaning is law, direction, and also refers to the first five books of and the foundation to the whole Bible. The one who created us gave us a way to live, instructions for life— Torah. So a fuller definition of Torah is God's way and God's will for us as revealed in God's Word. And often the Psalms are just that—meditations on and reflections of Torah.

Did you ever know someone who loves poring over instructions for a gadget or software or machine until their skill with it is amazing? That's the idea here. The Blessed One loves poring over God's instruction book for life, meditating on it day and night. The Hebrew word for meditate is the same word for chewing the cud. Picture a cow or a camel. To meditate on words is to roll them around in your mind, consider various perspectives, and hear them over and over again with fresh ears. That's the brilliance of setting words to rhythm and meter.

I listened today to Psalm 1 set to music, and the refrains stirred in my mind long after. Do you see the Blessed One upon their path, delighting, meditating. In verse 3 that person is "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do

prosper.” The picture is beautiful and vivid—a great tree spreading wide and thriving in health. In the Bible, trees are the imagery of life and of life’s source. This blessed person is like a grand tree, healthy and strong, because its roots have found the steady water of a stream. It bears fruit, offering nourishment to others, fulfilling its purpose. Its leaf does not wither. Stout leaves come from nourished roots, the result of all that delighting and meditating. Whatever they do prospers.

Do you know what it’s like to plant something—a tree or a garden—and just hope for the best? Yet some folks have a knack for it. In America, we call it a green thumb, that magic touch that makes plants thrive. Of course, it isn’t magic. It’s knowledge and skill diligently applied. This blessed person in Psalm 1 has a green thumb for life. The skills learned from God’s Word make life prosper.

In verse 4, the music turns sharply. It lowers, darkens. “Not so the wicked. They are like chaff that the wind blows away.” The imagery is again both vivid and concise, almost jarring. It pictures a threshing floor after grain is harvested. Great bundles of grain have been gathered, but much of it is not consumable. Threshing is the process of separating with the help of the wind.

The farmer takes a large winnowing fork and lifts the grain into the air, tossing it into a breeze. The good stuff—the edible grain—has more weight, more substance. It falls. The worthless stuff—the chaff—is light. Think corn husks, but smaller. The wind catches the chaff and carries it away, separated and gone. As we gaze upon the two paths before us, the psalmist calls us to see it. The fruit of righteous living has weight, substance that endures. The Bible calls that glory, but the works of the godless bear no enduring fruit, no eternal

weight or lasting substance. The Bible calls that vanity. In God's threshing floor, they are chaff.

Verse 5. "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous." The psalm now lifts our gaze to the distant future, to the end of all paths, and the very last chapters of the whole Bible.

Judgment. This is God's threshing floor. And here the wicked will not stand. Did you notice the echo of verse 1? Sinners had their stand. But here at judgment in the assembly of the righteous, the great multitude of joyous worshipers gathered and washed clean by the blood of Christ, here the sinners cannot stand. And the final verse draws us back again to the fork in the road, the separating of the two paths.

Verse 6. "For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction." Look upon the two paths. See how many travel the one and how few the other. Jesus takes up this very image in His most famous sermon: "for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few."

The way to life may be difficult, but look closely. The Lord watches over it. So what about you? Which path will you take? Don't tell me. Answer to yourself.

This is your journey. To quote Robert Frost, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less traveled by. And that has made all the difference."

Psalm 2 | An Anthem of Hope in the Lord and His Messiah

Welcome, friends. Melanie Hurlbut here with Psalm 2 a psalm that paints an incredible picture of the Lord working together with His Son to bring His blessings to all nations and peoples.

In this second Psalm, through the Son's remarkable prayer and rule, we see the Lord's promise of life that is ascribed to the righteous individual in Psalm 1 now getting extended throughout the earth. It's breathtaking. And together, these combined visions of Psalm 1 and 2, a design to introduce the entire Psalter. This psalm's vision is panoramic in its scope and grandeur, reaching back all the way to God's plans in creation and all the way forward to God's plans in Christ. Incredible.

So let's jump on in and follow the psalmist as he describes just how this blessing of life becomes available to all the nations of the earth. The psalmist begins with a question in verse 1 "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?" Can you hear the psalmist's incredulity? The futile scheming of nations and peoples is immediately exposed as empty and fruitless. In this one opening question, Psalm one has already shown us the final destination of the way of the wicked. It leads to destruction. What a waste of precious life.

But how much more for whole nations and peoples, kings and rulers? No nation or people can live and prosper long in rebellion to the Lord. The last verse of this psalm also confirms it: "Your way, kings and rulers of the earth, will lead to your destruction." The Lord God is not going to sit by and let

earthly rulers destroy his good creation. The Lord's plans will prevail on the earth. But how? The psalmist watches in verse 2 as the kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles." Did you hear what these kings and rulers are saying? "Let us break their chains and throw off the shackles." They are rebelling against the Lord and rising up to throw off the rule of His anointed. They don't want their ways to be constrained in any way by the Lord.

So who is this Lord's anointed? When the psalm was first written, it was David anointed by Samuel as the man after God's own heart to rule Israel as its king. But by the time the Book of Psalms was arranged and edited into five books, it's at least five hundred years after David. During the fifth century BC, Israel is ruled by Persia, and there is no Davidic king on the throne.

Nonetheless, the editors placed this psalm front and center with Psalm 1 to lead faithful Jews in hope-filled worship and prayer. So after the Babylonian exile and the failure of the Davidic line, who would these Postexilic Jews look to as the Lord's anointed? We've got to stop here for a minute to take a look at this psalm's panoramic vision. We've got to look back, just as these post-exilic Jews did, to remember God's covenant with Abraham, Moses, and David.

In spite of their failure, these Jews fixed their hope on the Lord and on His covenant faithfulness. They took hold of the Lord's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 to send a future anointed son who would reign forever. Somehow they understood that this Son of David would pick up all the promises of God given to Israel through Abraham to bless the nations and carry those promises forward to their fulfillment. And so the Psalms place all their hope, prayers,

and worship on the Lord and this coming Davidic son. But the panoramic vision of this psalm also reaches five hundred years forward to the first century when Rome rules Judea and the world.

The early church understood this psalm to be speaking about Jesus. Peter and John in Acts 4, just threatened and released by the Jewish Council, turned to these verses to pray boldly for more power to proclaim the gospel with the Lord healing and performing signs and wonders in Jesus' name. And when they prayed, asking God to consider the ruler's threats, the Lord shook the place where they were meeting and filled them with the Holy Spirit and boldness. The Roman and Jewish rulers alike had conspired to crucify Jesus.

But in putting him to death, the Lord had accomplished precisely what these rulers had tried to prevent. So let's return our gaze to the psalm before us and listen to the Lord's response to their plots.

In verse 4, "the one enthroned in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them." I love this. This verse lifts our head and attunes our ears to the voice of the true King, our heavenly king. What's the Lord doing? This one enthroned in heaven? He's laughing. What is he laughing and scoffing at? The feeble attempts of earthly kings to thwart his plans being carried out on earth.

What can all this mean? What were the post-exilic Jews to make of this psalm and the Lord's heavenly laughter? How would singing and praying this psalm carry them through the devastatingly difficult times under Persia, Greece, and Rome and inspire them to faithfulness, hope, and prayer until the coming of their Messiah? We only have to stop for a minute to think of other kinds of anthems of hope sung by oppressed peoples during times of great adversity.

We can all look back in our cultures and nations to find them. In 1904, the Black American Methodist minister Charles Tindley wrote a hymn called “I’ll Overcome Some Day” to encourage faithfulness, hope, and perseverance for himself and his congregation. His father had been a slave, and by the time he wrote his hymn, it had only been a generation since Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. Blacks in America still faced incredible oppression. So he picked up the tune of a Negro spiritual from the Civil War and wrote these opening lines: “This world is one great battlefield with forces all arrayed. If in my heart I do not yield, I’ll overcome some day.” Sixty years later, these words were adapted and popularized during the Civil Rights Movement in the song “We Shall Overcome” by the likes of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez.

Psalm 2 does the same thing for the post-exilic Jews as they sing and pray for God to bring His kingdom and Messiah. This psalm focused on their Lord’s victory over the nations will help them persevere and hold on to hope. Their Lord not only scoffs at the Jews enemy’s futile attempts to thwart His plans, but also in verse 5, he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, “I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain. I will proclaim the Lord’s decree. He said to me, ‘You are my son. Today I have become your father.’”

Did you notice what the Lord does in His wrath? He installs His king on Zion. Enough with these imposter kings who resist God and His ways. The Lord himself will install His king, who like father, like son, will enforce God’s will on earth as it is in heaven. Isn’t that incredible? No wonder God laughed. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2 that none of the rulers of this age understood God’s mysterious wisdom, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. So again, with a panoramic sweep, we see from this psalm all the way

to Jesus, when through his crucifixion, confirmed at his resurrection and ascension, God installs Jesus as Lord and King, the earth's only rightful ruler.

And I love what comes next. What will be the Messiah's first official act as king? Let's take a look in verse 8. "Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth, your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron. You will dash them to pieces like pottery." What does the Father tell His Son to do as his first official act as king? Pray. He even tells His Son what to pray for—for those rebellious nations to become His inheritance.

Through prayer and the Messiah's rule, He will shatter the mold of Adam and reshape the nations, teaching them to obey His ways. If we turn our gaze again to Jesus, we can almost make Him out on the mountain, giving His apostles their great commission, telling them to go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all He commanded.

So what is the psalmist's advice to the earth's rulers? Verse 10. "Therefore you kings, be wise. Be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his son, or he will be angry, and your way will lead to your destruction. For his wrath can flare up in a moment."

What is the psalmist's advice? It's three commands. Serve the Lord, celebrate His rule, and kiss the son. The nations have been given a warning and an opportunity. They have the opportunity to receive a great gift. They can be the Lord's people. And he can be their God. They can enjoy His goodness that He offers them freely. Or if they refuse, they can remain on their dangerous and certain path towards destruction.

But for those who will welcome the Lord's rule, the Abrahamic promise has finally come to fulfillment. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him. So no matter what circumstances you find yourself in now, there are certain to be times ahead that like the post-exilic Jews, you will need an anthem of hope. A song of courage and perseverance with the promise of God's laughter, Jesus's prayer, and His rule that brings blessed refuge to all who worship him.

Remember, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. And He is with you until the end of the age.

Psalm 3 | You and God Against the World

Welcome back to Through the Word. I'm your host, Peyton Jones, and today we'll be in Psalm 3. Have you ever found yourself being blamed for everything? You know that you're innocent, but everyone else thinks you're guilty. It's a powerless feeling when it seems to be you against the world. And in those moments, it helps to know that God sees that God knows.

But what if everybody's saying you're in this predicament because God Himself was against you? That's what was happening with King David, who penned this psalm. He has nowhere else to turn but God. So in verse 1 he cries out, "Lord, how many are my foes? How many rise up against me?" How many? It felt like everyone. But it wasn't just anyone either.

David was older when he's writing this. He's conquered many kingdoms, earning peace for Israel. But then he sees Bathsheba bathing nude on the rooftop, and he must have her. That's another story for another day. But to get her, David commits murder to cover up his adultery. Then David's whole kingdom starts to unravel, starting with the pulling of a thread of David's family, which also starts to fall apart.

Then David's son Absalom, watching in the wings, starts the rumor that God isn't really with David anymore in verse 2, "Many are saying of me, 'God will not deliver him.'" Absalom, David's smooth-talking son, acts like a seedy politician standing at the door of the king's hall, getting the ear of everyone who had come to see David, telling them, "The king is too busy for you these days. But maybe I could sort out your problems. What do you need? Perhaps I can help you." But Absalom wasn't helping them. He wasn't even helping David. He was helping himself.

Slowly, he ingratiates himself into the hearts of David's loyal subjects, gaining their loyalty so that he could usurp the throne. Once again, David's on the run, just like he was before being made king when he was a threat to Saul. Now he's a threat to his own son. And that had to hurt, especially with the rumors flying that God was done with David, done with David because of his sin.

First there was the murder of Uriah, but then taking his wife Bathsheba. But that was many years ago. David had made other mistakes since then like numbering the people in a forbidden census that almost got the whole city of Jerusalem killed by a plague. No wonder it was so easy for Absalom to start that rumor, "God will not deliver him." Those rumors were flying, but David doesn't dwell on the rumors. He looks to the One who can shield him from the sticks and stones and the words that can surely hurt him.

Verse 3. "But You, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the one who lifts my head high." Did you catch it? Just two powerful little words, and the psalm swings around. Those two words—"but You"—like two small door hinges carrying a massive amount of weight. They swing David back around to face God. "But You, Lord, are a shield around me." You see, this wasn't the first time David has been on the run, needing God to be a shield and the lifter of his head. David's been here before.

When on the run from Saul. As a young man, David kept his faith and trusted that God would deliver him. And God did. But now, as an old man, David knows God can do this, but note that David says, "You are my glory." David has nothing he can glory in. He's busted up his life. There's plenty to throw stones at in most of our lives. "But let him who glory, glory that he knows me," says God in the Bible. And here David does. Verse 4. "I called to the Lord, and He answers me from his holy mountain."

David, by the way, is far from God's holy mountain, Mount Zion, the mount that Jerusalem is built on. David is back out in the wilderness again, roughing it in caves, sleeping under the stars. And just as he lays his head down to sleep, just like before, David calls out to the Lord in the night. And God doesn't just hear. "He answers me," says David. And whatever God says to David is personal to him. It soothes him as the weariness and exhaustion of the situation take him, and David finally gets some rest in verse 5 "I lie down and sleep. I wake again because the Lord sustains me."

In the morning. David opens his eyes, but doesn't take for granted that he's still alive. "I wake again because the Lord sustains me." David would normally be too afraid to fall asleep in case his hiding place was found. But David says, "The Lord sustains or keeps me." God's presence is like the hand of a mother upon the forehead when a child is sick. Soothing. David is not abandoned. He's sleeping under the watchful eye of his father.

My friend, every morning we awaken, we can have the confidence that God has kept us here for at least one more morning. And I'm not guaranteed tomorrow. And neither are you. But at least today was in God's plan for our life. Going into our day with that knowledge should give us a booster shot to say, "If God is for me, who can be against me?" That's the effect God's presence has on David as his faith surges with renewed confidence in verse 6 "I will not fear, though tens of thousands assail me on every side."

If the world is against David, it doesn't matter if David is against the world. What matters is if God is against David and He's not. God is for David. So let's do the math. You and I against the world equals one against eight billion, but you plus God equals no contest against that eight billion. You against the world equals certain defeat, but you plus God equals an undefeatable army.

David knows these incredible odds and calls upon his army of one in verse 7. “Arise, Lord, deliver me, my God. Strike all my enemies on the jaw. Break the teeth of the wicked.” David’s not messing around here. Strike my enemies on the jaw. Break their teeth. Knock them out, God! Whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait a second here. David, did you just pray for God to punch people and break their teeth?

Understandably, David’s a little hurt here. And that’s what I love about the Psalms. David here is being real with his feelings. He goes to God as he is, not waiting to be perfect. But notice where David tells God to strike them. Ah, on the mouth. Remember the gossip, the rumor mill, their wagging tongues? David’s being metaphorical here and asking God to silence their rumors.

“Arise,” David says. God has heard David, but more than hearing him, He’s answered him. But now he asks God not just to hear, not just to answer, but to act. And David closes in verse 8, “From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.” From the Lord comes deliverance, not from people. From the Lord. Nowhere else. And of course, at this point God was all David had. And at the end of the day, anything and everything can be taken from us at any moment—our job, our health, our loved ones, even our very lives. The only one in control of your circumstances and mine is God.

But I love that David brings it back to God’s people. God’s people had let him down. They doubted him. This psalm wasn’t about David’s love of being king because being king was difficult, and David probably wanted to chuck his crown in the river sometimes, but he was there to be a blessing to God’s people. And if that meant he had to take a few hits on the chin, David was always willing because David wasn’t alone.

A thousand years later, Jesus, our King, would hang on a cross and God's people would shout at him, "Let's see if God delivers Him." Jesus. Very similar to how they said God would not deliver David. Unlike David, Jesus would be innocent, and everyone would think Him abandoned and turn away from Him.

So if this is where you're at today—you against the world—just remember: sometimes that just means you're in good company.

Psalm 4 | Bedtime Prayer to Calm an Anxious Heart

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms, my friends. Today, the fourth psalm. A bedtime prayer. Verses 4 and 8 each indicate that the words here are to be offered unto God before bed, a short petition to set the heart at peace and the mind to trust in the Lord.

Do you know what it's like to lay down, to rest your body but your mind won't cooperate? David is troubled from the get-go, apparently by other people, people working hard to make him feel shame. Shame can weigh heavy on the heart and rob us of sleep. I picture David rolling out from the bed and landing his knees on the ground, elbows in front of him, searching for the words to get this deadweight burden out from his heart and up to the Lord. I've been there.

Yet this is more than a prayer. The opening instructions tell us, "For the director of music with stringed instruments, a Psalm of David." David wants his prayer set to music so he can repeat it. He wants a melody to learn in the day that will stay with him in the night hours. It's a useful trick. In your darker moments, the right song can rescue you from your own thoughts. The tune gets in, and the feelings follow. What does this psalm sound like? David says stringed instruments, and it's a lament. So I hear the deep cry of a cello or the lower notes of a lonely piano.

Yet the psalm also turns from lament to confidence and peace. The Psalms Project has a lovely rendition of Psalm 4, and Poor Bishop Hooper's rendition is stirring, almost haunting, though the words are somewhat adapted.

We begin at verse one: “Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.” There is desperation in those words—not hopelessness—but real and desperate need. Answer me when I call. I need to know that you hear me, Lord.

“My righteous God” is also translated “God of my Righteousness.” We shall see that David’s mind is troubled by people, people who do wrong. When the world is all wrong, anchor your mind on the one who is right, my righteous God. When your own heart is all wrong and guilt robs you of sleep, call out to the only one who became sin so that we could become the righteousness of God.

Back in verse one, “Give me relief from my distress.” This one is a stress prayer hoping to prevent stress dreams. David’s hurt is real, and he needs relief. “Have mercy on me and hear my prayer.” A request for mercy is one born of humility. “Please God. I don’t deserve you, but I need you.” Then, quite suddenly, David breaks from his prayer to speak to people, to the very ones whose words are bothering him.

Verse two: “How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?” Why break from prayer so soon? Have you ever had your prayers interrupted by memories of what someone else said? So has David. Their words taunt him, mock him. He breaks from prayer to shake them off. Look at his words. “How long?” David is tired of this. Will you people turn my glory into shame? Another translation says, “Insult my honor.”

It’s one thing to insult me, quite another to insult my honor. It’s what mockers do. They mess with you until they find the thing that matters to you. Then they

dig. It reminds me of a kid at the Catholic school where I taught math. One kid who took his faith seriously. The rest mocked him as “holy boy.” They would sneak porn in front of him on their phones. Why? Because they knew he didn’t want to sin. They knew he was different.

The irony of that story is how unsurprising it is. We all know that’s how boys are. Religious school or not, that’s how people are. Boys, girls, men, women, they mock faith. They see a godly person trying to live for glory and shame you for it. School bullies, street gangs, or just friends being stupid. Now, if you get a hard time for being self-righteous or judgmental, that’s different. You probably deserve it.

David’s not claiming to be sinless, but he’s trying to do right. Back in verse 2. “How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?” Now there’s a great picture. David defends himself by challenging them: “You mock me for seeking God, but you chase delusions.” Empty gods like power, money, pleasure. They’re worthless. All of them. How long until you see it? Selah.

Verse 3 “Know that the Lord has set apart His faithful servant for Himself. The Lord hears when I call to Him.” David takes on the mockers now with a steeled confidence. I see him kneeling for prayer, but glaring to the side, staring them down in his mind’s eye. He tells them off not with trash talk, but with truth. “Know this. God’s got me. The Lord set me apart. You mess with me, you mess with him. You may not fear me, but the one who has my back should shake you to your core.” He reminds them and reminds himself. “The Lord hears me when I call to him”—and that truth can put a thousand worries at bay and silence the words of a million mockers. I call, God hears.

Then in verse 4, with God’s presence real to David, his tone changes:

“Tremble and do not sin. When you are on your beds, search your hearts and

be silent.” Who is he talking to? Is David still challenging the faithless or now encouraging the faithful? Or maybe both. It’s the sort of lyric that sounds different each time you hear the song. Music does that. I’m guessing that David might have said the same—that the meaning grew over time and that ultimately he encouraged himself: “tremble and do not sin.”

The awareness of God’s presence changes the room. Tremble. Translators struggle over whether this is a fear of God sort of trembling or whether it ought to say, “be angry and do not sin,” as Paul quotes in Ephesians. I wonder if maybe all of those emotions might be mixed up here for David. Angry about the slander, angry about injustice, calling his enemies to tremble before God, and finding his own heart trembling in the Lord’s presence as well. “Tremble and do not sin. When you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.”

David is silencing his enemies and his own fears. I can almost see David putting this to music to remind himself, “I’ll sing this so that my frustration with them doesn’t bring out the worst in me.” Selah.

Verse 5. “Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord.” Again, I think this is spoken to his foes, but even more so to himself—do right and trust God. The wicked do wrong than bring worthless sacrifices to God with no intent of changing. I will not let my anger with them drive me to do the same. I will sacrifice to God rightly then trust Him for all the rest. The righteous sacrifice is Jesus, His life for me. My right sacrifice is living sacrifice, my life for Him.

In verse 6, his prayer turns back to God: “Many, Lord, are asking, ‘Who will bring us prosperity?’” The doubters have been challenging David’s faith. Their words haunt him. “You believe in a good God. Look around. Where’s the good?” David tells God about it and he prays, “Let the light of your face shine

on us. Fill my heart with joy when grain and new wine abound.” Now, every other translation makes this a declaration rather than request. “You have filled my heart with joy. Lord, when your face shines on me. My heart overflows.” They want to see prosperity. Lord, I have more joy right now, right here in your presence than they have on their best harvest day, their best day of the whole year. This is the reward after the lament. I didn’t give in to anger. I brought it to God, and I trusted God because He answers when I call. He answers, and now joy is mine once again.”

Verse 8. “In peace I will lie down and sleep for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.” A beautiful close: my heart at peace, time to sleep, God’s got me. This is the peace of a soul that has responded to Jesus’ call “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Good night, friends. Sleep well tonight.

Well, something to sing to myself as needed. I don’t have much of a singing voice, but here you go. “In your anger, do not sin. In your anger, do not sin. See the danger your heart is in. In your anger, do not sin. Just lay down in your bed. Don’t say something you’ll regret. You will not be overcome by the violent. Tremble before the Lord. Now your joy it is restored. Just search your heart and be silent.” [laughter] It’s as good as it gets.

Psalm 5 | A Good Song for Bad Times

Welcome back to Through the Word. Peyton Jones here, and today we'll be in Psalm 5. A good song for bad times. This is one of my favorites. Psalm 5 is a sad song, but sad songs say so much. Before David gets singing, he gets writing, dedicating this psalm to the Director of Music. Read the title: "For the Director of Music for pipes. A Psalm of David."

"For the Director of Music" could mean it's an instruction for this to be used for worship addressed to the director of worship at the temple perhaps. Or maybe David's dedicating this song to the director of all music, the one who gave David his inspiration, the one who invented music. Either way, David expects you to have your pipes ready. Any flautists out there? The title even tells us it's meant to be played on pipes. Whoa, that does sound kind of sad.

David wants us to listen to more than the music. He wants us to listen to his words—and not just us. He wants God to listen too. Verse 1. "Listen to my words, Lord, consider my lament." A lament is a complaint. But not just any kind of complaint. It's what you sing when your heart's breaking like a country music singer looking for an outlet or a man singing the blues. Perhaps his song is like a sad country western song where David, wrenching his heart, drips tears on the pages as he writes.

You can hear the somber flute playing a sad tune of verse 2, "Hear my cry for help, my king and my God, for to you I pray." David here doesn't feel like God is listening. I felt that way. And I'm sure you have too. Sometimes when you're in pain, you can feel that God must not care for you, or He'd never let you feel that kind of pain you do. Sometimes pain is disorienting. Heartache is

confusing. So David, desperate, tries to get God's attention as he takes up the flute and the song: "Hear my cry for help." He calls God "my King."

David knew what it meant to be king. People came to see him every day to plead their case with him because he was in power. He could help. But now David needs God to be his king, to hear him plead his own case.

Verse 3. "In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice. In the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly." Like those who waited outside the palace doors day after day on the outside looking in, waiting for the doors to open so David is waiting for God to open the doors to him, to listen to him.

David feels like he's outside the throne room of heaven, calling out to God to be heard. But David doesn't pray like someone throwing spaghetti to the wall, hoping something will stick. David says he waits expectantly. That's like someone praying for rain who brings an umbrella. He expects God to answer because he knows what kind of king God is.

And in verse 4 he tells him so: "For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome. The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong; you destroy those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, Lord, detest." But delights in the humble, kind people and defends them and takes up their case."

Verse 7. "But I, by your great love, can come into your house. In reverence I bow down toward your holy temple." After that long laundry list of other people's sins, David knows he's far from perfect. He's been arrogant. He's lied. He's also been wicked at some points. Therefore, he knows that it's only

by God's great love that he can come into God's house. So the great King David bows down reverently, in humility: "in reverence I bow down toward your holy temple."

And now, in verse 8, he makes his request: "Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies—make your way straight before me. What humility David shows here. Look at the humility that David continues to show: "Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness." So far, his confidence has been not in himself, but in God's love. And now it's in God's righteousness rather than his own.

The enemies here have David surrounded. "Lead me because of my enemies." David needs God to be his satellite navigation to keep him from misstepping. "Make your way straight before me." Saying "make your way straight before me" is like saying "let me see the path." If you've ever been lost on a hike, you know how easy it is to lose sight of the path. And the more you try to rely on your own sense of direction when you're lost, the more lost you become. David needs to get back on the path.

His enemies are a real threat. There's real danger here. David can't afford to mess around. How about you? Wouldn't life be so easy if it weren't about people? David is encountering the familiar people problems we all face. And like us, he doesn't quite know how to handle this situation—they or even himself. Have you ever been there? I'm sure you have that go to person on speed dial that you always call when you're in a bad situation to get wisdom on navigating those scenarios with difficult people. But for David, that person was God. "Make your way straight before me."

Verse 9 tells us a little more: “Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with malice. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongues they tell lies.” Their words can’t be trusted, but God’s can. Nothing they say is true. Their heart is filled with evil that when they open their throat to speak, death and disgustingness comes out. They’ve been telling lies about David.

But now David wants God to tell the truth about them. Verse 10: “Declare them guilty, O God.” They are guilty, but David isn’t done. “Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.” And then suddenly David switches his tune to something more upbeat in verse 11: “But let all those 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.”

Wait a second. Gladness? Joy? Rejoicing? Um, hey, David. This is supposed to be a lament. The flute, the dirge, the mournful tune, remember? You’re kind of breaking the mood here. But now we see that David is not only changed his tune; he’s changed his words. Now the pipes seem to be playing a victory song, one that swells and builds like a crashing of waves, not of sadness, but the waves of God’s love washing over him. “Let all who take refuge in you be glad.”

That made a difference. David has taken his refuge in God, and now he feels God’s spreading protection over him like a mother bird protecting her young. It’s a beautiful picture. “Let all who take refuge in you be glad. Let them ever sing for joy.” “Ever” means always. Even in the bad times. Even when things have not yet been resolved. Like David, we can remember God’s goodness to us in the midst of hard times. A good song for bad times.

David wants us to remember God is protecting us even when we can't feel it or when we can't see it. When we can't feel it or see it, we can still know it. And before the song ends, I can hear the tune change one more time, slowing to a meditative conclusion in verse 12: "Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with favor as with a shield."

David has God's blessing, God's favor. He's been surrounded with that favor as with a shield. He's safe in God's love despite his outward circumstances. David doesn't see everything he wants, but he knows that he has everything he needs. Like Paul, he can say, "cast down yet not forsaken." Having nothing yet possessing everything.

My friends, if you're in a place today where your heart is lamenting your circumstances, this song is for you. God hears your pain and hurt. He wants you to know that you can rejoice and be glad despite your pain and circumstances because God is in the midst of our pain, not denying it, negating it, not even correcting it as Christians might do, but hearing it, validating it. "You surround them with your favor as with a shield." And God's favor is a powerful reason for us to change our tune.

Psalm 6 | The Roar of the LORD's Unfailing Love

Welcome back, Through the Word. Melanie Hurlbut here as we dive into Psalm 6 on this remarkable journey through the psalms. In the introduction—Psalms 1 and 2—we've seen two paths open before us: one that leads to destruction and one that leads to life.

We caught a glimpse of the rebellion of the nations as they foolishly fight against God's plans being fulfilled on the earth. But we also heard the Lord's laughter as He installed His son on earth as king to call the nations to allegiance. Quite remarkably, the Lord offered the blessing of the Righteous One featured in Psalm 1 to all nations in Psalm 2 who will take refuge in him.

Then, as we entered Book One of the Psalms, we encountered David's prayers arising out of devastating conflict with his enemies—both with his own son Absalom, who led his countrymen in civil war, as well as with the surrounding idolatrous nations. David lumps them all together in sweeping terms such as "his foes," "the arrogant," "the wicked," and he prays for God to banish them for their sins and to bless the righteous. It's within this context that the opening of Psalm 6 takes us by surprise. And so it begins, "For the director of music. With stringed instruments. According to sheminith. A Psalm of David."

Now listen as David cries out to the Lord in verse 1 with an instrumental score in the background that we might not have expected: "Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath." Wow. Can you feel the huge emotional shift in the music from David's first few psalms? David doesn't give us any personal details here, but for the first time in these opening psalms,

David sees himself in danger of the Lord's anger and wrath. This is the first of seven penitential psalms in the Psalter, and David, convicted of his sin, knowing where the wrong path leads to destruction and death, cries out for help to the Lord.

I can hear one of my favorite Hans Zimmer soundtracks playing in the background here. Perhaps you know it. The eerie and evocative sounds from The Lion King when Simba and Nala encounter the smells of death as they enter the elephant's graveyard. Like them, David knows something is deeply wrong. He's going to need the Lord's help to escape this destination of the bad road he's chosen. But David also knows that in this sinful state, the Lord's holy anger or wrath could kill him. Have you ever found yourself in this terrifying place? You've been foolish. You've done something wrong. And that sick feeling in your gut fills you with a holy dread of the consequences, both immediate and longterm.

The sounds and smells of death are all around you. It's at times like these that what you really believe about the Lord is exposed. Where do you go? What do you do? What do you say? Do you keep foolishly going the wrong way? Or do you try to hide away in shame? David doesn't do either. Listen to David's deeply honest prayer. Verse 2. "Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint. Heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony." Did you hear David's two requests? "Have mercy on me, Lord. Heal me." David doesn't run from the Lord because of his sin. He runs to him. He cries out in weakness, "I am faint."

Acknowledging that his sin has left him painfully powerless and sick, David cries out for healing. We get the sense from David like Simba trying to scratch his way up the steep walls of the elephant's graveyard that if God doesn't

come to help him, his doom is sealed. Verse 3. “My soul is in deep anguish. How long, Lord? How long? Turn, Lord, and deliver me. Save me because of your unfailing love.” Now “anguish” is a strong word. Not only is David feeling physically sick, he is in mental and emotional pain. Listen to his three requests. Turn, Lord. Deliver me. Save me. The instrumental music here swells in intensity.

Where did David find the strength and courage to call out to the Lord in this desperate state? David prays, “Save me because of your unfailing love.” And this is where we see it: David’s deep faith and confidence in the Lord’s name. In fact, as we go through the Psalms, we will see the Lord’s name—Yahweh—is David’s constant meditation and motivation, compelling him to pray and empowering him to trust in God’s covenant-keeping love.

Just like the righteous man in Psalm 1, David shows himself to be a man who delights in God’s instruction. And as we go through David’s psalms, we catch a glimpse of David’s favorite parts of the Torah muddled with his fingerprints as he returns to them again and again. And here it is. David prays from Exodus 34:6 & 7—the place where Yahweh taught Moses to pray for the idolatrous Israelites all those years before.

So let’s stop the music here just for a minute because this is really important, and it’s something we often miss as we read through the Old Testament because we’re conditioned to think of the Lord’s name Yahweh as synonymous with the phrase the “I Am that I Am” from Exodus chapter 3. Now that’s true, but there’s so much more to it than that.

The Lord's name revealed in that early chapter in Exodus is incomplete. It's better for us to think of it as written with an ellipsis. You know, the dot, dot, dot coming after it that leaves us waiting for what comes next. Imagine Moses saying, "Okay, God, so you're the 'I Am that I Am,' are you? Could you elaborate, please? The 'I Am that I Am' what?" And that's exactly what God reveals to Moses as he journeys with him intimately and profoundly, through Israel's monumental failure, through intercession, to the Exodus climax when God's Spirit fills the tabernacle to dwell in their midst.

It's against this backdrop of Israel's failure that God's character is revealed. Remember the drama? Moses was up the mountain to ratify the covenant while the Israelites below with no capacity to trust in a God they can't see built and worshiped the golden calf jeopardizing God's entire salvation plan but refusing to let go. Moses had pressed into God and learned to pray as never before crying out, "Lord, show me your glory!" The Lord revealed to Moses what he had been waiting for—the glorious what of His name.

This is so good that we just have to stop to listen to this here. It's rich and beautiful like worshiping to Cory Asbury's song, "Reckless Love." The Lord made His goodness pass before Moses and proclaimed His name the Lord, the "I Am that I Am," the "compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin, yet not leaving the guilty unpunished." And immediately Moses bowed his head and worshiped and prayed, "Lord, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us for your inheritance" like the prayer we heard the Messiah pray for all nations in Psalm 2.

David's confidence even in the darkest of times, even when he himself is the problem, is right here in this glorious refrain that sings the what of the Lord's name. And so David prays audaciously, learning from Moses, "Save me because of your unfailing love."

Verse 5. Among the dead no one proclaims your name. Who praises you from the grave? I am worn out from my 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."

But if David is so confident in Yahweh's character, why this deep anguish? Why does he wear himself out with groaning and flood his bed with tears? Let's turn back up the Hans Zimmer soundtrack again from the Lion King's elephant graveyard scene to help us. Can you hear the eerie soundtrack we listen to at the beginning turn frantic as Simba and Nala are surrounded and then chased by hyenas wanting to eat them for lunch? Something we forget so easily is that sin takes us somewhere on a path towards destruction, just like we were taught in Psalm 1, a path where enemies both within and without are waiting to eat us for lunch.

David needs God's salvation because of his foes. Bursting on the scene like Mufasa to rescue Simba, David suddenly lifts up his voice, and we hear joined with his voice the roar of the Lord. Verse 8. "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." David has not held on to his sin. He's seen where it leads. He smelled death all around him, and he's seen his foes surround him. And what has he done? He has cried out to the Lord of unfailing

love, to the glorious God who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin, and David has been heard with confidence.

He finishes this penitential psalm in verse 10, proclaiming, “All my enemies will be overwhelmed with shame and anguish; they will turn back and suddenly be put to shame.” The Lion of Judah has fought on David’s behalf, and like the hyenas hightailing it away from Mufasa, David can see his enemies turning tail to run.

It’s an amazing rescue of David by the Lord his God that shows the incredible glory of the Lord’s steadfast love. But it also teaches us how important it is to listen to and obey the words of the Lord. This psalm humbles me. How often do I stray foolishly, wanting to seek my own adventure instead of delighting in God’s way?

And when I do, what do I do? What will you do? David teaches us to cry out with all that is in us for the Lord’s salvation because of His unfailing love. So no matter what difficulty you’re facing whether caused by your own sin or that of others like Moses, like David, cry out and don’t stop crying out for the salvation you need until you hear the roar of the Lord’s steadfast love.

Psalm 7 | Vindicate Me, O Lord

Hello friends, and welcome to Psalm 7. This one is a prayer for rescue and for justice, for righteous judgment and for vindication. “Save and deliver me. Bring to an end the violence of the wicked.”

Have you ever prayed that prayer? Have you ever sung that prayer? There is a power in song, an ability to draw out the heart, to help us cry out to God from our anger, angst, and anguish. David knew that power. He wrote this psalm, and the opening words tell us that he sang it to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjamite. From the context, it appears that Cush has slandered David. Some of you know what it’s like to be slandered—falsely accused. You try to do right, and someone starts telling everyone else you did wrong. Suddenly, people are talking about you. Your reputation is on the line, your good name muddied.

Now that’s a rough trial for anyone, but for someone entrusted to lead like David, slander like that can undermine everything he does. So to read this psalm well, you’ve got to put your heart in that place—slandered, desperate for vindication. That’s an important word here in the psalms. See, slander is tricky. Try to defend yourself, and they just challenge you more. What you really need is someone who knows everything and who everyone trusts to step up and tell them you’re innocent. What you really want is for God to tell the world he didn’t do it. That’s vindication.

David steps up to the great judge of all the earth and asks him, “Vindicate me, Lord, according to my righteousness.” Okay. Pause there. Some of us have a serious problem with this one. David, you’re not righteous. None of us are

except Jesus, and you're not Him. This is going to come up repeatedly in Psalms, so let's deal with it now. Some scholars address the difficulty by agreeing Jesus is righteous and He took our sin so that we could become God's righteousness.

So when we pray in Jesus' name, we are righteous. Makes sense. Others take it a step further, asking the question, "How would this psalm sound if Jesus were the one praying it?" That's an intriguing challenge for every psalm. The New Testament often quotes the psalms and puts many of the words in Jesus' mouth as if He is the one speaking.

Prophetic passages work that way sometimes. And do you recall that Jesus was slandered? Have you ever thought about how that felt, standing there, bound and beaten, a spectacle for all, accusations hurled at him before the Sanhedrin, again before Pilate, mocked and ridiculed, accused of nonsense?

So I think that reading this from Jesus' view is valid. But I also think David's plea is valid on its own. C.S. Lewis offers a fantastic insight here in his *Reflections on the Psalms*—great book—Lewis points out that Christians tend to read references to justice and judgment differently than Jews. Christians often think first of God's final judgment, whereas Jews, particularly here in Psalms, are concerned with earthly judgment like a civil case where one person has wronged another.

To be righteous in God's final judgment is to be truly and completely good in God's sight. But to be righteous in a civil case simply means to be right and innocent in the matter at hand. David was certainly guilty on other counts, but

he did not do the things that Cush accused him of, and that matters. Earthly justice matters a great deal to God for one person and for all peoples.

Both will be considered in this psalm. So let's get into it. My soundtrack for study time was songs from the Civil Rights Movement. It's no coincidence that great movements of justice have had gospel songs for their anthems. The introductory words call this "a Shiggaion of David." Full disclosure I tried to come up with a joke about David getting "shiggy" with it, but it came out wrong every way I said it, including that one. Sorry, David. Sorry, listeners.

Verse 1. "Lord my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me, or they will tear me apart like a lion and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me." "Refuge" is a mighty word. It's used often here in Psalms. It's a very personal word for David. He was a hunted man. He knew precisely how it felt to hide silently in a cave, waiting and hoping for danger to pass. "Lord my God, I take refuge in you." David pours out a desperate cry. "Lord, they're tracking me down like lions ready to rip me to shreds." Slander threatens you—your name, your character shredded.

Verse 3 is a clue of what they accused him of: "Lord my God, if I have done this and there is guilt on my hands—if I have repaid my ally with evil or without cause have robbed my foe . . ." Now knowing that it was a Benjamite accusing David, this was probably related to King Saul. Most Benjamites sided with Saul in his rift with David, though David didn't even want a rift. Many held a grudge against David and spread lies to undermine his kingship. Here they likely accused him of betraying Saul, turning on his ally.

The reverse of the truth. “Lord, if I’m guilty . . .” Verse 5. “Then let my enemy pursue and overtake me; let him trample my life to the ground and make me sleep in the dust.” For David, loyalty is paramount. If I betrayed, take me out, God. I would deserve it.

Verse 6. “Arise, Lord, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies. Awake, my God; decree justice.” Watch David’s response carefully. His enemies rage against him. He doesn’t slander back. He doesn’t let anger get the best of him. Man’s anger does not produce God’s righteousness. He calls on God’s anger. “Arise, Lord. Awake, my God; decree justice.” Those words are crucial to the heart cry of the Psalms: “Lord, decree justice.”

Verse 7. “Let the assembled peoples gather around you, while you sit enthroned over them on high.” David’s imagination grows vivid here. Sick and tired of slander and gossip swaying opinions, he envisions all the peoples gathered to God’s throne. Let the Lord sit enthroned. Let him declare. Verse 8. “Let the Lord judge the peoples. Vindicate me, Lord, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High.” Now remember, David is not claiming to be sinless. He is claiming to be innocent in this matter.

That’s valid just as it’s valid for you to want your name cleared of accusations you didn’t do even though you’re not perfect. But I do wonder about this verse—if there isn’t a pre-echo of something greater, one that we cannot possibly earn or deserve, but nonetheless desire: to stand before God Almighty and be declared righteous, to have integrity, to fend off every slanderer, even our own guilty conscience. But maybe that’s my own heart reading into it.

For his part, David takes his plea to another lofty goal. Verse 9. “Bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure— you, the righteous God who probes minds and hearts.” Now there is a noble prayer: “end the violence.” The Hebrew word simply means “evil.” End it, Lord. And David looks to God. You are righteous. You probe minds and hearts. Slander and gossip can make it so hard to know who’s right, who’s fake, who’s true. God knows.

Verse 10. “My shield is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart.” I love that picture. Slander is like arrows. My shield is God. Just try to get through this. Verse 11. “God is a righteous judge, a God who displays 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.” David’s image of God may surprise you, but it is thoroughly biblical. I can’t help but wonder if David has been meditating on Exodus 15, Moses’ victory song. “The Lord is a warrior.” David is not seeking his own vengeance. He is looking to the true avenger. “‘Vengeance is mine,’ says the Lord, ‘I will repay.’”

And to further talk himself out of taking his own revenge, David reminds himself in verse 14: “whoever is pregnant with evil conceives trouble and gives birth to disillusionment. Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit they have made. The trouble they cause recoils on them; their violence comes down on their own heads.” David’s heart finds rest in the knowledge that evil deeds have a boomerang effect—justice. God does that. And with his heart at peace once again, David closes with verse 17: “I will give thanks to the Lord because of His righteousness; I will sing the praises of the name of the Lord Most High.”

Psalm 8 | Lost in Space, Lost in Worship

Welcome back to Through the Word. Peyton Jones here. And today I'll be your guide through Psalm chapter 8. "For the director of Music. According to gittith. A psalm of David." Psalm 8 is unique in the pantheon of the Psalms because it names the gittith as an instrument.

What's that? What's a gittith, you say? Funny enough, it fell out of popularity about 4,000 years ago, so it was kind of big before you were born. The gittith was a harp, a Philistinian harp, to be exact. And the Talmud tells us that David brought it back from his time as a mercenary general in the Philistine army. Why that's important is that it places this psalm early in David's life when he was still a young man. And we shouldn't be surprised because David's early hymns often speak of nature when he wasn't too far removed from being that shepherd boy who played the harp in the fields, singing to God to the bemusement of his flock.

Verse 1. "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants, you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger." Verse 1 and 2 give a hint that David is away from home, most likely in Philistia amongst his enemies, which is why he says, "through the praise of children and infants, you have established a stronghold against your enemies." David hears children laughing, babies crying, and hears those natural sounds as worship to the creator. Their praise is a stronghold against God's enemies, the very people that God is living among—the Philistines.

And there in the presence of his enemies, David is transported in his mind back to the temple, a replica of the heavens. In fact, the heavens are the ceiling of God's temple out in nature. As David looks up one night, far away from home, he opens his mouth in wonder like an infant himself. "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens." David can't get to the temple. He can't worship there. He's too far, but he can worship right where he's at. Have you ever been there?

Somewhere out in nature where you just had to simply stop and praise God for everything that your eyes were taking in? This morning I went for a sunrise walk along the docks of Nantucket Island in the crisp winter air, and the sky was strikingly beautiful. Every step was like an act of worship. Every eyeful brimmed with God's glory, and God's name was majestic in all the earth. "He has set His glory among the heavens," says David. No matter where you wander, you can wonder. Nature is God's cathedral, and that's just during the daylight.

But David here is under the stars where the universe shows off and galaxies come out to play in verse 3. "When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you set in place, what is mankind, that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" A philosopher once said that if the stars only came out every 100 years, the entire world would stop to gaze with mouths agape under the vault of stars, their light show we so take for granted, David looks up and his marvel turns to worship. "The heaven, the moon, the stars, the work of your fingers," David says knowing that the universe dripped from the fingertips of God without effort and the presence of the vastness of space— God's first creation—David wonders why God would even think of him at all.

If he felt like an infant before, he now feels like a fleck of stardust, insignificant and indistinguishable from the rest of creation. “What is mankind that you are mindful of them?”

That question is only partially answered in verse 5. “You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.” It doesn’t make sense. We’ve been made a little lower than the angels. We, sentient beings. We can’t fly. We can’t travel via quantum mechanics like angels can. We are bound by the laws of physics. Unlike them and for some reason unknown to David, mankind above the angels is crowned with glory and honor. In other words, we are made in the image of God Himself. One of the things that sets us apart from the animals, by the way, is the ability to worship.

You probably know that they’ve trained gorillas to use sign language, the most notable gorilla being named Koko. Yet Koko never gazed up at the heavens like David did here and question her own existence or her soul because Koko was not given the capacity to worship God. Her very existence like the rest of creation worships God, but she lacks the moral soul given to humans to serve God of her own free will. To this difference between us and the animals, David turns in verse 6. “You made them rulers over the work of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim in the paths of the seas.” Here David begins to understand. The animals are lower than me, yet I love them. They matter to me. I admire their beauty. And David’s eyes have shifted from his vertical gaze at the heavens to a horizontal gaze at his fellow creatures.

And in verse 9, he says, “Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” David here repeats his opening line, making a praise sandwich. He’s so overwhelmed by God’s majesty that it all points back to God’s name. Any majesty that you see out there in the wild in creation has God’s name attached to it. Like when an artist signs a painting, the heavens, the animals, even you, fearfully and wonderfully made, are signed with the artist’s signature.

His image stamped on your soul for you, my friend, were the most magnificent creation of all, someone made in the image of God. And the more majestic the art, the more majestic the artist. How majestic is your name, Lord, in all the earth.

Psalm 9 | The Avenger of Blood Remembers

Welcome again, friends, to the Book of Psalms. The ninth psalm is the first one devoted primarily to praise. You may have noticed a lot of lament thus far, yet the Psalter will move progressively toward praise. Picture the book like a grand symphony with various chord progressions all starting and returning here and again, weaving the symphony together. Think Dvorak's Ninth Symphony: badum bum bum bum.

In the psalms, praise will ring out stronger and stronger into a great crescendo of hallelujah. Thus far the sounds of lament and cries for justice have dominated. Remember that the book was compiled into this order in a time of restoration. At that time, lament resonated first, and the call for justice continues here, but the mood lifts dramatically.

Psalm 9 is a victory song. I hear the resilience of old gospel hymns and the confidence of the Rocky theme. The words here are both a proclamation of and a cry for God's justice. David sees the oppressed and afflicted and cries to God for deliverance and judgment. Let's dive in at verse 1. "I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High."

There is determination in David's words. "I will" is a decision, a commitment of his whole heart. I will sing praise. In the year that was my life's most painful, I wrestled with many doubts. I found myself in mental ruts, thought loops that worked like old tires spinning themselves deeper into the mud, and it brought out a version of me I didn't like. I finally realized that the choice was mine. I must choose to take every thought captive. So I did, and I said out loud, "I

choose hope. I choose faith. I choose joy. I choose love for me, for my family. I choose it.” That became my mantra every time darker moods took hold. That’s where I see David here: “I will give thanks. I will tell. I will rejoice. I will sing praise.” Come on, David, let’s hear that song, brother.

Verse 3. “My enemies.” Pause there. Quick reminder that David is not referring to the folks at work who annoy you. We all have personality conflicts. This is not that. When you read “my enemies,” picture first David’s life; his whole life was battle. His enemies tracked him down to destroy him. And second, recognize the greater battle—spiritual forces of evil attacked David because God chose him, because God promised a messiah through him. In the larger sense, these words belong to Christ. His enemies are the enemies—evil, oppression, hatred, death. David’s victory cry here is a pre-echo.

Okay, back to verse 3. “My enemies turn back; they stumble and perish before you. For you have upheld my right and my cause, sitting enthroned as the righteous judge.” Victory. David stands atop victory’s hill and beats his chest at the world. They came to destroy him. Now they flee. Not before him—before the Lord. God is enthroned. He upholds what is right not because I’m right, but because He is the righteous judge. He wins. There is a sense of fulfillment here to David’s plea in Psalm 7, but now it is much larger.

God has upheld the cause of the righteous. As you hear the song, you get the clear sense that David’s view from this hill carries him out of his own time to something far greater. This is the victory: justice over the wicked, freedom for the oppressed. Yet David sees it, and he wants us to see it—to climb Victory’s hill with him, beat our chest at the world and declare with God’s people we win. When all this is over, we win.

Verse 5. “You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; you have blotted out their name forever and ever.” There are memories from this life that must not endure. To my brothers and sisters who know trauma, you know this. God will wipe away every tear, and He will blot out the very names of the wicked.

Verse 6. “Endless ruin has overtaken my enemies, you have uprooted their cities; even the memory of them has perished.” Next, our eyes are lifted further on and further up to the closing chapters of Revelation’s glory. Verse 7. “The Lord reigns forever; He has established his throne for judgment.” This is the vision that strengthens every believing heart—all God’s children singing, “Glory, glory, hallelujah. He reigns forever.” His throne established. We will see it. And every wicked deed, every worker of evil will face judgment. David sees it now by faith.

Verse 8. “He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity.” How my heart longs to see it—to see the world ruled in righteousness, the people judged with equity. That’s my Lord. That’s how He rules. But what about now? What about the mess I’m in? Verse 9. “The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.” That verse is a powerhouse. God is refuge. He is safehouse, protection, and safety. Seek him. He will not forsake you. So what about them? The people who need refuge now? Believer, I hope this challenges you as it does me. This is our God, the one whose image we reflect. Righteousness, equity, refuge.

In my own country, we Christians often hold a rather negative attitude toward refugees. I’m not talking about the complexities of politics. I’m just challenging our attitude toward the oppressed. Perhaps we misread this verse like we

misread the passage about enemies, as if the Psalms are only written for me and my situation. What about them? Don't let me challenge you. Let the Word challenge you. Read carefully. "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed." If that's so, what should his people be? Selah.

Now David has been transfixed on seeing the Lord, but now he turns to us. He wants us to sing. Verse 11. "Sing the praises of the Lord, enthroned in Zion; proclaim among the nations what he has done. For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted." Now there's a title for a hero: avenger of blood. That's our God. Jesus is avenger. God's vengeance is not like ours—no blind rage or payback. The word "avenge" here means inquire and hold to account.

For a man like David, who saw more than his share of friends fall to the sword, it means a great deal to know that God calls every drop to account—every act of oppression, every injustice, every abuse of power, every drop of blood. He who avenges blood remembers. He does not ignore the cries of the afflicted. And that is worth singing. Now something I so appreciate about David, he can be so transfixed on seeing God's glory above that we forget that he's singing from a pit below.

Verse 13. "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 Daughter Zion, and there rejoice in your salvation." All this time he's standing in the pit, asking God to lift him up to victory's hill. Lift me up, Lord, so I can sing, so I can rejoice. Save me.

In verse 15, he rises. He sees it. "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 acts of justice; the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands."

Mired in a pit of persecution, David finds his strength in God's justice. Three different ways David describes the justice of God as simple, straightforward, getting what you give: dig your own pit, caught in your own net, snared by your own work. Justice. Your own cruelty lands on you. For some of us, this is great encouragement. For all of us, it's also a sobering warning.

The wicked go down to the realm of the dead—all the nations that forget God. But God will never forget the needy. The hope of the afflicted will never perish. Powerful contrast. The oppressors forget God, but God never forgets the oppressed. As I studied this psalm, I listened to the old soundtrack from Prince of Egypt, "Deliver Us." So good. I can almost picture David meditating on the Exodus story and writing this psalm as his own soundtrack.

The Lord hears the cry of the afflicted. Their hope will never perish. Evil perishes. The wicked perish. Cruelty and oppression perish. Hope endures. I choose hope. Verse 19. "Arise, Lord, do not let mortals triumph; let the nations be judged in your presence. Strike them with terror, Lord; let the nations know they are only mortal."

And so the Lord has lifted David from his pit to rise up upon that great hill, to see to the end, to God's final victory. Coming back to the present, David calls upon God. "Arise, Lord, and judge." Remind all those who act as if they are gods. Remind them they're human. They are mortal. All their power and cruelty ends. We stand on that hill. We win. Selah.

Psalm 10 | Why Are You Hiding Lord?

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms, everyone. The tenth psalm is a lament and a hard question—“Why, Lord?”—right from the start in verse 1: “Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” Have you ever asked that? Really have you asked God why He’s hiding?

“I need you now, God. So where are you?” If you haven’t asked, I hope the Psalms give you that freedom. Bring your hard questions to God. It’s how strong faith gets that way. “Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” Now that’s a valid question if it’s genuine. David genuinely wants a response because he does believe in God. Why are you hiding when we need you most?

Before we dig in, what does this psalm sound like? For me, it reminds me of a great scene from the movie *Last Holiday*, “Why me, Lord? In another genre, the song “Farther Along” by Josh Garrels captures some of the heart of this one. So what is bothering David so much?

He pours it out to the Lord in verse 2: “In his arrogance, the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts about the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord.” So this is the problem. The wicked man, the whole lot, the whole world full of them, their arrogance convinced of their own greatness, attacking the weak, scheming against them. That makes me angry—schemes to take advantage of the elderly, the poor, the migrant, the young.

In verse 3, he brags about it and blesses the greedy as if God honors greed. Now read carefully. This man is not an atheist. He doesn't disbelieve God. He reviles God. That means "despise with contempt." He treats God as worthless. Verse 4 captures him well: "In his pride the wicked man does not seek Him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God." Now there's a picture. His thoughts just ran out of space. No room for God—not a priority. We all know people like this. The practical atheist. They believe there's a God. But for all practical purposes, God doesn't affect their living. In my country, that might even be most people.

Verse 5. "His ways are always prosperous; your laws are rejected by him; he sneers at all his enemies." Wait a second. Psalm 1 said prosperity was for the godly person. What happened to "not so the wicked?" Well, that's exactly what David feels here. Why, Lord? Do you ever struggle when your world doesn't match up with the ideals of the Word? I do. David did. And that's what the Psalms are for—to wrestle through it with God.

Did you know you can do that? Did you know that you should do that? Verse 6. "He says to himself, 'Nothing will ever shake me.' He swears, 'No one will ever do me harm.' His mouth is full of lies and threat; trouble and evil are under his tongue." Now there's an evil not to be underestimated. Lies and threats are exceedingly destructive. The helpless live in fear as the wicked boast. When a powerful person threatens, there is an awful sense of dread. And when you see a helpless person intimidated, it just makes you angry.

Okay, I have to break to tell you a story. I was on a plane last week studying the Psalms on a long flight. The person next to me had a movie on their phone. I saw Denzel Washington on screen, and from the look of it, I figured it

was one of The Equalizer movies. Now, I haven't seen any of them because I'm a baby when it comes to screen violence, it just really affects me. But I recognized it, and I have the hardest time not looking at movies next to me on the plane. The whole setup for the movie was Denzel moving to this idyllic European town. Sweet people, gracious hospitality. But then thugs show up. Wicked men. They intimidate, threaten, extort, and get away with it. The people are powerless. And I have to tell you, it was so well done I could feel the righteous anger building up in me. I couldn't even hear the movie, but even just peeking at it makes you angry. Everything in you just cries for justice.

"Come on, somebody stop them!" I looked back at the psalm in front of me, and I realized that's exactly what David feels angry. Indignant. He wants justice. "Why, Lord, don't you do something?" And David is not in a movie. Injustice is real life. Look at verse 8: "He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent. His eyes watch in secret for his victims; like a lion in cover he lies in wait. 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."

Three times David uses the word "helpless" to describe the poor victims. Why is there no help? Why do the wicked get away with it? Where is the hero? Where is the Lord? Verse 1. "He says to himself, 'God will never notice; He covers His face and never sees.'" Here again, practical atheism. The wicked man believes God is real. He's just convinced God doesn't care. Now, David is not atheist nor is he the helpless. He's a warrior. But now he's confused.

Where is his warrior god when the helpless need him? There was a scene in the movie next to me—sorry, still peeking over—where Denzel is in a little cafe sitting in a corner. Two thugs walk in and begin intimidating a nice family. I think the dad is the local police or something. Also powerless. Their cruelty and arrogance is so bad. And you just see Denzel in the corner booth watching. I'm guessing it's the third movie because he's clearly trying to stay retired and stay out of it. And I kept trying not to peek, but everything in you just wants to shout at the screen to say, "Get up! Do something! Stop them!"

I share that story because David feels exactly that way toward God. Look at verse 12: "Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, oh 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?'" David's questions are genuine, but it's not clear whether he's asking God or challenging the wicked man. I kind of think it's both. I think David is in transition here from "Why, Lord, don't you act?" to "Why, wicked man, are you so foolish to believe that God won't act?"

I think David sees Denzel sitting in the corner, and he knows. I think he's shouting at the screen, "You guys picked the wrong cafe." Now, I'm not comparing Denzel with God. Just my feeling with David's feeling. In verse 14, his feeling becomes confident: "You, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless." A noble defiance awakens in David's heart. The wicked might be dumb enough to believe that God doesn't see, but I am not that stupid. They are not helpless whose helper is the Lord.

The tone shifts. “Why Lord?” is over. The final stanza is bold. This part reminds me of the song “Strong Enough to Save” by Tenth Avenue North. Great song.

Verse 15. “Break the arm of the wicked man; call the evildoer to account for his wickedness that would not otherwise be found out.” Get him, Lord. In that cafe scene, one of the thugs passes Denzel. Big mistake. Denzel grabs his arm, twists it, and slams his face to the table. The other thug starts to get up, and Denzel just points at him. Just points. Total control. You messed with the wrong guy. That is the heart of verse 15. You messed with the wrong God. Vengeance is his. He calls the evildoer to account.

16. “The Lord is King forever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.” David renews his faith by speaking what he knows to be true. The Lord is just. The Lord hears. Evil perishes. The Lord is king forever.

Read Psalm 10. This guide is dedicated to all those who dedicate their lives to defend and protect and who do it with integrity. You reflect the image of your maker. This is for you. Shout out to Trey Jones, my dear friend’s brother and my brother in the faith.

Side note. Psalms 9 and 10 are combined in some ancient Bibles and modern Catholic Bibles, which sets a different numbering for all the psalms from here to 148. And now you know why.

Psalm 11 | Always on the Run

Welcome back to Through the Word. I'm your host, Peyton Jones. And today we'll be worshiping with David in Psalm 11 through the tune of "Always on the Run" by Lenny Kravitz. Okay, that part's not serious. But despite David being on the run from Saul, he actually refuses to run. Spurgeon called this the psalm of the steadfast.

Let's listen to verse 1 to find out why. "In the Lord I have taken 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.'" David begins with a steadfast declaration, planting his feet firmly with a wide legged stance determined to make his stand: "In the Lord I take refuge."

David was determined to place his fate in the hands of God, not Saul or himself even if that meant that refusing to run meant that Saul would kill him. But wait, I thought David did run from Saul. Not really. David refused to go completely out of Saul's reach because he was innocent and didn't want to appear like a guilty man. Instead, David repeatedly gave himself into the hands of Saul, making his presence known when Saul slept at night, creeping into his camp, yet refusing to kill him.

Maybe you remember that from 1 and 2 Samuel. Appearing on a ledge, David once asked him, "Why do you pursue me? I have not wronged you" and yet had to dodge a spear when Saul's reply was, "No, I still want to kill you, David." David was in no panic. What he did do was make himself harder to kill by moving around, but it wasn't out of fear or lack of trust in God. Quite the

opposite. In verse 1, we hear the urging of David's friends and comrades, urging him, "Flee like a bird to your mountain," as if to say, "David, get out of Saul's reach. Go further away. Why do this dance with him?" But in that urging, David sees a trap. "How can you say this to me?"

Verse 2. "For look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart." You see, David being innocent will not run. A bird may fly, David says, but the archers will use that to take him down. What did David mean by that?

Something similar happened to Nehemiah years later when Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's enemies paid people to advise him to flee into the temple like a president heading to the underground bunker so that he would look afraid. This would cause people to lose their confidence in God, but Nehemiah recognized the snare and refused to walk into the trap. In the same way. David here recognizes that if he flees, he appears guilty, and his enemies will use it against him like archers shooting at a bird as it flies away. His enemies were not playing by the rules.

Verse 3. "'When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?'" Look, we've all been there. We're taking the high road. And they've forgotten that a high road even exists. We go high; they go low. They're ignoring the foundations or God's laws. The rules we all are meant to operate by. So David asks, "What can the righteous do?" How do you behave when you're playing by the rules and your enemies aren't? What do you do?

David doesn't know, but he knows in verse 4 God sees. "The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord is on His heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; His eyes examine them. The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, He hates with a passion. On the wicked He will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot."

Wow, mama, you actually said what? The Lord is going to do what? Hold on, Mama. Only Lenny Kravitz fans will appreciate that last line, but okay, so this isn't something to rejoice in necessarily. Fiery coals and burning sulfur. Scorching wind consuming your enemies. When James and John wanted to rain fire on the people who rejected them, Jesus laughed and called them sons of thunder. Today we might call them big boom and little boom. But David is comforted that the God of justice sees, that He is a God that repays all evil. And although Saul is on a very long leash, God is still holding that leash, and eventually everyone comes to the end of their tether.

The Lord examines them with His X-ray vision. His eyes from heaven's vantage point sees all, and He examines everyone. He sees David's heart too, trusting. He sees Saul's heart that Saul loves violence. And David takes comfort. God hates what Saul loves. God therefore will act, but in his own time. My friends, never fret when holding out against someone else's evil. The delay in God's acting is where the trusting God part really matters. In waiting, the rubber hits the road. Imagine this mournful song now taking an uptown beat. David concludes like Lenny Kravitz on the run with a funky sax solo of celebration despite still being on the run.

Truly, it's something to get up and dance about in verse 7. "For the Lord is righteous, He loves justice; and the upright will see His face." So when you

can't run, at least run away. You can worship. Sing, and dance that God is righteous even when others are not. You can praise God that He loves justice against those who love violence. And the upright, David says the upright will see His face.

Insert your name there. You will see God's face. Take the double meaning here. Either you see His face in death—that's the worst that could happen to David at this point—which on the other side of death, the sleep of death, you'll awake moments later to see the face of Him you love. And at that point, you'll actually thank your enemy. Or like David does here you'll see God's face in the midst of your trial, on the run, in the midst of their plots, schemes, and evil designs against you. And, my friends, seeing God's face more clearly than the evil faces contorted in rage against you, seeing His face makes all the difference. At least it did to David.

Psalm 12 | Help!

Welcome back to Through the Word. I'm your host, Peyton Jones, and today we will worship in Psalm chapter 12.

Have you ever heard a song about life and death that seems to have an angst to it because the stakes are high? Have you ever been in an emergency where there's just a step between you and death? When you're about to impact just before an accident, or you're slipping off the edge of a trail with a fall below, you don't pontificate or struggle to find the right word. The right word just blurts out of your mouth, help!

And that's what David blurts out at the beginning of Psalm 12, a psalm about words, dangerous words, words that can hurt us, and pure words that can protect us. Verse 1. "Help, Lord, for there's no one faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race." "Help, Lord"—those two words, brief yet powerful. David goes to the Lord whose words are faithful and true because no one, he says, is faithful anymore. No one in the human race.

But why does he say that? What does David mean here? Well, he unpacks it a little bit more in verse 2. "Everyone lies to their neighbor; they flatter with their lips, but harbor deception in their hearts." Okay, so David means their words can't be trusted. Everyone lies. They flatter and harbor deception in their two-faced hearts. Go back to verse 1 for a second: "For no one is faithful anymore; the loyal have vanished from the human race." Here in verse 2, he says, "Everyone lies." It's like David is giving up on humanity here. And maybe you felt like that before. You've been betrayed and in the bitter sting of being let down by people that you depended on, people you trusted who turned and

were fake and false, you just kind of give up. In those moments, it feels like we just can't trust them. And if we can't trust them, then who can we trust?

And with that question hanging in the air, David turns to the one he knows is always faithful, who doesn't lie, who doesn't flatter, who never harbors deception, but always speaks true. He turns to the Lord, the one whom David learned faithfulness from, the one he can turn to when he can't turn to anyone else.

Verse 3. "May the Lord silence all flattering lips and every boastful tongue." The heading of this psalm calls it a sheminith, which means male voices literally. Perhaps this was the closest thing you could get to a chant, almost like a rap. It sounds like men talking together in low, deep voices in punctuated equilibrium. They're talking a bunch, David says, but they're saying nothing—a bit like our social commentators these days. And David wants to silence them now.

And in this I can hear the music dramatically stopping, perhaps in the very moment where David says, "May the Lord silence all flattering lips." At this part of the song, the music stops on a dime, and then the male chanting builds to a crescendo through the first two verses and then suddenly here stops.

"May the Lord silence all flattering lips and every boastful tongue." Pause for dramatic effect. But then the music begins again, the cello being struck with strokes in a rhythm of talking as the voices make noise again, dramatically sounding off at verse 4. "Those who say, 'By our tongues we will prevail; our own lips will defend us—who is Lord over us?'" "Our own lips will defend us." Wow, these people really rely on their ability to talk themselves out of any and

every situation. All their lives they get by on being false, but that can only go so far before people eventually find you out. But even when people who lie are exposed in their lies, have you ever noticed they still try to talk their way out of it? They even think here they can talk their way out of things when it comes to God.

“Who is Lord over us?” they boast arrogantly. They imagine that when they appear before God, they’ll be able to stand or speak. But in a quivering mass of jelly, they’ll only be able to prostrate themselves, bowing the knee and neck to him, and the only words they’ll find whimpering out of their mouths to their own astonishment will be, “Jesus is Lord.”

In verse 5, they’ll get a taste of it when God rises up in the here and now. “‘Because the poor are plundered and the needy groan, I will now arise,’ says the Lord. ‘I will protect them from those who malign them.’” Those are the words of God. Now God has spoken into the psalm. He is faithful. And if this is what He says, this is what will be.

Verse 6. “And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold, refined seven times.” Note the contrast here between what God says and what His words mean versus the words of man. And here we see those words purified in a crucible. The hotter the fire, the more furious the flames, the more faithful God’s word shines out in the crucible. It’s been tested many times before—not just in your life, not just in David’s. And God always comes through on keeping His promises.

Let's look at a few examples of God keeping His word of judgment. They didn't believe that they'd be swept away in the Old Testament by the Babylonian kingdom until it happened, and they were dragged away. Then there was AD 70. Jesus had predicted the destruction of the temple. Again, they didn't believe it until one stone was taken off another just like Jesus said.

There are many instances in David's own life, and now maybe you can think of some occurrences in your own life where God was proven right and every man a liar. David's strength here is that he trusts God's words personally. They stand out to him with flawless purity against the sewage being spewed by the human race, a pure drop in a sea of noise.

And this brings David to declare in verse 7, "You, Lord, will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked, who freely strut about when what is vile is honored by the human race." Huh? Sounds like our time today. David knows that God's word will keep him secure even if it doesn't change his current circumstances or what people do. And that's a tough one. Most of us would love the world around us to conform to God's standards.

Instead, like David, we see them freely strutting about honoring vileness. David includes the entire human race here because it's not just a cultural problem after all. It is a human problem. It's what happens when we reject God's Word and fill the vacuum with our own.

So, friends, thanks for joining me today to listen to God's words and to draw encouragement and strength from what He says.

And as one author wrote, "We read to know we are not alone." David wasn't alone. And you're not alone either, my friend. God is here. God knows. God sees. And God has spoken. And the words of men will not be the final word.

Psalm 13 | How Long, Lord?

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms, my friends. The thirteenth is a lament. “How long, Lord?” A psalm for the lonely, for the abandoned, for the forgotten. More precisely, it’s for the believer who is forgotten by God.

I know, I know. The Lord never forgets his people. He will never leave you nor forsake you. I know that you know that. But right now, in this psalm, our friend David doesn’t feel that. He’s a believer, a man after God’s own heart no less, and he feels forgotten. Take a look at verse 1. “How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” Now for some of us well-meaning friends trying to help David, let me stop us before we start.

We might want to fix him, you know, make it better. Encouragement is good. But when good intentions cross over into depression shaming, we’re not helping. If we make them feel like a lesser Christian because they’re depressed, we’re making it worse. And don’t do that to yourself either. Shame makes us hide, and hiding our feelings means we don’t process our feelings, and unprocessed feelings get stuck inside. The beauty and power of the psalms is the expressing of feelings—real feelings. Even wrong feelings are real feelings, and they won’t get right until we process them.

The Psalms help us process. Look at the top of the psalm. It’s right there: “For the Director of Music.” Not only did David feel it, he put it to song and kept it. Then he sent it to the worship director so everyone could sing it together to God. And the Holy Spirit saw fit to ordain this psalm for Scripture for us. This is Bible.

David feels abandoned by God like it will never end. He sings it, and God saved it for us. Amazing. He saves every tear, doesn't he? What does this psalm sound like to me? There's a classic Rod Stewart song called "Seems Like a Long Time." It fits well here. Also, The Porter's Gate has a song called "Daughters of Zion," a beautiful and hopeful lament. So let's dig in.

Verse 1. "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" There are tears in those words, "How long, Lord?" Four times he repeats, "How long?" It's one thing to endure heartache, quite another to be stuck in it. Will you forget me forever? Forgotten is a pretty lousy feeling. We've all been there. I think we're most prone to feel it in our teen years. Friends leave you behind, and the pit grows in your heart that keeps telling you no one cares anymore.

Grow older, get some perspective. Things get better. But David is a grown man here. And it's not just friends who forgot him. "How long, Lord, will you forget me?" That's a whole different level of feeling forgotten. Unremembered by your maker. David felt it. A lot of believers have felt it. And have you ever considered that Jesus felt it? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It was terrible, and He felt it. Jesus can relate. That amazes me.

Now feelings are not always reality, but they are part of our real experience. And read closely. He feels forgotten like God is hiding His face. David went through some long struggles with enemies chasing him down for years. Even as king, he lost a son more than once. Trials like that can feel like God is hiding. Verse 2. "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

Wrestling with thoughts—anxiety thought pattern in downward spiral. New day, same sorrow. One is bad enough. But if this is going to be my everyday, come on, Lord, I just want to be done. And that enemy's triumph part, David feels defeated. You know that feeling? Losing a big game is one thing, but losing at life can just deflate you.

I remember a really hard year. Well, it was a hard decade really, but smack in the middle, it was just relentless. Have you ever heard the phrase “I can't win for losing”? That was like my theme song. Job, bills, mortgage, argument. If it could be lost, I lost it. Now this isn't about me, and I know plenty of you have stories that could melt the wax off mine. We all go through it one way or another, and no one has a monopoly on pain. I share mine because it was real, and reading through the psalms should be about reality. Hypothetical struggles only offer hypothetical hope. I want to know this stuff works on the real hurts.

Now, I do not have enemies in the same way that David did—violent enemies, war enemies. Our stories are all different, but the greatest enemy to reckon with in verses like this is the devil. Our enemy is real, and the spiritual forces of darkness will absolutely make it their aim to help you feel forgotten and defeated, especially when God has plans for you. Crazy part of my story—that year I felt so defeated, same year we launched Through the Word.

Seemed like nothing went my way. Looking back, those trials were vital to my faith story. But in the midst we just felt lost. I had plenty of promises from God. So does David. So do you. But those were so long ago, they felt forgotten. I felt forgotten. “How long, Lord?”

Verse 3. “Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death.” The middle stanza of the psalm is a desperate prayer. That’s what David does with his sorrow. He prays. “I need to know that you see me, Lord. I need to hear you respond. I need light so I can see. If you don’t come through, Lord, I could just close my eyes, fall asleep and die.” He’s not suicidal. He’s just done. I’m no expert, but that sounds a whole lot like depression to me.

Does it encourage you to know that David went through depression? It should. He’s a man of God after God’s heart. His struggle does not diminish that. “If you don’t come through God, I’ll just die.” And in verse 4: “And my enemy will say, ‘I have overcome him,’ and my foes will rejoice when I fall.” David is a fighter, a warrior, but right now he just can’t find the will to fight. Why bother? If you don’t come through, Lord, if you don’t come through. I don’t know how long David spent between verse 4 and verse 5. I don’t know how many times David repeated the first two stanzas when he sang the song.

I’m guessing some renditions had more repeats than others, but I do know this. The song doesn’t end there. Verse 5. “But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.” What a change. What a turnaround. But what changed his situation? Nope, not yet. David changed his mind, changed what he’s looking at. He started praying to God and in the process of pouring out his soul to the Lord, his eyes got fixed on God, and he realized, “I trust you, Lord. I trust in your unfailing love.”

Now, that little phrase translates one of the Bible’s most important Hebrew words: hesed. A 1535 English translation invented the word “loving-kindness” because we just don’t have a word to capture its depth. It’s the love of

God—part of his name in Exodus 34. It shows up 128 times in the Psalms. That's key. David trusts because he knows God's nature. His love will not fail.

Back in that dark year of trial, I held on to that phrase. I even started signing off emails with it: "Always in the unfailing love of Christ." I needed to say it for my own sake. Verse 5 again. "But I trust in your unfailing love. My heart rejoices in your salvation."

Final verse: "I will sing the Lord's praise, for He has been good to me." And there's that determination again. David makes a decision. I will. I will sing praise. I will sing to the Lord. I want to declare it. I want Him to hear it. Why? Look at my life—not just right now. Look at my whole life. I know He's been good to me. I know His promises. I know He will never leave me. I know He won't forsake me. I trust you, Lord. So if that's all true, why didn't we just start there?

Well, feelings don't work like that, and our faith is stronger for going through the process. If your feelings can relate to this psalm, you're in good company—David, Jesus, and countless more. If I could send you a song to respond to this one, there's a song by Switchfoot that nearly brings me to tears every time I hear it: "I Won't Let You Go." So powerful. That's my song for you. But first, my psalm for you is Psalm 13. "How long, Lord?" Revelation 6 answers, "Just a little longer." Hold on. Hold fast. He is coming quickly. His love will not fail.

Psalm 14 | Call Upon the LORD for His Salvation

Welcome back, friends, as we worship and pray with David today through Psalm 14.

The psalms never stop to amaze me, and as we learn to pray and sing them, we're joining our prayers to the prayers of the saints who've gone before us, joining a tradition that's been going on for at least 3,000 years since David lived in 1,000 B.C. Isn't that incredible? Think about it for a minute. We're also worshiping side by side with first-century believers, who Paul instructed in Ephesians 5 to sing and pray these psalms so that they could be immersed in the life of the spirit.

And everywhere people have called on the name of the Lord Jesus throughout the history of the church, these psalms have taught us how to pray, how to worship, how to be wise, how to stand firm in hope in the midst of evil times, how to do our part in our generation as God establishes His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. And Psalm 14 today is no different.

It's a psalm of deep longing, uttering cries from a heart that knows things on earth are meant to be different from all the wickedness we see and experience around us. It's a longing we all share. Deep in our bones like an old Bruce Cockburn song, there must be more. More love, more life—not more thoughtless cruelty. So let's jump on in and join our hearts and prayers with David today. And as we do, you might hear strains of another Bruce Cockburn song in the background playing "Rumors of Glory" as we long for the Lord's touch deep in our heart. The superscription reads, "For the director of music. Of David."

Now let's press the pause button here just for a minute for a quick word about the superscriptions of the psalms. They're ancient and inspired just like the psalms themselves. And while not everyone agrees about what they mean, the Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint, used by most Jews in Jesus's day, they had translated this phrase we read in the NIV as "to the choirmaster" to mean "to the conquering leader, or for the end times."

This means that most first-century Jews read all the psalms as if they pointed to the Messiah, not just a few of them. They prayed them and sang them not just as rumors of glory, but as promises of glory to be fulfilled by the coming Davidic son. I love this. Jesus prayed these prayers, and He claimed to be the answer to them—the one righteous human being who would finally deal with evil and bring God's salvation to Israel and through Israel to the world.

So with that great hope in mind, let's begin in verse 1. "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good." Wow. This is a pretty dark place to begin. But when people abandon God, it doesn't take long for human actions and relationships cut off from His life and love to rot as well. We start to be our own measure of good and evil. Soon we're all mixed up and in a sorry state, no longer able to tell what's right and good and true. But it doesn't go unnoticed.

Verse 2. "The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away; all have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one." Yahweh sees. He looks down from heaven on all mankind. He's looking at all the people he created and trying to find even one person—Gentile or Jew—who does good, who isn't corrupt and rotting from the inside out. But He doesn't

find even one. Can you feel the weight of that? It's devastating. There is no one who does good—not even one.

The Apostle Paul picks up this stinging indictment against Jews and Greeks in Romans chapter 3 to make his case that all humanity is infected with sin. Every mouth is stopped, and the whole world is held accountable to God. It's very clear as God looks down at the people He's created, that apart from Himself, there is no hope in sight.

Verse 4. "Do all these evildoers know nothing? They devour my people as though eating bread; they never call on the Lord." Now David is part of that all humanity and that no one who does good. But did you notice in this psalm, David seems to make a distinction here between these evildoers who were devouring people—who are they?—and the "my people who are being devoured." What's the difference between these two groups? Only one thing—evildoers devour people like bread. But David's people—Yahweh's people—don't. Instead, they call on the name of the Lord. This is telling.

Like Bruce Cockburn in his song "Rumors of Glory," we see the extremes of who humans can be, and in that distance some tensions born. What's going on? Fools and evildoers are stuck in a closed system. There's always a lack, always a competition for limited resources to meet their needs. They have no hope beyond the world that they live in and have built, and because they see no way out, they devour each other, eating up people as if they were bread. But God's people are different. Knowing humans are nothing and have nothing apart from Yahweh. What did David's people—God's people—do?

They call upon the Lord, trusting in His mercy and grace, His steadfast love towards humanity, calling upon Him to be their help and salvation. And this makes all the difference. Look at verse 5. “But there they are”—that’s the evildoers—“overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous.” What an incredible reversal. When we call upon Yahweh, we’re connected to a God bigger than ourselves. He doesn’t leave us alone. The tables are turned, and now it’s the evildoers who are filled with dread.

Read verse 6. “You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the Lord is their refuge.” David has looked at the foolishness of people who say in their heart that there is no God and seen it for what it is—a zero sum game. No one wins. But he’s also looked up and met the gaze of the Lord from heaven. He knows there is a God and not just any God, but Israel’s God—Yahweh—the Lord of steadfast love, and that knowledge stirs in David a deep longing that cries out, confident that his God will answer.

Verse 7. “Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!” That word “salvation” is Yeshua in Hebrew. David longs for and prays from the depth of his being for the coming of the promised Davidic Son and the salvation He will bring. “When the Lord restores His people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!”

As David closes this psalm, he is certain of God’s coming salvation, and we know God’s promise to be trustworthy. Yeshua—God’s salvation in Jesus—has come, and so we rejoice. Jesus is our conquering ruler. All authority in heaven and earth belongs to Him. So no matter what fools say in their hearts today as much as in David’s day, we look to Jesus to be our refuge from trouble, and we pray with confident hope and thanksgiving for the

Lord's promise of glory, His presence and power to help and save us when we cannot save ourselves.

Psalm 15 | Needed: A Righteous Man

Welcome, friends, to Psalm 15, an incredibly challenging psalm that is prayed and sung in response to the dilemma posed in Psalm 14 and the deep need for salvation to come out of Zion.

Let me explain. If you're like me, you weren't raised to read and pray and sing the psalms contextually, connecting them together to shape your thinking, your praying, and your worship. I was originally taught that the Book of Psalms was an anthology, organized much like a collection of hymns. But later in my Christian walk, I discovered the Psalter's intentional shape with the psalms placed not just into five books with an introduction in Psalms 1 and 2 and a conclusion in Psalms 146 to 150 but also stitched together with thematic seams between successive groups of psalms.

These themes explore problems that raise questions and shape quandaries that require Yahweh to give His divine response. These themes drive the Psalter forward wrestling with Yahweh for His intervention as Israel's only means of salvation. This is why the Psalms have pride of place as the prayer book of the faithful during the post-exilic period, as God's people reflected with Yahweh on the Torah and the prophets, the returned exiles wrestled with God over their ongoing captivity to ruling powers like Persia and Greece not to mention the problem of Israel's own unfaithfulness.

How would Yahweh keep His covenant promise of steadfast love to redeem Israel and through Israel to redeem the nations of the world? His own name and His own righteousness were at stake, along with the salvation of Israel and the world. But through the psalms, God's people learned to wrestle

unashamedly with this dilemma, calling God Himself to covenant faithfulness, ultimately finding hope in His name—Yahweh—alone. So with this in mind, let's dive in to Psalm 15. "A psalm of David."

Verse 1. "Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain?" Can you feel the emotional weight of this question? It arises out of the problem raised in Psalm 14 that the Apostle Paul also picks up in Romans 3 when the Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand any who seek God, what does He see? Psalm 14 told us that God sees all have turned away. All have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one. This is damning.

Does God really mean this—that even the best in Israel like Moses and David are corrupt and fail to do good? But yes, that's what the biblical story shows us. Moses wasn't able to enter the Promised Land because he hit the rock out of his own anger instead of speaking to it as God commanded. Likewise, King David failed when he chose adultery and murder instead of faithfulness to Yahweh. What then can be done?

So let's stop here for a minute to unpack Psalm 15's opening questions so we can feel the full force behind them. "Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?" What is this sacred tent? "Who may live on your holy mountain?" What is this holy mountain? Does it refer to Jerusalem where Solomon had built the Lord's temple to replace the tabernacle, the mobile tent of meeting that God had given Israel at Mount Sinai, another holy mountain of God? These are good places to start. But like signposts, they are intended to point backwards and forwards beyond themselves to something greater.

Pointing backwards, when we take a look at the designs of the tabernacle and temple, we see that they function as a miniature Garden of Eden. Once a year, through the redemptive intercession of the High Priest, that one Israelite priest, would symbolically ascend the original mountain of God to enter Eden and so connect God's people again with Yahweh in his garden dwelling. But this yearly liturgy also pointed forward to a time of restoration when all humanity would have access to God's presence on Eden's holy hill.

But Israel had failed to keep covenant with God, and the temple had been destroyed. And even after their return from Babylon, the Second Temple remained without the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, Jerusalem and the temple pointed forward like a broken signpost toward the day where somehow, in His faithfulness, Yahweh would do what He had promised. And so, at the end of Psalm 14, David had cried out, "Oh, that Yeshua—salvation—for Israel would come out of Zion!"

And so Psalm 15 picks up David's cry and becomes a prayer for the Lord's salvation to come out of Israel, for God to send a person who can dwell in Yahweh's sacred tent, who may live on Yahweh's holy mountain. And what sort of person will embody this salvation? Verse 2. "The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart." This is a high calling to live in the presence of God. Someone has to be good through and through. Truth has to be our substance, the essence of who we are.

Jesus Himself said that it is out of the heart that the mouth speaks, and that precisely is what defiles us because our hearts are impure. But David is talking about more than just not speaking lies.

Listen to verse 3. This person has to be someone “whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor and casts no slur on others.” David lets us know that this kind of person embodies truth so deeply that they speak honor of their neighbor, building right relationships in all they say and do so that their neighbor is never misrepresented before God or others. Wow. Are you starting to feel the weight of David’s questions? I am.

This psalm weighs me in the balance and finds me lacking the substantive weight of a person of truth. I long to dwell in God’s presence, but already this psalm leaves me utterly disqualified. You see, untruthfulness, like all sin, enters our being and makes us flammable. And that’s dangerous because Deuteronomy 4 tells us that God is a consuming fire. Without truth in our inmost being, God’s very presence and life will consume us like flame consuming oil. This psalm awakens in me a holy fear and a reverence for the holiness of God.

But David continues. The person who may dwell in Yahweh’s sacred tent and live on Yahweh’s holy mountain is someone who, verse 4, “despises a vile person but honors those who fear the Lord.” David isn’t telling us to hate bad people, but he is talking about who we lift up as our heroes, who we tell proud stories about and give places of honor. Today Hollywood, Netflix, and our songs on Spotify tend to exalt anti-heroes—those who care nothing about right relationships with God or people. This can’t be if we want to dwell in the presence of God. We’ve got to love what he loves. We’ve got to be a person who keeps an oath even when it hurts and does not change their mind, who lends money to the poor without interest and who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.

Truth. Fear of the Lord. Trustworthiness. Dependability. Keeping our word. Caring for the poor. Upholding justice. These are the things that characterize those who are able to dwell in the Lord's presence. David says, "Whoever does these things will never be shaken."

I don't know about you, but I am undone by this psalm. I am shaken. I long for all these things to characterize me. But the truth is I'm still a mixture. I've grown in character over the years, but to my shame, I cannot say that I embody them completely with my whole heart. And so again with David, I cry out as he did in Psalm 14, "Oh, that Yeshua— salvation—for Israel would come out of Zion." And Yahweh has heard David and all Israel's cry.

Yeshua is Jesus' Hebrew name. He is our salvation. He is the one righteous man, the first human being who, through His resurrection and ascension, now dwells with God on His holy hill. In Jesus we find our refuge and our hope.

And so I sing with Matt Maher, "Lord, I need you. Oh, I need you. Where sin runs deep, your grace is more. Where grace is found is where you are. And where you are, Lord, I am free. Holiness is Christ in me. My one defense. My righteousness. Oh, God, how I need you."

Psalm 16 | The Good Life

Welcome back to Through the Word. Psalm 16 today. And you probably agree that it's a perfect day for a miktam.

Wait, what's a miktam? You don't know? Well, it's straight from the title: "A miktam of David." We don't have an exact English translation of the word, but it can be translated to mean one of three things. Number one, a jewel or something precious. Number two, something dug for. Or three, something hidden. Psalm 16, though, seems to be talking about all three. The more you dig for its hidden riches, the more it rewards you with precious gems.

Each verse in Psalm 16 is its own treasure, and the deeper you go, the more you're rewarded. If you've ever had a friend that you see from across the room and they smile, wink, or nod at you to let you know they see you, this is how this psalm has always turned up in my life to let me know God is there.

And David needed to know God was there for him in verse 1. "Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge." That's the theme of the entire psalm right there. David has taken refuge in God, not just in a particular circumstance, but for his entire life. Here David is banking on God. He's putting all of his eggs in one basket. He's placed the entirety of his life in God—his dreams, goals, aspirations, and hopes. He's bet all of his money on God, trusting it will pay off. "Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge."

Let's look at verse 2. "I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.'" Can you say this? I mean, really say this because until you can, you'll keep trying to find good outside of God. But David says, "Lord,

you are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.” I remember my friend’s dog running away all the time. They were good owners. They fed the dog, loved the dog, and gave it a fantastic life. But the moment that gate or front door was open, that dog bolted, convinced that something better lay on the other side of that door. How long has it taken us to be convinced that there is no good for us outside of God?

David looks at those who get it, others who value God as their treasure too and in verse 3 and 4 says, “I say of the holy people who are in the land, ‘They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.’ Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take their names on my lips.”

David feels a deep kinship to those who take delight in God, and he delights in them. But then he sees those who are running after other gods and notes that instead of being satisfied like he is, they’ll just suffer more and more. Those that run after other gods will suffer more and more.

Back to my friend’s dog that used to bolt outside that day, there was a day he bolted out the door into the street and right under the front tire of a car. He lived, but he couldn’t really run after that. Skippy couldn’t skip any more. Unlike Skippy, God doesn’t want you to get hurt before you get convinced that God is all you need.

Verse 5. “Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.” There are benefits to valuing God above all else. David says, “You make my lot secure.” And by lot, he means “my

everything.” He says, “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.” What does David mean when he talks about the boundary lines? Think of a piece of land. It’s where you live. It’s everything you own within that boundary. And here it’s a picture for David’s entire life. I picture David looking around, counting his blessings and saying, “Life is good. It’s been good. As long as I stay close to God, it’s probably going to be good.”

In other words, David has a satisfied mind that reminds me of another song by Bob Dylan, a cover of an old blues song called “A Satisfied Mind,” and the lyrics go like this: “How many times have you heard someone say, ‘If I had his money I’d do things my way’? But little they know it’s so hard to find one rich man in ten with a satisfied mind. Once I was wading in fortune and fame, everything that I dreamed of to get a start in life’s game. But suddenly it happened. I lost every dime. But I’m richer by far with a satisfied mind. When my life is over and my time has run out, my friends and my loved ones I’ll leave there no doubt. But one thing for certain. When it comes my time, I’ll leave this old world with a satisfied mind.”

It wasn’t about what David had. It was about Who he had. That was the secret to his satisfied mind like Paul able to say, “I have learned the secret of contentment in any and every situation.” David and Paul both had the Lord. “You alone are my portion and my cup.” They could say that he was all they needed. Can we say that?

Listen to the benefits of being able to in verse 7. “I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night His heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart

is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also rest secure.” In God, David has his guidance. It’s unshakable. He rejoices. He rests secure. That’s what it feels like when God is your refuge. But then David goes further than anything in life and speaks of something even greater after death.

Verse 10. “Because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.” David believes in a resurrection here. David did see decay, and his bones did lay in dust. Yet David knows he will not be abandoned to the realm of the dead. David’s soul is in heaven with Christ right now today. But when Christ returns, his body will be resurrected and join his soul.

But David isn’t really speaking of himself here. No, he’s speaking of the best thing that God has to offer. The ultimate benefit of putting your trust and portion in God alone. He’s speaking of Jesus. By the way, we know this because this verse is used repeatedly in the New Testament about Jesus and as a fulfillment of this verse, a prophecy of Jesus. “Nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” The Holy One was a term for the Messiah. And because Christ rose from the dead, says Paul, so will we. So if Christ is risen, we will be too because God did not abandon His Holy One to the realm of the dead, and neither will He abandon us either.

In this sense, this psalm is a miktam, a hidden jewel, something you have to dig for a bit, a treasure hidden under the surface. In verse 11, David comes back to the here and now. “You make me to know the path of life; you fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

To quote the famous Welsh hymnist William Williams Pantycelyn, Jesus is greater than his blessings. He's greater than his grace. Any benefit you can find, Christian, it all comes back to Him. The path of life is only great because you share it with Him. And David has found his pot of gold here at the end of the rainbow. "You fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

My friend, what do you do with that? Look around today. Take stock of your life and say to yourself, "I am content. I have a satisfied mind. The boundaries have fallen to me in pleasant places."

Psalm 17 | God's Justice Will Vindicate the Righteous

Hello friends. Melanie here to welcome you to Psalm 17, “a prayer of David.” This prayer for justice arises out of David’s deep longing for the Lord to come and put the world right. Before we start, let’s situate this psalm in its literary context for a moment.

In Psalm 14, David has prayed for God to send his Yeshua—his salvation—to come out of Zion. In Psalm 15, he has prayed for a blameless human being who will be able to dwell with God on his holy mountain. And in Psalm 16, David has found refuge in the Lord’s promised Davidic son, the one we met in Psalm 2, so that somehow in him David could know the path through death into life in God’s presence. The psalms really are quite amazing. So now let’s join David in Psalm 17 as he lifts his earnest prayer for justice to the Lord.

Verse 1. “Hear me, Lord, my plea is just; listen to my cry. Hear my prayer—it does not rise from deceitful lips. Let my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right.” Did you catch David’s intense petition right from the start of his prayer? Three times he appeals to the Lord to hear and listen to his prayer with shameless audacity, confident in both the mercy and justice of Yahweh. David appeals to the Lord to look at his situation and to see what needs to be done to make things right.

Verse 3. “Though you probe my heart, though you examine me at night and test me, you will find that I have planned no evil; my mouth has not transgressed. Though people tried to bribe me, I have kept myself from the ways of the violent through what your lips have commanded. My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not stumbled.” This is amazing.

David is making some pretty bold claims about his commitment to walking in God's ways. Four times David tells God that I've planned no evil, my mouth has not transgressed, I have kept myself from the ways of the violent, my steps have held to your paths. What's going on here? Is David praying arrogantly like the Pharisee in the Luke 18 parable where Jesus commends the humble tax collector's prayer versus the self-righteous prayer of the Pharisee? Knowing David's life story, I used to really struggle with David's prayers in psalms like these.

That's where I found reading the psalms in sequence really helps. Remember in Psalm 6 we heard David cry out to God for mercy because of his own sin and then listen to him receive rescue from the Lord. In Psalm 14, David himself acknowledged that there is no one who does what is right nor seeks God. So what does David's prayer here reveal? David is showing us how to trust the Lord's character and lean into Him, taking God at His Word.

Throughout these psalms, we see David quickly and deeply receive Yahweh's forgiveness when he stumbles and sins. David doesn't wallow in guilt and shame, but instead he turns around, makes the necessary changes, and gets back to walking with God and learning to do what is right. David makes it clear that, like Psalm 1 teaches, he has committed himself not to walk in the counsel of the wicked but to delight himself in the Lord's instruction.

David is pursuing the Lord's promised blessing of life and is determined even when he messes up to commit again to hear and obey God's commands. Listen as David leans into the Lord and prays with confident expectation.

Verse 6. “I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer. Show me the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes.” I love this. David is not afraid to pray God’s promises and hold God to His word.

Yahweh has revealed Himself to Moses as the God who keeps steadfast love to those who love Him. So David boldly prays for the Lord to show that steadfast love to him right here, right now, in the middle of the unjust situation he’s facing. Listen as David describes his desperate circumstances.

Verse 8. “Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who are out to destroy me, from my mortal enemies who surround me. They close up their callous hearts and their mouths speak with arrogance. They’ve 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 fierce lion crouching in cover.”

What incredibly descriptive language. David feels like a hunted man, tracked down by the wicked who encircle him, lurking in ambush, ready to pounce and devour. It’s not hard to imagine David praying this during his wilderness years when Saul and his armies were hunting for him nor late in his reign when his son Absalom hunted for David to kill him and steal the throne.

But what about us? Our enemies can appear in many shapes and sizes. Some of you may need rescue from genuinely evil people who are pursuing your life for their own gain. For others, our enemies are more subtle like ubiquitous cultural spokesmen who lure our children and our friends away from the path of life with false promises of drugs, sex without consequences,

and an easy life. Even things like sickness, temptation, economic hardship, family challenges, anxiety and depression can be enemies that surround us and threaten to swallow us whole.

But David's prayer is changing the way I pray. Listen to David's commanding, almost impertinent prayer in verse 13. "Rise up, Lord, confront them, bring them down; with your sword rescue me from the wicked. By your hand save me from such people, Lord, from those of this world whose reward is in this life." The wicked don't understand that this age will come to an end. But God Himself will come as King and put His world right. But for the wicked, their only hope is in this world and what they can take for themselves.

Verse 14. "May what you have stored up for the wicked fill their bellies; may their children gorge themselves on it, and may there be leftovers for their little ones." David is not concerned here about being polite nor does he confuse unjust circumstances in his life for the will of God. Instead, he prays boldly for justice against his adversaries. Just like Jesus taught his disciples to pray, God will repay with evil all who do evil, bringing their own evil ways down upon their own heads.

Verse 15. "As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness." David is confident the Lord will answer his prayers and vindicate him, showing the world that he has walked in the Lord's path of life, he will awake—not just the next day but eventually from death through resurrection to see the Lord's Messiah face-to-face. As I close this psalm, I can hear one of my favorite Easter songs, "Graves into Gardens," playing in the background, and I'm certain David is singing along.

“Lord, there’s nothing better than you. You turn graves into gardens. You turn bones into armies. You turn seas into highways. You’re the only one who can.”

So as you read Psalm 17, let David’s prayer challenge you to shamelessly audacious prayer for God to come and deal with this world’s enemies, to vindicate His people, and to put His world right.

Psalm 18 | David's Tribute to the LORD

Welcome, Through the Word, to Psalm 18, a deeply historical psalm of David, also found in 2 Samuel 22. It's David's tribute to the Lord, a song of thanksgiving celebrating when, as the superscription tells us, "the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul."

He said, verse 1, "I love you, Lord, my strength." David's thanksgiving here bubbles up and over in deep love and appreciation for Yahweh the Lord. His prayers have been answered, and deliverance has come after a long obedience against impossible odds. Saul had pursued David relentlessly for seven or more years while he and his men had hidden in caves and towns in the wilderness.

Eventually, David had sought refuge among the Philistines, only to have Ziklag, the town given for he and his men to live in by the Philistine king, robbed and burned by Amalekites. In that moment, David had faced his darkest and most dangerous threat of all. First Samuel 30 tells us that David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him. Each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and his daughters.

David was surrounded by enemies: Saul and his armies, the Philistines, Amalekites, and now his own embittered men. But what David did next sets him apart. Bereft of friends, family, resources, home, and country, David found strength in Yahweh, his God. David tapped into the Lord as a source beyond himself. He was steadied in faith and hope, not just for himself but also for his men and for God's promises to Israel given when he was anointed king, and

as a result, David was miraculously able to recover all their wives, children, and belongings.

David's deep faith in the Lord was forged in this furnace of adversity. He trusted Yahweh and found Him faithful. So let's listen to David's tribute song to Yahweh's greatness, one that is so important the Scripture recounts it twice.

Verse 2. "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." Did you notice David stack up multiple images of strength—my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my shield, my horn, my stronghold? David wants to make something very clear. Man-made strength is insufficient. What he needed was only found in the source of strength itself—Yahweh. And clinging faithfully to the Lord made all the difference. Listen as David recounts his faith journey.

Verse 3. "I called to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I have been 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." David was not your Rambo-type warrior. He wasn't afraid to walk transparently dependent upon the Lord even when faced with many enemies. But in this passage four times, David tells us that there is one enemy which loomed larger than them all. It entangled, overwhelmed, coiled around, and confronted him.

What was it? Death. This is telling. We can see that David understands all his battles to be part of the primal battle of Genesis 3 against death that since their failure in the garden hangs over all fallen humanity. And what's more,

David's deliverance from his enemies acts as a signpost pointing forward to God's ultimate victory over that tyranny of death. So what did David do?

Verse 6. "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. "David called. He cried to his God for help. And his cry came before the Lord into His ears. David's language here evokes the Exodus when the Lord heard the cry of the Israelites and came down to deliver them from the hands of the Egyptians. So let's listen in as David expresses his deliverance in language like Moses used to celebrate Israel's Exodus and the Lord as the victorious warrior God.

Verse 7. "The earth trembled and quaked . . . the mountains shook. . . Smoke rose . . . consuming fire came from His mouth. . . He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under His feet. . . The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy, with great bolts of lightning He routed them. The valleys of the sea . . . were laid bare at your rebuke, Lord, at the blast of breath from your nostrils. He reached down . . . and drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy . . . who was too strong for me. . . But the Lord was my support. . . He rescued me because He delighted in me."

This is incredible. David understands his rescue from all his enemies and Saul in Exodus terms with Saul acting like Pharaoh, an unjust ruler enforcing his power through an alliance with death. But David as the Lord's anointed has committed himself to a different kind of allegiance to the Lord and to His ways.

Verse 20. “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 am not guilty of turning from my God. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, and to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the devious you show yourself shrewd.” For a long time, I didn’t know what to do with these verses. They terrified me because they seemed to require an unattainable blamelessness before the Lord.

And in Psalm 15 we did learn that only he who walks blamelessly and does what is right will dwell on the Lord’s holy hill. The psalms do reveal a desperate need for a righteous human being to rescue humanity from evil. But listen as David tells about where he has placed his hope.

Verse 30. “As for God, His way is perfect; The Lord’s word is flawless; He shields all who take refuge in him. For who is God besides the Lord? It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure. . . You make your saving help my shield, and your right hand sustains me; your help has made me great.” This is amazing. David understands that right relationship with God and others is necessary, and he sees the Lord, His words, and His ways as its source.

David recognizes that the Lord supplies the help and sustaining power for righteous living to all who take refuge in Him. What an incredible revelation of the Lord—God both upholds His justice and provides the help and strength for the righteousness that we need. From great distress and fear of death at the beginning of the psalm, now David is triumphant.

Verse 37. “I pursued my enemies and overtook them . . . I crushed them so that they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet.” Here again are echoes of Genesis 3. David’s allegiance to Yahweh has made him a partner with the promised deliverer, who crushes the serpent’s head and puts all enemies under His feet.

Verse 43. “You have delivered me from the attacks of the people; you have made me the head of nations. People I did not know now serve me, foreigners cower before me; as soon as they hear of me, they obey me. They all lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds.” This is quite remarkable. David proclaims that the Lord’s deliverance made him the head of nations, pointing expectantly to the fulfillment of Psalm 2 and the installment of God’s kingly son over the rulers of the earth.

This psalm seems to suggest that there are only two sides to the battle for earthly dominion—an allegiance with death seen in Saul and David’s other enemies or with Yahweh, the source of life and help and strength. And David has made his choice.

Verse 46. “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 a violent man you rescued me. Therefore I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing the praises of your name. He gives His king great victories; He shows unfailing love to his anointed, to David, and to his descendants forever.”

And what about us? To whom will we give our allegiance? And to what? Or to whom will we give glory as our source of life and help and strength?

Andre Crouch said it beautifully in his tribute song, "To God Be the Glory": "To God be the glory for the things He has done. By His blood, He has saved me. By His power, He has raised me. To God be the glory for the things He has done."

Psalm 19 | The Heavens Declare

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms, my friend. We have arrived at 19. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.”

This psalm is beauty, elegance, and power. Opening Psalm 19 is like driving out of the crowded city into wide, open space and that first moment when you stop, get out, and look up. The sky opens above you and never stops widening as you feel yourself shrinking and your heart stretching open, the heavens declare.

Back in verse 1. “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 reveal knowledge.” I have a little saying I keep. “Always remember to look up.” I use it to remind myself on those days when I’m doubting and questioning to stop and listen. It’s amazing how many questions get settled when I look up. The heavens pour forth speech.

What are the answers? I have no idea. I don’t speak Sky, but I get the distinct impression it’s saying a great deal about the glory of God. Glory means weightiness, substance that endures. In the Bible, it’s the opposite of vanity. This whole world is fleeting. Glory is eternal. I may not get all the answers, but that reminder does my heart a lot of good. David has been asking God, “Why, Lord? How long, Lord?”

In Psalm 19, he steps outside, looks up, and listens. For me, its feel is captured musically by a pair of songs by Switchfoot, “Stars” and “On Fire.”

Back here, verse 3. “They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” Step outside into open space. Look up and take it in. Do you ever wonder at it? The great big blue of it all. Glorious.

Want to know why it’s blue? Wavelengths. Sunlight is pure energy—photons traveling through space as waves in a vast array of wavelengths, a small section of which is visible light and each wavelength is a color. Now all those colors are streaming through space at 300,000,000 m/s. When sunshine hits our atmosphere, those waves bounce off tiny particles of sky. Short wavelengths bounce the most. Blue. More bouncing means more of them hit your eyes from all directions. All the others together make white and combined look up and it’s sky blue. Come evening time. Sunshine is traveling lower through more atmosphere. The blue bounces too much and dissipates.

Now the longer wavelengths come through yellow sun, and even longer oranges and reds bend through water droplets in evening clouds and light up your sky for the glory of sunset. Every sky is a wonder. Every moment and every viewpoint, a unique masterpiece never seen before or after. And there inside your gazing little eyes, specialized cone cells meticulously designed to receive the hundreds of trillions of photons per second that bombard each eye decipher every wavelength and translate them into electrical signals, a process that would require calculus faster than a supercomputer in every cell.

You have millions of them, and those cells send signals to your brain, which interprets it all into a glorious skyscape of color and beauty. Amazing. The fool says in his heart there is no God. Notice in his heart, not mind.

Back in verse 4. The heavens testify every day and everywhere on earth. Day after day and night after night they reveal. Speaking of night, starlight travels millions of light years just to sparkle up your eyes and deliver the message. Are you listening? The galaxies are testifying. David continues, "In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun." The phrasing there simply means that God made a dwelling for the sun, a place it belongs in space. The sun, the source of light, the source of life, of all the energy that flows through every creature and every ecosystem, God gave that sun a home, and David watches with awestruck wonder. The sunrise opens the day like a bridegroom kicking off a wedding. The sun treks across the sky like a champion runner running with joy.

Verse 6. "It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth." Then in verse seven, David jumps quite suddenly from the testimony of creation to the testimony of God's Word. The two testify together, yet their testimonies are distinct. Notice that creation testifies of God's glory. God is a title. But the law belongs to the Lord. The Hebrew there is His name, Yahweh, the "I am." Creation declares God's nature. Scripture reveals His name.

Verse 7. "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul." That verse says a lot more in Hebrew than we hear. Law is again Torah, God's will and God's way for us as revealed in God's Word. The Torah of the Lord is perfect, complete, flawless. "Of the Lord" is repeated six times. David is absolutely taken in because our creator has shown us a way to live that is right. He meditates upon it. It refreshes the soul. Refresh means turn back, restore to life. Peter says that we are "born again of imperishable seed, the living, enduring Word of God." That's David's experience here. God's word is

trustworthy, right, radiant. It is good. Meditate on that. The creator of all things, the God who designed our very being has revealed for us a right way to be and act and interact.

David long lamented the wrongness of the wicked. Now he looks up to heaven. Now he looks up to heaven and down to Scripture. Here is rightness; here is good. I well remember this experience in my own life. In my youth, I too lamented the hatred and greed and cruelty of the world. Then I discovered the Word. Proverbs caught me first—wisdom, right living. Then one day on lunch break, I was reading Romans 12, and I was struck—sincere love, others above self, serve joyfully, overcome evil with good, and I could feel my soul revived as I read. Imagine if people lived this way. This is right. This is good.

Back in verse 7. “The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.” That was true for me. I was simple, and I read God’s statutes, trusted, and found wisdom. Verse 8. “The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.” When the spirit awakened my soul to the Scriptures, I remember so distinctly that I could see like a blindfold was removed I wasn’t even aware of. I looked around, and we all had them, but now the Lord’s commands were radiant, shining.

Verse 9. “The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.” There is a purity cleansed from all the world’s wrongness in the fear of God, the respect for His instruction. And it endures. “The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.” And there it is—righteous. In a world of wrong, David has found what is right, and when you find that you value it.

In verse 10, “They are more precious than gold . . . sweeter than honey from the honeycomb.” David is prioritizing here. What a person values, they invest in—time, effort, cost— and a worthy investment pays off, David finds the payoff in verse 11. God’s commands offer warnings. They save us from hurt and heartache. In keeping them, there is great reward. David is all in. Let’s do this. This is the good life. But then another reality sets in.

Verse 12. “But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.” I too recall this realization. When I first discovered the Word, I became convinced that this is good and right. But I was also still pretty convinced that I was good and right, at least mostly—better than others anyway. But then what if I don’t see it? What if I’m nose blind to the stink of my own sin? Who can discern their own errors? David is on the verge of the third great revelation here. The first, God’s glory is evident. Second, God’s way is good. The third, I am not good. Isaiah saw it. He saw the Lord high and lifted up and replied, “Woe to me! I am ruined. I am unclean.” Peter knew it the moment he recognized Jesus’ true nature: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.”

Paul wrestled with it in Romans 7. He wrote, “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good. The law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me?” David is just beginning to realize just how desperately he needs it too. He’ll get there. It took me some time, but he makes a good start here.

Back in verse 12. “Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” David’s

closing prayer is a submission and a reliance upon the Lord. “My Rock”—that’s safety, stability. “My Redeemer”—that’s something different entirely. The redeemer is the one who buys back out of foreclosure, out of slavery to set right again, to set free. God’s creation shows us glory. God’s law shows us righteousness, but it takes God’s redemption to make us righteous and bring us to glory. Lord, this is for you—my Rock, my Redeemer.

Psalm 20 | Some Trust in Chariots

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms. The twentieth is a blessing Psalm. Beautiful concept, a blessing—words spoken aloud to speak hope for your future and vision for what's to come. More importantly, words to invoke the blessing and protection of the Lord over your life. “May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.”

You know who says words like that? A mom, one who cares, who spent the last couple decades being the one who answered the call for help, or a dad who devoted his life to protect and provide, now sending them out into the world. May the Lord answer you. May His name protect you now. As a dad with grown kids, I am well familiar—first at school, then college, work, wedding. It's your life now, son. May the Lord answer when you call. But there is another send-off quite different. And it is the occasion for this psalm—sending off to war.

Psalm 20 is a blessing for the warriors pronounced by those staying back—family, countrymen, priests. David wrote it, and he was well familiar. David's whole life was battle, and he wanted these words pronounced over his troops before each battle. So how do you prepare for battle? Now, you and I might picture the battles of work and life, and I think it's fair to apply this psalm at home, but with a humble and solemn respect for the very real wars fought by those for whom it was first written.

First, consider what it meant then. Then apply it now. And also a middle step. Consider what it meant to Jesus in His battle. Jesus is our warrior king. His war is against the very enemies of our souls. The New Testament applies

more passages from Psalms to Jesus' life than from any other book, and we're just two chapters away from the crucifixion psalm. So it makes sense to look for Messiah here and the leading up to the cross. The powers of darkness stood ready to vent their fury; the sin of the world and death itself prepared to destroy him.

And Isaiah 50 pictures Jesus setting His face like flint for the battle ahead. Indeed, this blessing fits well, and that also helps us for Jesus' battle is our battle, and in His victory and His alone, we win. So as you read, first picture the armies of ancient Israel ready to follow King David into battle. As the people gather to pray and to sing this blessing loud over their heroes and their king. Start with David, then consider Jesus, then apply it now. Got it? Let's dive in.

Verse 1. "May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you." Distress will come; you will call. May the Lord answer. Four times we will see that word. Our Lord does more than listen. He answers, and He protects. But look closely. "May the name of God protect." Name is personal. You know him. Name represents character. God revealed His name at Sinai: "The Lord, compassionate and gracious, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love, forgiving but also punishing the wicked"—all that is bound up in his name. When my kids were little, they all knew that in loud and crowded spaces, I didn't always respond to "Dad"—too noisy—but when they called my name, it worked every time.

Name is personal. "May the name of the God of Jacob protect you." You know him. He is faithful. Calling Him "God of Jacob" takes our relationship way

back, back before Israel even believed. God was always faithful even when we were not.

Verse 2. “May He send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion.” The sanctuary was God’s dwelling place on earth. God is everywhere, of course, but the warriors of Israel had a powerful reference point to anchor their faith, a reminder that the Lord dwells among them—the sanctuary. At the dedication of the temple, Solomon called upon the Lord to hear when His servant prays toward this place.

Verse 3. “May He remember all your sacrifices and accept your burnt offerings.” The sacrifices and offerings made the believer acceptable before God. They atoned for sin so the believer could approach the Lord. Without them, why bother asking for God’s help in battle if I am his enemy? I need the sacrifice. Now fast forwarding to the cross, this blessing prayer really hits home as Jesus headed to battle against death itself. The great hope of every believer was for the Father to accept Jesus’ sacrifice, and our great hope in every battle is for the Lord to remember Jesus’ sacrifice for us that we might be heard. Every offering is fulfilled in Christ. Yet it is quite powerful for me to picture the Old Testament warriors first and what those sacrifices meant to them.

Verse 4. “May He give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.” Now be careful with that one. Selfish desires and selfish plans have no place here. But if you’re laying your life down to walk into battle for God’s kingdom with selfless intent, this is absolutely for you. May He give you success. You know, it’s funny how I read the words differently now than I once did. As a younger man reading words like these, I pictured my own need. I

was the one heading to battle through life and serve the Lord. I'm older now. I still have plenty of battles, but reading the blessing now, I immediately think of my kids. My oldest is parenting, my son preparing for marriage and planning for mission far away, my youngest beginning college. This blessing speaks my heart for them.

Verse 5. "May we shout for joy over your victory and lift up our banners in the name of our God." As the peoples declare the blessing with one voice over their warriors heading out, they picture the return victory banners waving high in the wind and notice again banners in the name of our God— His glory, not ours. And then the seventh and final blessing. "May the Lord grant all your requests."

Then in verse 6, the voice changes quite literally. Thus far the peoples have sung the blessing together, but notice the wording change—no longer "we" but "I." In my mind's eye I see it—the warriors standing to receive the blessing facing the priests and the peoples, all proclaiming the blessing with loud voices, then a pause, a hush of anticipation, and one voice rings out—one voice to rally them all like William Wallace in Braveheart—a declaration. Verse 6. "Now this I know: The Lord gives victory to His anointed. He answers him from His heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of His right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm."

That one voice will echo in the hearts and minds of the warriors. "Now this I know." That's right. I do know. The Lord gives victory to His anointed. That's the King. God has chosen Him. The Lord has made Him victorious against all odds. We follow Him into battle, yet the word "anointed" in Hebrew is Messiah.

This psalm is about Jesus. He is our King. We follow Him into battle. And this I know—the Lord gives victory to His Messiah.

And in my own battles through life, verse 7 echoes again and again: “Some trust in chariots.” In David’s time, chariots were the pinnacle of weaponry, a key measure of wartime strength. Yet God had commanded his kings not to multiply and amass horses. At least in David’s time they obeyed. So how could they compete in battle? When they stepped up to the battle lines and looked across, outgunned and outmanned, that lone voice would echo again: “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.”

This was their legacy. Abraham against the four kings, slaves in Egypt escaping the world’s largest army, Joshua at Jericho, Gideon with 300 men taking on 135,000, now David. Notice we trust in the name. We know His name—the Lord. When I face battle, I trust in the name Jesus, Yeshua, the Lord abounding in love and faithfulness saves.

Verse 8. “They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm.” The lone voice finishes. You can feel the crowd lift as they prepare for one final shout. And now the warriors join in. They know it. They’ve declared it time and again. They’ve received the blessing. And now their shout fills the skies.

Verse 9. “Lord, give victory to the king! Answer us when we call!” Read Psalm 20. Receive the blessing and shout for our warrior Messiah who laid down His life to conquer death and save enemies and sinners like us. Long live the King.

Psalm 21 | Borrowed Strength

Welcome back to Through the Word. I'm your host, Peyton Jones. And today we'll be in Psalm chapter 21.

Have you ever felt you don't have what it takes? Modern songwriter Bono once penned the words, "Some people got way too much confidence, baby." The fact is all of us are weak in some points. Peter's constant lesson from Jesus was that as strong as he was, he was weaker than he imagined. Sound familiar? That slow process of convincing us of our own weakness brings us to the end of ourselves where we learn to rely on a strength greater than our own.

This is what David finds as the king in verse 1. "The king rejoices in your strength, Lord. How great is his joy in the victories you give!" As king, David could have rejoiced in his own strength or might, even claiming credit for his victories, but David was a man chosen by God because he didn't do that. David always gave credit where credit was due. "The king rejoices in your strength, Lord. How great is his joy in the victories you give!" David might have hit the battlefield and clashed swords with the enemy, but he knew who was winning the war on his behalf.

Starting in verse 2, David begins to recount all of the further blessings that God has given him. "You have granted him his heart's desire and have not withheld the request of his lips." I would imagine that David was in awe that God was so good to him. But maybe we can ask David, "David, what was your heart's desire? What was the request of your lips, David?"

And David answers in verse 3, “You came to greet him with rich blessings and place a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked you for life and you gave it to him— length of days, for ever and ever.” You came to greet him, he says, with rich blessings. Go back in time with me for a minute back to David’s story—way back in the beginning, his early years when he tended his father’s sheep.

Imagine with me you’re David minding your own business. Your brothers call across the field telling you to come in, come home, it’s time for dinner. And as you approach the house, you’re shocked to see your brothers lined up. And the legendary Samuel the prophet standing there with the legendary horn of anointing. That horn was used to anoint kings like Saul. And when Samuel locks eyes with you, he grins and says, “Behold the man of God’s choosing.” What he does next, though, he pours out the oil all over your head. It may have well been a bucket of ice water as shocking and out of the blue as it was.

This would be David’s constant encounter with God—God coming to him with rich blessings and putting a crown of gold on his head. Somehow it still to David didn’t quite seem real, and sometimes David wondered if that crown would ever truly fit. But then the hard times started. On the run from Saul when all he could ask for was another day to stay alive, he asked you for life, and you gave it to him. “Length of days, for ever and ever.” But wait, there’s more.

Verse 5. Through the victories you gave, his glory is great; you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty.” There’s that phrase again—“through the victories you gave.” How else could David explain his first victory as a

shepherd in the battle against a lion or a bear? David knew who was with him in those encounters. And Goliath, undoubtedly God. This was David's pattern— fighting battles that were too big for him, trusting God, and then watching God win his war.

Verse 6. "Surely you have granted him unending 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." "Unending blessings." David, what's your secret? What? How did you get all this? Where did this come from—this favor, this grace? David is singing of God's incredible grace. You see, in the way that God approached David with grace, He approaches us too.

In fact, in grace is the only way God can approach us and have a relationship with us. We are made kings and rulers in Christ. God jumped us in grace, put us into His gang, and surprised us by His love. Let me ask you. How else can we explain it that we're here, that we know Him? It was all Him. David gives us the other side of the coin. David, in turn, responds to God's first move by putting his trust in the Lord.

Verse 7. "Through the unfailing love of the Most High he"— David's speaking of himself—"will not be shaken." Notice that back and forth. It's David's way of saying we loved Him because He first loved us. The more God loves David, the more David trusts the Lord, and the more David trusts the Lord, the more God continues to pour out His blessings of love. Not bad. Have you ever felt surprised by joy as C.S. Lewis put it?

Throughout your whole life, God has wanted to surprise you with salvation, blessing upon blessing. Have you been jumped yet? Have you been paying attention? Have you taken stock of what God has done for you? And as we in talking about God's love for us, we shift here into God's anger towards His enemies. In verse eight, David calls them God's enemies. They're God's enemies because they mean us harm. God has made our enemies His enemies.

Verse 8. "Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies; your right hand will seize your foes. When you appear for battle, you will burn them up as a blazing furnace. The Lord will swallow them up in His wrath, 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. You will make them turn their backs when you aim at them with drawn bow."

Perhaps you've seen the movies where a foe is victimizing someone, and the hero steps in to defend them. The foe states, "This is none of your business," seemingly ending the conversation. But then the hero responds, "I'm making it my business." David knows that God is making our enemies His enemies. And of course, that's exactly what he did do. Jesus appeared for battle, taking the field—the same field that you and I take on a daily basis. He wrestled with temptation and won—for us. He grappled with sin and defeated it—for us.

He dealt with all the human experiences of heartache, abandonment, betrayal, and every other effect of sin and pinned it to the ground. He ran at our guilt, condemnation and fought it all off—for us. At the cross, He defeated our ancient foe, Satan himself, and rendered him inoperable—bones broken,

limbs immovable, jaw hanging loose, only his tongue left wagging until the final day when He'll rip out that too. And finally death. He conquered death, the final enemy, and awaits its complete destruction when He flings it into the Lake of Fire. With fire, He will consume them. Anything that was a threat to us, Jesus came for, fought with, and conquered. And in heaven for all eternity, He bears the scars, the scars of His love. Will you repeat the worship song of heaven with me? "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain."

And echo verse 13, as David echoes one final time whose strength he depended on to see his enemies defeated." Be exalted in your strength, Lord; we will sing and praise your might." Amen and amen. Until next time, may we exalt the strength of the Lord. Because when we are weak, He is strong. That's Peyton Jones out today, limping alongside you in a greater strength until the next time on our journey through the Word.

Psalm 22 | Psalm for a Crucifixion

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms. Psalm 22 is a lament written by David, and it's like nothing else in the whole Bible. But then again, it's a great deal like something else in the Bible, a connection that is almost stunning.

Read with me in verse 1. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?" David is hurting. He cries out to God in anguish. "Why have you forsaken me?" David lived a hard life, and though you and I both know God's promise to never leave or forsake us, David is feeling forsaken. Another reminder that wrong feelings are still real feelings, and the psalms give us a language to process them with the Lord. But there's something different here.

Scholars like to place David's psalms within his story, but this one is a conundrum. The language is vivid but it describes something David never endured—pierced hands and feet. And did you recognize that first sentence—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus said it a thousand years later on the cross. Jesus quoted this psalm and cried it out to His father from the very anguish of crucifixion. What's going on here? As before, we'll follow three steps as we read: what it meant to the writer, then to Jesus, then ourselves. Applying to David is a challenge because it isn't David's experience. I'm sure he was going through something, but his words are a graphic description of the feelings of crucifixion.

That won't be invented for another 500 years. While wrestling with his own trials, I believe that David has a vision so vivid, so powerful that it grabs a hold of him. He experiences it personally, feels it, and he fights to understand. Why

God? Why this? So as we step into the psalm, we also step into the vision and experience it with David and ask with him, “Why, Lord?” And that will carry us directly into step two. What did it mean to Jesus? Psalm 22 is a unique opportunity to connect with Jesus on the Godforsaken cross that saved our very souls. Then step three—for us. The cross was for us. He considered you worth it. But why, Lord, why did it come to this? That is precisely what David asks. So we ask with him and await an answer.

Verse 1. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer; by night, but I find no rest.” Forsaken. Abandoned. It’s a formidable feeling. Why are you so far? Why don’t you answer? The silence from God makes it that much harder. Call emergency, no one picks up. My sense here is that David is only beginning to connect with the vision ahead. I think he feels this in his own life, but in that feeling, he begins to connect with a story he does not yet understand, and he struggles with the feeling. It doesn’t seem right. It shouldn’t be like this. Why?

Verse 3. “Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.” The reason it doesn’t make sense is that I know who God is. You are the Holy One. In verse 4, “In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.” Three times he says trust. There is no hurt so personal as broken trust. And David feels that from God, and it doesn’t make sense. “Generations of ancestors trusted you, and you came through.” David’s identity is built on his trust in God. Why God?

Verse 6. “But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.” It is here that I believe David’s vision becomes vivid. He’s there feeling it, and what he feels is scorn—people looking at him like he’s less than human, like he’s a worm to be crushed.

Verse 7. “All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. ‘He trusts in the Lord,’ they say, ‘let the Lord rescue him. Let Him deliver him, since He delights in him.’” The crucifixion scene is growing clearer. Insults fly at him. Mockery is a subtle yet insidious weapon. It shouldn’t hurt but gets under your skin. The cruel words attack his identity. He trusts the Lord. David feels it. Jesus feels it. David tries to pull himself out, tries to reason with God.

Verse 9. “Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you.” In other words, I didn’t just make this up, God, you did this. I trust you because you made me trust you. My whole life you’ve been my God. Now where are you? Verse 11. “Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.” The darkness is close now. No help. And David feels it all closing in. From his words I see David fully immersed now, experiencing it all with Jesus.

Verse 12. “Many bulls surround me . . . encircle me.” His words now are dread, terror. He describes it like facing a lion, mouth open, ready to slice through his flesh, trapped. Fourteen. “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.” He’s desperate, powerless. During his trial, Jesus took a beating that killed many men. Upon the cross, every last bone feels it dislocated. David feels it. “My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.” David is a warrior; his heart pumped enough courage through his veins to take on any foe. But now it’s like wax melting in a fire. Emptied, lost, hopeless. Mouth dried up, tongue stuck.

In verse 15, “You lay me in the dust of death.” That’s it, God. I’m done. But it’s not done. It’s worse. “Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.” Amidst the swirling emotions of dread and desperation, a sharp pain rings out. Hands pierced, feet pierced. This is crucifixion. This is Jesus. 17. “All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.” Look at the words “on display”—people staring, worse-gloating. Why? The vision is sharper now. Shadows find clarity. David sees it.

Verse 18. “They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” What an odd and striking detail to include. David sees it, feels the indignity like that’s the only bit of him worth saving. The man, worthless. David sees that clarity a thousand years before it happened. We have a copy of this text from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

But in verse 19, David’s words lift from the scene back to God: “But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.” His words now are about saving. “Deliver me.” “Rescue me.” Watch the order. It’s reversed. Rescue me from the dogs, the lions, the wild bulls. He’s lifting out of it now. And notice the word choice. Help, deliver, rescue, save—salvation words.

Then in verse 22, salvation turns to praise: “I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!” 24. “For He has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; He has not hidden His face from Him but has listened to his cry for help.” David is renewed and watch his words. In

verse 6, he was despised and scorned. But not now, not by the Lord. The Lord listened. He is not forsaken. And David sings. 25. “From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord will praise Him—may your hearts live forever!” David’s heart is restored. Strength returns to his bones. Courage floods his veins.

And in verse 27, his vision expands: “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.” What a transformation David has taken from the crucifixion to the very ends of the earth to distant peoples turning to the Lord, bowing before him. Somehow this suffering leads to God’s reign.

Verse 29. “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.” Now there’s quite a phrase—“those who cannot keep themselves alive.” All the living, all the dead kneel before the Lord. And all in response to a vision of suffering, of pierced hands and pierced feet.

Verse 30. “Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.” Now that’s some audacity, David. The ends of the earth, future generations. Who makes a claim like that? But here we are, 3,000 years later, 150 generations come and gone, and we are reading this psalm and sharing the story of the cross in every corner of the planet. Amazing. And one more verse. “They will proclaim His righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!” And that’s our job to—proclaim it. He has done it. The word “done” is the same word for finished. It is finished.

Psalm 22 B-Side | You Gotta See this Worm

Hello friends, and welcome B-siders to the extra content for Psalm 22. And what a chapter! If the Bible is holy ground, then Psalm 22 is like the Holy of Holies. Shoes off. And God's design here is fascinating.

The gospels have the story of the crucifixion, but only here can you read it from Jesus' own perspective. And the detail that David chooses to share is riveting. The pierced hands and feet in verse 16, the casting of lots for His clothes in verse 18. And there's far more detail than that, much of it quite astounding and all a millennium in advance.

Keep that in mind as you read—a thousand years before the crucifixion, five hundred years before such a thing was even practiced. Even the liberal scholars still set the writing no later than 500 BC. We have this psalm in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Yet David describes the crucifixion, the mockery of onlookers in verse 7, all His bones out of joint in verse 14, and His heart turned to wax so precise to the physical experience of crucifixion—the heart literally fights to pump blood through the veins until it gives out—the dehydration of verse 15 all fits the cross.

Now, I have to admit. I don't like delving deep into the gruesome details of Jesus' death. I don't do well with graphic violence in general, and this one is real. And it's Jesus, my friend, my Lord, closer than a brother. It is powerful to remember what He endured for us and that He considers you worth suffering for. And we are reminded that this is how our sin was atoned for.

The price is paid in full, no more payment necessary or allowed. But gruesome details, I'm just not wired to dwell there, yet there is one small detail so amazing I just had to give it a B-side. Here in Psalm 22, it's the worm.

Read verse 6 with me. "But I am a worm and not a man." Now, as far as David is concerned, I imagine that he wrote that sentence quite simply to express how he felt in the vision. Experiencing the cross with Jesus, he felt like a nothing. He felt like the lowest creature he could think of as he saw the crucifixion through Jesus' eyes—the scorn and derision, the mocking of onlookers—he felt like a worm. Now, the purpose of reading Psalm 22 is not to geek out on multi-layered Bible connections. That's why I save this for the B-side.

Reading Psalm 22 should be a powerful and personal experience. Reading what He endured, we remember that He is worthy and He is worth it, whatever our cross may be today. And I hope you had that experience when you read it. But now check this out. David wrote the word "worm" to express his feeling, but the word he chose is not a generic worm. If you consult a Bible dictionary, you'll see the Hebrew word is *tola*, a very specific type of worm or grub really.

In Hebrew, the full name is *tola'at shani*, and the Bible sometimes says *tola* and others *shani* to refer to the same little bug. Also in the Bible dictionary, you'll see that the word *tola* comes up forty-three times in Scripture and *shani* forty-two times, but most of the time they're both translated as the color scarlet or crimson. Why on earth is the word for worm the same as the word for scarlet? And that question opens up a rather fascinating can of worms. And yes, pun very much intended. So let's dive into this little worm can.

You might want some goggles. The first time tola or shani comes up is Genesis 38, with the scarlet thread tied on a baby's little hand. Why is the word for worm the same as scarlet? Then in Exodus 16, when the manna was supposed to be eaten, but some saved it overnight and it bred worms or maggots, there they are—tola. If you recall that Jesus is the true manna from heaven and that manna represents Jesus' body, the connections start to grow. The manna was eaten by tola worms. The bread of life became a thing of disgust, just as the one who knew no sin became sin for us.

Here in Psalm 22. "I am a worm and not a man." Then the next time the word tola shows up is the instructions for the Israelites to gather offerings for construction of the tabernacle in Exodus 25. Those materials included fabrics blue, purple, scarlet, and fine white linen. Throughout the instructions, the word scarlet is either tola or shani—that same worm. Why is the word scarlet the same word for a worm? Because the scarlet dye used to color all the fabric came from a very specific worm, the tola, now called *coccus ilicis*. That's Latin. I tried translating it using Google Translate and it means "illegal cooks."

Why that's interesting, I don't know. What is interesting is that it's actually a grub, a little insect, but it moves like a worm. Their color is deep red or scarlet—tola. They're native to the lands around Israel. So when the Israelites were traveling through the desert to the Promised Land, they would have made scarlet dye for the tabernacle materials using the tola. Now we're getting interesting.

Recall that the tabernacle also pictures the body of Christ, the dwelling of God on earth, and tola were used to make the scarlet material. And check out this

little scarlet bug. The female tola bears the young, and when she's ready to give birth, ready to give her children life, she climbs up on a small tree and attaches herself to it. She's stuck there, and she will die there, hanging from a tree. See a connection? When she dies, the shell of her body hardens, and it protects her little children still growing. She sacrifices her life to save theirs—quite literally. When she dies, a crimson fluid comes out, staining both the shell and the tree. It looks like blood, and that's the fluid used for the dye to make scarlet cloths for the tabernacle and for the high priest's garments. Both picture Jesus, and the scarlet pictures His blood.

Back there on the tree, the mother sacrifices her life, but the children find new life, and to grow, they literally eat the body and blood of the one who gave them life. Gross, yes, but they're bugs. And remember that Jesus, the one who gave us life, calls us to eat His flesh and drink His blood. So the little tola'at shani comes up throughout the tabernacle instructions then shows up again in Leviticus in the cleansing of a leper, and then in Joshua when Rahab the harlot ties a scarlet thread in her window for the salvation of her household.

Then in Job 25 as Job's friend Bildad wrestles with the question of how a mere man can be justified before God. How is that possible when man is like a worm, a tola, and he says, the son of man a worm? Interesting word choice. Then tola shows up here in Psalm 22. "I am a worm and not a man." But that's not the last of it. Next is Isaiah 118. "'Come now, let us settle the matter,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'"

Scarlet here is shani, and crimson is tola. Not just the color of blood, but here the color of sin. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall become as white as snow.” Now tola is a Hebrew word, and the New Testament is in Greek. But the word scarlet does come up again. It’s the color of Jesus’ robe.

At His trial when He’s being mocked at the very place that we meet Him in Psalm 22, He is robed in scarlet. “I am a worm”—the scarlet worm—“and not a man.” All of that pointing to the crucifixion, to a death on a tree. What an amazing little grub. Now there’s one last part to this story. What happens to the tola on the tree? As we said, the mother dies, but her story isn’t over. New life comes out after three days. That’s right—three days.

The little tola are stained with the crimson from the mother. But something amazing happens to the body of the dead mother. The scarlet color turns to white. It dries up like a wax substance. Look at a picture of it, and it looks almost exactly like wool. Once dry, it breaks up into little white flakes and falls to the ground like little pieces of snow.

Seriously? “‘Come now, let us settle the matter,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’ And that is the story of the little worm called tola’at shani. Amazing.

Psalm 23 | The Lord is My Shepherd

Welcome, my friends, to Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. The twenty-third psalm is elegant, iconic, classic, powerful, and perhaps the most beloved work of poetry in the history of the world.

“A psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul.” What is it about these words that can move the heart so simply, so powerfully? Perhaps it’s the relationship we long for. “The Lord is my shepherd,” David sings, and every line echoes with contented confidence. And when he carries that contentment without fear through the valley of the shadow of death, we can’t help but long for what he has.

For a musical rendition, I recommend Jon Foreman’s “The House of God Forever,” and the band Miqedem sings Psalm 23 in Hebrew. Both are deeply moving. Verse 1. “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.” It is one of the most sublime statements in all of Scripture to look to the creator of all the universe, the weaver of your very DNA, and see in Him your shepherd, your provider, protector, and the guide of your life. “I lack nothing.” That tiny statement delivers a whole world of contentedness. Not that I have everything I could imagine, but I have God, and He’s got me. I’m good.

It should be noticed that the first statement cannot be claimed by just anyone for the shepherd relationship works two ways. A sheep follows a shepherd. All the description that follows is testimony to that relationship. Sheep belong to the shepherd. They are owned, not wild. Also poignant is the order of Psalm

23 immediately after 22, the psalm of crucifixion. The good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep. It's the foundation of our trust.

Verse 2. "He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul." And what a picture is that. So tranquil it nearly invites you in—green pastures like Ireland in springtime. But it's not just the pasture; it's the protection. Sheep are vulnerable. They will not lie down until they feel secure. With my shepherd on guard, I relax. Do you know those rare moments when you know you're safe and you actually enjoy life the way it was meant to be enjoyed? "He leads me beside quiet waters." No dangerous torrents—cool and quiet waters to restore and refresh.

And yes, at this point I picture Bob Ross painting happy trees in a meadow. So what's the metaphor here? Some see God's Word in the green grass and the refreshing of the Holy Spirit in the quiet waters. You might see more still. That's the beauty of poetry and perhaps my favorite line of all. "He refreshes my soul." Other translations say, "He restores." And what a thing to do.

The human soul can be weighed down with worries, harassed by fears, torn apart by grief, and just plain exhausted with life. He refreshes. He restores. The Hebrew word was used for righting a sheep that had fallen onto its back. Sheep lack the muscle to right themselves, and a flipped sheep is wolf prey for sure. But the shepherd restores. Our shepherd, restores a broken, tattered, and flipped-over soul.

Back in verse 3. "He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake." Path-guiding is crucial. No creature is more prone to wander than sheep nor more lost when they do. All we like sheep have gone astray. If you've ever

been truly lost and desperate to find the way, the right path is a treasured commodity. He guides us on them again and again. There are two meanings here for “His name’s sake.” God’s name represents his character. He guides me because that’s who He is. He is faithful. “For His name’s sake” also means that my actions affect His reputation. I represent Him, and He shows me right paths so I can better represent His righteousness. Now, the first three verses have been somewhat idyllic and somewhat idealistic. David well knows that the right paths are not always pretty green pastures.

So in verse 4, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” The psalm turns sharply from lush pastures into shadow and threat. The land of Bethlehem, where David kept sheep, sits on a hill surrounded by hills. Guiding sheep to pasture meant traversing valleys darker, shadowed, even dangerous. The Hebrew word for darkest valley carries gloom and terror, and just a subtle change in Hebrew pronunciation gave it the translation you likely recall: Valley of the Shadow of Death. Though the word death is not explicitly there, the feeling is for every dark shadow in life looms toward that final shadow. That’s why these words have been spoken over more hospital beds, funerals, and gravestones than any others.

Does verse 4 truly offer comfort or simply placate the grief? That depends on how honestly I can sing verse 1 to my shepherd. “Even though I walk through.” There is a knowing in that dark valley, a deep sense of awareness that the shepherd still guides, and He will see us through. I can’t help but think here of the Frozen movies and Olaf’s absurd confidence in the creepy forest that this will all make sense when I get older. Silly, I know, but if you’ve seen it, his unfazed confidence is inspiring if not well-founded.

David, on the other hand, has reason for his faith. “I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” Eyes off the shadows. Eyes on the shepherd. He’s with me. Don’t stop. Keep walking. Emmanuel. God is with us. “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” Rod and staff are the shepherd’s tools for leading. The shepherd prods a sheep toward good pasture, and we quickly learn to associate that slight discomfort with his faithful guidance. We learn to trust it.

That crook atop the staff is great for catching a sheep standing obliviously and dangerously close to a ledge. Ever been there? The rod was for guidance, but also for correction. The Lord disciplines the one He loves, and the staff doubles as a weapon for protection. When I see the wolf watching from the hilltop, my eyes dart back to the shepherd’s staff and find great comfort. I have deep appreciation for the word “comfort.” In the Bible, it is often used for the consoling offered to one grieving. Here it is not a soft, pillowy sort of comfort, but the shepherd’s strength and care that provides safety—the firm boundaries delivered by rod and staff. The Holy Spirit is our comforter, and He works in our lives very much like a shepherd’s rod and staff—guiding, convicting, correcting, protecting.

Verse 5. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Now, I must confess this line has long confused me. Why would I want to picnic in the company of enemies? David has previously expressed great fear and frustration with enemies. Yet here in Psalm 23, David’s heart is transformed. He is safe. He is content. The Lord is with him. God prepared a table. That’s an invitation to relax and enjoy food, to enjoy the company of your host. The Lord is indeed a gracious host, and perhaps the most surprising part of it all is, in fact, the presence of enemies.

As a warrior, David knows that you don't stop to enjoy food when the enemy is near. Yet here is David, enemies still in view, but heart at peace, able to fully enjoy the hospitality of his lord. Wolves watching, but the sheep nibbles away at the grass, trusting the shepherd to protect. Something I figured out, I can't afford to wait for my problems to go away to enjoy life; trust God and enjoy the table.

Back in verse 5. "You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." There is goodness in these words, a sense of deep gratitude. It is that moment when you look around at life and see all that God has given you. Suddenly you realize how distracted you were with all that could go wrong and how you lost sight of what you have. "My cup overflows." The picture is of a gracious and generous host welcoming you, the sort of host who really wants you to enjoy his generosity. That one's a life lesson for me—one that I too easily forget.

Enjoy grace. Enjoy God's grace. Open your heart to enjoy it, and you'll find your heart running full over with plenty spilling over to share all around. And as the Psalm closes, David looks at the feast before him. With gratitude overflowing, he lifts his eyes heavenward in verse 6.

"Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." And what a blissful place to close—chased through life by the Lord's goodness and love and a contented confidence for all of forever to come. I will dwell at home and at peace in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 24 | The King of Glory

Welcome back to Through the Word. Peyton Jones here. And today we'll be in Psalm 24.

Have you ever been in awe of something? Perhaps you've stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon or flown in a plane over a vast stretch of desert, and you felt so small and insignificant? The world is so vast, and you, after all, feel like a small hobbit in a very big world. It's not just that the world is so big that staggering to David here in this psalm. It's that the Lord is so much bigger.

Verse 1. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for He founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. "David exists within the world, a part of it. Yet God exists above it, as if He could put it in his pocket as a possession like you and I would our set of keys. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." He made it. He founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

Now go back in your mind with me to Genesis 1 where the Spirit of the Lord was hovering over the deep. All that exists is chaos, fluidity. Nothing solid, nothing secure, nothing safe. When God made the world, He brought order out of chaos, light out of darkness. Something solid and secure out of something fluid and chaotic. Why is David so in awe of God's power here?

We'll find out later that David is approaching the city walls of Jerusalem, returning from a battle where God turned up and showed His power. And as David is returning home, beginning to ascend the hill of the Lord, he's still awestruck by who this God is. How do you worship a God with power like that,

a God this immense, this majestic, a God who created the world and founded it on the waters? The big question for David wasn't how the heavens were formed. He just wanted to know how to approach God on earth. And that's the question he asks in verse 3. "Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place?"

I read David's words here, and I hear the longing in his voice. David wants to know God. He wants to know what it takes to ascend that mountain and to stand in that holy place and to be close to Him. But who can do it? Who can stand in the very presence of the very God who dripped the universe from his fingertips as effortlessly as a child might drip a spire of mud off his fingers at the beach? David is struggling between his longing to know this God and yet his overwhelming realization of who this God actually is. What does it take? Who do I need to be to be able to last in His presence, to be able to stand in front of Him like one stands before a king?

We frequently ask the question, "Have you accepted God into your life?" But the real question for David here is "Will God accept me?" That has been the question for ages. And David answers this question, "Who may stand in His presence or approach Him?" in verse 4. "The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god." Well, that's me and you out. It was David out too. He had anything but clean hands—adultery, lies, deception, and murder were what David racked up to his own credit so far. And perhaps you've felt that way as well on a Sunday as if you're unable to approach a God so clean, so holy.

But then you remember Jesus, His sacrifice, and you begin to feel a glimmer of hope. David needed a Savior. He needed someone who could give him the

blessing he couldn't earn himself. And maybe that's why he calls God his Savior in verse 5. "They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Savior." For us to approach God, we need a Savior. Christ received the blessing from God that He earned after taking all of the curses for our sin on the cross and making it possible for us to receive all the blessings David talks about. David knew that there was forgiveness with this incredibly great and majestic God. God had hardwired into his own worship sacrifice. There was a way to approach God through the blood of sacrifice, and there you would offer it for your sin, and a priest would cleanse you with water, and you would be declared someone with clean hands and a pure heart. David's only hope was in finding forgiveness.

Any other answer to David's question about who can approach God would lead you and I to trust ourselves. But as believers, we trust in Christ alone. In the hymn of that name, "In Christ Alone," reminds us that on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied. David knows that it can't just be for him alone.

Verse 6. "Such is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek your face, God of Jacob." Such is the generation of those who seek him. It's interesting to note here that David refers to that generation as those who seek the God of Jacob. David here is remembering another man who was far from perfect—Jacob. Back in Genesis, during the first part of Jacob's life, Jacob was known as "the Deceiver." Jacob resisted God trying to outsmart Him, trick Him, and take control of his own life through manipulation and trickery, and that's anything but clean hands and a pure heart.

With the confidence that God was gracious to someone like Jacob, David approaches the gates of the holy place in Jerusalem to worship the God of Jacob and to find God his Savior.

But in verse 7, the psalm seems to turn a little bit. It's not David approaching God in Jerusalem. God is coming up the hill with David. Most likely, David has taken the Ark of the Covenant into battle as God commanded them. The Ark of the Covenant, by the way, represented that God was with him. And it was said that God dwelt between these two carved cherubim on the lid, known as the mercy seat or God's throne. David may be following behind the Ark of the Covenant here in awe of his king, wondering if this city even knows who is about to enter into it— the very God who created the world. And as he approaches the holy hill behind the Ark of the Covenant, he tells the doors to open up wide in verse 7: "Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in."

David says, "Fling wide those doors. Lift up your heads, you ancient sagging gates sunk on your hinges. The King of glory is coming. Pull yourself up and rejoice." And perhaps David sees the city he's built. Its fortified walls and mighty gates, and they all seem dowdy compared to the glory of God. David's fortified gates somehow seemed to sag in comparison to this God who established the foundations of the earth—this God of glory. David repeats, "Lift up your heads, you ancient gates. Do you know who is getting ready to enter through you? The everlasting King of glory."

And as God's glory enters, David knows that the question everyone should be asking now is, "Who is this King of glory?" This, my friend, is the question we must all answer. As important as the first question— "Who can approach

Him?”— is the second—“Who is this King of glory?” And David answers for us: the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.” David, fresh from battle, knows that God is the victor and He deserves the glory. Jesus fought all of our enemies at the cross. He defeated sin, hell, and death for us, and therefore He deserves all the glory. This is why we can worship Him. This is how we get our eyes off of our wretched state, asking who can enter His presence and onto Christ, the King of glory, following behind Him as He enters into heaven and we are with Him.

In verse 10, David repeats the question: “Who is He, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty—He is the King of glory.” As I hear David shouting, “Who is He? Who is this King of glory?” My mind goes back to Sunday services that probably could have used some of this awe, some reminding of who this was who is entering the building, of whose presence we were entering. Do you know who this is? Do you realize who’s here right now?

David finds himself repeating, “The Lord, strong and mighty, the King, the King of glory,” because it’s just that awesome. My friend, may we be awed to come into the presence of God, and perhaps even more in awe at the fact that He has made us able to enter His presence.

Psalm 25 | Finding Refuge

Welcome back to Through the Word. Peyton Jones here, and we'll be in Psalm chapter 25 today.

We've all had feelings of powerlessness when someone smarter, stronger, or just older had complete control over us. Unable to say or do anything to change the outcome, we simply did what the bully asked. I can remember being forced to eat clods of dirt by a bully, unable to stop them, and having to pick myself up, feeling the burning shame as the blood rushed to my face as a crowd of kids, half of them laughing and mocking, the other half in shock, the shame lingering long after the noogie burn is gone.

In Psalm 25, David is under brutal attack from his enemies, powerless to change his circumstances, unable to stop their bad behavior, unable to control the outcome. But what do you do when you're powerless against your enemies? David places his trust in God in verse 1. "In you, Lord my God, I put my trust."

In Psalm 25, David won't trust people to have better behavior or even in himself to handle bullies in the right way. He's through trusting anyone but God. Verse 2. "I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause." What a statement: "No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame." It's not that David won't be forced to eat dirt clods by his enemies. He may. But that's not what brings shame.

The real shame comes when we act wrongly in the face of being mistreated. David knows that if his hope is in God, he will continue to act right even when others act wrong. People may try to put shame on him, but they can't put shame in him as long as he continues to trust God and act right. But acting right isn't easy. That's why David prays for help in verse 4.

"Show me your ways, 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." Your paths, your ways, your truth. David is in uncharted territory here like most of us when dealing with people problems. People problems, by the way, are largely judgment calls, and it's easy to make bad ones. David lacks a map or a compass, but he knows there's a trail just beneath the brush if only he could find it. "Guide me, Lord. Clear the undergrowth that I can see the path, the way I should act." Your ways, your paths. David knows if he puts his hope in God—"my hope is in you all day long"—then he can't go far wrong. David knows God will navigate him and guide him to safety.

But then David makes a special request in verse 6. "Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love, remember me, for you, Lord, are good." Twice in these verses, David talks about remembering. In verse 6, he wants God to remember His great mercy and love for they are from of old—constant companions to David all of his life. He can look back and remember mercy and love always being there. And he needed it because, like us, he was a screwup at times. Therefore, he asked God not to remember the sins of his youth.

We call this, by the way, selective memory, and the Bible gives us good reason to trust in the selective memory of God. God, we are told, willfully forgets our sins, telling us that He casts them into the sea of forgetfulness, never to remember them again. But God always remembers His love and mercy. And note the humility here. David starts off this psalm not wanting to be humiliated, but he can be humble and David is humble. He knows that he himself is not always good, but God is. What a precious phrase in verse 7: “According to your love, remember me, for you, Lord, are good.”

David focuses on God’s goodness in verse 8. “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 toward those who keep the demands of His covenant. For the sake of your name, Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.” Wow! There is a lot to unpack here, but the theme of these verses is that because of God’s goodness, He does all of the things that David prayed for in the verses previous. He instructs sinners in his ways. He teaches humble sinners. He guides and navigates them and teaches them His paths.

But maybe verse 10 threw you a bit when it says, “God is loving and faithful to all who keep His covenant.” But wait. I thought we couldn’t keep His covenant. True. But don’t forget. God never asked his people to be perfect. He asked them to follow Him and trust Him. And part of that covenant, including making sacrifices for their own sin when they didn’t, forgiveness was baked into the covenant. You see, the greater threat than David being put to shame by his enemies was being shamed by his own sin. “For the sake of your name, forgive my iniquity.”

Though it is great, God can forget our sin because He's forgiven it. Our sin has been dealt with by God. Let's skip ahead to verse 14 where David gives us the secret to hearing from God and receiving the guidance we need in tough times. "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." The Lord confides in those who fear Him. David feels like God is sharing a secret like you would with a close friend.

David's eyes are on the Lord, "for only He will release my feet from the snare." Now we see David stuck, trapped yet hopeful, like an animal unable to free itself. David waits for God to stoop down and release him from the snare his enemies have set. But more than stuck and trapped, he's lonely. Verse 16. "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted." He's had God's love and mercy to comfort him in his circumstance. And even though David knows God's love and mercy will comfort him in his lonely circumstance, he now asks God to change his circumstance in verse 17.

"Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish. Look on my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins. See how numerous are my enemies and how fiercely they hate me! Guard my life and rescue me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you." David, like us, can only take so much. You can feel his anguish here. He's suffering in this trap. He's in agony. He uses words "anguish," "distress," and "troubles of my heart." Again, he doesn't expect the behavior of his enemies to change any time soon. "See how numerous are my enemies and how fiercely they hate me!"

Now, David's hope isn't in them. It has to be in God. But he wants protection from his enemies. "Guard my life," he says. He wants deliverance from his

circumstances: "Rescue me." He wants to avoid humiliation: "Do not let me be put to shame." And David's only hope for all this is God. "For I take refuge in you." My friend, where do you take refuge? A refuge is a type of escape, a place you go to escape something else. Some escape their pain, trying to find refuge in a bottle. Others turn to equally flawed humans.

But where do you turn? Have you learned to take refuge in God and God alone? Turn to Him today. Put your hope in God and find Him as the one who will do everything that God has asked in this prayer. Until next time, thanks for joining me on our journey through the Word.

Psalm 26 | Examine My Heart

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms. Psalm 26 challenges me. I wrestled with this one. It's a psalm of David, and it begins, "Vindicate me, Lord, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered."

I have to admit, on first reading, David's words felt a little too perfect. A blameless life not faltered? Um, pardon my boldness here, but really, David? We know your sins, sir. So I wrestled over this one, and I have to say, I came away with a different perspective. So I'll share some of my thoughts. But I encourage you to do your own wrestling. And again, I suggest you read the psalm both before and after the guide. So let's dive in and look for David's heart here.

Back in verse 1. "Vindicate me, Lord, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered." Now David's sins are on full display in the Bible, and he just confessed that his sins are many in Psalm 25. That's why it's great to have David writing psalms. He can't fool anyone, but we also know his heart for God. He's a sinner, but he's also quite sincere in his pursuit of the Lord. So let's examine. Remember for difficult verses, check content, context, and cross-references. First is content. What does the verse really say? Checking the Bible dictionary, the word vindicate here is simply "judge me."

A more literal translation says, "Judge me, for I have walked in integrity." The Hebrew for walk indicates how you live, but the translation blameless life makes it sound a bit extreme like he's never sinned. So what does David mean by "judge me"? Is he demanding that God tell everyone he's perfect? I

don't think so. Check the context. His next words are, "I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered." Trusting God is not self-righteousness. It's reliance.

Then in verse 2. "Test me, Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind . . ." Three different ways David asks the Lord: test, try, examine. He wants God to search his heart and mind. He wants to hide nothing from the Lord. Self-righteousness doesn't do that. It hides a sinful heart behind religious ritual and false piety. David wants to be known. He wants his heart examined.

Back in verse 3. "For I have always been mindful of your unfailing love and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness." There's that reliance again. Self-righteous is also self-reliant, but David relies on God. He isn't focused on his own goodness. He's got his mind set on the Lord's unfailing love and faithfulness. Notice that David calls on the Lord by name here, and his mind is on the character revealed in that great name—faithfulness, forgiveness, and unfailing love.

Now, when we dealt with vindication previously, we made a clear distinction between David asking God to vindicate him regarding his entire life as if he had never sinned and asking God to vindicate him in a particular case, meaning that he didn't do this bad thing. And I think that's valid here. But I also think there's more to this. I believe that David is working on living his life in full integrity, and he's asking the Lord to check him on it. See, part of me challenges David's words: "Hey, no one can claim a blameless life except Jesus."

But then I sense a challenge back at me. Hasn't Jesus called me to live blameless? Even though I sinned in the past, didn't He save and forgive me so that I would walk in integrity now? And as I do my best and rely on God's faithfulness, shouldn't I ask Him to examine my heart and tell me how I'm doing? And that's how I read this psalm. David is not bragging to anyone about his goodness. He can't, but he is calling on the Lord to guide him in goodness. And consider the larger context. Psalm 26 really doesn't work without 24 and 25. Psalm 24: "Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?

The one with clean hands and pure heart, who trusts not in idols." David wants that. He longs to be that person. But he wasn't—not on his own. Yet he immediately lifted his attention. "Who is the King of glory?" Not David. The Lord Almighty. He is the King of glory. Then Psalm 25 begins with trust in the Lord. He asks God to "show me, teach me, guide me in your ways, Lord." He hopes in God and asks the Lord to remember him according to the Lord's love and mercy, not by his own sins. David takes his stand on the Lord's character—good and upright, instructing sinners in His ways. Sinners like David. That's amazing.

And that's David's hope in the Lord in His integrity. He asked forgiveness, and he's relying on God's faithfulness to grant it. And shouldn't we trust that God has forgiven us and now walk in integrity to the righteousness He gave us? David's trying to get it right now, and so should we. So in verse 4. "I do not sit with the deceitful, nor do I associate with hypocrites." Notice that David's first concern is avoiding the hypocrites. Paul wrote the Corinthians to remind them not to associate with immoral people, but he later clarified that the real danger is hypocrites who claim to be Christian but live immorally.

Back here, David is forgiven, trying to live with integrity, and he doesn't want bad company to corrupt good character. That's not holier than thou judgment; it's just protecting his own integrity. Verse 5. "I abhor the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence and go about your altar, Lord, proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds." Now there's another claim that seems impossible, doesn't it? "I wash my hands in innocence." Who can claim that? Remember, it was the one with clean hands who can ascend God's holy mountain. And we all know that David had blood on his hands. And he was reminded of it often. And yet that's what makes this truth so powerful. David prayed, "Take away all my sins."

And look at him now. Now the Lord did not take away David's responsibility towards those he hurt, and he doesn't for you either. In the covenant law, taking responsibility and making restitution was part of reconciling with God but so was cleansing from sin. Look closely at verse 6. Where is David? He's about the Lord's altar. The sacrifice has been made, and David's hands are clean. For us, that altar is the cross. And he doesn't go telling everyone how good he is. No, he tells of all the Lord's wonderful deeds. David is in that glorious moment of revelation that the Lord offers to every believer. That moment that we know forgiveness—we confessed our sins, called on the Lord, and were convinced that He is faithful and just to forgive. And David revels in it. It's amazing he won't let the hypocrites drag him down.

Forgiveness is too good to just hang out and let sin back in. Verse 8. "Lord, I love the house where you live, the place where your glory dwells." A forgiven David just wants to hang out at God's house to dwell where His glory dwells. Remember David's joy in Psalm 23 to "dwell in the house of the Lord forever." But who can stand there? The one with clean hands and pure heart. And the

Lord gave him that. He forgave, He sanctified, He justified and vindicated. The King of glory did it. And David doesn't want to go back. He doesn't want to be like the sinners anymore, and he doesn't want their destiny.

Verse 9. "Do not take away my soul along with sinners, my life with those who are bloodthirsty, in whose hands are wicked schemes, whose right hands are full of bribes. I lead a blameless life; deliver me and be merciful to me." So David closes where he began—a blameless life. Again, it literally says, "I walk with integrity." Notice David still knows that he needs mercy, but that doesn't mean he just keeps sinning. Walking in integrity to God's forgiveness means that we stop sinning, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to do it.

We're different now. The old has gone and the new has come. A new creation. Verse 12. "My feet stand on level ground; in the great congregation I will praise the Lord." That level ground means we don't have to keep slipping. We have foundation now—His name, His salvation, His resurrection. We stand now with confidence. We belong here with his people and together we praise.

So read Psalm 26 and join the congregation of the forgiven.

Psalm 27 | My Fight Song

Welcome back to the Book of Psalms, everyone. Psalm 27 is my psalm. I claimed this one right away. My fight song. Do you have one of those? A song that takes you back to a time and place when you battled and endured.

The opening chords start up and all the struggle and emotion and fight come pouring back. Crank it up, and it always seems to come on when I need it. When life feels like eleven rounds in a boxing match and I'm in the corner looking up through sweat and tears and blood, but the music kicks in; stand up, beat my chest, and shout at the world, "Bring it."

I have to admit Psalm 27 would not play on typical Christian radio. Not the way I hear it. Too raw. They hit the guitars too hard. For my soundtrack while studying, I went back to my old school playlist: "We Shall Overcome" by the Supertones, "Until My Heart Caves In" by Audio Adrenaline. You might not recognize my songs, but I'm sure you have your own—songs that carried you through the hard years. I think that's what the psalms did for David and for faithful Israelites centuries on.

For something more familiar, think "I'm a Survivor" by Destiny's Child or even "Immigrant Song" by Zeppelin. Driving rhythm, primal scream, let's go. Just don't play Psalm 27 on a flute. Put down the ukulele, plug in your amps, and crank it till you feel it. David is a warrior, and this is a fight song.

Verse 1. "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?" Just reading it, I feel it again. You know the feeling when the guitars kick in and strength floods your

veins? The Lord is. All of David's resilience and grit begin here. "The Lord is my light." No darkness shall overtake me. "The Lord is my salvation." No sin will condemn me. "The Lord is my stronghold." No weapon formed against me will stand. So you tell me, of whom shall I be afraid?

Verse 2. "When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident." David's confidence nearly bursts off the page. This is no empty bravado. This is God confidence. David sees the field of battle. He knows the danger, "though an army besiege me." But he also knows the one in whom he trusts. "My heart will not fear." I can almost feel the reverb in my chest. But then the music lifts above the field of battle.

Musically speaking, verse 4 is a bridge, the kind that lifts you up by the heart and leaves your feet nearly floating. "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple." One thing. There is great power in undivided focus. David makes one request, and he seeks after it. He desires God's house and pursues God's presence.

Verse 5. "For in the day of trouble He will keep me safe in His dwelling; He will hide me in the shelter of His sacred tent and set me high upon a rock." Safe. "Whatever life throws at me, He will shelter me. My life may be under siege, but my soul is safe tucked away in God's tent." And the music lifts higher still, far above the din of sword and battle lifted high upon that rock.

Verse 6. “Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at His sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy . . .” I love the imagery. A battlefield can overwhelm you and so can life. It crowds your vision until all you see is conflict. Yet David is lifted above his enemy’s perspective, and in God’s presence he gets his joy back and every sacrifice is worth it. God is worth it.

Back in verse 6. “I will sing and make music to the Lord.” David is resilient. The setting is still the day of trouble, but David is determined he will sing. Life gets rough. The world drags you down. But pop in those headphones and let the song lift you. Sing to the Lord. And he’s not content to just sing his song out into the void. In verse 7, he calls on the Lord to hear his voice. “Be merciful to me and answer me.” In other words, I need to know that you heard me, Lord. Have mercy and answer.

Verse 8. “My heart says of you, ‘Seek His face!’ Your face, Lord, I will seek.” And now the song of survival becomes a song of seeking. That’s how it works, isn’t it? Storm hits, you brace your feet against it, and battle by battle it strips you bare. Your heart grows resilient. But it demands something. If we’re going to survive this storm, we need purpose. We need a direction to fight towards. David’s heart calls to him. “Seek His face.” He listens, looks heavenward, and responds, “Your face, Lord, I will seek.”

Verse 9. “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, God my Savior.” Now you might be tempted to tell David you don’t need to pray that. Of course God won’t reject you. He would never forsake you. But remember, respect the poet’s process. Let David process his feelings, and he’ll help you

process yours. The storm is on, and David needs to know that this fight is for something. He gives voice to his anxieties about being forsaken in order to give them to God and let them go. Verse 9 is anxious. Verse 10 is resilient.

“Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.” David reminds himself that the Lord is not like people. People let you down. The Lord is faithful. People betray. The Lord is faithful. Even your own flesh and blood forsake you. The Lord is faithful. And when the fight is over, the Lord will receive you. Verse 11. “Teach me your way, Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.” David is focused now, determined to press on along the straight path God has called him to. Oppressors battle against me. Lead me Lord.

Verse 12. “Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations.” At last we see the nature of David’s battle—false witnesses, malicious accusations, a battle over words, reputation, and truth. A life and death battle, indeed. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians that our battle is much the same, demolishing arguments and pretensions that set themselves up against the knowledge of God. Back here in Psalm 27, the music rises once more for the final crescendo, the culmination. And for me, verse 13 hits home like no other. “I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

You know how sometimes you hear a verse, and it’s missing something because you remember it from a different translation. This translation is good, but years ago when you read it, it was like God spoke it to you personally, and you just need to hear those words again. That’s verse 13 for me. Mid-2000s, 32 years young, I was a young dad with three kids to feed, guide, and provide

for—bills piled up and all the demands of ministry and pastoring teenagers into adulthood. Meanwhile, life didn't seem too concerned about my personal problems. My dad in the hospital—stroke. I needed a fight song, an “I will survive” song. I opened Psalm 27.

When I got to verse 13, it was like the clouds parted, and I heard God's voice. I'll read the New King James because these are the words I remember. “I would have lost heart unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” The phrase “I would have lost heart” is not in the Hebrew; italics in the new King James indicate that the translators added it to try to capture something inferred in Hebrew.

See, David begins verse 13 with the word “unless” like he's already halfway through a thought. Unless. Like he doesn't even want to say the words, doesn't even want to think where he'd be. Unless I was sure, unless I was convinced, unless I knew with everything in me I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

That was my fight song. Those are the words that steeled my heart against the storm. The psalm closes with a quiet confidence. Like a warrior's heart that's found peace. Verse 14. “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”

Psalm 28 | Help! Again...

Hello friends. Welcome to Through the Word. My name is Peyton Jones, and today we'll be in Psalm 28 on our journey through the Word.

When the Beatles sang their hit single "Help!" they cried out, "Help! I need somebody, not just anybody." And David needs help. And not just from anyone. He needs help from someone he can count on. He's desperate for dependability. That's why he calls God his rock in verse 1. "To you, Lord, I call; you are my Rock." Think of what it means to call God a rock. A rock is constant. It's always there. It never changes. It's dependable. You can count on it. And that's good to know because it is so hard to find stability in an unstable world like we live in. Times may have changed, but life hasn't— at least not that much.

In Psalm 28, we find David calling on God because he's the only one David knows he can depend on, and he's still not completely sure he can depend on God. Even in calling God his "Rock," David, like us, still needs reassurance that God is in fact listening, that God will listen. The second part of verse 1 continues. "Do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who go down to the pit." Deaf ear. Does God have a good ear and a bad ear? David uses a figure of speech here because if you've ever spoken to someone who loves you like your grandpa and you speak into their deaf ear, they might turn and say, "Sorry, I didn't hear you. That's my bad ear. Talk to my good ear."

David needs to make sure, in his desperation, that his message is getting through. He's sending up prayers, but he doesn't know if God is answering

back, returning his call, or just staying silent on the line. David knows he's in real trouble. He just doesn't know if God knows he's in real trouble or if God even cares. David says, "If you don't answer me now, I'll be like those who go down to the pit." The word pit here is Sheol, which was the Hebrew word for grave. Hear his desperation here. David's saying, "Answer me or I'll die. Help!" David was no drama queen. He had faced death many times, but he was desperate. And when you're desperate, you feel alone.

Verse 2. "Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your most holy place." "Hear my cry for mercy." David isn't just praying here. He's crying out with all of his being, making desperate pleas. "Help me! Hear my cry for mercy as I call you for help." Oh, and David knows he needs mercy. We all need mercy. We just don't always know how much we need it. But desperate situations often reveal just how desperate we are. David lifts his hands here in worship. In our culture, lifting your hands means surrender. For example, "Stick 'em up. Put your hands in the air where I can see 'em." And in worship it implies the same.

Raising your hands means surrender. And if you think about it at all, worshiping itself is a type of surrender. You worship because you know you need to—that you're not enough. You're not all there is. There's someone bigger than you that you can depend on, that you must depend on, that you need help. But the raising of our hands is also something we do as children when we want to be picked up. And David wants God to pick him up because he doesn't want to be swept or dragged away with the rest of humanity who doesn't trust God.

Verse 3. “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.” David has not been acting like the people around him. He’s being honest. He’s being loving. And in some ways he’s wondering to himself, “God, does it even matter? Do you even notice how I live? Are you deaf to my cries and blind to my behavior? Does it even make a difference how I live? Or will I just be swept away with all of humanity?” First, David wonders if God hears. Now, he wonders if God sees. But here’s what’s interesting. David doesn’t just wonder if God sees the good of the faithful. He is also wondering if God even sees the wickedness of the unfaithful.

So he prays in verse 4. “Repay them for their deeds and for their evil work; repay them for what their hands have done and bring back on them what they deserve. Because they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord and what His hands have done, He will tear it down and never build them up again.” Fake people—people who pretend to be your friend but deep down hate you, wrong you, betray you. David’s words—“they speak cordially with their neighbors but harbor malice in their hearts”—seem to describe a lot of people to be honest. David asked God to repay their deeds and repay them for their evil work. “Repay them for what their hands have done.” Their evil works done to David are a big problem.

But David wants to see God work, and he wants to see it now. We don’t know what they did to David, but he’s hurt. These are the words of someone in pain—and hurt people, hurt people. But David isn’t seeking to hurt them. He is asking God to repay. He’s praying for justice. And that’s actually biblical. The Bible tells us, “Repay no one evil for evil, but leave room for God’s wrath. The Lord will repay.” And that’s good news. God says, “Whoever hurts us touches

the apple of his eye.” And David says, “These people have no regard for the deeds of the Lord.” They don’t seem to be those that have surrendered their lives to God. But David has. He can rest easy that God has this even if David doesn’t.

And in the midst of his desperation, David turns to worship in verse 6. “Praise be to the Lord, for He has heard my cry for mercy.” Did you catch the shift here? “The Lord has heard my cry for mercy.” Suddenly David knows that God has heard, that God is listening. But what gave him that confidence? We don’t see a change in his circumstances. Maybe this was a statement of faith that came from his worship. David has no proof that God is listening, but he knows God. He knows His character and that God would listen. After all, any God worthy of your worship would surely listen to it, right? David turns his eyes to God’s character, and he sings the things he knows to be true of God. “The Lord is my strength”—verse 7—“and my shield; my heart trusts in Him and He helps me.

My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise Him.” And David paints God with two more pictures of stability: strength and shield. God is my strength. You know nothing saps our juice like people problems. David was drained, but now he’s energized. God has been his strength and his protection. It’s not that he doesn’t have enemies anymore, but God is his shield like an invisible force field. You’ll experience this as a believer sometimes: people saying and doing horrible things against you, yet somehow you feel removed from the situation as if you’re outside of it, as if nothing can touch you. That’s what David is feeling.

And it's not just for David alone. It's for all of us according to verse 8. "The Lord is the strength of His people, a fortress of salvation for His anointed one." God is a fortress. You are untouchable in Him. "A fortress of salvation for His anointed one." An anointed one here could mean three different things. You see, oil was used to anoint someone for refreshment, and you would anoint people when they came to visit you to refresh their dust-caked pores and soothe their skin.

But in the Bible, there was a special anointing oil for priests and kings that symbolized the Holy Spirit all over a person's life. And of course, the third meaning the Anointed One was a term from the Messiah. Well, you're not the Messiah, and you're not the king like David was, but God is still all over your life. He is with you, and He hasn't just put His Spirit on you; He's in you. You're pretty special to Him, by my estimation. That's why the first part says, "God is the strength of His people." That's you. You are His people.

Verse 9. "Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever." David closes here with a beautiful picture of a shepherd carrying us on his shoulders. As a shepherd himself once upon a time, David feels like that little lamb that needs the extra care, attention, and affection, the one that can't make it on his own. And so the shepherd picks the little lamb up, puts him on his neck, two legs straddling each shoulder, and carries him just like he's carrying you. He wants to be close to you than you could ever imagine.

Because sometimes when you're hanging on the line wondering if you're going to get an answer, the line isn't dead. It's that God is right next to you. He's already moved you close in those times. He's put you on His shoulders

and you just didn't realize it. "Save your people and bless your inheritance." Don't miss it. God calls you His inheritance here. We are what He gets out of this deal. It's all He wants. It's all He's ever wanted—you. He wants you, and He wants me.

My friend, Psalm 28 tells us that we can depend on God when we don't feel like it, when we doubt if He's there, even listening, we only have to remind ourselves of who He is. And once we're reminded of who He is, we can rest in what He does. He listens, He protects, He blesses, He carries, and He helps.

Psalm 29 | David Rides the Storm

Welcome to Through the Word. My name is Peyton Jones, and I'll be your guide on today's journey through Psalm 29 where David rides the storm.

When a thunderstorm hits, do you run indoor for cover to stay dry, or do you walk out into the storm to experience it? Most of us run for shelter. Not so John Muir, explorer, mountaineer, conservationist, and founder of Yosemite. When a storm of biblical proportions moved through the Yosemite Valley, Muir felt himself drawn out to the mystery of the natural world to witness what was not commonly witnessed by men.

Moved by the majesty of the wind and the swaying of the sequoias, Muir climbs a 100-foot high noble fir and rides the storm as the tree whips in wide circles under his weight and swings in the fury of the gale sometimes at nearly 90 degree angles. Muir would go on for pages to describe the sounds and behaviors of the forest that could not be experienced on a sunny day. Writing in his journal, Muir says, "It's as if the very landscape had been transformed into another place."

And in the same way, David is experiencing a thunderstorm in the desert but catches a glimpse of God through the natural phenomenon that gives him a glimpse into the very throne room of heaven. Lightning flashes, thunder rolls, and the earth shakes as David is drawn in by the power of the storm that reveals the majesty of God.

Let's join David in verse 1 as he screams above the howling wind, aiming his voice at the heavens and the angelic creatures who experience God's

presence. “Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.” David is exhilarated in this storm, his pace quickening, his heart beating. Nature has awakened his soul just like God told Job in the book of Job that it would. When God describes His power, might, and wisdom, He does it through His creation, such as the Leviathan or Behemoth at the end of Job’s dialogue.

Nature reveals sights and sounds for those who care to look like David braving a storm that reveal God’s character. In Romans 1, Paul tells us that the invisible attributes of God can be clearly seen through what God has made—the creative world around us. This is why David is shouting at the heavens telling the angels to worship God.

Soaking wet, David repeats his shout above the wind and rain in verse 2, as he tells the heavenly beings to sing of the glory that he’s witnessing in the wild. “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his Holiness.” Suddenly, the lightning flashes, and the entire sky lights up the night like someone turning on a strobe light. And David is reminded of the blinding white glory of God that Moses couldn’t stare into—the glory due His name. David is stopped in his tracks as the night turns to day in a split second and says, “Worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness.” This splendor means light or a flash of light. The splendor of God’s holiness is depicted in Scripture as a cloak of light that God surrounds Himself with. It’s what the Bible refers to when it speaks of God’s glory. And we get a picture today of God’s glory and what it must have been like when we try to stare at the sun.

The radiation of the sun's essence is too much for us to behold. And God's holiness is like that. It's where His glory comes from—the splendor of His holiness, the light that comes from God's holiness. But what is holiness? Holiness is a term which is deep but essentially means “other”—that there is no one like God. Therefore, worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. But after the lightning strikes, there's the thunder.

In verse 3, “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 storm as noisy as it is as the wind tears through the trees and ravines and the water splashes all around him, David hears the voice of God in the thunder, a voice like thunder, a voice that has the power to split trees and create worlds. The voice that once said, “Let there be light,” now gives an encore performance. The voice, the flash of light, a reminder of the voice that caused there to be light long ago. We were all taught, by the way, to gauge the nearness of a lightning strike by counting the seconds between the flash of lightning and the clap of thunder. Closer the lightning and thunder come together—almost instantly together—God is approaching. There is no counting one 1,000, two 1,000. No. God is near now.

And as the lightning forks from heaven to earth, it strikes in verse 5. “The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.” The lightning hits the tree and the thunder rumbles as the tree shatters in a blinding fury. David is in the center of the storm and like being in God's presence, it is both majestic and frightening, wonderful and terrible.

Verse 6. “He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox.” The animals can't stay still. They startle at the lightning and bound from where

they've taken shelter. And David sees that Lebanon and Mount Hermon, the landmarks on the horizon, also start at the Lord's presence, as the very earth trembles beneath his feet. It is awesome. Heaven is shaking earth. Verse 7. "The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning; 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!'" Not only is the ground shaking the desert of Kadesh, but the voice of the Lord twists the oaks. Trees bend and break, stripping their bark, ripping pieces of it off the trees with hurricane gale force.

This is no mere shower. David thinks, "I could die here. I'm out of my depth. What am I doing out here?" This is nuts. Everyone who has ever had a close encounter with God in the Bible has said the same thing. They've all said they were afraid that they might die. This is why the angels worship. This is why they don't need to be told to ascribe to Him the greatness due His name as we humans do. This is why they constantly fall over themselves and fall down to worship Him according to the glimpse of the throne room that Revelation gives us where they constantly fall down, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." This is a God who deserves glory.

And that is why verse 9 says, "The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'" Far away in the temple they are crying out, "Glory," as just the edges of the storm ripped through Jerusalem. But David in the desert sees this stretch of wilderness become greater than the temple itself, consecrated by God's very presence. They know God deserves glory in His temple, but they don't know the half of it. David has dreamt of building God a house, a permanent structure, but this

wilderness has become the only house of worship he needs for the moment. Has David witnessed God entering his world again, visiting it with such presence that humans run and hide for cover like we read about in Revelation, where they run like terrified animals panicked at His presence, asking the mountains to crumble and fall on them, to hide them from His glory like dumb animals scared by the lightning and thunder? No, this is merely God speaking, and it's had this effect. God has not visited yet. This is merely collateral damage surrounding a being so awesome as God. The world has not yet witnessed the full majesty of God Himself. And God Himself still sits enthroned above the storm.

In verse 10, "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." David, as powerful as he is among men, is reminded of who Israel's true King is. David can do many impressive things like win wars and build temples, but he knows he cannot make anything even remotely like this happen. And David is relieved that God is enthroned as king forever, giving strength to His people and blessing them with peace. He's relieved that God remains enthroned above the storm.

At least for now, David wants to be on the right side of a God like this, and because he is, he need not run from the storm. He can run into it. What others find terrifying nightmare fuel David finds as fuel for worship. It reminds me of something Jonathan Edwards wrote in New England during the eighteenth century when he decided not to run for cover, but instead wandered into a field and ride the storm and worship God: "And scarce anything among all the works of nature was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning. Formerly, nothing had been so terrible to me. Before I used to be uncommonly terrified

with thunder and to be struck with terror when I saw a thunderstorm rising. But now, on the contrary, it rejoiced me. I felt God, so to speak, as the first appearance of a thunderstorm, and used to take the opportunity at such times to fix myself in order to view the clouds and see the lightnings play and hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder, which oftentimes was exceedingly entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God.

While thus engaged, it always seemed natural for me to sing or chant for my meditations, or to speak my thoughts in soliloquies with a singing voice." What about you? Have you ever worshiped God in the splendor of holiness where words failed you when you were out of your depth, where you thought you might die if God revealed himself any more to you?

My friend, I invite you to walk into the storm with God and brave a grander view of His power, majesty, and holiness. Ask God today to reveal Himself to you more and more every day so that you find your worship matching the worship in heaven that echoes in eternity.

Psalm 30 | Joy Comes in the Morning

Welcome back to the Psalms, everyone. Psalm 30 is here, and it's time to rise and shine because joy comes in the morning. Psalm 30 has one of the Psalter's most beloved verses: "Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."

It's a beautiful psalm of thanksgiving, just brimming with gratitude and praise to the Lord for getting us through. Ever been there on the other side of the storm? Amazing how your perspective changes when you're just grateful to be alive. You come back to God singing a whole different tune. And Psalm 30 is that tune. Although we should note, not everyone comes back.

Remember when Jesus healed ten lepers? How many came back to say thanks? Just one. But remember what happened for that one? His soul was saved. When Jesus helps you, it pays to stop and say thanks. Back here David was rescued, and he put this song to music to make sure he never forgot. Now, the title above Psalm 30 tells us it was written "for the dedication of the temple of David."

However, the word "temple" is the same as house, so scholars disagree on exactly what house dedication this is. But I think the content best fits the dedication of David's own house, the palace. It was a major point of arrival in David's life after years and years of trial and struggle. Remember that David was anointed king as a teenager, and his faith in God was strong at a young age. But life did not work out clean and pretty.

First, the life of a warrior. Then he lived on the run from King Saul for over seven years, pursued by his own countrymen. But the hardest years ended. Life moves forward, and David found himself in a time of peace. And the Lord saw to it that David had a house and a really nice one at that. Now, if you've ever moved into a home—a real home—after a long season of not having a home, you know the sense of deep gratitude that comes with it. Something about those years without really changes you.

When we moved our family into the home we're in now, it had been five years without real stability and a full decade of serious struggle. I used to describe it like a plant pulled out of the dirt and roots, just yearning to find home soil. So Psalm 30 hits home for me—no pun intended. Okay, maybe a little pun intended.

Verse 1. "I will exalt you, Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. Lord, my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me. You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit." The first three verses include the word "you" six times, and every one of them is directed to the Lord. "You got me here, Lord. You get all the credit." I find in my own life that the deep trials have had the great benefit of leaving me thoroughly convinced, "If I ever get out of this thing, it's got to be God. There is no way I can save myself."

David knows it too. "You lifted me. You healed me. You brought me up from the dead." David feels resurrected. And it turns out resurrection is God's specialty. So David commits himself to praise, and in verse 4 calls us in with him. "Sing the praises of the Lord, you, His faithful people; praise His holy name." Gratitude is contagious, and there's something great about sharing it.

Then the glorious verse 5. “For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.” I love it. “His anger lasts a moment.” The Lord’s anger toward His children is righteous, patient, controlled and always temporary. David is likely speaking of fatherly anger here, as in God’s discipline. The Lord will get angry with us, but it’s quick, and His favor lasts a lifetime. “Favor” is the key word here.

The Hebrew indicates delight, acceptance, and an act of will. You know the difference between someone who loves you because they have to, and someone who loves you because they choose to because they just really like you like a dad who just lights up with smiles every time he sees his kid. That’s favor. And no matter what your dad was like, God’s favor doesn’t quit. It lasts a lifetime. God smiles over you. “Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”

That’s hope, and hope in the Lord endures. And in verse 6, David reflects back on older times. “When I felt secure, I said, ‘I will never be shaken.’” I think David is looking way back, back to his younger days when his faith was so strong and secure. I call it puppy faith. You know how puppy love has all the great feelings of love but totally unrealistic expectations? Puppy faith is the same—only toward God. Teenagers are quite prone to both. David was an idealistic kid, thought nothing would ever shake his faith.

In verse 7, “Lord, when you favored me, you made my royal mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed.” There’s that word again—favor. David felt it. God’s smile on him was like a mountain beneath his feet. Firm footing. But then the unthinkable happened. Look at it—“when you

hid your face.” Now again, you might tell David that he’s wrong, that God would never hide his face from his son. But David felt like it. And let’s be real. Haven’t you ever felt like God was hiding? I absolutely have. I well remember in that decade of struggle my wife asking, “Heard anything from God lately?” Not lately, but I’m holding on desperately to the promises I heard back when. David feels it.

And it’s a good lesson for all of us. I call it spiritual winter. Your walk with God comes in seasons. Fail to understand that, and winter will come as quite a shock. Where’s the sunshine? Where did all the green plants go? Maybe some of you live in spiritual Hawaii. Good for you. But the rest of us go through seasons. Yet the amazing thing about it—God designed seasons to make things grow. Seriously. Our faith was designed to survive the winter and thrive again in spring. Watch what David did in his winter. Verse 8. “To you, Lord, I called; to the Lord, I cried for mercy: ‘What is gained if I am silenced, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?

Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me; Lord, be my help.’” David thought he was dead for sure. What did he do? He cried out to the Lord. We’ve read plenty of his laments already. Now David has perspective. He made it through, but he will not forget that he called and God answered. Verse 11. “You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.” And what a trade that is! What a contrast! Wailing turned to dancing. Notice that David is all about the word “you” again. “I didn’t do this, Lord. You did.” And David dances. I love that about David. You might not know this about me, but I love to dance. Nothing formal, no training.

But in my house with my wife and my kids, music comes on, and the whole kitchen is a dance floor. And when our family finally landed in a house after years of instability, kitchen dance floor was on. Just like music, dancing can be a powerful expression of emotion, good or bad, right or wrong. But here in Psalm 30, David's dance is bursting with gratitude and joy. "You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy." Now there's a picture. Sackcloth was worn by Jews to feel outside what they felt inside. David went through it, but not now. Now he is clothed in joy. And what an outfit that is! God did that. And why did he do it?

Verse 12. "That my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever." David knows that the Lord didn't set his heart free to keep it quiet. His heart will sing. Sing his praise from way down deep. And sing that praise forever. Does that mean smooth sailing from here out? Sorry, seasons don't work that way. Fall will come and winter too. And so will spring once again.

Galatians reminds us not to lose heart in doing good, for in due season we will reap a harvest. In due season. That's God's timing. The real trick is learning to dance through winter because you know the season giver. His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime. Even if His face seems hidden, He's still smiling over you. And rejoicing comes in the morning.

Psalm 31 | A Trap Turned Into a Refuge

Welcome back to Through the Word. I'm your host, Peyton Jones. And today we'll be in Psalm 31. If you've ever been unsure of what to do next, wondering if every next move could be the wrong one, then you'll understand how David feels in Psalm 31. If he steps left, there's a trap. If he steps right, a hidden mine. Whether covered mine or mineshaft, David is paralyzed by fear, unsure of what to do next.

Maybe you felt that way before. And to top it off, no matter what decision you make, it seems that the critics, the accusers will broadcast your failures to everyone, adding insult to injury. What do you do in a situation like that where you're unsure, unable to move? Darned if you do; darned if you don't.

In verse 1, David turns to the only place he can—to God. "In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness." David has a choice. He can take his chances. He can roll the dice. But he may fall into the hidden trap—a dark hole surrounded by steep walls, powerless in the pit with no way out. Feeling powerless, David realizes he's already surrounded by steep walls. But they aren't a prison. They're a refuge. Strong walls surround him—walls of protection. Now God is all around him. "In you, Lord, I have taken refuge." David is swallowed up by God and His protection.

In verse 2, he prays inside that refuge. "Turn your ear to me, come quick 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. Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge." Note in verses

2-4 how often David uses terms like rock, fortress, refuge. Just like David used to live in caves when he was younger to hide himself from Saul so now he's hiding in God, asking God to be the impenetrable wall that makes David feel safe. How fast our perspective can change. Have you ever experienced it?

The Bible is filled with examples of traps turned refuge. Moses at the Dead Sea finds his dead end is really his deliverance as the sea closes behind him over a pursuing pharaoh in his wake. Daniel's three friends thrown into the fiery furnace discover their trap turns refuge as a fourth figure—one like the Son of Man—appears in their midst.

Here, in the same way David, thinking he might be ready to die, lets his desperation lead him to ultimate surrender in verse 5. "Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God." Wait. I've heard that before. Who else uttered those words? Someone who was in a trap. Someone innocent who was betrayed, treated like a criminal, and mocked. That's right. Jesus uttered these same words when condemned to die like a criminal when he was trapped, cuffed, beaten, and nailed to the cross. And because He would find no peace from men like David, He surrendered Himself to a faithful God: "Into your hands I commit my spirit."

David continues in verse 6. "I hate those who cling to worthless idols; as for me, I trust in the Lord." If we were David's mom, we might say, "Um, David, we don't hate." But David does hate. He hates those who cling to worthless idols. We often hate in others, funny enough, what we see most in ourselves. Perhaps David is fighting desperately to cling to his trust in God. And it's not

easy. It's not easy for any of us. Sometimes it's easier to put your trust in God than it is to keep it there.

As David battles desperately to keep all of his hope and confidence in God, David makes a shift in verse 7. "I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not given me into the hands of the enemy. You have set my feet in a spacious place." Suddenly, David isn't concerned anymore about making a false step and tumbling into a pit. No. Now he has breathing room. He can stride around. He's got a wide berth. Where did David find this? Remember, he had felt hemmed in, trapped.

But then when he realized that he wasn't in a pit but in a refuge, he takes himself back in his memory to the cave he used to hide in as a young man. That cave that symbolized to him God's protection—that rock when he was young, and trusting God back then seemed so easy—and it's there that he remembers God's incredible love that filled that cave. And David makes a choice here, and it's all about perspective. "I will be glad and rejoice in your love." Those times in the cave when Saul was hot in pursuit trying to ferret David out of his hiding places so many times it seemed like the end. But David remembers, "You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not given me into the hands of the enemy." And he thinks He probably won't now.

God has never let him down. So even though David is not yet delivered in the present, he knows that this present pain will turn to future praise—eventually. He remembers God's faithfulness in the past and resets his faith for the future. But back to the present.

Verse 9. “Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and 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 and an object of dread to my closest friends—those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. For I hear many whispering, ‘Terror on every side!’ They conspire against me and plot to take my life.” Talk about drama. Talk about trauma. David has been through the wringer. Distress. Eyes weary from crying. Weak with sorrow. Bone-tired. Shunned. He’s the contempt of his neighbors.

Like Job, even his closest friends can’t be counted on. “Those who see me on the street flee from me.” There’s no greater loneliness on earth than when your closest friends abandon you along with everyone else. But again, David is not alone.

Verse 14. “But I trust in you, Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.” What a powerful statement. “My times are in your hands.” David here surrenders to the suffering. Like anyone, David wants deliverance right now, but surrenders to God’s timetable. He allows his suffering to test his faith here. And his faith holds, and David surrenders. Verse 16. “Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.” Up till now, David had seen only darkness even tucked away in the rock, the refuge of the Lord. It’s been dark there in this place of suffering. So David prays, “Now, Lord, let your face shine on your servant.”

In verses 17 and 18, David prays for his enemies to be turned to darkness. But then in verse 19, David expects to receive good things from the Lord. We all know that feeling—expecting a delivery, a package in the mail filled with good things. You know that feeling, right? Looking at the mailbox, checking it every day to see if that amazing package has arrived. David knows that God has good things stored up for him in verse 19. “How abundant are the good things that you have stored up for those who fear you, that you bestow in the sight of all, on those who take refuge in you. In the shelter of your presence, you hide them from all human intrigues; you keep them safe in your dwelling from accusing tongues.

Praise be to the Lord, for He showed me the wonders of His love when I was in a city under siege. 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.” What a shift in perspective. David says, “In my alarm I said, ‘I was cut off from your sight!’” He thought God wasn’t seeing him, yet now he knows God has heard him. “You have heard my cry for mercy . . . and He has shown me the wonders of His love.”

There in that refuge, in that trapped hidden fortress, David is surrounded by God’s love. He’d felt like a city under siege. But now, God’s impenetrable love changes all of that. And it’s not just for David. He loves us greatly, too. So David says love Him back.

Verse 23. “Love the Lord, all His faithful people! The Lord preserves those who are true to Him . . .” That’s you and that’s me. So a final exhortation in verse 24: “Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.”

Psalm 32 | Confession That's Good for the Soul

Welcome back to Through the Word. I'm your host, Peyton Jones. And today we'll be in Psalm 32 on our journey through the Word.

Have you ever done something that you were so ashamed of, that you didn't want to be around anyone? You didn't want to look anybody in the eye? You felt vulnerable and exposed as if everyone knew what you did. The burden of guilt you carried even made it hard to look at yourself in the mirror. No matter how hard we try to stuff feelings like those down, they keep coming up like a bad case of heartburn.

David had done something terrible. He'd taken advantage of a young married woman named Bathsheba spying on her bathing on the rooftop. He misused his power to take advantage of her, got her pregnant, and then tried to cover it up by having her husband killed on the field of battle so that he could take her as another one of his many wives. It's the stuff of soap operas and tell-all tabloids. But that was the problem. David moved on like nothing ever happened and for that entire time refused to speak about it. And he was miserable. Walking around with your guilt eating away at you from inside is like carrying a curse everywhere you go.

This is why David focuses in verse 1 on feeling blessed when he finally breaks and breaks his silence to confess to God what he's done. Verse 1. "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." David had covered up his heinous sins, but that didn't help things. It made them worse. But there's a difference between covering up your own sins and having them covered by God. "Blessed are those whose sins are covered." To

understand what David means here about having our sins covered, we have to go way back into the Old Testament when God told His people how they could be forgiven. You see, they had to take an innocent animal into the temple, confess their sins over it, and then allow the priest to slay it in cold blood. The sin was said to be transferred to the innocent animal—the innocent paying for the guilty. That’s what the word “forgiven” means—literally your sin given away, given to someone else. Someone else has taken the blame. Someone else has paid the price. Someone innocent. The Lamb of God would come to take away the sins of the world, but He’d not yet appeared.

So when the priests performed that sacrifice, he would take the blood of that lamb and cover the person with it, hiding that person under the blood, covering them. “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are covered.” And the word “transgression” means a sin that you committed when you knew better. In self-defense of our actions, we often plea, “I didn’t know,” but David knew better, and that made it all the harder to accept that God might actually forgive him. Perhaps David couldn’t forgive himself, so he locked it away and moved on like nothing had happened.

But in verse 2, he continues, “Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them, and in whose spirit is no deceit.” The word blessed. What a contrast to the curse David had been carrying around. He pens a psalm after the pus of his sin is festered and built up over time. But now that zit of his guilt has popped, and he finally feels relief. And that’s the only good thing about a zit. But there’s nothing good about sin. God has intervened with grace, and David is experiencing the blessedness of grace itself. And David goes on to say, “And in whose spirit is no deceit.” Even that feels good. If you’ve ever lived in deceit or an elaborate cover up to hide what you’ve done,

living a lie is no fun. Bathsheba's belly has been swelling, and with it his shame, growing silently under the surface, becoming increasingly harder to hide. But now that he's confessed, he feels the deceit of his own lies leave his system like poison leaving the bloodstream. And it feels good.

Verse 3. "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." The title of this psalm tells us that it's a maskil. We don't exactly know what a maskil is, but it appears to be a word that involves teaching, telling, or talking. But teaching, telling, or talking is exactly what David refused to do these last nine months as his guilt internally gnawed at him, sapping him day after day, night after night, "your hand heavy on me," he says.

This is the difference, by the way, between letting God bear your sin for you or trying to bear it yourself. Bearing it yourself leads to a tortured existence staggering under the weight of what you've done. It's a type of hell on earth. Confession is the only thing that will make the difference. Verse 5. "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. Selah." Acknowledging that sin before God is the first step to being right with God, and it shows how much David has been trying to put it behind him to bury the evidence, but allowing God to take that sin, getting it out into the open is like vomiting when you've been nauseous for hours—not a pleasant experience, admittedly, but such a relief when it's all out.

David's spiritual nausea is over. Better out than in, I always say. But twice in these verses, David outlines how his confession led to God forgiving him. I

confessed, and you forgave the guilt of my sin. And even now, David pauses and pins the word Selah, a word that appears in the psalms of David occasionally, which doesn't exactly have an English translation, but a word that scholars believe means pause, meditate, think about this. Selah. As if David is still blown away by the graciousness of God. But why should David be forgiven for what he did? I mean, it was pretty terrible. But why should I? Why should you?

And David knows he's no special case in verse 6. "Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah." There's that word again. Stop. Meditate. Ponder. David says, "Let all the faithful pray to you." David had not been faithful, but he was faithful here to return to God—finally. And David doesn't take for granted that God forgave him. Note the phrase "while you may be found" as if there was no guarantee that we can't go beyond help by stubbornly refusing to turn back. David feels the rising waters of his guilt and shame as if he's barely escaped the flood. David sings like a survivor who has been rescued.

But what a statement. "You are my hiding place." David had thought he could hide what he'd done. He could hide from it like Adam hiding in the bushes. But there was no refuge in running from his actions like Moses trying to bury the Egyptian he'd murdered in the sand. But how ironic. David ultimately finds God is his hiding place. The only safety he can find from what he's done is in God, and there confessing his sins God surrounds him with songs of deliverance after nine months of tortured silence. Stop, pause, meditate, and count your lucky stars? No, thank your gracious God.

In verse 8, in response to David finally spitting out what he's done, God breaks the silence on his end. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on 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." Nothing described David more during that period than a mule or a beast. Have you ever rushed into sin and afterward thought, "How could I have been so stupid?"

No understanding like a cow walking into the slaughter pen. Except God says more than that—he was rebellious, "having to be controlled by a bit and bridle, or they will not come to you," and you can almost hear the hurt in God's voice. He wanted David simply to come to Him in his shame, not run from Him, but to trust Him, to come to Him for help, for forgiveness, for guidance. But David refused. He stubbornly kept going in the wrong direction, hurting himself and others even more until Nathan the prophet came and confronted him like putting a bit and bridle in his mouth. Like David, we can come to God the easy way or the hard way. And David had chosen the hard way for too long.

But in verse 10, speaking from experience, David says, "Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in Him." Thankfully, David knows now from experience that like his woes multiplied the longer he was on the run from God so God's lovingkindness, His unfailing love would surround the one who trusts in Him.

Before this, David's guilt slowly suffocated him like someone putting a pillow over his face. But now that's replaced in an exchange that happens the minute David turns back from God. That suffocation of guilt is replaced by being surrounded with God's love. Remember, even if you've walked a

hundred steps away from God, it's just one step back. All you need to do is turn around. And with the love of God surrounding David, he feels his strength returning, energizing him, causing a song to well up within him.

Verse 11. "Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing all you who are upright in heart! Selah." And David ends with a final Selah, perhaps because he knows that he has not been upright in heart but that for the moment he is—no deception, no secret sin, nothing gnawing at the innards of his soul. "Meditate on this," he tells himself. "Remember this." And with that, he invites us to stop, to pause, to ponder this.

My friends, stop and pause today and let your pondering turn to wonder and let your wonder turn to worship. Jesus bore your sins so you don't have to.

Psalm 33 | Rejoicing in God's Righteousness

Welcome, friends, to Psalm 33, a rare orphan psalm in the midst of the forty-one psalms comprising Book One.

It's called an orphan because it doesn't have a superscript identifying the psalm with David or any other author. But it is sandwiched between two of David's psalms and follows on thematically from Psalm 32. So let's take a quick look at the continuity between them.

In Psalm 32, David boldly proclaimed blessing on the one whose transgressions are forgiven. In that psalm, David transparently modeled his practice of confessing his transgressions, bringing them to Yahweh, and taking refuge in the Lord from the trouble stirred up by his own sin. And in response to the Lord's forgiveness, Psalm 32 overflowed with remarkable encouragement as David meditated on Yahweh's unfailing love.

What amazing news that the Lord doesn't abandon us when we sin. No! Instead, the Lord calls us to run to Him into His unfailing love to receive both His promise of safety from trouble and instruction in His ways. And so Psalm 32 finished with a command to those made righteous through forgiveness to sing and be glad. Now today's psalm, Psalm 33, is that song, the kind of song that we should sing as we rejoice in the steadfast love of God. So let's jump in.

Verse 1. "Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it's 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." Listen

to all those commands for the righteous to celebrate. Sing. Praise Him. Play skillfully. Shout for joy. And who are the righteous? In Psalm 32, David didn't identify them as those who've never sinned. No. David made it clear that the upright are also those who quickly and humbly confess their sin, who run to the Lord for His patient instruction and seek the Lord earnestly to learn his ways.

This is remarkably consistent with our New Testament faith. The upright are defined by the Lord in whom they have put their trust and their responsive obedience to grow up into Him. This song celebrates the reality of God's forgiveness as we joyfully receive what is offered to us, giving us courage for a way out of the messes of our own making, to be found by the Lord and brought home when we have lost our way. It's a new song, written for every sin-weary heart that finds itself suddenly set free.

Verse 4. "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." Isn't this incredible? Faithful lover of righteousness and justice, Lord of unfailing love. This is the character of our God. Yahweh will do for us what He has promised, and because we can trust Him, we can sing in the midst of every storm.

Verse 6. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth. He gathers the waters 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." Did you notice the repetition? First we sing because the word of the Lord is right and true. We can trust His forgiveness and steadfast love with all our

being. Second, we sing because by the word of the Lord the heavens were made. Yahweh is the Creator God. His word doesn't just hold our lives together. His word holds the entire universe together. Not to trust Him for forgiveness, protection, instruction, to make us righteous makes us out of step with the fabric of all creation. How foolish it is to trust in our own way instead of His.

That's why in verse 10, the psalm proclaims, "The Lord foils the plans of the nations; He thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand forever and the purposes of His heart through all generations." God will not allow the wayward nations of the world to resist His purposes for ever, nor will he allow evil and sin to thwart His good plans for His people and His world. Yahweh's word spoken over creation is that it's good and very good. His blessing of life and goodness will prevail.

Verse 12. "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." In Psalm 32, David proclaimed the blessing of the one whose transgression is forgiven.

Now Psalm 33 sings about the blessing of the nation whose God is the Lord. Isn't this amazing? God doesn't just want to redeem individuals. He wants to redeem the nations of the world. And this is precisely Israel's calling that through the blessed forgiveness and refuge they receive, all the nations would likewise be blessed. God is so good. This is precisely why Jesus commands believers in Matthew 28 to go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that He commanded.

Now, all God's people in Christ are called to participate in Israel's servant calling to walk in God's ways and to reflect His love out into the world. And so we find our message to the nations in verse 16. "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." Listen to all those salvation words: saved, escapes, deliverance, and more. They're all offered to us, but only found in the Lord where we receive deliverance through His unfailing love. That's what we're to walk in and proclaim to the world. And so we raise our voice and sing loudly to all who will listen.

Verse 20. "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 be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you." So I encourage you today to lift up your voice and sing loud and clear a song of the Lord's unfailing love, a love that finds us when we're lost, forgives us when we've sinned, and becomes a refuge even from the storms of our own making.

Perhaps you want to join me in singing one of my favorites. "The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen could ever tell. It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell. The guilty pair, bowed down with care, He gave His son to win; His erring child He reconciled and pardoned from his sin. O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure the saints' and angels' song."

Psalm 34 | It's Never Too Late to Trust

Welcome back to Through the Word. My name is Peyton Jones, and I'll be your guide today as we go through Psalm chapter 34, one of the richest psalms in God's hymnbook.

Have you ever been watching a film or show from a bygone era like *Casablanca* and they drop a line like, "Here's looking at you, kid," and you think, "Oh, that's where that came from"? You know, a ton of these classic one-liner verses here are tweetable tweets, and you may have heard them before, but you didn't know that they came from this psalm. What *Casablanca* is to films with all of its quotes Psalm 34 is to the book of Psalms—a masterpiece, not just for the rich single line quotes, but it is a literary acrostic, meaning that every verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

The title note tells a piece of that story: "Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he left." Most of that story can be found in first Samuel 21, when, on the run from Saul, David slips just out of his reach, crossing the border into Philistine country instead of being caught. But there was a problem. David was the most feared and hated warrior in Philistine country probably because of the Philistine body bags he'd stacked up as one of Saul's generals. But now, in enemy territory, David feels that he has one hope of survival: pretend to be mad so that King Abimelech doesn't see him as a threat. His plan worked. Lying worked. Deception worked.

But David's story isn't done. Many people would die for David's lie when all was said and done. Those one-liner quotes in Psalm 34 are the profound truths that David learned on the other side of telling deadly lies. So let's join David in the cave, relieved that he's escaped in verse 1. "I will extol the Lord at all time; His praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together."

David is full of praise, but verse 4 gives the reason. "I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears." From verse 2 where David says, "Let the afflicted hear and rejoice," to verse 4 where David is delivered, his relief is palpable. You can almost hear the shock. "I called, and He answered." David sounds shocked because he is shocked. When David pretended madness he was not trusting the Lord. His fears were in the driver's seat calling the shots. And maybe you've been there. Your fears have caused you to act irrationally and in a way that you normally wouldn't act. So you panic.

You go into survival mode. David acts shamefully here in this story, pretending to be a madman and to quote 1 Samuel 21, verse 13, "letting saliva run down his beard." That's why I find verse 5 very telling. "Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame." But David's face had been covered with shame, spittle running down his beard as he pretended madness. And David knows that even though he failed to trust in God that what he is saying here is actually true. "Those who look to Him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame."

Verse 6. “This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles.” Well, David did trust God—eventually. Better late than never. This poor man is David. When he pretended madness, he was tragic, pathetic and pitiful. I can picture David here knowing he’s screwing up as he does it, ashamed of pretending to be a madman, praying to God, and perhaps even disguising his ravings and rantings as prayers asking God to get him out of this mess. He’s ashamed. He can’t believe he’s acted this way, and it will cost him more than just his dignity. It will cost people’s lives. But again, we’ll get to that. David eventually realizes that in contrast to his troubles and fears, God had his back the entire time.

Verse 7. “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.” David had the angel of the Lord, God himself encamping around him, keeping watch over him. He just didn’t know it—at first. So David invites us to see what is easily missed that we can trust God at all times.

Verse 8. “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him.” I’m not going to lie. I love Costco. You’re walking down the aisle and on either side of you are endless options, so you keep them all in mind maybe as you walk down the aisle. But then someone in an apron ambushes you and holds out that little white paper sample cup. So unfair. Taste and see. And before you know it, you’ve loaded up on an industrial sized box of whatever.

David is telling you, “Taste and see.” He’s telling you not to keep trusting God as merely an option. Try it. Taste His protection. You’ll be blessed like I am. “Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.” Verse 9. “Fear the Lord, you His holy people, for those who fear Him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak

and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.” David keeps talking about the fear of the Lord, but the fear David had in Philistine country was not only a different Hebrew word—it means dread terror— but the fear of the Lord is a type of trust, faith, dependence on Him. And now David beckons us in like he’s going to tell us a secret.

Some hard won lesson in verse 11. “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 . . .” Show of hands. Who likes living, who loves life, who desires to see many good days? Me, me, me. Okay, I’ll teach you that. Come close. And we poise ready to hear what David will say. Okay. Only good days. No more bad days. I can’t wait. Yes, David. What is it?

The answer, verse 13. “Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.” We look around. Wait, I . . . Did you hear that? Um, David, that wasn’t really the answer we were looking for. Finally, we come to the rest of the story. Madness, murder, and mayhem, remember? You see David had just told a pack of lies that got people killed. Right before David pretends madness before Abimelech, he stumbles into the priest’s encampment on the run from Saul and tells the high priest he’s on a secret mission from Saul himself.

So when Saul gets there later and hears David came through, he slaughters over ninety priests for unwittingly harboring his enemy—all because of David’s lies. So how is David in any place to teach us if he screwed up so bad? Well, sometimes you teach best the lessons you learn the hardest or the slowest. David may have screwed up, but rather than disqualifying him from instructing us here, it gives weight to his words.

Learn from my mistakes, kids. Don't do what I did. Don't be like me. Trust the Lord early, often, and always. But David isn't done teaching us. Verse 14.

"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, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth." "Turn from evil." But David didn't turn from evil. "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous." But David wasn't righteous. How is David after what he's done and the blood on his hands not blotted out? I mean, what hope does David have? What hope do we have when we've messed up big?

Verse 18. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." When you're at your worst-broken, crushed, and heartbroken, you often feel that God is distant and far. But no. David says the Lord is close, and this too is known from experience. David knows it because God had been close to him when he was crushed. David is brokenhearted when he hears about the priests. He's crushed in spirit and God is there.

Verse 19. "The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all; He protects all of his bones, not one of them will be broken The Lord will rescue His servants; no one who takes refuge in Him will be condemned." Interesting that David uses the word "condemned." What a relief that our mistakes don't condemn us. For we can say with Paul that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And Jesus is here, by the way, in verse 20. "He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken." And this is actually used as a prophecy of the strange occurrence where Jesus' kneecaps weren't shattered by the Romans because He died too fast on the cross. Right in the heart of this psalm, Jesus makes a

cameo, and it's because on the cross He took all of the condemnation for us. The Lord can be near to the brokenhearted.

Like verse 19 says, you will have many troubles. But these truths in this psalm laid out in acrostic form combat the lies. They are maxims that matter. They'll get you through. They'll remind you to trust God instead of your harebrained schemes. And I don't know about you, but that's the kind of deliverance that I need.

Psalm 35 | Mean Girls

Welcome back to Through the Word. My name is Peyton Jones, and I'll be your guide today in Psalm 35 on our journey through the Word.

Most of us learn early on that we live in a cruel world. Perhaps it's that mean middle school girl spreading painful rumors about us that we're helpless to staunch. Or as adults, someone at work trashes us to coworkers in the break room. If you've grown up but still struggle with a cruel world where justice seems a meaningless word to most, then David feels your pain. And Psalm 35 has a lot to say to you.

Verse 1. "Contend, Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me." David tells God here to fight for him. This isn't his fight after all. He didn't start it, and he doesn't want to finish it. He prays, "God, will you handle it? Will you fight with those who are fighting with me?" Verse 2. "Take up shield and armor; arise and come to my aid. Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to me, 'I am your salvation.'" Armor. Weapons. David wants to see God suit up like Iron Man and save the day telling him, "I got this. I'm here now. I am your salvation."

And David needs a superhero because foes according to verse 10 are "too strong for me." He tells God that he wants them to get a taste of their own medicine in verse 4. "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."

David's attackers may not believe in justice, so David wants them to experience it.

He wants the hunters to become the hunted, the pursuers to be pursued, and by God himself, no less, the angel of the Lord. He pleads his case with God, telling him why God should turn the tables on them. Verse 7. "Since they hid their net from me without cause and without cause dug a pit for me." David's saying, "I was just minding my own business, but they had it out for me."

Verse 8. "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, Lord?' You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them." Note that David wants them to feel the same surprise he did. That confusion, that shock: "May ruin overtake them by surprise." Doesn't that sound a little vindictive, though? Perhaps. David isn't perfect after all.

But I think we can all relate to the justice of somebody experiencing the same pain they've caused others. David wants them to feel what he feels—the surprise, the shock. We've all had that moment of mini-justice on the playground when those words first came out of our mouths. "How does it feel? How do you like it?" But David doesn't want to be the one who brings that aha moment to them. He wants God to do it. David pictures that moment. "My whole being will rejoice when I see justice."

In verse 11, David gets descriptive with what they're doing, how they've caused him pain. "Ruthless witnesses came forward; they question me on

things I know nothing about. They repay me evil for good and leave me like one bereaved.” Is David talking about lawyers here—ruthless witnesses asking him questions to trap him? He may not be on trial, but he certainly feels like it.

But back to David’s shock and bewilderment about why they’ve mistreated him in verse 13. “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; assailants gathered against me without my knowledge. They slandered me without ceasing. Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked; they gnashed their teeth at me.” What a contrast. When they were hurt, I mourned like they were family. I felt their pain. But when I was hurting, they laughed. They kicked me when I was down, mocking me with glee. How long?

Verse 17. “How long, Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, my precious life from these lions. I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among the throngs I will praise you.” David feels like a lamb in the teeth of a lion. Jesus said He’d send us out like sheep among wolves. And that’s why we need to know we have a shepherd to protect us when we can’t protect ourselves. “Rescue me from their ravages, and I will give you thanks in the great assembly.” David is saying, “They have plotted against me in secret, but I will praise you in public.”

Skip to verse 22. “Lord, you have seen this; do not be silent. Do not be far from me, Lord. Awake, rise to my defense! Contend for me, my God and Lord. Vindicate me in your righteousness, 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.’” Silence. David wants his attackers to be silent. But when God is silent, it troubles David. David knows that if God sees something, He’ll say something. “Don’t be far from me.” You know, confusing times like this can make us all feel like God is far away like we’re unloved and uncared for, like sheep without a shepherd. It’s that playground trauma rushing back in. “I’m in a big world, one I don’t understand. And people are mean. And mom isn’t here. And there’s nobody for me to run to.” But David knows he can still run to God.

David makes four pleas in verse 26 and 27—two for the persecutors and two for the persecuted. Verse 26. “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.” Shame and disgrace for the persecutors. But now for the persecuted.

Verse 27. “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 proclaim your righteousness, your praises all day long.” We all know that moment when the tables finally turn—when justice is served. We watch that movie when the bad guy gets what’s coming to him. After two hours of watching the heroes struggle, and in that final moment of retribution, that frustrated sense of justice that’s been building up in us needs somewhere to go like a can of soda shaken up—that pressure building.

And in this case, for David, it’s turned to praise. “May they shout for joy and gladness.” The persecuted pleas turn to praise because there is still justice in

the world because God is still in it. Living through these types of injustices can make life feel a lot like watching a long movie where we're not seeing God acting. God seems silent. We're not seeing justice, and it's hard to get through it. Maybe that's because we often see the face of men more than we see the face of God. But He's still there behind the scenes. And sometimes those who push kids down on the playground get reputations as bullies and end up having no friends just like the adults in the workplace who get found out for being backstabbing ladder climbers that nobody trusts or wants to work with get their due.

Justice doesn't always work the way we want it to, or in the time we think it should, but God is always there, watching, waiting, and working behind the scenes. And my friend, it's all because He delights in you.

Psalm 36 | Mountain Top Experiences

Welcome back to Through the Word. I'm your host, Peyton Jones. And today we'll be in Psalm 36.

Have you ever been on a mountaintop—somewhere out in the wilderness, the smell of pines, big sky, the melodic music of a stream and not a care in the world? And then it hits you. I have to go back down this darn mountain where all those jerks are. Pitted dread interrupts your mountain high as you remember you have to reenter the concrete jungle and rejoin the rest of the mess of humanity as they continue to break the world. And frankly, you don't want any part of it.

I pictured David here in a clearing in the wilderness, perhaps in a meadow with a stream running by with grand views of majestic mountains where David gets a message from God, an insight about the sinfulness of the wicked.

Verse 1, he tells us, "I have a message from God in my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked; There is no fear of God before their eyes. In their own eyes they flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their sin. The words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful; they fail to act wisely or do good." God's revelation of wickedness outlines how they think in verses 1 and 2 and how they talk and act in verse 3. "There is no fear of God before their eyes. In their own eyes they flatter themselves," David said.

If you've ever had something stuck in your eye, everything blurs, your vision distorts, and you can't see properly. The wicked could see the fear of God—another way of saying how awesome God is—if their own

awesomeness weren't in the way. "They flatter themselves too much to detect or hate their own sin." Dummies. Wait, I mean, I'd totally hate on them more, but actually sometimes that's true of me too. Never mind. Let's reread verse 3. "The words of their mouth are wicked and deceitful; they fail to act wisely or do good." It's not just their eyes. They've also got a problem with their mouths. "The words of their mouths are wicked and deceitful." Deceitful. Okay, so they don't see the truth about themselves. So in some ways they're actually deceived and lying to themselves, which makes them lie to others. No wonder. If their thinking is out of whack, then it's not surprising that their words are also out of whack.

You see, the Bible teaches bad thinking leads to bad living so they fail to act wisely or do good both day and night, according to verse 4. "Even on their beds, they plot evil; they commit themselves to a sinful course and do not reject what is wrong." So the problem with their brains, or how they think, leads to the problem of what they say and do. That's during the day. But when most of our brains are shutting down for the day ready to sleep, David says their thinking causes them to ask the same question every night: "What are we going to do, brain?"

Lying on their beds, their wicked thoughts respond: The same thing we do every night. Try and take over the world." They plot, scheme, and invent new ways of innovating sinfulness like mad scientists. They are the Teslas of treachery, the Edisons of evil, Oppenheimers of obscenity, inventing new forms of depravity when they should be sleeping.

But it's never enough because wickedness is never content with itself. Sin never satisfies. It always hungers for more. And whatever evil they

accomplish, it only increases their cravings for more. Think about it. What is sin ever given you that has lasting value—that gave more than it took? What passion did you ever indulge in that didn't just leave you hungry for more? No wonder they're always looking for more, for something new. But sitting in that meadow, listening to that stream, trying to take in the grandeur of that great blue sky above him, enjoying the peace of it all, David thinks about how content he is just with God Himself, how there's always enough.

In fact, like the overwhelm of his senses brought on by God's creation, David can't take it all in. He looks up to the sky in verse 5. "Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies." With a smile on his lips and joy in his heart, David knows that his big as the sky is God's love for him is bigger. As grand as the heavens are at night, God's love knows no height, depth, nor width. It's just too much to take in. And it's good for us to take in God's love at this point in the psalm because we are all sinners.

Paul quotes verse 1 of this psalm in the book of Romans to remind religious people like us that the passage about sinners doesn't just describe them, it describes us too. We forget that we are sinners as well. We forget what Paul reminds us of that we who judge others practice the same things. But luckily, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. David saying, "Lord, your love reaches to the heavens," for loving a sinner like me. And reaching to the heavens, that's like saying to the moon and back. God's faithfulness or His commitment to us reaches to the skies, and that is to infinity and beyond. That's why everything in what David is about to say is big, like really big. Whereas sin causes a scarcity mindset where it's never enough, God gives David and us an abundance mindset.

Verse 6. “Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep. You, Lord, preserve both people and animals.” God’s righteousness here is seen as an unscalable height towering majestically above us. “David, do you mean like the highest mountain like Mount Everest?” “Yep.” “And God’s justice, David, is it like the great deep—the deepest? Well, David, I know that’s great news for us, but it’s not really the best of news for the other guys in the beginning of this chapter.” “Nope, it’s not, Peyton, but I’m not done, so keep reading. I told you I had a message from God, and I’m not done delivering my burden.” “Okay, sorry, David. It’s just that I’m trying to do this Through the Word thing here. Wait. You know what? Never mind. Continue.”

Verse 7. “How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.” Priceless—that means nothing in the world can compare with God’s love. Why? Because it’s unfailing. God’s love never stops. It never ends. Therefore, we can take refuge in the shadow of God’s wings. God protects us and cares for us. Verse 8. “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.” Sitting by a spring that never ceases, David knows that God’s love like that river will never run dry. He will always have what he needs—God’s love bubbling up from the ground giving him the river of your delights.

And I want to ask, when was the last time that something delighted you? The word “delight” is a type of word we use rarely for something that has lit up our entire being like a new puppy, or holding a baby, or remembering that one Christmas as a child that stands out above all others where you came into the living room Christmas morning and there it was. There’s not scarcity here, but

abundance. David feasts on the abundance of God's house, and it may be that he's able to just reach out and pick a piece of fruit like a pomegranate or an olive out there in the wilderness and just eat it. He finds his surroundings to be like a Garden of Eden where he has everything—in fact, not just everything—too much, everything he needs for life and more. The sun providing light, lighting up his path. “In your light, Lord, we see light,” but the wicked, they walk in darkness. They can't see properly. But David has an oracle, a revelation, a message. He sees it all, every bit of nature here communicating to him what it was created for to show him God's love and faithfulness.

That's why he says earlier in verse 6. “You, Lord, preserve both people and animals.” It all communicates God's abundance of love. But David's not done. He makes a request. “More of the same, please,” he says in verse 10. “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!” As David makes his way back down the mountain passing boulders and trees wiped out by a storm, lying dead and motionless on the mountainside and on the valley floor, David descends the mountain path, ready to rejoin the mass of sinners like himself.

But there is one subtle difference—David sees God. He's been on the mountain with Him. “Continue your love to those who know you,” he says. And by that, he doesn't mean that God may stop loving us. He means, “God, as I descend this mountain, let me keep experiencing it.”

Mountaintop experiences are great, by the way, but the good news is that we can continue to experience God's love just by cracking open the Word like we did today and reading about it and reminding ourselves of His incredible, unfailing love that reaches to the heavens. But let's not forget. David knows that he's not any better than anyone else. Those evildoers just like me, and just like you, can still experience God's love at any time. There's enough to go around here for everyone. There's hope for everyone after all.

Psalm 37 | Fret Not for the Wicked

Welcome, my friends, to Psalm 37, a psalm of wisdom and patience in response to evil. David has wrestled through his own feelings toward evil in many psalms, but he's older now. Time has taught him patience, and wise old King David directs this psalm not to the Lord, but to us to share the hard earned wisdom that years of prayer and patience have taught him.

You can hear the age and experience in his words. The psalm is a Hebrew acrostic, each verse beginning with the next letter in the alphabet. Grandpa David took time so that the young could memorize it. I have one grandson. He's two. His whole world now is adoring family and fun discovery. Someday soon, the real world will hit. Hatred. War. Cruelty. It's not our job to shield them, but we should equip them to respond well. How do you respond to wickedness? Mentally, how do you process? The Bible calls us time and again to fight injustice and defend the weak.

But Psalm 37 is about the heart's response when you see the wicked do wrong and worse yet, succeed, how do you guard your heart? We begin at verse 1. "Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong." First tip: don't fret. The Hebrew word literally means kindle. Fretting over evil is like dumping dried pine needles on the sparks of anger in your heart. Be wise. The fireball you make will burn you and those closest to you. Stop fretting. Second tip: do not be envious. Don't desire what they have. It's tempting. Wrongdoers make a quick payoff, taking as much faster than earning. Do not envy them. Why?

Verse 2. “For like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.” The key word is “soon.” Look ahead, son. See their destiny.

Verse 3. “Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.” The opening foundation of our response to evil is trust in God. Trust Him and do good. Eyes off the wicked; eyes on the Lord. And dwell in the land. Seven times in this Psalm David will speak of the “land.” Land is a picture of God’s enduring providence. The land outlives us all. It sustains generations. Enjoy safe pasture as the good Shepherd enables. The wicked chase schemes; the righteous work the land.

Verse 4 is much beloved. “Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” Recall from Psalm 1 that delight is that spark of wonder and curiosity that captivates our attention. Redirect your focus off the evil and onto the Lord. Delight. Don’t be fooled by grumpy religious piety that frets every evil. Stop kindling the fires of self-righteous anger and delight in the Lord’s goodness, and He will give you the desires of your heart. But hold on. Is God suddenly your genie? What if your heart desires wicked things? Think it through. If your heart craves evil, I guarantee you are not delighting in the Lord. Try it. Take real time to delight in Him. Then tell me what your heart longs for.

Verse 5. “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn . . .” Notice the reward. Wait for it. Righteousness pays off. Verse 7 is a call to patience in the Lord’s presence: wait for him. Don’t fret. Be still. Verse 8. “Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.” Third time now. Don’t fret. Stop. Refrain. Notice the self-control required, the action necessary to turn

from wrath. Turn your eyes away from the bad things they're doing and look ahead to where they're going.

Verse 9. "For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land." Watch that phrase, "inherit the land." It will come back. "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 peace and prosperity." There's that phrase again, and this time I recognize it. "The meek will inherit the earth." Jesus said that; it's the third beatitude. Jesus was quoting and reflecting on this psalm. "Meek" is a complex word.

To a bully, meek sounds like weak, but meekness is chosen—a strength that isn't flexed. One Bible dictionary defines the meek as those wholly relying on God, rather than their own strength to defend against injustice. Meekness is the outworking of our trust in God. The Bible opposite of meekness is self-assertive and self-interested. The meek will defend the weak but allow God to defend the self. "The meek will inherit the land." The Hebrew word means "land, earth, dirt, territory," and it carries all the vastness and depth that the word still carries for us.

When the old man says, "Buy dirt," he doesn't mean a shovel full of brown stuff. He means land. Land to dwell on. Land to grow in. Land to sustain you. You know, maybe this is a country song. Throughout history and still today, one of the greatest predictors of long-term success is inheriting land. David says those who hope in the Lord—the meek—inherit the land, all of it from God. Jesus echoes it.

In verse 12, “The wicked plot against the righteous . . . but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for He knows their day is coming.” They draw their sword to slay the upright, but in verse 15, “their swords will pierce their own hearts.” I love how verse 16 begins. “Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked.” But how is that possible? The answer is time. Look down the road.

In verse 18, “The blameless spend their days under the Lord’s care, and their inheritance will endure forever.” So God’s providence covers today and tomorrow—your shepherd today, your provider forever. And there’s that word “inheritance” again. Don’t strive to take it. Trust the Lord to give it. In verse 19, trust Him in times of disaster and days of famine. In verse 20, “The wicked will perish.” Like an old Cheech & Chong movie, they will go up in smoke. And verse 21 explores the world of takers and givers. Take a look. “The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously . . .”

So who has more in the end? The taker or the giver? Simple math says it’s the taker every time. But the question is a trick. Your view is too small. You forgot to account for the great giver and taker of all things in verse 22. “Those the Lord blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be destroyed.” There it is again, almost as if he wants our hearts set on it. “Inherit the land.” Next, “the Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in Him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.” I love that picture. Firm steps— stumble, never fall.

And in verse 25, some well-aged wisdom: “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 a blessing.” I

love this. For me, this is the great fulfillment of verse 4. When I delight in the Lord, this is the great desire of my heart—not simply to be blessed or have my children blessed— but that my children will be a blessing, to be the conduit of God’s grace to all they meet. And praise the Lord, my kids are grown and are precisely that. That blesses me. So in verse 27, David turns to us and makes this charge: “Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever. “Wrongdoers won’t last. Their offspring will perish too.

But in verse 29, once again, “The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.” The psalm moves to closing with a call to listen to wisdom, to hear the righteous. The wicked may plot against, but the Lord protects. We begin with trust. We end with hope. Verse 34. “Hope in the Lord and keep His way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are destroyed, you will see it.” David reflects. He’s seen the wicked. They thrive then pass, never to be found. And his final admonition comes in verse 37. Consider—that means think it through. “Consider the blameless, observe the upright; a future awaits those who seek peace.”

There’s a future, a land, a legacy. But all sinners will be destroyed. There will be no future for the wicked—no future, no land, no legacy. And how do you survive today? In the final verses: the Lord is your stronghold. Take refuge in Him.

Psalm 38 | To Remember the Hurt

Welcome back to the Psalms, everyone. The thirty-eighth is a psalm of confession and deep, heart-wrenching guilt.

Verse 4 captures the tone. “My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.” Musically speaking, my first instinct was to call this a goth track—dark, brooding, emotional. Just look at the words: searing pain, utterly crushed, groaning in anguish. It’s dark. And one thing I appreciate about goth is a willingness to feel your feelings. And music helps, helps you process. But then it could also be a country song, heartbreak story of pain and guilt. That’s country.

Then I found it: Johnny Cash’s rendition of the Nine Inch Nails song, “Hurt.” Cash recorded it just months before he died. A devoted Christian of deep conviction, he opened the album with a reading from Revelation and a track about Jesus’ return, dense with Bible and powerful hope for eternity. So why would he follow that with a painfully dark song about self-harm and addiction? He recorded it because he never forgot what it was like to hurt. Cash spent some dark years as an addict. He remembered the pain and the pain he caused. God rescued and God restored, and Cash spent the rest of his life thanking Jesus for life and hope. But he remembered where he came from and he remembered the hurt.

Here in Psalm 38, the opening words in the King James read, “a psalm of David. To bring to remembrance.” The NIV says “petition,” but every other translation renders it “remembrance.” David wrote these words to remember the guilt and put it to music so he wouldn’t forget the hurt and wouldn’t repeat

it. This psalm is for the addicts, the sinners, the guilty, all of us who've been through it and got stripes to show it. Get ready to cry, cry, cry. David's about to clean out some old wounds.

Verse 1. "Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath." David starts the psalm in trouble with God. He knows it. Conviction hit hard. Correction, he can handle. But he fears God's wrath. "Not your anger, Lord, not your wrath." And watch how he describes the conviction. In verse 2, "Your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down on me." David is well familiar with the sight of an arrow piercing a man, and that gruesome visual is exactly how David feels God's conviction. It dug deep, and now it's stuck. Ever been there with guilt? It hurts.

Verse 3. "Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; there is no soundness in my bones because of my sin." David is ready to crumble like his bones won't hold him up. No health, no soundness. He feels his rottenness eating away. Now, it's not clear whether David has a flesh and blood illness, or if this is all a metaphor for his guilt. Either way, it is thoroughly clear that this is about sin. There's no Bible record of David having an illness quite like this, but there is plenty of record of his sin—lust, adultery, lies, even sacrificed another man's life to cover it. I don't know what sins haunt your memory, but maybe you can relate.

All of this hurt, David says, is because of his sin. In verse 4, "My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear." Guilt sinks you like a weight. David is overwhelmed. Five feet high and rising, the flood of guilt rolls in. Now David will get past this. God will raise him up. But this psalm is about remembrance. Never go back there.

In verse 5, “My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly.” The wounds from God’s arrows of conviction are festering now, loathsome. The sin was deep, and it’s oozing out like the disgusting pus that it is. It has to come out. And David knows why—because of my sinful folly. “I was stupid, Lord, foolish and sinful. I did this.”

Verse 6. “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.” David is mourning—a man in black—and that searing pain in his back, a literal translation is “loins,” leading some to believe that this might just be a sexually transmitted disease. Now, I think it’s a mistake to link all STDs with sin, but for those who feel the pains of both disease and guilt together, there’s a cruel irony. David may well be familiar.

In verse 8, “I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. All my longings lay open before you, Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.” David brings his painful lament back to the Lord. And what a statement! “All my longings lay open before you.” I can’t hide anything from you, Lord. You know the longings that led me down into sin and you know the longings that call me back up to you. Before people I can hide, but not you, Lord. You see everything. No more hiding.

Verse 10. “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.” Alone, isolated. Now when you’re this far down, the worst thing you can do is isolate. But for David, they are leaving him. Friends, neighbors—gone. I guess things happen that way. Some folks can’t

handle your dark days, but you still miss them when they're gone. Friends are out, but in verse 12, enemies are crowding in. "Those who want to kill me set their traps, those who would harm me talk of my ruin; all day long they scheme and lie. I am like the deaf, who cannot hear, like the mute, who cannot speak. I have become like one who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply."

David feels powerless. Guilt does that to you— renders you deaf and mute. Why listen when nothing makes it right? Why talk when everything inside is wrong? But in verse 15, he looks up once more. "You will answer, Lord my God." The one thing that holds him back from the pit is faith. "You will answer, Lord my God." David waits for God. Verse 16. "For I said, 'Do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me when my feet slip.' For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me." You can almost see David with his feet right at the ledge, nearly slipping about to fall, and the pain of guilt doubles down on gravity. So he does the only thing he can do.

In verse 18, "I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin." That short little verse is the crucial heart of the psalm. "I confess." Iniquity is more than just one sin. It's all of it, all the darkness within. And read carefully. He doesn't just regret getting caught. "I am troubled by my sin." The Hebrew word indicates deep concern, even dread. Do you feel that over your sin when you confess? The Lord is merciful and so should we be. But Jude reminds us to show mercy with fear, hating even the clothing stained by the flesh. In verses 19 and 20, David laments those who are enemies without cause and who hate him without reason. It's a lonely place. "Those who repay good with evil lodge accusations against me, though I seek only to do what is good."

David wants to do good now, wants to walk the line on the straight and narrow. But sometimes when you try to get right, others still mean you wrong. So one last time he brings it back to God. Verse 21. "Lord, do not forsake me; do not be far from me, my God. Come quickly to help me, my Lord and my Savior." And there it ends.

Feels a little unfinished, doesn't it? But that's where David wanted it remembered; the fire of guilt was not quickly extinguished. As David well recalls, there will be recovery, and Psalm 39 will begin that road. But for now we dwell here. As for Johnny Cash, he too remembered; it's the reason he wore black. I'll close with his own words to explain: "I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down, livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town, I wear it for the prisoner who is long paid for his crime, but is there because he's a victim of the times.

I wear the black for those who've never read, or listened to the words that Jesus said, about the road to happiness through love and charity, why, you'd think He's talking straight to you and me." What's that? How many Johnny Cash song titles today? I think there were nine. But who's counting?

Psalm 39 | Vanity's Antidote

Hello, Through the Word. Psalm 39 today—a stirring reflection on life’s brevity. Do you know those times when you just don’t feel like talking? Here in Psalm 39, David has reason for reticence. He’s been rebuked, disciplined by Almighty God.

I know that feeling—caught. I know I screwed up, and I just want to walk away, shut my mouth, and settle. Thoughts race around my head, and my stubborn heart broods and simmers to fight it—to blame someone else. But I know it’s my fault. I did this. Ever been there? Caught by God. Stewing in your own guilt as people pass this way and that. But you just want to settle your heart between you and the Lord. And eventually you begin to observe, people watch and as they hurry by, life comes into perspective. First, you see them, then yourself. What am I doing? That’s where I see David in Psalm 39.

This one is raw and honest. Musically, I hear Adele on her 30 album. So let’s dive in at verse 1. “I said, ‘I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth while in the presence of the wicked.’ So I remained utterly silent, not even saying anything good. But my anguish increased; my heart grew hot within me.” David is determined to stay quiet. I’ll put a muzzle on my mouth, and he does it to keep his tongue from sin. It’s that feeling when you know that words will just get you in more trouble, and notice the setting: “in the presence of the wicked.” He doesn’t want to say something foolish—not here, not around them. Like a kid in trouble in public, you hold your tongue, but you feel dad’s gaze. That’s David.

Back in verse 2. “So I remained utterly silent, not even saying anything good. But my anguish increased; my heart grew hot within me.” I can almost see David sitting alone on a public bench, people passing by. I picture it raining, but David’s heart burned so hot he could set fire to that rain. Back in verse 3. “While I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue.” Finally, he can’t take it. He’s got to speak. He’s got to vent. But watch who he vents to. Verse 4. “Show me, Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.”

David vents to the Lord. Did you know you can do that? Did you know you should do that? Cry your heart out, but cry it to God. He can handle it. And look what David cries: “Show me, Lord, my life’s end.” That’s a bold prayer. “And the number of my days.” Something deep is stirring in David’s heart. Life’s brevity is hitting home, and he can’t shake it. He doesn’t want to shake it. He wants the wisdom that comes in embracing it. When we were young, life rolled out like an endless winding road. But time passes. And those memories feel like a million years ago and yesterday all at once. David’s feeling it. And he asks the Lord to show him.

Remember the handwriting on Belshazzar’s wall? “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.” Belshazzar hid from mortality. David faces it like Ebenezer Scrooge staring at his own grave. “Show me Lord, let me know how fleeting my life is.” Fleeting, frail, ceasing to be. That’s life. Wisdom confronts it.

Verse 5. “You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure.” David looks at his life on the timeline of history and sees it passing

quickly. A mere handbreadth. Count the fingers, done. But watch his words. “You have made my days. You, Lord.” Life’s brevity is God’s doing. His wisdom has willed it. Why? Viewing the span of our years from God’s perspective, we begin to understand. Everyone is but a breath. Now, there’s a word with deep Bible roots. Breath. The Hebrew is hebel. It literally means breath, but also means fleeting, transitory, meaningless, vanity. It’s the central theme to the Bible’s great philosophical work in Ecclesiastes. Fantastic book.

And its ruminations begin here in Psalm 39. Then again, they go further back. Back to the very beginning. The first time the word hebel comes up is Genesis 4. And it’s not a word; it’s a name. Abel. Why would Adam and Eve name their son “breath”? Or worse yet, “vanity”? It’s not the same word from Genesis 2 when God breathed life into Adam. This one is fleeting breath, here and gone. Why the name? My theory is that the word’s meaning came after Abel. Abel was the very first person in the Bible to die quite suddenly, and his name became a reminder. No one is guaranteed tomorrow. “Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure. Selah.”

And in verse 6, “Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom; in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be.” I picture David sitting quietly as if God put him in time-out, people coming and going all around. Why? What are they chasing? “In vain they rush about.” And there’s that word again—hebel. Vain. More pre-echoes of Ecclesiastes here. Don’t you remember our Ecclesiastes study? Bad dates, dead monkeys. The Bible will return here often, and someone like you or me needs that reminder. I love the picture here of heaping up wealth—great big piles of it without even knowing what or who it’s for in the end. It’s pointless chasing wealth, chasing pavements, chasing the wind.

But in verse 7, David turns his gaze. People watching is done. Daydreamer time is over. Time to reflect on his own life. “But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.” Ever look back at yourself after God catches you and you realize you were acting like all the other fools chasing empty dreams? David catches himself. “What do I look for?” I’m called higher. The word “look” is literally “wait.” Like those who wait on the Lord in Isaiah 40. While everyone else goes chasing about all around me, I’m just standing here in the way. So what am I waiting for? My hope is in you, Lord.

Verse 8. “Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools.” It’s sort of like saying, “Please don’t discipline me in front of the bullies.” “I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this.” “You are the one.” God did this. You set life’s brevity and you disciplined me when I forgot it. Romans 8:20 echoes this, “For creation was subjected to vanity.” Same word—by God’s will. And God did it in hope that His creation and His children would be freed from the bondage to decay. That’s the freedom of finding your treasures beyond this fleeting life. Now David is ready for time-out to be done. “You disciplined me, Lord. I had my priorities out of whack. You were turning tables on the money changers in my heart. And I see it now. But go easy on me, Lord.”

In verse 10, “Remove your scourge from me; I am overcome by the blow of your hand. When you rebuke and discipline anyone for their sin, you consume their wealth like a moth—surely everyone is but a breath. Selah.” There it is one last time—hebel. Breath. Surely everyone is like Abel, gone in a breath. David is ready to move past his folly. It’s water under the bridge now, and he closes with a request.

Verse 12. “Hear my prayer, Lord, listen to my cry for help; do not be deaf to my weeping. I dwell with you as a foreigner, a stranger, as all my ancestors were.” David gets it. He’s a foreigner in this life. The same word means “houseguest.” We’re all guests in God’s great house just passing through. Wise sojourners don’t heap up bags of wealth to carry. They store up treasures at their destination and notice: “a stranger, as all my ancestors were.” Looking back on generations before, you see it. They all came and went. Interesting, “foreigner and stranger” is exactly how Abraham described himself when he buried his wife, Sarah. David sees now that he is the same.

So in verse 13, “Look away from me, that I may enjoy life again before I depart and am no more.” David needs closure on this discipline now. Don’t read it wrong. He’s not asking God to go away so he can get back to sinning. He just wants timeout to be over. Can I get up now, dad? Just as Ecclesiastes ends with a call to enjoy life, but not the empty life of chasing wind, really enjoy.

Embrace the fleeting wind with open hands and live for eternal glory like Scrooge on Christmas morning finally enjoying life for the first time. Glory is vanity’s only antidote. But hold on. Did I just hide my top fourteen Adele songs in this guide? Maybe I did. Rumor has it I do stuff like that. Read Psalm 39 and listen again to see if you can find them.

Psalm 40 | “40”

Welcome back to Through the Word. This is your host, Peyton Jones. And today we'll be in the infamous Psalm 40.

Have you ever felt stuck in life like you're at the bottom of a deep, dark hole? No matter what you try to do to get out of it, it only makes it worse. As a kid, I believed that quicksand was a real danger. I mean, Indiana Jones fell into it. Cowboys rode into it somehow. Atreyu lost his horse in it. Somehow I thought quicksand was going to be a bigger problem than it turned out to be in life. But those movies trained me somehow to survive it. I learned the more we struggle sometimes, the more we sink. David felt stuck in a hole in Psalm 40 unable to get himself out. So he did one of the hardest things we can ever do when sinking in a bog. He waited.

Verse 1. “I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry.” If you grew up in the eighties, this song was blaring all over the radio to the tune of U2's song “40,” aptly named for it was a rock song based on this psalm. Frontman Bono has always had an intimate relationship with the psalms, and in a meeting with Eugene Peterson, Bono said about hearing this psalm in church: “Great words. Shame about the tune.” He went on to say, “Why isn't church music more honest like this?” You can listen to U2's song “40” today and get the tune that gives the overwhelming sense of relief that David feels here—the praise from ceasing his struggle and simply waiting.

In verse 2, David gives the reason for his praise. “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.” You know what's worse than a pit, don't you? A slimy pit. Mud

and mire. Slick walls with nothing firm to stop the sink. David knew those walls were slippery when wet because he had tried to save himself. Finally, he gives up. Like a person sinking in quicksand, he simply waits. He waits on God to rescue him. God hears. No longer is David struggling, but surrendering. And surrendering to God is like shooting the bat signal in the sky. And here God comes to the rescue. God lifted me out of the slimy pit, the mud and the muck and set my feet on something solid—a rock. Suddenly, David is no longer sinking. He's singing.

Verse 3. "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God." David's song before was probably a lament, a sad, hopeless song. But now it's praise. A new song. One he's never sung before. And perhaps that blend of lament and praise was what Bono was getting at when he complained about church music. Because I pictured this song changing when David gets to this verse, I picture the mournful blues transforming to symphonic strings. And sometimes, like this song, our life can feel like both at the same time, mournful yet uplifting, like Paul stating in Corinthians, "We are cast down yet not forsaken."

Still in a hole, but waiting, knowing God will lift us up. Knocked down, but not knocked out. Stop and ask yourself, what kind of song are you singing today? Is it a song of guilt? A song of confusion? A song of pain? Betrayal, loneliness, or relief? Rescue? Or perhaps a combination of all of them at the same time? I get the feeling that David's song here included some kind of blame, self-blame. After all, most of the pits I've ever fallen into, I've dug myself. And perhaps David was feeling guilty, caught in the consequences of his own sin.

It would certainly shed some light on why David may be saying in verse 6, “Sacrifice and offering you do not desire . . .” Have you ever asked yourself what God really wants from you? It’s a good question to ask from time to time because we so often forget. God doesn’t want our money. He doesn’t want our groveling. He never asks us to make it up to Him when He rescues us. That would be like a superhero saying, “Hey, I saved you from that falling building. All right, pay up. That’ll be two hundred dollars.”

If you’ve ever been stranded late at night and a friend or parent comes to pick you up because of your own stupidity like maybe you failed to get gas or you stopped checking your oil or even locked your keys in your car, you know what this feels like. The shame and embarrassment of having to be rescued from a problem you created without any help from anyone else. But now you need help from somebody else. David knows God doesn’t want his guilt. He doesn’t want his sacrifices. He just wants David. Take note of that. When you screw up, God just wants you.

And verse 6 here proves this. “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—but my ears you have opened—burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.” “My ears you have opened.” This is one of my favorite pictures in the Bible. It doesn’t mean to make you listen like when old people tell you, “Open your ears, young whippersnapper.” No, this is referring to a custom from the Book of Moses. The law where a servant served his time paid off his debt, making him free to go. But if that servant loved the master, Moses says they could opt to join that family. But if they did, it would be for life. They go from being a servant out of need to becoming a son of love.

They go from servant to family in a moment and to symbolize it, they would literally go to the front door and they would nail their earlobe to the front doorpost, showing that now they were a part of the furniture, part of the establishment. They were devoted to that family for life. “You have opened my ears,” David’s way of saying, “You’ve earned my love for life, Lord. I don’t want to be anywhere else with anyone else.” God’s love—just that He wanted David makes David want God. “We love Him because He first loved us.” And in this psalm, David encapsulates that act actually happening.

But in verse 7, something shifts. Suddenly, David announces something that doesn’t really fit him. He’s speaking, but not about himself. David waxes prophetic as he nears God here, and the spirit takes hold of him. Note that he rephrases God doesn’t want sacrifice at the tail end of verse 6: “Burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.” And then verse 7, “Then I said, ‘Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.’” Wait a minute. Hold up. That sounds a bit like Jesus.

In fact, Hebrews directly quotes these verses about Jesus becoming our sacrifice. God didn’t want the offerings of bulls and goats, so Jesus steps forward in human flesh. “Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, my God . . .” Even in the shadow of the cross, Jesus says, “Not my will, but yours be done.” Jesus not only desired to do God’s will, He did it perfectly. He once stated, “I always do what pleases Him.” And that’s the only reason Jesus could die for us is because He was innocent of sin, and the only reason He was innocent of sin was because God’s law was in His heart.

Jesus lived a perfect life, the life you and I could never live. Then in His body He took all the penalty for mankind and God punished Christ instead of us. Now it's all making sense. Psalm 40. I couldn't save myself. I dug my own pit, but I cried out to God, and He set my feet upon a rock. Wait a second. That's another title for Jesus. Man, how prophetic was David? But he goes on. Verse 9. "I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, Lord, as you know. I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help. I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness from the great assembly."

Bono would be proud of David here as David sings about his salvation and deliverance, the volume swells and the percussion booms. He sings loud, he sings proud. He's shining the light of the salvation he's freshly experienced singing his new song. And God is using David. But I wonder if David knew what was happening as he composed, if he knew that he was prophesying about the Messiah. Or did he back away from his composition, thinking, "I don't know what just fully came out of me, but I think God is speaking something I don't fully understand"?

Either way, David sings of God's faithfulness in spite of his own unfaithfulness. He sings of God's saving help, and now he turns to God to ask for even more mercy because David knows he's not out of the woods. He's been given grace and mercy. But that's never a one-time thing. Like us, he knows he needs more and more every day.

Verse 11. "Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord; may your love and faithfulness 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.” Was Bono right about Christian art and music when he said it was dishonest? Speaking of the Psalms, Bono admired the pain, the honesty that David expresses.

Try echoing David at church sometime. “My sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see.” Uh, you might get a bunch of Bible verses shoved at you. You’d get a ton of advice, opinions, and probably instruction, but you might not get honesty. David has no problem baring his heart here with everyone because he’s found a God he can completely and totally trust.

He’s received mercy, and rather than making him a monster, it only humbles him even more, giving him a final confession in verse 17. “But as for me, I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; you are my God, do not delay.”

Psalm 41 | Mercy for the Weak, Mercy for Me

Welcome back to Psalms, my friends. Psalm 41 will close out the first book of the Psalter with a humble cry for mercy. David wrote it, and the betrayal described in verse 9 leads many scholars to conclude the timing here is Absalom's rebellion. David's own son plotted to take the kingdom by subterfuge, and when David refused to fight his son, his trusted advisor Ahithophel turned on him and others with him.

Betrayal is a wound like no other. Deceptive loyalty. Broken trust. David knew it. Jesus knew it. In fact, this Psalm is quoted in John 13. Sometimes I forget that Judas was a close friend to Jesus. What was that like? I think this psalm is meant to help us relate and help us know that Jesus can relate to us. David is also very sick. You know what it's like to be so sick you could just die? Just end it, Lord. Sickness can mess with your head. You're not suicidal, but you're also not thinking right. And what you really need is a friend in their right mind to talk sense, "You're gonna make it."

But what if you get the opposite? A friend who acts nice but then walks away and roots against you. That's where I see David in Psalm 41, sick, defenseless, and under attack from his own friends. Yet the first three verses are different. David begins with an observation. Read with me. "Blessed are those who have regard for the weak; the Lord delivers them in times of trouble. The Lord protects and preserves them—they are counted among the blessed in the land—He does not give them over to the desire of their foes. The Lord sustains them on their sickbed and restores them from their bed of illness."

It's a beautiful declaration of the Lord's faithfulness to the faithful. If you value the lowly, the Lord will value you. It's one of the Bible's greatest themes.

Proverbs tells us that whoever is kind to the needy honors their maker. And Jesus says that whatever you do for the least of people, you do for Him. And long before David, the law of God gave detailed and numerous instructions for His people to care and provide for the poor, the weak, and the lowly, orphans, widows, foreigners, refugees, poor, handicapped, women, children, servants.

So much of God's law delivered careful guidance to care for and empower anyone weak, outcast, or marginalized in any way. And look at David's words. The first three verses are full of covenant language: "blessed in the land," "the Lord protects and preserves." David is meditating on the law just as Psalm 1 encouraged. David is sick, betrayed, and looking to God's Word for the comfort his friends fail to offer, and the Word delivers. And he begins, "Blessed are those who have regard for the weak." Stop and consider the value of that verse.

Do you see it? What a treasure! And hidden right there in plain sight. Seriously. Just stop and consider. Okay, I'll stop saying, "Stop and consider." But do you see the benefits? The Lord of the whole universe protects, preserves, blesses, sustains through sickness, and restores back to health. That's a gold mine. And all of that for showing regard for the weak. Amazing. But what we should really stop and consider is not the verse, but the lowly person. Take time to care. The word "weak" here refers to any one poor, lowly, or generally looked down on, and the word "regard" means consider carefully and indicates wisdom and prudence.

So this is not a call to hand money to beggars out of pity. That often hurts more than helps, and it fails to stop and consider the value of the person and how to truly help. Even well-meaning charities often fail at this. It takes real wisdom to solve root causes and end poverty cycles. God's law provided real help for ancient times, and I'll commend you to the laws of Exodus 22 and others for insight. But the personal application is simple. Value people. All people. Ask their name. Enjoy their personality. Honor their humanity. Dignity for all. Value the lowly, and the Lord will value you. Simple math. Because let's face it, we are all lowly next to God, yet He still cares.

Now remember, David is sick, and one of the covenant promises was freedom from sickness if you keep the covenant law. But David knows he hasn't done it. So in verse 4, "I said, 'Have mercy on me Lord; heal me, for I have sinned against you.'" Notice that we moved from human mercy to God's mercy. David needs it. He is the weak one now. And remember that mercy too was built into the covenant. We forget sometimes that the law came with sacrifice and atonement so that sinners could be set right again. David calls upon God at the mercy seat.

But not everyone gets that in verse 5. "My enemies say of me in malice, 'When will he die and his name perish?' When one of them comes to see me, he speaks falsely, while his heart gathers slander; then he goes out and spreads it around." Enemies make miserable friends, don't they? And they are pretending to be David's friends, speaking falsely while gathering slander. Miserable. And look at the cruelty. "When will he die?" No care. No human dignity. He's old. Just be rid of him. The very antithesis of verse 1.

Then in verse 7, “All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst for me, saying, ‘A vile disease has afflicted him; he will never get up from the place where he lies.’” Well, that’s just downright mean. “They imagine the worst for me.” I can almost hear the lilt of joy as they talk about the vile disease upon him. Notice their language is not unlike the cursings of the covenant. That’s their hope for David. Also notice the whispering. David is still king, but some disloyal men are scheming—men he trusted. Verse 9. “Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.”

Now that’s a painful verse. Let that one set in for a moment and feel David’s hurt. And yes, feel Jesus’ hurt. That’s the verse that Jesus quoted when Judas shared bread like an old friend while plotting to get him killed. Wounds from an enemy are surface, but broken trust cuts deep and leaves a dark scar upon the heart. “One who shared my bread.” That’s something friends do. David remembers sitting to eat and laugh, and it just hurts. But enough of that. David turns his thoughts away from the hurt and back to the Lord.

Verse 10. “But may you have mercy on me, Lord; raise me up, that I may repay them.” David returns to his plea for mercy. “You are not like them, Lord. You are faithful, and you forgive. Raise me up.” Good news, David. Resurrection is God’s specialty. But hold on. What’s with that last part— that I may repay them? Does David just want payback? Revenge? That doesn’t seem right. He just asked for mercy. And will he immediately offer no mercy to his enemies? Seems rather unlike David, who showed great patience with Saul’s attacks and even patience on the angry man who threw rocks and hurled insults when he fled Absalom. And it’s thoroughly unlike Jesus who cried, “Father, forgive them,” from the very cross.

So what is this? I don't know for sure, but I did look up the word behind "repay" here, and it's a word that's broader in meaning than just repay or requite. It means "complete, finish and make peace with." The sense here is not vindictive revenge, but rather closing a matter. I think David wants the strength to get up and put a stop to this treachery, and David closes with a grateful prayer.

Verse 11. "I know that you are pleased with me, for my enemy does not triumph over me." In final reflection, David realizes something—he's still standing and they don't win. God wins. Right defeats wrong. Good triumphs over evil, and God wins. And in verse 12. "Because of my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever." David doesn't claim to be perfect here. He already confessed sin, but he is true. And with God's faithful forgiveness he can walk in integrity. And with that he returns again to covenant words: "Set me in your presence forever."

That was always the greatest promise of the covenant: God with us. And with a final praise quite fitting for the close of Book 1, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen." And to that I say amen and amen. Thanks for joining us in Book One of Psalms. Can't hardly wait to open up Book Two.