

Psalms - Today in the Word 2

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Devotionals & Illustrations TODAY IN THE WORD Psalm 32-100 Moody Bible Institute

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Psalm 32:1-6

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. - Psalm 32:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Viking explorer Eric the Red discovered a new North Atlantic island in the tenth century. It was covered mostly with glaciers and rocks, having only a few patches of land that were suitable for living. Yet Eric gave his discovery the name Greenland, in the hope that colonists would be more likely to come to the new island if it had an attractive name.

Whether Eric's ruse worked is a question for the historians. But it illustrates our human tendency to put a positive spin on reality. Psalm 32 may have been written against the background of another ruse. We do not have the exact details in the text, but David apparently sinned in some way and tried to cover it up (vv. 3-5) (Some believe it was David's sin with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11).

The king tried to deny the truth for a period of time, but it only made him miserable. He complained that his strength 'was sapped as in the heat of summer' (v. 4).

Some of our Today readers may identify with this analogy more quickly than others, but all of us have experienced summer heat that left us feeling drained and exhausted. Of all the seasons, summer has the unique ability to steal our energy. David chose his word picture well, because our Christian lives can also enter a period in which our faith feels parched and weak.

In David's case, sin was the cause of a summer drought in his heart, and even his body. The remedy for David's dryness was full confession of his sin to God and a prayer for forgiveness. If that is the cause of our problem, the remedy is the same. Instead of being blasted by the summer heat of guilt, the believer whose 'sin account' is current with God is blessed.

There are other reasons for a period of time like this, of course. Physical or emotional suffering, intense spiritual struggle, or any number of other circumstances can bear down on us and drain away our strength. But whether our need is to confess, or persevere in the face of a hard trial, God has new strength waiting for us when we turn to Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We again encourage you to use Scripture verses in prayer. Today's lesson calls for this kind of response.

The Scripture we suggest is another passage that will probably be very familiar to you, Isaiah 40:28-31. Why not go to these powerful verses and turn the prophet's statements into a prayer for spiritual strength? Since yesterday's application emphasized

thanksgiving, you may want to continue that theme by thanking God that He never grows weary, and that He promises strength to those who are tired. Even if your faith is not in a summer drought right now, you'll find these truths invigorating

Psalms 32:1-11

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. - Psalm 32:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Forgiveness is good for you. Several recent studies have shown links between forgiving others and mental and physical health. Vengeful people, for example, place themselves at higher risk for cardiovascular problems. Anger and depression resulting from unforgiveness put the body under tremendous stress; chronic stress weakens the immune system and can lead to other physical disorders. Unforgiveness also increases the chances of a heart attack, cancer, high blood pressure, and other illnesses. But forgiveness can help lower depression, anxiety, and stress. It reduces blood pressure, decreases heart rate, and helps one sleep better at night. Letting go of hurts and offenses reduces the burden on both mind and body.

Researchers are finding what believers have long known: Forgiveness is a rich blessing. To confess and be forgiven is a righteous pleasure. Since we know that God delights to forgive (see October 1), we can be sure that He intends for us to delight in it as well!

Today's reading describes the exuberance of being forgiven. The sequence is simple: when we confess, God will surely forgive our sins (v. 5). When our sins are forgiven, we will surely experience joy and blessing. "Blessed" (v. 1) has been said to mean, "Oh, how very happy!" By contrast, before the psalmist confessed, he labored under heavy conviction. His silence, an implicit attempt to deceive God about the truth of his sin, was a burden. The language David used here is extreme--he groaned continuously, his strength was sapped, and his bones wasted away--so extreme that some commentators believe he endured a physical illness. He suffered because he wouldn't acknowledge his sin before God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Psalm 32 is traditionally known as one of the "seven penitential psalms." If you wish, read another of these psalms as a supplementary Scripture reading today. We're reading three of them already this month, but you might choose Psalm 6, 38, 102, or 143

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 32:1-11

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. - Psalm 32:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll warns us that our society's message of "instant gratification" holds a danger for believers, the way an undertow in the surf can sweep away an unsuspecting swimmer. The danger is that our "instant" society can lead us to believe there are shortcuts to getting where we want to go. The fact, Swindoll writes, is that "there are no shortcuts to anything meaningful."

This observation really rings true when it comes to the issue of confession, forgiveness, and restoration. We all want peace of heart and a clear conscience before God. These blessings are available on a daily basis to every believer--but there is no shortcut to achieving them.

David found that out the hard way. For about a year after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband (2 Sam. 11), David tried to find peace in his kingly activities and his family. But the poison leaked out of the sin he had worked so hard to cover, eating away at his body and spirit. The pain didn't stop until David fell on his face before God in confession and repentance.

Clearing one's conscience before God is another purpose of prayer. In this psalm David describes the peace he found in confessing his sin and receiving God's forgiveness, and he teaches us the truths he learned that we need to know.

We need to read this Psalm along with Psalm 51 to get a complete picture of David's confession and restoration. Here he urges us to confess sin before the "mighty waters" of trouble roll over us the way they rolled over David as he attempted to hide his sin.

Notice that there are no shortcuts or easy formulas here. David had to come clean 100 percent before God. He also had to face the consequences of his sin, which in David's case were definitely "mighty waters."

David was very picturesque in describing the alternative to free and willing confession of sin. The person who refused to own up before God readily would have to be brought to account against his or her will like a stubborn mule. "Do not be like [that]," David

says (v. 9). Let's take his advice!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God is so gracious to us in Christ that He gives us a way to bring our sins to Him--and to go away forgiven.

Confessing the sin that accumulates in our daily lives is a privilege we have because Christ's blood has already paid the price for those sins. We often encourage our readers to make confession a regular part of their prayer lives. The cleansing promised in 1 John 1:9 is for you...today.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 33:1-5

The word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. - Psalm 33:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow called the rituals of life ""secret anniversaries of the heart."" He was referring to the moments, the remembrances, and the routines that add meaning to daily life.

We hope each day this month is an ""anniversary of the heart"" for you as we celebrate the faithfulness of our loving God. Today's reading suggests a ritual that will enhance your celebration and add new meaning to these days leading up to Thanksgiving. The Bible calls us to ""sing joyfully to the Lord"" (v. 1).

The psalmist's call is to those who are ""righteous"" and ""upright,"" terms that describe those who are in right standing before God. In New Testament terms, these are people who have joyfully received God's forgiveness and cleansing for sin by putting their faith in Christ and His work on the cross. That's something worth singing about!

The song is ""new"" (v. 3) because nothing like our redemption in Christ has ever been seen before. The psalmist refers to this new song prophetically--it will be sung when the risen and exalted Christ opens the scroll in heaven (Rev. 5:9-10). Notice that the subject of the song is Christ's worthiness because He is the Redeemer.

As we return to Psalm 33, we are urged to sing praises to God because His Word is true and ""He is faithful in all He does."" That applies to anything that could happen to us, regardless of whether it seems good or bad from our perspective.

In other words, God's faithfulness is not an escape hatch from trouble or temptation. Rather, we have the rock of His person and His promises to cling to in any kind of storm. God's faithfulness also means we never have to question His motive in allowing trials in our lives (James 1:2-4). He remains righteous and just in everything He does--no exceptions.

In verse 5 we are introduced to one of the greatest manifestations of God's faithfulness: His ""unfailing love,"" which God will never rescind or recall, no matter what happens. Remember this word, because we will meet it again and again. Because of God's loyal love, we can sing joyfully to Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The psalmist says it is ""fitting"" that God's people should sing a song of praise to Him.

That means praise is appropriate anytime and anywhere for those who know God and have enjoyed His faithfulness in their lives. Why not sing to the Lord right now? Praise Him through your favorite hymn or chorus. Or, turn to Revelation 5:9-14 and let the words of heaven's ""new song"" refresh your heart. Praise God for His salvation, and for the promise that His unfailing love is yours in any situation.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 33:4-11

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made. - Psalm 33:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

Annie Jump Cannon, a pioneering astronomer of the early twentieth century, invented the modern system of classifying stars according to their spectra. She grouped them into seven categories, each labelled by a single letter, so that today we speak, for example, of a "K-type star." Since her day, three new categories have been added, but her system is still taught in basic astronomy classes.

Cannon catalogued more than 400,000 stars over a career of more than 40 years. She is also credited with discovering 300 variable stars. For her work, she was given the first honorary doctorate ever presented by Oxford University, and was the first woman elected as an officer of the American Astronomical Society.

The stars observed and classified by Annie Jump Cannon should prompt praise for the God who created and organized them. He alone is worthy!

Psalms 33 urges us to sing to God a new song (v. 3), then gives us plenty of reasons to do so. One is His character (vv. 4-5). His words are right and true, utterly reliable and trustworthy. He's faithful in all that He does (cf. Ps. 119:89-90). Furthermore, He is righteous, just, and loving. His love is everywhere and it never fails!

The psalmist moves naturally from God's attributes to His works, chiefly creation (vv. 6-9). By the same powerful word that is always right and true, He made and ordered the created world. We might say verse 9 is a short summary of Genesis 1: "He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm." It's that simple!

God is sovereign not only over creation, but also over all the peoples of the earth (vv. 10-11). He's no local deity! He has full control over the plans and ambitions of the nations, but they, on the other hand, can do nothing to thwart His purposes.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As we did back on January 10, today we'd like to suggest that you learn more about nature. Using any resources you choose, learn to recognize several common star constellations in our night sky.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 34:1-7

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. - Isaiah 26:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

In August, 1875, English bishop Edward Bickersteth was on vacation when he heard a minister speak on Isaiah 26:3. The speaker pointed out that in the original language of this verse, "peace" is repeated, the Hebrew way of conveying perfection. Bickersteth noted the insight--and that same afternoon, he shared the comfort of this verse with a dying relative. God's peace seemed to flood the room, and Bickersteth was so moved that he took out a pen and paper and wrote the words that we know today as the hymn, "Peace, Perfect Peace."

Isaiah 26:3 is a wonderful promise, and Psalm 34 shows us one way to make God's peace real in our lives--through the expression of praise and thanksgiving in prayer.

The promised peace comes to the person whose mind is steadfast because it is fixed on the Lord. Verses 1-3 of our text reveal a mindset that is focused on the Lord, as David offers up to God his prayer of praise.

We can't talk about the power of prayer without realizing that one of the primary purposes of prayer is to "extol the Lord" (v. 1). And besides bringing God the glory that is due Him, this kind of prayer also serves as a testimony to others. David called on the congregation to join him in glorifying God.

David went on to explain the source of his confidence (vv. 4-7). God had delivered David from great danger and fear in the episode with the Philistine king Achish (1 Sam. 21:10-15). David went from fear to peace and radiant confidence because he sought God in prayer, and the Lord answered.

We're all "poor" in the sense David describes in verse 6. In ourselves we are bankrupt of the spiritual resources we need to experience God's peace and deliverance from trials.

But everything we lack, our great God has in abundance. When we praise Him even in the middle of trouble, we find the peace that comes only when "the angel of the Lord" takes up guard duty around us.

Paul knew that same peace. And he understood the vital connection between praise and thanksgiving, and the peace of God (see Phil. 4:6-7). When we come to God with joyful, thankful hearts, His peace "does sentry duty" in our lives.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Of course, God's peace does not mean the absence of problems. But it does provide the grace and power you need to persevere and praise Him despite any difficulty. According to Paul, peace comes with thanksgiving. Why not gather the family around this

weekend, or get together with a few Christian friends and have a ""praise and thanksgiving"" party? Recall the good things God has done and is doing for you.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 34:11-16; James 4:11-12;

Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. - Psalm 34:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Although the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects the freedom of speech, not all forms of expression are legally acceptable. Slander is one of the types of speech that the Supreme Court has ruled can be restricted. But this doesn't mean that the Court has made it easy to restrict slander. In order to win a slander case against someone (along with libel, which is slander in a printed form), you must be able to prove that the content of the statement was demonstrably false and that there was a malicious intent before the slander was spoken. Because of this burden of proof, very few slander cases actually are brought to court.

God's Word has a clearer restriction on slander for Christians: don't ever do it! In our passage today, James returns to a theme that has recurred throughout this book—the use of our tongues. There are many ways we can use our tongues for evil purposes, and one is to slander and condemn people.

James clarifies why our slander, particularly against other Christians, is problematic. When we speak evil of others, we are sitting in judgment over them. Our critical spirit is then assuming the place of God, who is the only one who has the right to judge others. Our slander is another outworking of our pride and favoritism, two sins that we have already seen indicate that we are no longer walking according to God's desires but are following our own path.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Sins that we commit with our tongue can happen so quickly, often before we've realized it.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 35:1-28

The Lord will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal. - Isaiah 42:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

In times of war, soldiers and generals often become popular heroes. Their brave exploits frequently attain legendary status. During World War II, General Douglas MacArthur came to signify firm, unflinching resolve when he left the Philippines declaring, "I will return."

When he did, in fact, return to liberate the Philippines from Japanese control, a famous photo of him wading ashore captured the American sense of commitment to be defenders of freedom against aggression.

Today's reading portrays God as a divine Warrior or Defender. David calls on the Lord to come to his aid, picturing him as a mighty, rescuing soldier wielding all-powerful weapons (vv. 1-3). The king, himself a famous military commander, knew that his successes and victories resulted not from human strength, but from God's supernatural power (2 Sam. 22).

This passage alternates between accusations against the wicked and prayers for God to save the psalmist. David's enemies had attacked him without cause, so he hoped their downfall would be sudden and complete. They repaid evil for good, betrayed friendship, made false accusations, and took malicious delight in all of it.

Showing faith in God's righteousness, David prayed that his enemies would be routed: "God, come and fight for me! Vindicate me! Defend me! Strap on your armor and rush to my aid!" When that day comes, he said, "My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long" (v. 28).

God fights on behalf of His people, as He did to bring Israel out of Egypt. On the eve of the battle of Jericho, He appeared to Joshua as the commander of the heavenly hosts. He uses His might to help widows and orphans (Prov. 23:10-11). As a warrior, He also opposes His people when they follow false gods and sinful lifestyles.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Memorizing Bible verses is an excellent way to encourage ourselves with truth. To strengthen your faith with the thought that God is our Warrior or Defender, why not memorize one of the less familiar verses or cross-references from today's reading?

We recommend the brief prayer of Psalm 35:23: "Awake, and rise to my defense! Contend for me, my God and Lord."

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 37:1-9

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. - Psalm 37:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Several months ago the newspaper told the unusual story of an elderly man in Minnesota. This gentleman offered to leave his \$375 estate to any clergy from any faith, or anyone else, who could answer his questions about spirituality and the afterlife, and make him 'feel better about facing eternity.'

Are there really people out there who are willing to give everything they have to find peace with God? Of course there are, and they aren't always the rich and famous. Countless numbers of ordinary men and women want to know how to find lasting contentment in their souls.

Psalm 37 is a great formula for peace and contentment but it's not for everyone, and it's not for sale. David is writing to 'the righteous' (v. 12), 'the blameless' (v. 18), 'the just' (v. 28). These are people who already know God as Savior. God can make astonishing promises to them, like the one in today's verse, when their hearts are right before Him.

This is another familiar psalm, like the one we studied yesterday. We want to focus on the details of what could be called David's formula for peace. You may want to write these down on a card you can post somewhere this month, because they're a wonderful remedy for fears.

First, our trust needs to be in the Lord, not in the assurances of experts. He is the One who can help us 'enjoy safe pasture' even when the world seems like a dangerous place (v.3).

Second, we're told to delight ourselves in God (v. 4). That means He Himself becomes our number one desire, not the temporal gifts He can give us.

Third, when we commit our way to the Lord (vv. 5-6), He will vindicate us, probably before those who would be critical of our service to God.

Fourth, we need to be still in God's presence (v. 7, see the December 1 study). Here the focus is on not worrying about what others may do and their seeming success. This verse is tailor-made for the worries our world has today.

Fifth, David says to refrain from anger (v. 8). We tend to get upset when it seems like the bad guys are winning. The best thing we can do about it is to put ourselves in God's hands and then stay there. He is never surprised by anything.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Did you notice that these five items are commands? God is not giving us an optional way of life we can take or leave.

Instead, it is His will that we live this way. If you wrote down the five steps to the formula, review each of them now to see how your daily Christian life lines up. And if you haven't jotted them down yet, we suggest you do so and regularly review the list this week.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 37:1-9.

TODAY IN THE WORD

Envy can rear its head at the most unexpected times and in the most unlikely places. A reporter once went to Hannibal, Missouri, the hometown of author Mark Twain, to find out details about the writer. There he asked a man if he knew Twain. The man said he did, but scoffed, "I know just as many stories as Mark Twain. The only difference is he just writ 'em down!"

The fact that famous people inspire envy in others shouldn't surprise us. The envy that Twain's fellow Missourian felt over his success comes all too naturally to us. Famous or successful people usually attract more than their share of old classmates, acquaintances and former neighbors who knew the person "back when" and try to downplay his or her accomplishments.

Such remarks may seem harmless. But envy can be truly deadly. There's little doubt that it belongs on the ancient list known as the Seven Deadly Sins. One old usage of the English word is also used to describe malice, the kind of evil motive that can lead to murder. For example, we're told that envy was the driving human motivation behind our Lord's crucifixion.

Pontius Pilate wanted to set Jesus free because he knew that the chief priests and elders were acting out of envy (Matt. 27:12-18). Their hatred of Jesus was evident to everyone who watched. Envy is dangerous. If Satan can get a foothold in our hearts by causing us to look with malice on the success of others, there's no telling what can happen. To soothe our resentment, we might even find ourselves doing something to bring the other person down.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If we are looking at others long and hard enough to be envious of them, we have our eyes in the wrong place.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 37:23-31

I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. - Psalm 37:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

In a recent article in Christianity Today magazine entitled 'Gambling Away the Golden Years,' John W. Kennedy points out that among elderly people, addiction to gambling is a growing problem. The gambling industry is very skillful at marketing its wares to seniors, offering every conceivable incentive. Part of the reason gambling is so popular among people in this group is that many of them have more disposable income and time available than at any other time in their lives, and many are also seeking an escape from loneliness.

In the middle of this moral and spiritual fog, we need to hear the ringing testimony of a biblical 'senior citizen,' King David. He beautifully affirms the hope of God's people, and God's faithfulness, in the poetic words of today's verse. The Word speaks to the fears and anxieties that can grip a person's heart in the season of faith that comes during the older years.

Notice first David's straightforward statement, 'Now I am old.' There was no self-consciousness or sense of regret at all about reaching this stage of life, which is as it should be (v. 25).

Now admittedly, older people in our culture face a problem David didn't encounter. In ancient Israel, as in most non-Western cultures even today, a grey head was considered a badge of honor. The elderly were looked to for wisdom, not set on the sidelines or exploited.

But thank the Lord, culture doesn't have the last word in the lives of God's children. Psalm 37 details the incredible stability godly older people can have in Him, and the lasting impact they can make on their world.

For example, God will firmly anchor those whose lives are a delight to Him those who 'turn from evil and do good.' They may stumble, but they will not finally fall (v. 24). Neither will they be forsaken (v. 27).

From this position of spiritual strength, these seasoned saints can pass on blessing to their descendants (v. 26). They can even help ensure the stability of an entire nation (v. 29) and share the wisdom of God accumulated over many years of trials endured and tests completed (v. 30). That's a priceless legacy.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

David was absolutely convinced that older people have a lot to offer the kingdom of God. That fact will never change.

Senior friend, what do you consider the three most valuable spiritual assets you have that God can use in a meaningful way? You may want to think about it and write them out. Then turn them into a prayer request, offering these strengths to God, thanking God for the opportunities you already have to serve Him, and praying for new ones. This is a good exercise for all the Today family, in fact.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 38

I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin. - Psalm 38:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

A leading Boston Puritan, Samuel Sewall, was one of the judges during the notorious Salem witch trials in early American history. Afterwards, his conscience began to eat at him. One day he heard his son reciting Matthew 12:7: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent." Sewall knew he had to repent. On January

14, 1697, he stood before his church with head bowed while his pastor read out his humble confession.

Confessing our sins before God is another type of prayer we should practice often. Psalm 38 is traditionally considered one of the seven “penitential psalms,” with the others being Psalms 6, 32, 51, 102, 130, and 143. The main point is found in verse 18: “I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.” Thus, when the psalmist asked the Lord to help him, we understand that he was talking primarily about forgiveness.

David’s soul was sick, and he described these feelings in intense bodily terms. He had no health, his bones were unsound, his back ached, his wounds festered, he was mute and deaf, he felt crushed and helpless. All these symptoms afflicted him because he knew he had offended God (v. 4). God was disciplining His child, exercising holy wrath to bring him to the painful point of repentance. The physical imagery is so vivid here that some commentators actually think the psalmist had a life-threatening illness! Have you ever confessed your sins with this kind of spiritual intensity? In addition, because David was Israel’s king, God had made his sin and its consequences public. As a result, his friends had dropped away and his enemies were waiting to pounce.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As we see in Psalm 38, there’s nothing heavier than the burden of sin, and nothing sweeter than a draught of God’s forgiving love. 1 John 1:9 says: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Ask the Spirit to search your heart and bring you into unhindered fellowship with the Lord. If there is unconfessed sin, as well, repent before the Lord. Renew your commitment to righteousness and enjoy even closer fellowship with Him!

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 40

He lifted me out of the slimy pit; ... he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. - Psalm 40:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the Scripture reading today, you may have been puzzled by the beginning of verse 6: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced.” Put aside all thoughts of jewelry—the explanation is found in the Mosaic Law. “But if the servant declares, ‘I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,’ then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life” (Ex. 21:5–6).

In other words, to have one’s ear pierced symbolized a voluntary, lifelong commitment to service. Verse 6, then, is King David’s declaration that he is God’s servant for life. In the prayer of Psalm 40, he explained why he made this choice—God’s saving actions and character.

Who is God and what does He do? He hears and answers prayer. He saves and redeems people in trouble, giving them a secure place to stand. He even puts a new song in their mouths to praise Him for doing so—and if anyone was ever qualified to write that verse, it was David! Even beyond the mighty wonders God had done, though, the psalmist was amazed at the personal relationship God had made possible between Himself and mere humans. He has revealed to us personally His love, truth, and faithfulness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Let’s imitate the psalmist and make a better effort to let praise dominate our prayer times

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 45:1-7

About the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever.” - Hebrews 1:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, once described Jesus Christ’s earthly life in these terms: “To save man He became Man—not merely like man, but very man. In language, in costume, in everything un sinful, He made Himself One with those He sought to benefit. Had He been born a noble Roman instead of a Jew, He would perhaps have commanded more of a certain kind of respect; and He would assuredly have been spared much indignity. This, however, was not His aim; He emptied Himself [as] the meek and lowly Jesus.”

Taylor was describing the aspect of the Lord’s ministry we are most familiar with as Christians. Because Jesus took on human flesh, lived a sinless life, died on the cross, and arose in victory over death, we have forgiveness of sins and the sure hope of eternal life.

But let’s also remember that, although His royalty was obscured by His lowly surroundings in Bethlehem, Jesus Christ was born a

King (Matt. 2:2). The Messiah was God's ruler who would perfectly fulfill His promises to Israel, including His covenant with David: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16). Jesus Christ is the only one qualified to rule forever.

Because David's royal line held such great importance for Israel, the Old Testament writers often spoke of the current king on David's throne in very exalted terms. Psalm 45 is a good example--a royal psalm apparently composed to celebrate an unnamed king's wedding. The king may have been Solomon.

The psalmist composed a message full of energy. Was he aware he was also writing about Messiah coming out of the line of David? We can't say with certainty, but the language definitely describes the reign of Christ. Far more than any human king, He is clothed with "splendor and majesty" (v. 3), and He will someday ride triumphantly out of heaven. Verses 2-7 are a tremendous description of the kingdom glories Christ will bring.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God is always true to the promises He gives us in His Word.

In fact, Paul said, "No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Cor. 1:20). This word of confidence and hope will brighten your winter weekend. What promise from Scripture has been especially comforting or challenging to you lately? Why not pray God's Word back to Him? Then close by thanking Him for Christ, who is the guarantee that God always keeps His Word.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 46; 1 Kings 19:1-18

Then Samuel said [to the Lord], "Speak, for your servant is listening." - 1 Samuel 3:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Lord, I know not what I ought to ask of thee ... I simply present myself before thee, I open my heart to thee... I am silent; I offer myself in sacrifice; I yield myself to thee; I would have no other desire than to accomplish thy Will. Teach me to pray. Pray thyself in me. Amen.—François Fénelon

Ole Hallesby shares a significant incident in his book, *Prayer*. Although his young son knew that he was not supposed to disturb his father during work hours, the boy nevertheless came into his father's office one day and said, "Papa, dear, I will sit still all the time if you will only let me be here with you!"

For many of us, however, simply wanting to "sit still" with the Lord may not be our daily experience. We are more comfortable doing things for God and speaking to Him than simply listening to Him.

Sometimes we aren't even sure how to listen to God. The Lord spoke to Elijah in "a gentle whisper" (v. 12), but we may prefer a great shout! Our culture suggests that "louder is better" and more important.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We can hear the Lord in a variety of ways—directly through the ministry of the Holy Spirit or indirectly through other people or circumstances. Most often, however, we hear Him in conjunction with His Word, either through the words in the Bible itself or in prayer as we seek to understand His Word.

Although the busyness of our lives and our own fears of silence may make us feel uncomfortable to simply come before the Lord in silence, great blessing comes when we do. Find some time today, when you know you won't be interrupted, to come quietly before the Lord, silently reading through Psalm 46.

Slowly read the psalm, waiting quietly after each line to take in what the Lord has said to you from His Word. Pause and reflect on His truth. Don't worry if you feel silly or if you don't "hear" anything. In some ways, being silent before the Lord is like a human relationship: the better we know someone, the more comfortable we feel being silent with that person. Our ability to sit silently before Him increases as our relationship with Him deepens.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 46, 116

Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, save me!" - Psalm 116:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

Write thy blessed name, O Lord, upon my heart, there to remain so indelibly engraven, that no prosperity, no adversity shall ever move me from thy love. Be thou to me a strong tower of defense, a comforter in tribulation, a deliverer in distress, a very present help in trouble, and a guide to heaven through the many temptations and dangers in this life. Amen.—Thomas À Kempis

Psalms 40 contains striking references to enemies and their destruction (vv. 14–15). Many psalmists often faced physical death, so it's not surprising to find bold prayers for protection in the Psalms. We may not face such harrowing physical experiences, but our lives are filled with nonphysical enemies that plague us, such as depression, anger, lust, fear, and bitterness.

The stark portrayal of enemies and the confidence in the Lord's deliverance make the Psalms a prayer book for those who seek protection, whether from physical dangers, emotional threats, or spiritual enemies.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The most effective prayers for protection need not be long. Consider the simple "Lord, save me!" recorded in today's verse and uttered by millions throughout the ages. Often in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances this is all we can truly pray. In such times, the Lord's promise "I will be with you always" (Matt. 28:20) is a profound assurance.

How has God protected or delivered you in the past? Consider using these experiences as the basis for your own psalm praising God for His protection. Perhaps you are experiencing a trial at this time and you desire the Lord's protection as you travel or face a treacherous situation at work. The Psalms are really songs—you could write your prayer as a song to God, asking for His protection and deliverance. The following prayer may also help give words to your prayer.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 46:1-3; Isaiah 46:9-13

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

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last November, Britain's Prince Charles was greeting a group of children during a visit to Riga, Latvia, when a young woman reached out from the crowd and slapped the prince across the face with a flower. Charles flinched and pulled back as police grabbed his assailant and took her away. The prince was unhurt and continued along the street speaking to bystanders.

The reason for this assault provides a perfect illustration of the complex and disturbing times in which we live. The woman told police she attacked Prince Charles to protest Britain's role in the U.S.-led bombing of Afghanistan following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Think about that international tangle for a minute. A young person in a Baltic country was protesting a Western European nation's involvement in a war that was provoked in the United States and was being fought in Central Asia. Our world is not only a smaller place than ever before, but a more confusing and dangerous place than ever before.

We are definitely in the middle of hard times as a nation and as God's people. You'll recall how quickly and almost frantically various religious and political leaders took the stage after September 11 to assure us that Islam was a religion of peace, and that the terrorists did not represent the vast majority of their people. Trying to prevent revenge attacks on our Muslim neighbors is a worthy goal, but this action calls for us to ignore differences and to strive for religious unity that threatens the truth of the gospel. It will take courage for Christians to lovingly but firmly "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Look at the "declaration of dependence" the writer of Hebrews made. It is based on the promise quoted above: "So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?' " (Heb. 13:6). The psalmist expressed a similar thought: "Therefore we will not fear" (Ps. 46:2). It's understandable that moments of fear will come in your life. But if your confidence is in the Lord, you can rise above the fear and discover a new level of trust. Ask God to help you keep your heart fixed on Him.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 51:1-17

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

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Reliving the Passion, author Walter Wangerin questioned whether the reasons for a particular sin matter.

Does the motive of a sin--its rationale, its reasons--make it any less a sin? Isn't the betrayal of the sovereignty of the Lord in our lives always a sin, regardless of the factors that drove us to betray Him? Yes! Yet we habitually defend ourselves and diminish our fault by referring to reasons why we "had to" do it. We sinners are so backward that we try to justify ourselves by some condition which preceded the sin.

To rationalize sin is to justify oneself, protecting and holding onto sin. But to see sin as God does is to repent in brokenness of heart, allowing His forgiveness to cleanse us.

The background for today's reading is King David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, Uriah (see 2 Sam. 11-12). His eventual confession prompted by a confrontation with the prophet Nathan is recorded here.

Where did David begin in his confession? He began with God. His confession showed great faith in God's character: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions" (v. 1). He trusted in God's power to forgive sin--to blot it out and wash the sinner clean. Hyssop symbolized ritual cleansing under the Law (v. 7). The king's confession also demonstrated spiritual brokenness. He understood how much he offended God; in fact, he couldn't forget it. He grieved deeply over what he'd done--it was as though his bones had been crushed. He acknowledged the justice of God's punishment, which is no light statement considering that the penalty of his sin was the death of his baby son (v. 4). He also acknowledged his general sinful condition (v. 5).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Which verse in Psalm 51 impressed you the most? Why? Which of David's attitudes did you find most convicting? Why? How can you apply these biblical truths to your life today?

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 51:1-17

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love. - Psalm 51:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

The father of a soldier, who was being court-martialed, appealed to president Abraham Lincoln to pardon his son. Lincoln then brought out a telegram he had received from one of his generals, who asked Lincoln not to interfere in the case. But when the man's face fell in despair, Lincoln wrote a note saying the soldier was not to be shot until further orders were given from the President.

'Why, I thought it was a pardon,' the father said.

'My old friend,' Lincoln replied, 'I see you are not very well acquainted with me. If your son never dies until orders come from me to shoot him, he will live to be a great deal older than Methuselah.'

Lincoln's dilemma is a good illustration of two aspects of sin that are two more reasons why theology matters. These are guilt and forgiveness, two biblical teachings that have been the victim of much unclear thinking in our culture.

Forgiveness was a hot topic of conversation this past year. But much of the rhetoric shows that once again, the world's idea of forgiveness falls short of the biblical standard. That's doubly true for the generally accepted notion of what it means to be guilty.

In David's prayer of confession, we are reminded that only God can forgive the guilt of sin (v 14). This is because sin is first and foremost an offense against God and His holy standards. David, a murderer and adulterer, said to God, 'Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight' (v. 4).

God is the offended party whom we must deal with when we sin. That's a radical departure from the idea that guilt is solely a legal concept to be decided in court, or an outmoded relic from our Puritan past that needs to be discarded. If all behavior was a person's private business, it would be virtually impossible to determine guilt.

It's not surprising that people who have a defective view of guilt also tend to devalue forgiveness. It's not just a matter of God patting us on the head and sending us on our way. David knew there was a cost to forgiveness, and his plea to God reflected his knowledge that sin required a blood sacrifice.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Psalm 130:3 makes the profound statement: 'If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?'

The answer, of course, is that none of us could stand before God. Praise the Lord that verse 4 continues, 'But with you there is

forgiveness; therefore you are feared.' When we think of the guilt that sin brings, and what it cost God to forgive us, we can't do anything but praise Him for a priceless gift. We suggest that you put praise at the top of today's prayer list.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 51:16 Broken Things

Read Psalm 51:16,17

Have you ever studied the broken things in the Bible? A woman broke a vessel at the feet of Jesus and anointed Him. Jesus took bread and broke it as a picture of His body given for us. God uses broken things, and He starts with broken hearts. This is what repentance is all about. God doesn't listen to the lips. He doesn't measure a material sacrifice. He looks at the heart and says, "If your heart is broken, then I can cleanse it." When David sinned, he could have brought all kinds of sacrifices. But they would not have pleased the Lord. God was waiting for the sacrifice of a broken heart. That's why David said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart--these, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17). David's sins should have brought him condemnation and death. He committed adultery, and he murdered a man. No sacrifice could be found in God's sacrificial system for this kind of flagrant, rebellious, deliberate sin. But David did not die. Even though no sacrifice was available for his sin at the time, God looked down the corridors of time and saw a cross where Jesus Christ would die for David's sin. God looks at the heart, not the hand. He wants sincerity from the heart, not religious routine. A broken heart is not remorse, nor is it regret. It is repentance, a turning away from sin. It's telling God you hate sin, are judging it and claiming his forgiveness. Bring to Him the sacrifice of a contrite heart.

Psalm 51:1-17

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TODAY IN THE WORD

In Reliving the Passion, author Walter Wangerin questioned whether the reasons for a particular sin matter.

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TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Which verse in Psalm 51 impressed you the most? Why? Which of David's attitudes did you find most convicting? Why? How can you apply these biblical truths to your life today?

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 52

But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God. - Psalm 52:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

David was on the run from Saul. While fleeing, he stopped by the town of Nob to pick up supplies and guidance from Ahimelech the priest. Doeg the Edomite, Saul's "head shepherd," spotted David in the temple and reported Ahimelech's apparent treason to Saul--

who then called the priests of Nob and had Doeg put them to death. He killed 85 priests and decimated the entire town (1 Sam. 22:9-23). Psalm 52 is David's outcry against Doeg's action.

The content of Psalm 52 is all the more remarkable for its context. Spoken by David, the fleeing outlaw, to Doeg, the high court official of the current king, it reveals David's unswerving faith in the God of Israel and his ability to see beyond the crisis of the present moment.

Verses 1–4 describe Doeg's evil in terms of his speech. His tongue "plots destruction" and cuts the innocent like a "sharpened razor." He delights in untruth and the "harmful word," and boasts of his evil.

The consequence of his evil, spelled out in verses 5–7, is ultimate ruin. He will be torn from his tent by God, brought down, uprooted from the living--when he least expects it. His trust in wealth and his destruction of others will prove to be false strongholds (v. 7), and the righteous, confident in God's power, will laugh at the unmasking of his weakness.

The final two verses assert that the only true stronghold is the Lord. The temporary "power" of the man who trusts in himself for his security contrasts with the eternal security of the man who trusts in the Lord's unfailing love. David, though on the run, envisions himself as a securely rooted olive tree, "flourishing in the house of God" (v. 8). Olive trees live for hundreds of years! Even though David's life seemed transient, he knew that God's love for him provided security.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Psalm 52 is an exercise of faith. In a difficult situation, David nonetheless declares God's power, mercy, and goodness and affirms his trust in Him.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 55:1-8

Arise, cry out in the night... pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. - Lamentations 2:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Thomas Paine's famous Revolutionary War pamphlet, *The Crisis*, includes these profound words: "These are times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in the crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheaply, we esteem too lightly; it is dearness only that gives everything its value."

Paine's insights take on even more meaning when you read them in the context of our study on prayer.

A person who is facing a crisis, not of war, but of intense spiritual turmoil, knows that times like these do in fact try our souls. And in times like these we learn the difference between being a "sunshine patriot" who shrinks back from trouble, and a soldier who stands strong during the conflict and experiences the joy of winning something of priceless value.

If today's devotional had a title, it would be "The Agony of Prayer." It's safe to say that most people who have prayed consistently have had times of agonizing prayer. This is another side of prayer we need to explore.

It's much more exciting to talk about answered prayer and prayer that flows out of deep joy. But there is also power in the prayer that comes from an anguished heart, when it seems that God is far away and the problem is pressing us to our limits.

Lamentations is filled with examples of agonizing prayer. Today's verse is part of Jeremiah's distressful cry to the Lord as he watches Jerusalem being besieged by the Babylonians and unthinkable horrors being committed.

David was no stranger to trouble himself. He had real enemies with real weapons hounding him. Even though most of us haven't faced that reality, who hasn't expressed a wish like the one David voiced (vv. 6-8)? We believe that honest, trustful, tenacious prayer in times of pain provides us with that refuge.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Another believer who experienced a time of agony wrote "Near to the Heart of God," a beautiful hymn we can draw comfort and strength from today.

Cleland McAfee was a pastor in Chicago and wrote these lines at the double funeral of his nieces, who had died of diphtheria: "There is a place of quiet rest, Near to the heart of God; A place where sin cannot molest, Near to the heart of God." Why don't you sing these words to the Lord today?

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 62

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. - 2 Samuel 22:2-3a

TODAY IN THE WORD

Historian Roland Bainton writes that Martin Luther composed the well-known hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" during a time of deep depression. Yet, reflecting upon Psalm 46, Luther was moved to pen one of the most enduring proclamations of Christian confidence in the unshakable nature of God.

While Luther may have composed this hymn while in a medieval fortress, the psalmist probably had in mind a thick-walled, stone city, located high upon a hill. David, the author of Psalm 62, was well acquainted with such fortress cities. With first-hand knowledge of the protection that strong, high walls offered, he created a powerful image of the reality of God's strength. But as secure as a stone fortress was, David knew that God alone was the true protection for his soul (v. 2).

Many times throughout his life, David faced powerful enemies who wanted him to fall (vv. 3-4). At such times, he turned to the only possible source of hope—God. Notice how many images David used in order to convey his confidence in God. God was his rock, his salvation, his fortress, and his refuge (vv. 6–7).

By describing God as a rock, David used another metaphor to describe God's strength and solidity. Rocks in ancient Israel often provided hiding places, or refuge, in the harsh wilderness. We know that David was forced to flee to the desert more than once in his life. So, again drawing upon his own experience, David knew that the greatest possible refuge was none other than God Himself. No wonder he urged the people to "Trust in him at all times" (v. 8).

The rest of Psalm 62 offers a sobering picture of those who refuse to make God their fortress. Instead, these individuals trust in extortion or stolen goods (v. 10). But David knew that God, his refuge, justly rewarded righteous behavior and punished evil (v. 12).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Unlike Martin Luther or King David, you probably don't live in a strong fortress! To understand the power of this imagery, consider checking out a book on ancient fortresses or medieval castles from your library and listing elements in these structures that offered protection and strength. For example, high walls protected from enemy assaults and fire. A hill location enabled enemies to be detected early. Think about specific ways in which God protects and strengthens your soul like these fortresses protected their inhabitants.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 63, 2 Samuel 15:13-37

To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. - Psalm 3:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

William Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*, begins with Caesar's return to Rome after winning a battle. The common people love him, but others are afraid he'll seize power and do away with the Senate.

Senator Cassius, a longtime political opponent of Caesar's, conspires to murder him. He recruits several others for his plot, including Brutus, Caesar's friend. Brutus tells himself that he's doing this for the good of the nation, that Caesar must be destroyed before his ambitions to become emperor are fulfilled.

The next day, the conspirators attack Caesar after a speech and stab him to death. As he's dying, Caesar looks up and sees that his friend had conspired against him.

David, too, was betrayed by someone close to him—his son, Absalom.

Tipped off about Absalom's rebellion, David left Jerusalem with those still faithful to him, including his bodyguards. David tried to release Ittai and others, but after all their battles together, they'd bonded with him and decided to share his fate (v. 21). The king also sent Hushai to spy on Absalom, arranged a courier system for messages, and prayed against Ahithophel's counsel.

Second, David expressed grief. He wept, covered his head, and walked barefoot to demonstrate his extreme sorrow. He felt betrayed as both father and king. He was shocked that men such as Ahithophel had joined the rebellion. The people also wept as he

left the city, showing that not everyone had joined Absalom.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

David probably wrote Psalm 63 during the events described in today's reading. He was on the run, discouraged, wondering what God was doing. It's significant that under these circumstances his strongest desire was to draw near to God: "My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me" (v. 8).

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 65:1-13

Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! - Psalm 65:4a

TODAY IN THE WORD

Studying the book of Romans before his conversion, Martin Luther felt unable to find peace with God: "My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage Him." At last he found the answer. "I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the 'justice of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love."

In short, Luther had finally understood that God forgives! Salvation is not about "merit" but mercy. His feelings--of being reborn or of entering paradise--parallel the psalmist's in today's reading.

The first two verses frame this psalm of praise. Verses 5–8 describe God's awesome power over nature and nations, and verses 9–13 conclude with images of God's blessing. These references to fertility and abundance give people more reasons to worship, even as creation itself joins in.

Our focus is on verses 3–4. What's the human condition? We're overwhelmed by sin, unable to help ourselves. We've been defeated. What's the solution? "You forgave our transgressions" or "You made atonement for our transgressions," (v. 3, NIV). As we've seen throughout this month, God's forgiving love comes to the rescue.

Since forgiveness is part of God's nature, when He forgives, we experience His presence and rejoice in it. The psalmist used a metaphor of living in the Lord's house (cf. Ps. 23:6; 84:1–4). To be forgiven means to be loved means to be chosen. We who have been chosen by God join His family. He's personally present in our lives, filling them with good things. To be "filled" means to be sated or saturated, that is, fully satisfied.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

With all the psalms we've been reading this week, perhaps you'd like to try writing one of your own. In your spiritual journal, or as a poem, why not write out a psalm of confession and forgiveness?

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 66:16-20; Isaiah 6:1-6

God is light: in him there is no darkness at all. - 1 John 1:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

"Father, cleanse me through Your Word. Let it search out and bring to light all that is of self and the flesh in my faith. Let it cut away every root of self-confidence, that the Vine may find me wholly free to receive His life and spirit... Only You are my hope. Amen."—Andrew Murray, *The True Vine*

As we consider God in whom there is no darkness, we begin to understand why Isaiah reacted to God's holiness with an overwhelming sense of his own sinfulness (Isa. 6:5). God's moral perfection may make us wonder how He could ever hear our prayers, or even why He would want to.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Understanding God's holiness should deepen our appreciation of the Holy Spirit whom the Father has sent in the name of His Son Jesus (John 14:26). The Spirit of Truth dwelling within us leads us into God's truth and helps us to discern error and sin within and around us. The indwelling Spirit enables us to yearn for God's holiness and to walk in His ways.

It's not surprising that the Holy Spirit is integrally woven into New Testament passages on prayer. Spend some time today reflecting on the Holy Spirit's role in prayer as revealed in John 14:15–27, 16:5–16, and Romans 8:1–39. What does Jesus promise the Spirit will do? How does the Spirit help us pray? Then ask the Holy Spirit to open your spirit to His leading in holiness and to His prompting in prayer in new and deeper ways.

The following prayer may be a helpful guide as you pray for holiness.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 72:1-11

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. - Luke 1:32-33

TODAY IN THE WORD

One historian says that Dwight L. Moody was the first major evangelist in North American history who was a premillennialist in his theology. Moody believed in a future, literal kingdom in which Jesus Christ would reign on earth as a fulfillment of God's promise that Messiah would sit on David's throne. Moody also believed that God's judgment would precede the kingdom, and often said that God had given him a lifeboat to rescue people from the sinking ship of a world heading to judgment.

We mention Moody's beliefs not only because they are relevant to our study, but also because today is the 163rd anniversary of his birth in Northfield, Massachusetts.

Moody served as an evangelist during America's so-called Gilded Age, when confidence in science, industry, and America's seemingly endless possibilities led some theologians to teach that the church could bring the kingdom to earth by its efforts. The idea was that Christian influence would grow to become so pervasive in society that the world would gradually improve and believers would usher in the kingdom age on earth. Christ would return at the end of this growth. This view was known as postmillennialism, which lost its popularity after World War I shattered the dream of mankind's steady spiritual, moral, and scientific improvement.

This brief review of late-nineteenth-century theology gives us some historical perspective as we study Psalm 72 today and tomorrow. You cannot read this powerful description of the Messiah's glorious kingdom reign without realizing that conditions like these have never existed on earth--and never will, as long as sinful human beings hold the seats of power.

In fact, if we look back on the twentieth century, we'll see that the postmillennialists were hopelessly optimistic. Not even Solomon, to whom this psalm is credited, could claim to "endure as long as the sun" or "rule from sea to sea" (vv. 5, 8). This earth will have its golden age, but only when Christ returns to judge sin and establish righteousness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Dwight Moody liked to say the only monuments he wanted to leave behind were the kind on two legs--men and women who were trained and were busy serving the Lord.

Today MBI is still raising up this kind of "monument." Our students benefit from the Institute's commitment to tuition-paid education--an innovation of Mr. Moody's to ensure that no one who wanted to serve the Lord would be turned away by financial obstacles. Please pray with us today that the Institute's financial needs will continue to be met this month, for God's glory and the extension of His work.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 72:12-20

Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. - Psalm 72:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1825 a wealthy Scottish industrialist and social reformer named Robert Owen purchased the small town of Harmony, Indiana, which had been home to a religious group from Germany called the Harmonists. Owen renamed the town New Harmony and attracted settlers with the promise of a utopian society. New Harmony became a famous experiment in community living as scientists and scholars came to study the movement. But the people eventually split into several factions, and by 1827 Owen's dream of an ideal society was gone.

At its demise New Harmony joined a long line of failed dreams and experiments by idealistic people who thought they could create their own small slice of the kingdom on earth. Many of these people looked at the world around them and reasoned that the only

way values such as peace, justice, harmony, and shared wealth would ever prevail would be in self-contained communities.

The human race has been dreaming of utopia since the days of Plato and his Republic. But an ideal world requires a ruler who is perfect in wisdom, righteousness, justice, and mercy.

Only one person meets these qualifications--God's sinless Son, Jesus, who has been made "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). The second half of Psalm 72 continues the exciting description of the justice, mercy, and prosperity that will prevail on earth when Christ takes His seat on David's throne. It will be a kingdom of universal righteousness and blessing, and it's in our future!

You probably have noticed by now that the Old Testament writers often focused on, and celebrated, Messiah's future reign as universal King.

But the idea of a suffering and crucified Christ, rejected by Israel and hanging in shame on a Roman cross, was a concept many devout followers of Christ simply could not grasp. Even Jesus' disciples refused to believe His predictions of His impending death in Jerusalem. And after His resurrection, Jesus had to explain to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus that it was "necessary" for the Christ to suffer (Luke 24:26).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Even though we know there are no perfect people or situations in the world, sometimes we can begin to expect perfection from ourselves and others.

Are you holding someone to an impossibly high standard? We often expect the most from the people we love the most. But demanding that other people meet our expectations can create frustration and strained relationships. Make sure the people around you know they are free to meet God's expectations and be ready to help them or forgive them when they do stumble.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 79

Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief. - Psalm 31:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Washington Irving observed the following about tears: "There is sacredness in tears... They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love."

The author of today's psalm would have agreed. His "overwhelming grief" is obvious in this lament psalm poetically grieving the destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 1–4). Speaking for the nation, the psalm petitions the Lord God to remember His people and to avenge their enemies (vv. 5–7)--a plea based on God's mercy and forgiveness (v. 8). The honor of God's holy name motivates further appeals for divine action (vv. 9–12). Finally, the people collectively vow to praise God (v. 13).

Psalm 79 provides a good introduction to Lamentations, which comprises five lament poems. The Hebrew name of this book is "Alas!"--a heart-rending indication of the consequences of Judah's sin. Second Kings 24–25 and Jeremiah 52 give the facts of the siege and exile of Jerusalem; Lamentations gives the emotions.

Tradition says that Jeremiah wrote these five poems in a cave west of Jerusalem while Nebuchadnezzar marched the people into exile. These poems are acrostic, meaning each line (or group of lines in chapter 3) of the poem begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This creative feature probably intended to stress the complete--or A to Z--nature of the nation's sin and to set boundaries on the nation's grieving.

The first four chapters of Lamentations portray Jerusalem from different voices: a princess forced into harsh labor with no comfort (chapter 1); the object of God's wrath (chapter 2); the solitary cry of an individual (chapter 3); and the former treasures of the city (chapter 4). In chapter 5, the exiles cry out.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One Bible scholar commented that Lamentations was written "to encourage completeness in the expression of grief, the confession of sin, and the instilling of hope."

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 84:11; Malachi 4:2

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. - Numbers 6:24-25

TODAY IN THE WORD

When was the last time you watched a sunrise? Perhaps you've slept in too often, and can't remember.

If you've been up, perhaps you've been busy or stuck in traffic, and not taken the time to enjoy this daily drama of nature. Perhaps because sunrise is so frequent, you've been taking it for granted. Yet no two sunrises are exactly the same—our Creator makes a new masterpiece each and every morning!

Today's verses use the sun as a metaphor for God. Notice there is no confusion between the sun and God, as in the case of the pagan nations which surrounded Israel. The sun is a created object, and only the Creator is worthy of worship.

In that case, what attributes of God do the Jewish writers want to highlight by comparing Him to the sun? One answer is His righteousness and glory (Mal. 4:2). For those who revere the Lord, a new day is coming. Like the sun rising, God will appear on the horizon of our wicked world, dispelling the darkness and bringing the fire of judgment to evildoers and granting healing and redemption to His worshipers (v. 1).

In exactly this way, the first coming of Christ was like a sunrise: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Isa. 9:2; cf. Luke 1:76--79). When the day of the Lord is full, there will in fact be no more need for the sun—"the Lord will be [our] everlasting light" (Isa. 60:19-20).

A second meaning of this sun metaphor spotlights God's blessing or favor (Ps. 84:11). That's why the standard priestly blessing included the phrase, "the Lord make His face shine upon you" (Num. 6:25). As with the first meaning, this happy result is only for those who are living righteously, "those whose walk is blameless."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Schedule a time soon to get up early and watch the sun rise. Pick a good vantage point. Allow plenty of time. You might even invite a friend to join you.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 86; 2 Kings 20:1-7

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. - Psalm 147:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the strong name of Jesus Christ I stand against the world, the flesh, and the devil... I reject the distorted concepts and ideas that make sin plausible and desirable. I oppose every attempt to keep me from knowing full fellowship with God... These things I pray for the sake of him who loved me and gave himself for me. Amen.—Richard Foster, Prayer

There is a growing recognition in the medical community of the role of prayer in physical healing. Many medical professionals who have no other explanation for a patient's recovery are willing to credit prayer.

As Christians, we shouldn't be surprised by this close connection—today's passage from 2 Kings records one such healing, and Jesus' incarnational ministry was filled with healings. Also, the gospels show that physical and spiritual healing may be closely connected.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In his book, *Prayer*, Richard Foster offers insights on physical healing, cautioning Christians to avoid the extremes of seeking medical means without prayer or seeking prayer while ignoring medical help. Foster documents miraculous healings, yet he frankly admits that healing is a mystery and discourages believers from blaming themselves when healing does not occur.

Foster outlines four steps for healing prayer, appropriate for both emotional and physical healing. First, listen. "We listen to people, and we listen to God" for more discernment. Second, pray. "This is the step of faith. As we come to clearness about what is needed, we invite God's healing to come." Third, believe. "This is the step of assurance... We focus on [his] trustworthiness and especially on his steadfast love." Fourth, give thanks. "This is the step of gratitude... Gratitude is often very powerful."

If you seek healing, consider also asking the elders of your church to pray for you, as outlined in James 5:14–15.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 86:1-17

You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you. - Psalm 86:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1972, the missionary aviation organization JAARS suffered its first fatal accident. Seven people died, including the pilot, when their twin-engine Piper Aztec crashed in the jungles of Papua New Guinea. The reason? A single nut had not been properly tightened during a routine inspection, and the resulting spray of gasoline caused a fire. The experienced mechanic at fault was overwhelmed by guilt: "The sight of those caskets lined up in the little open-sided tropical church hit me like a blow to the stomach... How could I face my friends? How could I face myself? I was overwhelmed with guilt. I was a failure."

Fortunately, the families of those who had died extended forgiveness to their brother, and slowly the pain healed. He later said: "Except for God's grace I'd be somewhere cowering in a corner in guilt-ridden despair--the eighth fatality of the Aztec crash... Praise God, it isn't so!"

That JAARS mechanic experienced true forgiveness--the blessing of God's lovingkindness as extended by His people. The joy we feel upon being forgiven is a direct result of His goodness to and presence with us. What could be better?

Psalm 86 begins with a prayer for help. David desperately needed God's power and mercy. He didn't ask based on his merit or his position as king but based on who God is: forgiving (or "ready to forgive," NASB), good, and abounding in love (v. 5). "Good" carries the idea that He'll graciously give us something to cheer us, delight us, and work to our benefit. Forgiveness does all this!

Forgiveness is at the heart of our relationship with God. Ever since the Fall, humans have been sinning and repenting, and God has been redeeming, forgiving, and restoring. Such mercy and grace best show His character (vv. 13, 15). In response to these truths, David proclaimed God's greatness and His worthiness to be worshiped as well as our responsibility to obey and glorify Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you think you've done something unforgivable? "Surely God could never forgive me. After all, what I did was so horrible ... " Such thoughts are a lie of Satan--he wants you to believe that God's love is less than it is.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 89:1-8

You are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you. - Psalm 89:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

A report earlier this year from the United Bible Societies in England stated that during 1997, at least part of the Bible was made available in thirty new languages worldwide. This work brought the total number of languages that have some portion of God's Word to 2,187--an increase of more than two hundred languages in the past four years!

Ethan the Ezrahite would have been happy to hear this good news from the Bible translation front. The author of Psalm 89 wanted the world to hear the good news of God's faithfulness and love to all generations.

In fact, the verses we read today make it clear that faithfulness was a mark of God's character long before the earth was ever established. Throughout eternity, the love and grace of God have been on display. In fact, God established His faithfulness "in heaven itself" (v. 2).

If we could have stood in a corner of heaven before earth was established--and indeed still today--we would have heard the testimony of "the holy ones" (v. 7), saying that no one in heaven could compare to God. These holy beings, including the angels and the living beings and elders described in Revelation, have always had only one item on their agenda for discussion: the awesome nature of the God they worship day and night.

Since God's love and faithfulness are securely established in heaven, do you think we have any real reason to worry about what happens on earth? The writer of Psalm 89 and the angels would answer no.

As a matter of fact, today's reading gives us a great example of God's attention to the earth. To illustrate the Lord's faithfulness, the writer mentioned the eternal covenant God made with David to establish his throne forever.

This is a covenant that reaches out to include all people, because the eternal throne God promised to David's descendants will one day be occupied by Jesus Christ when He comes to rule in His millennial kingdom (see the November 3 study).

Consider the joy and wonder experienced by the people in our opening illustration who have just received God's Word in their

language for the first time. Now they can join us in celebrating God's faithfulness, which will stand for eternity!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Many pastors end their Sunday worship services with a benediction that encourages the people to go out and tell someone else about the Lord.

Preparing us to be witnesses is one goal of worship and the ministry of the church. The psalmist was eager to let the world know about his faithful God. You probably know someone who needs to know Jesus Christ. Write this person's name on your calendar for the week, and begin today asking God for a divine appointment to share His love and faithfulness.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 90:1-17

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. - Psalm 90:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

From the moment Dorothy lands in the magical kingdom of fairies and Munchkins called Oz, she wants to return home. She goes on a quest to kill a wicked witch not for glory or fame, but to be given an opportunity to go back home to Kansas.

Toward the end of the story, she clicks the heels of her ruby slippers together three times and repeats, "There's no place like home, there's no place like home." When she opens her eyes, she's back on the farm!

For us as well, "there's no place like home," especially once we understand that our true Dwelling Place is God Himself. This biblical metaphor suggests that God is our secure resting place, that our life dwells within His Life, and that He is the place where we belong (cf. Ps. 84:1-4, 10).

At the beginning of today's reading, Moses sets up "dwelling place" as the main picture of his psalm. This word is sometimes translated "refuge" or "shelter," but usually means simply "home" or "habitation."

In what way is God a Dwelling Place? Human beings are sinful and mortal, but God is righteous and eternal. Therefore, our hope lies in taking refuge within His love and compassion (vv. 13-17).

The implicit background for this passage is the years of desert wandering following Israel's Exodus from Egypt. That's why it reflects such a strong sense of God's wrath. But that's also why the metaphor of God as Dwelling Place is so poignant. Moses and Israel had no home other than God! Under the circumstances, to begin the psalm as he did is a strong statement of faith.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Moses started with a picture of God as Israel's dwelling place, and used it to frame a psalm built on the nation's specific circumstances at the time. You could do the same thing.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 90:1-17

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. - Psalm 90:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Associated Press recently reported that Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania will soon offer its students a new minor in Civil War-era studies. The program will include study of the war's most famous battle, part of which took place on the school's 167-year-old campus. No one knows why the program hasn't been offered before, since the school has a war historian who runs its Civil War Institute. 'Doing a program on the Civil War at Gettysburg seemed eminently logical,' said one professor.

Knowing your own history is a good idea. We could even say that it's eminently biblical. Speaking on behalf of God's people, Moses prayed for God's insight on life not because he wanted to be a historian, but so he could live his days wisely.

Given the human condition in comparison to God's eternal nature and holiness, Moses' desire is right on target. God is eternal, the One whose changeless nature and righteous character we have been celebrating this month (vv. 1-2). To Him, even a thousand years are nothing.

In contrast, we are frail and sinful people, and even what's considered a full life span of eighty years passes quickly. Moses felt the consequences of sin being carried out in human life through a sense of moaning at the shortness and trouble and sorrow of life.

Moses wasn't being a pessimist or a complainer. His words are a reminder that death was not part of God's original creation and intention for the human race. God sets the years of our lives and our seasons of faith, but we can also look forward to the day when God will redeem His creation (see the September 30 study).

It's in this context that Moses prayed for wisdom. He also prayed that his days would be lived out under the smile of God's grace and compassion. And Moses wasn't just thinking of himself. His concern was that generations still unborn would learn of God's 'splendor' or glory.

In verse 14 we find the basis on which Moses could pray for God's favor. The Lord's 'unfailing love' is a solid foundation on which any believer can build a God-honoring life.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

There's a written exercise we suggest occasionally that can help you number your days according to God's wisdom.

Make two columns on a piece of paper. In the left-hand column, list a few of your spiritual goals, the ways you want to be remembered, and some specifics of the spiritual heritage you want to leave your family. In the other column write down the things you are doing right now to reach these goals. The results should give you a pretty good idea of where you are, and what may need to happen to get you where you want to go.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 90:1-17

TODAY IN THE WORD

Bumper stickers reveal a lot about the people who stick them on their vehicles. A quick glance and you can learn volumes: a person's hobby ("I'D RATHER BE SAILING!"); world view ("THE EARTH DOES NOT BELONG TO US; WE BELONG TO THE EARTH"); political leanings ("DON'T BLAME ME—I VOTED FOR BUSH!"); even the intelligence level of their children ("MY KID IS AN HONOR STUDENT AT A. E. PHILLIPS ELEMENTARY")!

Some bumper stickers are funny; others are crude. A few are true; most are not. Take, for instance, the recent sticker of a popular athletic shoe manufacturer: "LIFE IS SHORT—PLAY HARD."

That slogan merits our consideration. We need to evaluate it in light of the Scriptures. Life is short—that much is true. But given that fact, is the correct response for us merely to play hard? Not according to Moses. In Psalm 90, the great leader of Israel advocates a different response to the brevity of life. He calls for wisdom.

In the only psalm Moses ever authored, he describes living wisely. First, he explains that wise people understand their mortal condition (vv. 3-11). They have come to grips with their own mortality and are keenly aware of both their sinfulness and God's displeasure over sin.

Second, Moses asserts that wise people know their Creator (vv. 1-2, 13-17). In contrast to finite, imperfect humanity, God is infinite, eternal and holy. Furthermore He is a compassionate Creator who does good things for His frail creatures.

Third, Moses notes that wise people keep an eye on the calendar (v. 12). They recognize that they are allotted only a certain number of days in this lifetime. Consequently they want to spend carefully such a precious commodity. Too often we act as though we are immortal, taking for granted our loved ones, our family. Instead, we should value each moment and each person.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How do you treat the other members of your family? Today, take a moment to consider. Undoubtedly others watch how we live, especially those in our household. A Christian once asked a Jewish rabbi friend: "When are you Jews going to become Christians?" Reflect on the truths found in Psalm 90. It is only when we are convinced of the brevity of life that our minds and hearts are turned toward eternal things. Because life on this earth is short, we should value each minute with those we love

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 92

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree. - Psalm 92:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Recent sociological studies have shown that, in general, people of faith live longer and are happier. To worshipers of God, rooted in the true Vine, this should come as no surprise. Our scriptural hymnbook, the Psalms, written centuries before modern studies, suggests the connection between praising God and living joyously.

Psalm 92 in particular links worship and flourishing. Worship is, among other things, recognizing and naming God's goodness: His works, deeds, and faithfulness (v. 4). To worship God with our whole being is to regain a proper perspective on our life and the One who holds it. This psalm is written for the Sabbath day--a day of worship, a day dedicated to God.

The psalm contrasts the senseless man with the worshiper of God. They differ in perception and in longevity. The senseless man is ignorant of his own transience. He does not know that despite flourishing like grass, his life is temporary (v. 7).

This contrasts with the worshiper of God who knows that "it is good to praise the Lord" (v. 1). The worshiper isn't senseless like the other man, but knows that God's thoughts are "profound" and that He is "exalted forever" (vv. 5, 8). This joy in the Lord and His deeds causes eternal praise and adoration. The worshiper is seen as a tree taking root in God's house, a secure and sheltered place. "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God" (vv. 12, 13).

Being rooted in praise, says the psalm, leads to a life of fruitfulness. Unlike the senseless man who withers like grass, the righteous will "still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green" (v. 14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The psalmist writes that it is "good to praise the Lord ... to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night" (vv. 1-2). Consider reading this psalm of praise aloud to the Lord; read it several times until you are able to offer it as your prayer. Then proclaim His love--for you, your family, neighbors, co-workers, friends--and His faithfulness. What are concrete ways in which God has recently shown you His love and faithfulness that you could share with someone else? Be sure to make note of them.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 92:12-15

I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God. - Psalm 52:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll has this message of encouragement for older Christians.

'If nobody else has told you lately, hear me today, those of you in the colorful, twilight days of life we need you.'
Swindoll goes on to advise seniors, 'Live with the realities of the present, anticipate the future with hope, and let go of past disappointments.'

This is a great word for people who are in the season of life the world calls senior citizens. The world may target this segment of society (we'll let you decide at what age 'seniorhood' begins) mostly for financial plans, retirement centers, and political clout. But God has something more enduring in mind for His older children. It's called eternal clout.

There may not be a specific biblical term for the season of faith people enter when they reach the so-called golden years, but the Bible has a lot to say about this period of life. It's obvious from Scripture that God's desire and plan is for this time to be productive. Retirement in the extreme sense of trading a life of fruitful activity for that of a spectator is unheard-of in the Bible.

There are plenty of diet supplements and exercise routines that promise to keep older people fresh like a fruit-bearing tree (v. 14). But the psalmist is talking about staying energetic in soul and spirit. The key to spiritual fruitfulness in these years is actually the same as it is for a young or middle-aged person. It's a life centered in the worship and praise of God.

That's why the writer located the flourishing believer in 'the house of the Lord' and 'the courts of our God' (v. 12). This is the temple, the place where God is worshipped and adored and served, and where His people draw their strength.

The reason God gives long and productive lives to those who serve Him is that He is 'upright' (v. 15), or holy, totally separate from any evil. We know that God sends out His blessings based on righteousness because while wicked people may flourish temporarily, like new grass, they will be destroyed (v. 7). What a tremendous contrast for us to consider today.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Temporary success versus lifelong blessing. Put in these terms, it doesn't sound like a hard choice to make.

The problem, of course, is that choices don't always come to us with the consequences so clearly marked. We often have to sift through some confusing options to get at the heart of an important decision. Choosing to honor and serve God consistently is a decision we have to reaffirm regularly. Let's ask Him for wisdom to make good choices this week.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 95:1-7

TODAY IN THE WORD

If you have ever been awed by the sight of a giant redwood tree, you may appreciate what it took for loggers to fell one of those trees in the days before power equipment. Lumbermen would build a working platform around the tree, about twenty feet off the ground. Then they spent up to a week sawing a massive undercut to direct the tree's fall. Transporting it to the sawmill was no small task, either. Even one half of an old-growth redwood was a trainload of wood.

As the poet Joyce Kilmer once said, only God could make a tree like the giant redwood. The Old Testament psalmists loved to point to the majesty and beauty of nature to extol the only God great enough to create such wonders. Psalm 95 is such a psalm.

The psalmist's call to worship is exuberant, and the reasons he gives justify such praise. Nature provides one of the great metaphors for God, who is the "Rock of our salvation" (v. 1). Just as a giant redwood suggests soaring majesty, a rock typifies the strength and stability of our great Savior.

Verse 3 also emphasizes another familiar refrain of biblical worship: the reminder that God alone deserves the place of deity. One reason the nations around Israel fashioned false gods was in an attempt to control the forces of nature. But the plagues of Egypt demonstrated once for all the impotence of idols and the sovereign rule of Israel's God.

This psalm leaves no doubt about God's ownership of the earth. It is His because He created it, and it is His because He alone sustains it. The earth is in His hands, and the mountains and the sea belong to Him.

But the writer does not leave things on the cosmic level. Since God is the Creator of everything we see, it follows that He is our Maker as well (v. 6). Therefore, He has a dual claim on our lives, for He is our Creator and our Savior.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Reading Psalm 95 together as a family would be a great preparation for your worship today.

If you have not gone to church, you might plan to read these verses with your family before you go. Here's one idea worth trying: have a family member read the psalm aloud in the car on the way to church. Then take a few minutes to discuss the truths it teaches. You'll be amazed at the difference those few minutes will make in your attitude toward worship.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalms 95:3-7

Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God. - Psalm 95:6-7

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1715, Isaac Watts penned the words to a classic hymn praising God's awesomeness as seen in creation, "I Sing the Mighty Power of God." The first two verses proclaim:

I sing the mighty power of God that made the mountains rise,
that spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained the sun to rule by day;
the moon shines full at His command, and all the stars obey.
I sing the goodness of the Lord, that filled the earth with food;
He formed the creatures with His word, and then pronounced them good.
Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed where'er I turn my eye,
if I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky!

This hymn is a powerful summons to worship our Creator, and the same is true of Psalm 95. Yesterday, we affirmed the truth of creation; today, we move to the appropriate response--praise!

Today's reading makes a connection between the fact that God created and His authority over creation (cf. Ps. 24:1-2). The sea and mountains belong to Him, because He made them (vv. 4-5). Likewise, we should bow down humbly before Him, because He made us (v. 6).

God is our Maker--the creator of both individuals and nations, and for this psalmist, specifically of Israel. "Maker" implies that God is responsible not only for our physical existence, but also for the shaping of our destinies (cf. Deut. 32:6ff.). He is not an impersonal, distant Creator, but a God who cares for and looks after what He has made (v. 7).

The poet uses a metaphor of sheep and a shepherd, which we can also see in well-known passages such as Psalm 23 and John 10. The shepherd image suggests care, protection, guidance, and discipline, as well as kingship (v. 3; cf. Gen. 48:15; Mt. 2:6; Rev. 7:17).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The psalms frequently speak of different physical postures in worship. Today's verses mention bowing down and kneeling, and other passages also mention lying prostrate, standing, lifting up hands, clapping, and so on.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 96:1-13

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. - Psalm 96:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

For years, a dirt-encrusted painting hung in the San Salvador church in Venice, Italy. Entitled "Supper at Emmaus," it showed the resurrected Christ eating with the two followers He'd met on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13-32), and was believed to be a poor copy of an older work. A group called Save Venice had decided not to restore the painting.

Upon closer inspection, however, experts found that the painting was not a copy, but an original work by Renaissance master Vittore Carpaccio, worth \$50 million. Restorers removed layers of dirt and over-painting to reveal a colorful, finely detailed masterpiece.

The masterpiece was there all along. It simply needed close examination by experts to be recognized, and careful effort by restorers to be appreciated.

Perhaps this month has been like that for you—a gradual, more complete uncovering of God's master plan for missions. Perhaps you hadn't realized how far back His plan for world missions went, or how integrally every part of the Bible related to it. That master plan is the theme of today's reading.

Psalm 96 (cf. 1 Chron. 16) is a universal call to praise the Lord--all people and all creation are invited to join in! Verses 1-3 are an invocation or call to worship. Verses 4-5 assert God's worthiness to be worshiped above idols (cf. Jer. 10:1-16). Verses 6-10 list more of His attributes and present a picture of worshiping in His temple. Finally, verses 11-13 climax with references to creation and judgment day.

We are urged to sing a new song, proclaim God's salvation, declare His glory and marvelous works, and recognize who He is. He is the Creator, worthy of reverence and worship, strong, glorious, holy, just, and sovereign. "He will judge the world in righteousness" (v. 13; cf. Isa. 2:2-4).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Praying for world leaders can be a good way to boost your global missions perspective. Praying for the World's 365 Most Influential People, a book based on Paul's instruction to pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-2), gives you a prayer target for every day of the year.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 96

Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees. - Isaiah 44:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

Church services historically have begun with a call to worship, an exhortation to the congregation to fix their attention and heart on God. A call to worship can be a psalm verse ("Come, let us worship the Lord") or a song of preparation ("I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart"). A call to worship reminds us of who God is and why we come to worship Him.

For the next three days, we'll look at trees as part of God's creation. In Psalm 96 we see a world-wide call to worship. Through a series of exhortations, the psalmist invites all nations and creatures to rejoice in the reign of the Creator God and to focus their hope on His imminent return.

The psalmist exhorts the worshipers to sing of God's deeds to all peoples (vv. 1–3). This requires a new song because God's acts of salvation are continuous and daily: though we sing of God's past saving deeds, we also must "update" our praise to include the ways He saves us "day after day" (v. 2).

The psalmist also says to ascribe to God the honor belonging to Him (vv. 7–9), that is, to give Him credit. The Lord is to be praised because He created the earth, a deed that evidences His power and splendor. His claim to authority trumps all--other "gods" are made by human hands, "but the Lord made the heavens" (v. 5).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In what new ways has God shown His glory to you? Have you thanked Him?

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 97:1-7

TODAY IN THE WORD

David Brainerd was an American colonial missionary to the Indians who died at the age of twenty-nine. His diary reveals a young man intensely committed to God. Brainerd once said to Jonathan Edwards: "'I do not go to heaven to be advanced but to give honor to God. It is no matter where I shall be stationed in heaven, whether I have a high seat or a low seat there... My heaven is to please God and glorify Him, and give all to Him, and to be wholly devoted to His glory.'"

Clearly, David Brainerd had caught a glimpse of God that far too few believers experience. Once a person has been captured by the holiness, majesty, and glory of God, nothing else looks quite so bright.

One of our goals this month has been to help you gain a new appreciation for the greatness of the God we are privileged to love and worship. The writer of Psalm 97 helps to lift our vision to a new level with his description of a God before Whom the whole earth trembles.

The earth trembles because God controls the forces of nature. He can light up the earth with His lightning, and turn the mountains into wax (v. 5). No other god, no idol fashioned by the hand of man, has any claim that can match or surpass the one true God.

Yet the earth is also called to rejoice in the fact that our God reigns. Verse 2 suggests the reason. God is not a cruel despot or a whimsical tyrant who simply does as He pleases without regard for the consequences.

On the contrary, God's throne is built on righteousness and justice (v. 2). And because He displays these characteristics to an infinitely perfect degree, those who seek to know and worship Him can have absolute confidence in His character.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We need a vision of God like that of David Brainerd.

If we can see God as He truly is, it will take our worship and our entire Christian life to a new level. But sometimes there are other things--problems, habits, the needs and concerns of daily life--that block our vision and keep us from experiencing God as He desires.

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 99

The King is mighty, he loves justice. - Psalm 99:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

In our culture we have many ways of remembering American history. Of course, American history is studied in schools. Sometimes history is passed on through legends, like the one about little George Washington chopping down the cherry tree. We declare

holidays, such as President's Day. We put pictures of famous people on our money or postage stamps. We also play patriotic music, from 'Yankee Doodle' to the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic.' There are museums, historical novels and films, and commemorative celebrations complete with fireworks or reenactments of famous events.

Why do we do such things? We want to remember where we as a nation have been our heritage is part of our identity.

The Israelites felt exactly the same way. One way they memorialized their history was to write psalms of worship, thanking God for all He'd done for them. That was the purpose of Psalm 99. To close this month's study of the ministry of Samuel, we'll take a look at a couple of Bible passages to help us reflect on the meaning of his life.

In Psalm 99, Samuel was remembered as a leader worthy of imitation (v. 6). Moses and Aaron were also specifically mentioned all three were key figures in the period before the kings. Samuel 'called on [God's] name.' This suggested a commitment to worship and prayer, and a relationship with God based on faith and obedience. We've already seen his passion for interceding for Israel (cf. Jer. 15:1).

The glory goes not to Samuel or any other human leader, however, but to God. He reigns above all nations. He is holy, powerful, just, forgiving, and faithful to hear and answer prayer. These characteristics are prominently on display in the history of 'Jacob' (Psalm 99:4).

The appropriate response is praise and worship! 'Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His holy mountain' (v. 9). The same is true for us, since we worship the same God that Samuel did!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Twice already this month (on the 8th and 14th), we've encouraged you to make a spiritual timeline, a record of spiritual milestones in your walk with God. In essence, that is what Psalm 99 is.

With your spiritual timeline in front of you, write your own 'Psalm 99' a prayer or psalm that recalls your own spiritual history and heritage. Praise God for all that He's done over the years. Your psalm might mention both God's attributes and events from your life. For example, 'Praise the Lord for his faithfulness to me when I was in the hospital' or 'Thank you for your wisdom in guiding me to my present job.'

Our prayer is that this spiritual exercise will encourage you as you walk with God into the future!

[Devotional from Moody Bible Institute](#)

Psalm 100:1-5

TODAY IN THE WORD

We are so accustomed to the traditional holiday of Thanksgiving in the U.S. and Canada (Canadian Thanksgiving is on the second Monday in October) that it is easy to forget that the formal observance doesn't reach to faraway lands. That familiarity was underscored in a humorous way a few years ago when an eager young school teacher in Texas sent her fourth-grade students home with the assignment to explore how Thanksgiving is celebrated in other countries!

That assignment left a classroom full of children's parents mildly perplexed. But the teacher had the right idea. There's no reason to limit our thanksgiving to one day in one corner of the world. Anyone who knows Scripture knows that we certainly did not invent the idea of holding a festival to praise and worship God for His blessings.

Israel's national calendar contained great feasts to celebrate the harvest and commemorate events such as God's deliverance of the nation from Egypt. In addition, the people observed the weekly Sabbath by worshipping God and remembering His provision.

The psalmists also provide us with a literature of thanksgiving, today's psalm being a wonderful example. This is a joy-filled invitation to worship that is extended to ""all the earth"" (v. 1).

We hope the spirit of this psalm is reflected in your Thanksgiving worship today. Gladness and singing should mark the celebration of those who know the Lord and have experienced ""all His benefits"" (Ps. 103:2).

Verses 3-5 of today's text give us more reasons to thank God than we could exhaust in a lifetime. He is our God, our Creator, and our loving Shepherd who cares for us in His pasture.

These are enough to cause the psalmist to enter God's presence with thanksgiving and praise on his lips (v. 4). But there is even more.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Did you find a card pinned to today's study?

You did if you completed the exercise we suggested last Sunday and jotted down a handful of God's attributes you are especially thankful for. Use them today as part of your own worship, and you may even want to share them with others today as part of your testimony (see yesterday's study).

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