



TODAY IN THE WORD™

A ministry of Moody Bible Institute

SORROW *and* JOY

A Study in Psalms: Books Three and Four

JUNE 2021

God's Dwelling Place

From the President of Moody Bible Institute

*"When we experience God's presence,
it feels like home, a place where we belong."*



My mother lives in Spain. Since we are separated by many miles, we often talk on the phone. But there's something special about the

times I can be physically present with her, when I can give her a hug or sit across the table for a long talk. There's no substitute. While in this modern age we have countless ways to stay connected to others, we need and value physical presence.

In Psalm 84, the author expresses his longing to be in God's presence: "How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty!" (v. 1). His words show the intensity of his desire. His "soul yearns, even faints" (v. 2) to experience this closeness with God. When we think of God's presence, we may think of going to church. But God's presence is not limited to a building. In the Old Testament, God's people experienced God in tangible ways. After their dramatic escape from Egypt, God revealed Himself to Moses on a mountain (Exodus 21). Moses led the construction of a Tabernacle, a place "filled with God's glory" (Exodus 40). Solomon constructed the Temple,

filled with "the glory of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:11).

But the New Testament records a dramatic change as Jesus came to earth, the "radiance of the glory of God" (John 1:14). Following His death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit made the presence of God available to all who believe (John 16). As Christ followers, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20). How often we forget that we have open access to the presence of God. What an incredible privilege!

When we experience God's presence, it feels like home, a place where we belong. Psalm 84:4 says those who remain in God's presence are "blessed" and filled with praise. Being in God's presence gives us strength (v. 5). With Him, we find springs of refreshing even in the Valley of Baka, or valley of tears (v. 6). Those who are in God's presence "go from strength to strength" (v. 7). Even when we walk through the deepest darkest valley, God's presence is there.

The best place we can ever be is in God's presence. The Psalmist says, "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere" (v. 10). Nothing matches the manifest presence of God! ■

Jesus Wept

by Dr. John Koessler

“More than anything else, Jesus’ tears remind us that He is a faithful High Priest who can sympathize with our sorrows as well as our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15).”

If you want to begin memorizing Scripture, an excellent place to start might be John 11:35 which is one of the shortest verses in the Bible. It simply says, “Jesus wept.” Why did Jesus shed tears at the tomb of Lazarus? Did Mary’s grief move Him? Did He consider her assertion that things would have been different if Jesus had been there to be a criticism or a confession of faith? Maybe He was troubled by the wailing crowd that had followed Mary to the tomb.

Although we cannot know what lay behind the tears of Christ, we do know that they were genuine. Some in the crowd saw them as proof of Jesus’ love for His friend Lazarus (v. 36). Others viewed Jesus’ tears as a reason to criticize. “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” they complained (v. 37).

Jesus’ tears are proof of both the humanity and the compassion

of Christ. On the one hand, they are proof that even though He was God, divinity was united with true human nature in the one person of Christ. Jesus was not half God and half human. As the Nicene Creed confesses, Jesus was “very God of very God,” a phrase that does not mean that Jesus was *like* God but that He was truly divine. Jesus was also truly human. His divinity did not detract from His humanity, and His humanity did not nullify His divinity.

More than anything else, Jesus’ tears remind us that He is a faithful High Priest who can sympathize with our sorrows as well as our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15). The accusation of the crowd shows how they misread Jesus. They saw His tears as evidence of powerlessness. Jesus would go on to prove them wrong, not only by raising Lazarus but by rising Himself. Jesus’ sorrow was grief born of compassion, not helplessness. The one who weeps is also mighty to save. ■

For Further Study

To learn more, read *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* by Bruce Ware (Crossway).

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

WEEK 1: Have you ever been in a situation where you were waiting upon God? How does Psalm 74 handle that type of situation?

WEEK 2: How does Psalm 82 demonstrate God's heart for the poor and oppressed? (see June 10)

WEEK 3: How can numbering our days lead us to making wiser decisions? How does Psalm 90 help us with that perspective? (see June 17)

WEEK 4: How is our praise of God a motivation for missions? (see June 22)

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

TODAY IN THE WORD™

Sorrow and Joy

*Help us, God our Savior,
for the glory of your name.—Psalm 79:9*

Have you ever been in a situation where you weren't sure what to say? This can happen in our relationship with God as well. Sometimes, words fail us.

For years, I have prayed through the Psalms, one or two a day. The Psalms have helped me grow in my relationship with God, giving me language to use during times of joy or lament. They model what a relationship with God looks like. It is my prayer that through this study, we will:

- Learn how to relate to God in joy and sorrow
- Wonder at God's faithfulness, grace, and justice
- Express gratitude to God for His mighty acts of salvation
- Long for Christ's return when we will be in His presence forever

Your devotional author,



Ryan J. Cook

Ryan Cook is an Associate Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Moody Theological Seminary. He has worked in Christian education and served as a pastor in Michigan for seven years. Ryan and his wife, Ashley, and their three children reside in Northwest Indiana.

VOLUME 34 • ISSUE 6

Managing Editor: Jamie Janosz Senior Editor: Elena Mafter Contributing Editor: John Koessler Writer: Ryan J. Cook
Art Director: Lynn Gabalec Graphic Designer: Rachel Hutcheson Marketing & Production: Paul B. Currie

Moody Bible Institute is the sole publisher of *Today in the Word*, copyright © 2021 by Moody Bible Institute. All rights reserved. Please direct all *Today in the Word* inquiries to Donor Resource Management, 820 N. LaSalle Blvd., Chicago, IL 60610. Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Printed in the U.S.A. *Today in the Word* is published monthly. Printed on 30% recycled paper.

A Vision of God

Read Psalm 73

*Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.—Matthew 5:8*

Roman author Phaedrus once quipped, “Things are not always what they seem; the first appearance deceives many.” When the author of Psalm 73 looked around him, his first impression was of a world where the wicked flourish. He found himself envious of the arrogant (v. 3). It looked to him like the wicked could plot evil, engage in violence, and even mock God and—not only get away with it—but even thrive (vv. 4–12)!

The Psalmist then examined his own life. He had labored to keep his heart pure before God (v. 13). Yet, all his labor seemed to be in vain. He experienced only affliction and pain (v. 14). Didn’t justice demand that the godly prosper and the wicked be punished? Didn’t Scripture teach that truth (see Psalm 1)? This led him to a crisis of faith. He worried about defaming God before others and was deeply troubled in spirit (vv. 15–16).

The turning point comes in verse 17: “. . . till I entered the sanctuary

of God; then I understood their final destiny.” His first impression of the world had been deceptive. The reality was that the wicked were on “slippery ground” (v. 18). Their current prosperity only masked the reality that they were under God’s judgment (vv. 18–19). The Psalmist also realized he was not as forsaken as he had thought. God was with him and that was a better gift than any amount of wealth (vv. 23–24). Even if his material prosperity and physical health gave way, God was still his most precious possession (v. 26). This change in perspective came from an encounter with God in worship at the sanctuary (v. 17).

► One of the reasons regular worship is important is that it helps us see the world properly. When we worship, we are reminded of God’s sovereign rule, of the salvation He has achieved for us in Christ, and of our secure hope in His return.

Pray with Us

Heavenly Father, let us not be so weighed down by worry that we cannot see Your goodness. Thank You that You are with us. Help us understand that Your presence is the most precious thing we could ask for.

Rise Up, O God!

Read Psalm 74

*Your wound is as deep as the sea.
Who can heal you?—Lamentations 2:13*

How do we engage with God when we are deeply wounded? According to the National Institute of Health, trauma can affect our “beliefs about the future via loss of hope.” Israel had been through a major trauma. Their cities had been plundered, portions of their population had been exiled, and the Temple had been destroyed.

In response, the Psalmist begins with a series of questions, “O God, why have you rejected us forever” (v. 1)? He reminds God that He had redeemed them from slavery (v. 2). God their Shepherd would protect and provide (v. 1). The Psalmist takes God on a tour of the Temple. He describes how the enemies had come in like lumberjacks, hacked down pillars, then burned and defiled the sanctuary (vv. 4–8). Isn’t the Temple where God dwelt? Was it right for God to move into a house and have it burned down? The issue for the Psalmist was not so much that God had judged Israel. Rather, his anxiety was that the judgment would be everlasting.

Adding to the torment was the fact that God was silent. He had ceased to speak through His prophets (v. 9). No one knew how long this would last. At this point, the Psalmist steps back and reminds himself that “God is my King from long ago; he brings salvation to the earth” (v. 12). He knew that God is capable of redeeming Israel. He draws on imagery from Creation and the Exodus to celebrate God’s power (vv. 13–17). If God can crush the heads of Leviathan, surely He could meet Israel’s needs. The psalm ends with seven imperatives begging God to remember His people (vv. 18–23). There was no answer yet.

► We may often be in the position of waiting for God. But this psalm shows that our waiting does not need to be passive. It can be filled with lament, prayer, and reminding ourselves of what God has done in the past as a step toward hope for the future.

Pray with Us

Lord, we often feel Asaph’s desperation in our own lives. When we are tempted to despair, remind us of Asaph’s prayer—just as You did not abandon Israel, You will not abandon us.

The Cup of God's Wrath

Read Psalm 75

*When the earth and all its people quake,
it is I who hold its pillars firm. —Psalm 75:3*

When I was camping in a pop-up trailer with my family, a thunderstorm came up suddenly in the night. The wind shook the canvas and rocked the trailer. We wondered how long our shelter would hold up. Thankfully, the trailer and my family did not sustain any real damage. At times, this world can feel fragile and out of control. We might wonder if the next political or health crisis might be the end. In today's reading, the Psalmist praises God because he knows that the world is in His powerful hands. In verse 3, God declares, "When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm" (v. 3).

One of the things that can make the world seem unstable is when arrogant and wicked people are in positions of power. In this psalm, God confronts them directly (vv. 4–5). He describes their judgment with two memorable images. He proclaims, "I will cut off the horns of all the wicked"

(v. 10). The horn was a symbol of status and power. To cut off someone's horn is saying that their position and ability to influence will be removed. In contrast, God says, "the horns of the righteous will be lifted up" (v. 10).

The second image is a cup. "In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs" (v. 8). God's justice will one day be measured out. The New Testament teaches that Jesus is the one who drank the cup of God's wrath (Matt. 26:42). But for those who do not have faith in Christ, judgment will come (Rev. 20:11–15).

► Even though the world may look chaotic, God has it in His control. One hymn that expresses this truth well is "A Mighty Fortress is our God." Listen, sing, or just read the words of this classic hymn as you conclude today's devotional.

Pray with Us

As the hymn says, "And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us / We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us." You are in control, Almighty God; we trust You.

The Power of God

Read Psalm 76

*He breaks the spirits of rulers;
he is feared by the kings of the earth.—Psalm 76:12*

Investment advisors often use the phrase “Past performance is no guarantee of future result.” The phrase serves as a kind of disclaimer. Just because a particular company has performed well in the past, there is no guarantee it will do so in the future. While it may not be a sound way to make financial investments, it is a good way to judge someone’s character. It is why we ask for references on job applications, or ask about their work history.

In today’s reading, the Psalmist applies this logic to his relationship with God. He celebrates God as awesome and powerful. God has taken up His residence in Jerusalem and from there He has defended it by breaking “shields and the swords, the weapons of war” (v. 3). We do not know what specific victory is being celebrated, but the point is powerfully made. At God’s rebuke, “both horse and chariot lie still” (v. 6). The horse and chariot were the most feared weapons of the ancient world.

It would be like saying: “At God’s rebuke, aircraft carriers and nuclear warheads are powerless.”

God’s power is endless. The Psalmist asks in awestruck wonder, “Who can stand before you when you are angry?” (v. 7). God’s ability to defeat His enemies in the past serves as the basis of hope for the future. This psalm looks forward to the day when people from all nations will pay homage to God (v. 11). This theme comes to its fulfillment in the book of Revelation where rebellious powers and nations are decisively defeated (Rev. 19:11–21). The New Jerusalem descends from heaven, and “God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them” (Rev 21:3).

► As believers, you and I can know our future is secure because we serve an all-powerful God who has pledged Himself to it. No earthly ruler can stand against God who offers us endless security and certain hope.

Pray with Us

We rejoice in the security of knowing that You are with us now and forever! We extol You, our all-powerful God. Your wisdom knows no bounds and Your mercy is everlasting.

Our Waymaker

Read Psalm 77

*You are the God who
performs miracles.—Psalm 77:14*

What do we do when the way forward looks hopeless and confusing? How do we take the next step? Who will lead us? Again and again in Scripture, we see that God provides a way. It took ten terrible plagues, but Pharaoh finally decided to let Israel go free. But, shortly after making this decision, Pharaoh pursued them with the might of the Egyptian army. In the meantime, God had led Israel in a rather unusual direction. Instead of taking them directly to the Promised Land, they went south to the Red Sea (Ex. 14:2). There they found themselves stuck with the sea in front and the Egyptian army behind. There was nowhere to turn.

In this seemingly hopeless situation, God demonstrated His power dramatically. He held the Egyptians back and parted the sea so Israel could continue their journey (Ex. 14–15). God made a way where there was no way. The memory of this mighty act of God is what brought the author of Psalm 77 out of despair. The

Psalmist was in a distress; he could not sleep, and his thoughts troubled him (vv. 1–6). He understood that Israel deserved God’s judgment, but worried that it might be forever (v. 7). He wondered if God would forget to be merciful and compassionate to His wayward people (vv. 8–9).

To rouse himself out of this dark place, the Psalmist resolved to “remember the deeds of the LORD” (vv. 11–12). Specifically, he remembered how God had lead Israel in the exodus: “Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters though your footprints were not seen” (v. 19). God did not take Israel down the easy path but down one that looked impossible, to demonstrate His power.

► As believers today, we have even more reason to hope! God has met our deepest needs in Christ. Take a few minutes today and join the Psalmist in reflecting on God’s mighty acts; praise Him for what He has done (vv. 12–15).

Pray with Us

We praise You for Your mighty deeds! You are the Waymaker, the Miracle Worker, the God who saves. We worship You for Your mighty acts and extol You for the power You have displayed in our lives!

Knowing God

Read Psalm 78

We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD.—Psalm 78:4

In his classic work *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer points out the difference between knowing about God and knowing God. He understood that it was possible for someone to have sound theology, know the Bible well, be involved in ministry, and yet not really have a relationship with God.

One way we can know God's character is by reflecting on how He has related to His people. The Psalmist in today's reading recounts God's history with His people so that the next generation would "put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds" (vv. 6–7). The goal is not just to learn history, but to trust in the God revealed by it. The Psalmist reflects on God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. He reminds them how God defeated the Egyptian army and provided for His people in the wilderness (vv. 12–16). Instead of being grateful, Israel rebelled and complained (vv. 17–19). In His grace, God continued to provide for their needs and judged them for their sins

(vv. 20–31). These acts were both designed to cause repentance. Yet, Israel continued to rebel. They grieved God again and again. In response to their ungratefulness and disloyalty, God showed Himself to be slow to anger, merciful, and forgiving (v. 38).

The Psalmist reflects on the time period of the judges and early chapters of Samuel. He recounts God's continued faithfulness and Israel's obstinacy. God raised up David as king to serve as a faithful shepherd (vv. 65–72). On this side of history, we know David's line also failed to be obedient, which led to exile. Yet, God promised that a Davidic king would reign on the throne of Israel forever (2 Sam. 7:11–16).

► This psalm encourages us to share what we know about God with the next generation (vv. 4–8). We must tell God's story again and again so the next generation will put their trust in Him. Consider how you can take part in passing on these important truths.

Pray with Us

God in Heaven, we want to be intentional in passing on the stories of Your faithfulness to the next generation. Help us recognize opportunities to teach young people what a great God You are through the power of narrative.

Where Is God?

Read Psalm 79

*Help us, God our Savior,
for the glory of your name.—Psalm 79:9*

When a natural disaster like a tornado or hurricane strikes, government officials tour the areas hit hardest. One of the reasons for this is to show that they recognize the situation and intend to do something about it. Another reason is to highlight the devastation in order to arouse people's compassion so they will give to and participate in relief efforts.

In today's reading, the Psalmist takes God on a tour of their devastation. This was not a natural disaster, but a resounding military defeat. The Psalmist reminds God, "They have left the dead bodies of your servants as food for the birds. . . . They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead" (vv. 2–3). The Psalmist appeals to God's compassion so He will bring relief.

At the same time, the Psalmist recognizes that their defeat and the destruction of the Temple were well deserved. He recognizes the "sins of past generations" and prays that

God will forgive them (vv. 8–9). The Psalmist longs for God's deliverance not just for his own sake, but for God's sake. The foreign powers who dominated Israel viewed their victory as a sign that Israel's God was weak and powerless. The Psalmist pleads, "Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'" (v. 10). He looks to God as a good shepherd and prays that He will intervene to protect them. When that deliverance comes, "[t]hen we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever" (v. 13). The Jewish people have continued to pray this psalm on the Ninth of Ab, which commemorates the destruction of the Temple.

► Throughout history, Christians have used this lament when suffering persecution. The longings for forgiveness and justice in the Old Testament came to their fulfillment in Jesus. Forgiveness of sin is possible because of what He has done, and the hope of His Second Coming gives us the strength to persevere in trials.

Pray with Us

"Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'" (Ps. 79:9–10).

Revive Us, O God!

Read Psalm 80

*Revive us, and we will call
on your name.—Psalm 80:18*

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the wayward son recognizes his sin and comes to his senses, saying: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants” (Luke 15:18–19). It is an impassioned speech, given from a place of desperation.

Psalm 80 is a kind of Prodigal Son psalm. The nation of Israel cries out to God in the aftermath of a crisis. While they do not directly confess sin, they recognize that their plight is due to God’s judgment. They remind God, “You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful” (v. 5).

The Psalmist describes the nation of Israel as a vineyard that God has carefully planted and tended (vv. 8–11). But now God has broken down its walls: “Boars from the forest ravage it, and insects from

the fields feed on it” (v. 13). What God has built, He has now destroyed. The people lament, “Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish” (v. 16).

The Psalmist begs God to remember that He is the “Shepherd of Israel” (v. 1). Three times he asks God: “Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved” (vv. 3, 7, 19). The people know that their only hope is that God would bring about repentance and restoration. They pray, “[R]evive us, and we will call on your name” (v. 18). While this prayer is rooted in Israel’s covenant relationship with God, we, too, can echo this cry.

► When we wander away from the Lord, we can pray this psalm as a plea for restoration. Churches can pray it as a corporate confession. This prayer is rooted in the hope of Jesus, the Son of Man who makes our restoration possible (v. 17).

Pray with Us

We lift our faces to You even in the shame of moral failure, spiritual forgetfulness, or open disobedience. “Revive us, and we will call on your name” (Ps. 80:18).

True Worship

Read Psalm 81

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.—John 17:3

“What have you done for me lately?” It’s easy to forget how well someone has served us in the past, when we are disappointed with them in the present! Some companies take this approach with their employees: “It does not matter how great of a job you did last year, or last week—what value are you bringing to the company now?” The question for us today is: How often do we take that approach with God?

Today’s reading opens with a summons for Israel to praise God at the feast of Tabernacles (vv. 1–4). This was a time when Israel commemorated God’s deliverance in the Exodus and His provision in the wilderness (v. 5). We expect the psalm to continue in celebration. But it does not! Beginning in verse 6, we get God’s perspective. God reminds Israel that He freed them from slavery in response to their pleas for help (vv. 6–7). Yet, Israel did not listen to Him or follow His commands (vv. 8,

11). Instead, they worshiped other gods, followed their own counsel, and refused to give gratitude to the Lord (vv. 9, 11). You can sense God’s frustration: “If my people would only listen to me, if Israel would only follow my ways” (v. 13).

In the previous few psalms, Israel often appealed to God’s deliverance in Egypt as proof that God would intervene to save them again (see Psalms 77:10–20; 80:8–11). But here, God responds by reminding Israel that when He delivered them, they quickly forgot. They had a “What have you done for me lately?” relationship with God. They only wanted results, while God desired a relationship.

► God has given us salvation through the work of Jesus. Yet, like Israel, we may be tempted to follow our own counsel and set our own priorities. Remember today that God has “called you into *fellowship* with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9).

Pray with Us

God our Savior, forgive us for our forgetfulness. Before we ask You for the things we need, remind us that You are not only a giver of blessings but also our Father and our friend.

God of Justice

Read Psalm 82

Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.—Psalm 82:4

When 33-year-old Bob Pierce was in China holding evangelistic meetings, he was introduced to an abandoned Chinese girl. After she became a Christian, the girl's father beat her and threw her out into the street. She had lost everything. Moved by her story, Bob gave the young girl the last five dollars in his pocket, promising to send more. This simple act of generosity in 1947 led to the founding of World Vision, an organization through which God's people have supported and protected millions of needy children! God had a plan, not just for that girl but for Bob as well.

Psalm 82 provides a unique, prophetic look into the spiritual realm. The first verse portrays God as handing out judgment against the "gods." These are angelic beings who had been given some degree of influence in the world (Deut. 32:8–9). God judges them for showing "partiality to the wicked" and failing to "uphold the cause of the poor and oppressed" (vv. 2–3). Their failure to

stand up for and protect the most vulnerable in society led to God's condemnation: "I said, 'You are gods; you are sons of the Most High.' But you will die like mere mortals" (vv. 6–7). This judgment is described in Isaiah: "In that day the Lord will punish the powers of the heavens above and the kings on the earth below" (Isa. 24:21).

This psalm clearly demonstrates God's sovereignty and authority over every power and principality, whether in heaven or on earth. It also demonstrates God's heart for the weak and needy. The church today should also be concerned with care for the poor and oppressed. When we claim to have faith without works—it is no kind of faith at all (James 2:5–6, 14–17).

► What are you doing to extend God's love to the weak and needy? Consider joining an effort in your own community to offer tangible help to those in need. Or, give financial support to a worthy organization.

Pray with Us

Merciful Lord, fill us with compassion for the needy and defenseless. Show us ways to serve the weak and the poor. We seek to obey and honor You!

Grace in Judgment

Read Psalm 83

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. — 1 Timothy 2:3–4

The apostle Paul was under attack. He had been arrested on the false charge that he had brought a Gentile into the Temple in Jerusalem (Acts 21:27–29). A group of Jewish leaders had had enough of Paul. They made a pact that they would not eat or drink until they had killed him (Acts 23:21). Paul's nephew heard about the plot and warned Paul who was able to convince his Roman jailers to get him to safety. Because of this deliverance, Paul was able to continue his ministry in prison writing the books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.

In today's reading, the nation of Israel found itself in a similar situation. A group of ten nations had formed an alliance against Israel (Ps. 83:5). The word "alliance" is the term normally translated as "covenant." These nations covenanted that they would destroy Israel "so that Israel's name is remembered no more" (v. 4). But God had also made a covenant with

Israel that they would be a blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:1–3) and that Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore (Gen. 15:5; 22:17). Would the covenant of the nations undo God's covenant with Israel?

The Psalmist prays fervently that God would intervene and bring deliverance. He asks God not to be silent or aloof (v. 1). He reminds God that these enemies are God's enemies, trying to undo God's promises to Israel (Ps. 83:2–3). He asks God to defeat them just like He had in the past (vv. 9–12). God had bigger plans for these nations than simply their destruction. He prays that the nations would seek after God and come to know Him (vv. 16, 18).

► This psalm is a beautiful reminder that God will keep His promises and that, even in judgment, He desires that all people would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Pray with Us

It is natural for us to crave vengeance against those who wrong us. God of justice, teach us to love our enemies so that, like Asaph, we are driven to intercede even for those who oppose us.

Longing for God

Read Psalm 84

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
LORD Almighty!—Psalm 84:1*

When we were engaged, my wife and I had a long-distance relationship. We lived about four hours apart by car and every weekend one of us would make the pilgrimage to see the other. All year, we would wait impatiently for the end of each week so we could be in each other's presence.

Today's reading describes the longing of the Psalmist to be in God's presence in the Temple: "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (v. 2). The Psalmist looks with envy upon the birds who nest in the Temple who get to be in God's presence continually (v. 3)! The blessed life would be in the temple, ever praising the Lord (v. 4).

The next best thing would be to make the pilgrimage to worship the Lord during the festivals (v. 5). Here, the physical pilgrimage takes on spiritual dimensions as the worshiper passes through the "valley of Baka"

(v. 6). "Baka" literally means "weeping." The worshiper travels through the valley of weeping to appear in joy and strength before God in Zion (vv. 6–7).

The Psalmist feels most at home with God. "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere" (v. 10). He would rather be a doorkeeper in the Temple than in a position of power with the wicked (v. 10). He recognizes that his relationship to God is the most vital part of life. God is his protector and provider (v. 11). The one who is truly blessed is one who puts their trust in the Lord alone (v. 12).

▶ Although we can worship God on our own, there is a corporate dimension to worship in both the Old and New Testaments (see Heb. 10:25). Paul reminds us that on this side of the cross the church corporately is the "dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph. 2:19–22). Are you longing to join in worship this week?

Pray with Us

Lord Almighty, thank You for giving us Your church, where we can worship and serve You. We admire the Psalmist's hunger for Your presence and ask for the same fervency in our own hearts.

Justice and Forgiveness

Read Psalm 85

*Show us your unfailing love, LORD,
and grant us your salvation.—Psalm 85:7*

Have you ever needed to ask someone for forgiveness? It is a difficult place to be in because it means admitting that you have done something wrong. You also might not know how the offended person might react. You might ask for forgiveness, but will they grant it?

In today's reading, Israel found itself in the position of having to once again ask God for forgiveness and restoration. They begin by reminding God of how He has forgiven them in the past (vv. 1–3). There are many examples to choose from: the golden calf incident, the period of the judges, or the capture of the ark. Israel knew that God is a forgiving God, but they also knew that He is just and would allow the consequence of sin to run its course.

Here Israel begs, “Restore us again, God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us” (v. 4). They asked God to turn from His just anger and to demonstrate His love toward them (vv. 5–7). In verse 8, God

responds, “I will listen to what God the Lord says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—but let them not turn to folly.” God not only promises to restore His people but also to give them a vision of His desired future.

Of course, it is possible to have peace without justice, truth without love, or justice without compassion. God, however, presents a future where “[l]ove and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other” (v. 10). In other words, this future will be a time of true well-being. God's love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace will come together in an embrace that permeates the entire world.

► God's justice and peace have been demonstrated most fully in the life and death of Jesus. Because of His work on the cross, God's justice and love can both be satisfied. Psalm 85 should remind us not to underestimate either our sinfulness or God's gracious and costly forgiveness.

Pray with Us

Father God, may we never live a day without thanking You for sending Your Son to take our place on Calvary. Because of Christ's sacrifice, we experience love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace every day.

An Anchor for the Soul

Read Psalm 86; Psalm 87

*When I am in distress, I call to you,
because you answer me. —Psalm 86:7*

As a young college student, I lost my wallet at a concert. This would not have been a major issue except for the fact that my wallet contained my driver's license, social security card, and my birth certificate! This made it very difficult to prove my identity to get any of these documents replaced.

Psalm 87 reminds us that God keeps official documents, and we do not have to worry about these getting lost. He keeps a "register of the peoples" (v. 6), likely the same book referred to in other parts of Scripture as the Book of Life (Ex. 32:32; Isa. 4:3). What is surprising in this psalm is who is on that list.

The Psalmist declares, "All the nations you have made will come and worship before you" (86:9). This theme continues in Psalm 87, which reads like a prophetic oracle. In verses 1 to 3, the poet heaps praise on Jerusalem. He declares that the Lord loves the city in a unique way. Indeed, the holy

of holies in the Temple was the place where God's presence resided.

The Psalmist looks ahead to a day when people from all over the world would join with Israel. People from major superpowers like Rahab (another name for Egypt) and Babylon will stream to Zion along with people from Philistia, Tyre, and Cush (v. 4), worshipers from every tribe, nation, and language. While maintaining their identity as Gentiles, they will worship the God of Israel. This psalm will find its fulfillment in the return of Christ when those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life come into the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22–27).

► Is your name written in the Book of Life? Have you made a decision to follow Jesus as your Lord and Savior? This is not a fairytale, pie in the sky hope, but a future that God has promised and is our confident expectation (Heb. 6:19).

Pray with Us

Today we pray for those who stand on the cusp of salvation. Holy Savior, reveal Yourself to them in all Your mercy, love, and holiness. Lead them to surrender control, repent, and live in the lasting joy of knowing You.

Questions & Answers

by Dr. Valencia Wiggins, Assistant Professor at
Moody Theological Seminary, Field Chair of Counseling

Q A friend of mine says that I seem depressed. How do I know if she's right?

A Recently I viewed a video clip of my church service from the early part of 2020, before the pandemic. I noticed how individuals in the church sanctuary were singing, laughing, hugging, raising hands, and standing shoulder to shoulder. They were enjoying a time of worship and praise. Fast forward to the end of 2020. I drove past my church and noticed a nearly empty parking lot. I was flooded with memories and a sudden wave of sadness, emptiness, fatigue, and loss.

That's how quickly depression can occur. It arises from a variety of circumstances and can disrupt four key areas of our life: our body (sleep disturbance, low energy, no appetite), our mind (poor memory, inability to concentrate), our emotions (hopelessness, sadness), and our relationships. Depression is a common mental disorder that affects both our mind and our bodies. Globally, an estimated 264 million people are affected by depression. God has created us in wonderful and complex ways. He created our "inmost being" with emotions, feelings, thoughts, and senses (Ps. 139:13–17). All of

these beautiful parts are designed to function together in a certain way. However, just as we can become physically ill, we can also suffer from mental illness. Depression acts as an alarm signal to let us know a part of the body is not functioning as intended. It can be a sign that we need help.

Q Why do mature Christians experience depression? Shouldn't we be able to pray it away?

A If you experience depression, even as a Christian, you are not alone. Charles Spurgeon, a well-known preacher from the 19th century, struggled with depression for many years: "My spirits were so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet not know what I wept for." Spurgeon believed that his depression equipped him to minister more effectively. "I would go into the deeps a hundred times to cheer a downcast spirit. It is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might know how to speak a word in season to one that is weary," he wrote in 1858.

Spurgeon's challenges help illustrate the depths and sometimes debilitating effects of this mental illness. Currently, depression is the number one mental health concern,

“While dealing with depression may seem hopeless, the Bible shows us how to hope.”

followed closely by anxiety and stress. Depression is not new, and, even within the biblical context, we see references to it. We read about individuals who experienced these emotions, including Elijah (1 Kings 19:3–4), Job (Job 3:20–26), Paul (2 Cor. 11:24–28), and even our Lord Jesus who while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane was “overwhelmed with sorrow” (Matt. 26:37–38). The Psalmists express these feelings as being “downcast” (Ps. 42:11), “crushed” and “brokenhearted” (34:18), “disturbed” (42:5).

Q As a Christian, how should I deal with depression?

A Depression can manifest itself as general sadness and increase all the way to severe clinical depression. Someone experiencing severe depression may experience disruptions to their life and environment. In severe cases, it is always important to reach out to a licensed counselor or medical professional. Unfortunately, we never know how a traumatic event, sudden loss, or challenges, even those experienced long ago, will affect our emotional, psychological, spiritual, or physiological life. The good news is that when this happens, you can

receive help. You are not alone in this season.

If you are experiencing depression, here are a few suggestions to care for yourself: 1) Find a balance in your life between work, family, friends, church, and school; 2) Move your body (i.e., walking, exercise); 3) Connect with your family and friends and resist isolation. Getting together with others (especially in person, but even virtually) can help improve your mood; 5) Journal (expressing your feelings can give you an outlet and help you gain a better perspective); and 6) Tap into the power of prayer (Ps. 4:1; Ps. 17:6; Ps. 23).

Finally, while dealing with depression may seem hopeless, the Bible shows us how to hope. In the psalms, we read about the same struggle. The psalms often start with a question, and end with a hopeful outcome. For example, in Psalm 43: “Why, my soul are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise him, my Savior, and my God” (v. 5).

If you or someone you love need immediate help, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has a helpline. Call 1-800-950-NAMI or in a crisis, text “NAMI” to 741741. ■

Darkness Is My Closest Friend

Read Psalm 88

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.—John 1:5

After the death of his wife, Joy, C. S. Lewis processed his grief by journaling about his sadness and anger toward God and the world. He later felt his journal might help others who were grieving and published it under a pseudonym with the title *A Grief Observed*. Generations of readers have found consolation in Lewis's raw and honest portrayal of his life with God even in the midst of deep loss.

The life of faith will often include periods of intense pain and loneliness. In today's reading, the Psalmist expresses the deepest and darkest lament in the Psalter. He gives voice to the grief that even some of the most faithful of God's servants endure. As commentator Marvin Tate expressed, "Long trails of suffering and loss traverse the landscape of human existence, even for the devoted people of God. There are cold, wintry nights of the soul, when bleakness fills every horizon and darkness seems nearly complete."

The Psalmist is overwhelmed by troubles and seems fixated on death: "I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care" (v. 5). Even worse, he believes that God is the one who has put him in this situation (vv. 6–7). He called upon the Lord day after day, but heard no response (vv. 9, 14). God seems far away and hidden. Not only is he cut off from God, but he is also estranged from other people. He ends his lament with the line, "darkness is my closest friend" (v. 18).

► Even in extreme grief, the Psalmist clearly has not given up on God. He still prays, even if those prayers are full of questions and angst. It is appropriate for us to come to God honestly and ask probing questions during dark and difficult times. Even when we may not feel God's presence, He is with us.

Pray with Us

Lord of Peace, we know You can raise the dead, but in dark affliction we sometimes doubt that You can face our probing questions. Give us courage to talk to You about the things we fear to contemplate.

Remember God's Promises

Read Psalm 89

*I will sing of the LORD's
great love forever. —Psalm 89:1*

Much of our life of faith is spent living in between God's promise and its future fulfillment. All through the Bible, God makes big promises and then asks His people to live in faith. God promised Abraham he would be the father of a great nation when he had not even had a child yet and was already 75 years old (Gen. 12:1–4). It would be over 20 years before this promise was fulfilled.

In today's reading, Ethan the Ezrahite begins with a resounding word of praise. For the first 37 verses Ethan recounts the steadfast love of the Lord. He praises God for creation, His justice and righteousness, and for choosing David as Israel's king (vv. 1–20). God had anointed David, and gave him victory over his enemies (vv. 20–23). The poet celebrates God's covenant with David whom he had appointed "to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth" (v. 27). God had even promised that if David's descendants were unfaithful,

God would punish, but never abandon them (vv. 30–37).

The psalm takes an abrupt shift in verse 38. After celebrating God's promises to David, he wonders where God is now: "But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been very angry with your anointed one" (v. 38). Reflecting the crisis of the Babylonian exile, Ethan describes how Israel has been defeated. From his perspective, it seemed like God had renounced the covenant He made with David (v. 39). We know (of course) that in the New Testament a future descendant of David would fulfill all of these promises and so much more (Luke 1:32; Acts 13:22–23)!

► Notice that even though God's promises to David seemed broken, the Psalmist did not reject God. Instead, he turned to God in prayer (Ps. 89:46–51). Bring your worries about the future to God. We may not be able to see His plan right now, but we can trust Him.

Pray with Us

You have assured us that we will suffer in this life, yet calamity still takes us by surprise. Father, hold us close when we doubt Your presence, and fortify our faith when we question Your kindness.

Life and Death

Read Psalm 90

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

From the fountain of youth to the philosopher's stone, humans have long been obsessed with finding a way to cheat death and achieve immortality. For most people, the solution to the problem of death is to just not think about it, to live life as if it will never end.

In today's reading, Moses provides us with wisdom to live well. This wisdom comes from reflecting on the contrast between humanity and God. Moses reflects on the eternity of God. God is literally older than the hills (v. 2). Indeed, He is their creator. While a thousand years is enough time for about 40 generations of humans to live and die, for God it is merely "like a watch in the night" (v. 4).

Human life is fleeting. It is like grass in a desert climate that springs up in the morning, but withers and dies under the afternoon sun (v. 6). Moses reminds us, "Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our

strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away" (v. 10). This mortality is a result of sin going back to Genesis 3. Because of our sin, we are all under God's wrath (vv. 7–9).

Often people and human institutions act as if they will endure forever. Wisdom means embracing mortality and recognizing that true life can only be provided by God. Moses asks God to "satisfy us with your unfailing love" (v. 14). He understands that we are dependent upon God for any lasting significance to our life or work (v. 17).

► This psalm reminds us that life is short, hard, and ends in death. However, the message of the gospel is that Jesus died on our behalf and if we trust in Him, we can be forgiven and have eternal life. Jesus promises, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

Pray with Us

No reality is too harsh while You are on the throne, God. "Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble" (v. 15). We have counted the cost, and You are worth it all.

Safely Home

Read Psalm 91

*Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. —Psalm 91:1*

Every day we are reminded that human life is incredibly fragile. As we look at the world, there are endless threats pressing near—disease, war, famine, and spiritual forces of evil, to name a few. It can be easy to focus on these potential dangers and retreat in fear.

In the psalms, we see a realistic description of these threats, but also a strong reminder of God's loving care and protection. Psalm 91 is a profound call to trust in God, even in the midst of danger. The Psalmist declares that the safest place in the world is to dwell "in the shelter of the Most High" and to "rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (v. 1). Because of this, we do not need to fear "the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day" (v. 5). These real dangers are not beyond God's supervision.

Some of the most profound statements about God's protection are found in this psalm (worth

bookmarking in your Bible!). The Psalmist declares that "no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near you" (v. 10). Our daily experience may seem to indicate otherwise. Indeed, many of the godliest people in the Bible experienced persecution and suffering. So, how are we to understand this language? Perhaps it is best understood referring to God's ultimate defeat of evil at the return of Christ. Writing from a prison cell and close to death, Paul uses similar language: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:17).

► It is easy to look at our circumstances and experience fear. But the Psalmist and Paul looked to God for protection. This psalm is a good reminder to us that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:37–39)!

Pray with Us

You have already made good Your promise to deliver us from evil; our future with You is secure and eternal. Even when we ask for Your protection, we understand that nothing can separate us from You.

Made to Worship

Read Psalm 92; Psalm 93

You, LORD, are forever exalted. —Psalm 92:8

Music is one of the most engaging human activities. When we sing or play an instrument our whole being is engaged—our mind, our heart, and our body. Music unites us. In a choir, a group of unique individuals become one as they sing. Maybe that is the main reason God created music, because it is a wonderful way to praise Him!

Psalm 92 begins with an announcement that it is good to praise and make music to the Lord (v. 1). Today's reading encourages us to use the best of our musical skill to proclaim God's loyal love and faithfulness day and night (vv. 2–3).

God's loyal love and faithfulness are displayed in His deeds (vv. 4–5). While no specific acts of God are mentioned, the Old Testament is full of examples. God created the world, called Abraham, delivered Israel, provided food and water in the desert, and revealed the Law to Moses (just to name a few). Meditation on these gracious acts

leads the Psalmist to step back in awe and proclaim, "How great are your works, Lord, how profound your thoughts!" (v. 6).

There are two possible responses to this call to praise. The wicked will act foolishly and refuse to acknowledge God. They are "senseless" (v. 6). This word is normally used to describe animal behavior. Just as animals cannot step back and perceive God at work, the fool also cannot see beyond himself. Like green grass, the wicked may seem like they are flourishing for the moment, but their destruction is sure (v. 7).

In contrast, the righteous will grow like a majestic cedar or hearty palm tree planted in the Temple court (v. 12). They will flourish because they are close to God and stay connected to Him (v. 13).

► We were created to worship God. When we do, it leads us toward the kind of joy and life which can only be found in Him. Sing a song of praise to God today!

Pray with Us

O Lord, You do not need our worship, but You delight in it—and we delight to praise You! We laud Your justice and proclaim Your righteousness. May Your name be extolled in every nation, tribe, and tongue!

Judge of All

Read Psalm 94

Raise up, Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve.—Psalm 94:2

Have you ever tried to play hide-and-go-seek with a two-year-old? It can be pretty comical. I remember playing the game with my son at that age and found him standing next to his bed with his face buried in the covers. He thought, “If I cannot see my dad, he must not be able to see me!” While this is cute in a toddler, it would be foolish for an adult to hide in that way.

In Psalm 94, the wicked seem to have this perspective toward God. Because they do not see God immediately judging them for their acts of oppression and violence, they conclude that God must not have noticed. “They say, ‘The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob takes no notice’” (v. 7).

However, the Psalmist knows that God is the judge of all the earth. The question for him is not “Will God judge?” But it’s rather, “How long, LORD, will the wicked, how long will

the wicked be jubilant?” (v. 3). He encourages the wicked to change their thinking. Instead of acting like fools, they should pursue wisdom (v. 8). He reminds them that God is the one who created the ear and the eye, surely He also can see and hear (v. 9)! Nothing escapes God’s notice, He “knows all human plans” (v. 11).

Blessed is the one who submits to God’s discipline and learns from God’s Word (v. 12). This person knows that their only hope against the wicked is to trust in the Lord (vv. 16–17).

► We need to remember that God will one day bring justice to a corrupt world. Despite of how things look at the moment, Scripture teaches that God is the judge of all the earth. He cares about the suffering of the oppressed and will one day act to right all wrongs (Rev. 6:9–11). One day our lament will not be “How long?” But instead, “At last!”

Pray with Us

God in Heaven, You have claimed vengeance for Your own. May we love those who hate us enough to tell them about Your Son, that they may be forgiven for the very acts they have hurt us with.

Wholehearted Worship

Read Psalm 95

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.—Psalm 95:1

University of Michigan football fans call their stadium “the Big House.” When the team scores, the team’s 107,601 fans fill the space with so much cheering and shouting the sound can be overwhelming. One of the reasons why people enjoy watching the college game in person is to experience being part of such an enormous crowd united in the support of their team and celebrating their victories.

In today’s text, the Psalmist calls Israel to join in worship: “Come let us sing for joy to the LORD” (v. 1). The Psalmist describes singing, shouting, and making music to God. This is not a service for silent meditation, or half-hearted singing. No! This is a full-throated, raucous, and joy filled expression of devotion to the Lord.

God is to be praised with full enthusiasm because He is far above all other “gods” that people worship. The majestic mountains and powerful oceans owe their existence to God. He can hold them in the palm of His hand

(vv. 3–5). God is not only the creator of all things, He is also “our God.” He cares for us like a shepherd cares for his flock (v. 7). The only appropriate response is to drop to our knees in humble submission (v. 6).

Our worship should be more than just words. God requires wholehearted devotion. The Psalmist reminds Israel of the Exodus generation, who saw God’s power firsthand. This group of people quickly turned their back on God, grumbling against Him (Ex. 17:1–7). They even wished that they had never been redeemed from Egypt. Because of that, God judged them by not allowing them to enter the Promised Land.

► Do you praise God with as much energy and enthusiasm as you give your favorite sports team? God is not content with our expressions of worship just on Sunday morning. He desires and deserves for us to surrender our entire lives to Him.

Pray with Us

Our God is an awesome God! Fill us with Your joy, Father. Stir our hearts and minds with the power of Your might; may we be too overwhelmed with You to keep silent.

Sing to the Lord!

Read Psalm 96

Sing to the LORD, praise his name, proclaim his salvation day after day.—Psalm 96:2

Have you ever wondered why some people propose marriage at large gatherings, such as a professional baseball game? They may want to make the moment memorable by choosing such a setting. They might also feel it's not enough to declare their love to their beloved in private, they want the whole world to know.

Today's psalm is a rousing call to praise God. The Psalmist commands "all the earth" to praise the name of God all the time (vv. 1–2). God has done wonderful things for Israel (v. 3). He has chosen to dwell in Israel's midst (vv. 6, 8). He is far superior to any other so-called god (v. 4). It was not enough for Israel to keep the truth about this God to itself. Israel needed to proclaim His name and His works to all the nations.

"Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength" (v. 7). The

nations are invited to come into the Temple courts and present offerings to the God of Israel (v. 8). They are commanded to join Israel in worshipping the Lord (v. 9)!

But it is not enough to just have Israel and the nations worship God, creation itself is invited to join the chorus! The Psalmist calls on the heavens and earth, the seas and fields, and even the trees to proclaim the greatness of God (vv. 11–12). Our joy at the salvation God has provided overflows, inviting others to join us in giving thanks to the Lord. It is best to acknowledge God's rule now because He is coming to judge (v. 13).

► An important part of worshipping God is proclaiming what He has done to others. We can share the good news that Christ has died for our sin so that we can all joyfully come to God in worship knowing we are free and forgiven!

Pray with Us

How can we stay silent when the mountains and seas, the fields and the trees, cannot contain their praise? We raise our voices with the rest of creation to honor and worship You!

God Is King: Part 1

Read Psalm 97; Psalm 98

*For you, LORD, are the Most High
over all the earth.—Psalm 97:9*

The United States is deeply divided politically. One reason is that many people look to political victories as their primary source of hope for the nation. When their party wins an election, they are elated. When their candidate of choice is defeated, they fall into despair.

Today's reading provides us with the good news that it is not a human person who will ultimately decide our future. The good news is that "the Lord reigns" (97:1)! While humans act like they are in control, Psalm 97 reminds us that God created the universe and it directs us to worship Him alone (v. 6).

We must also name and denounce the idols that compete for our loyalty and allegiance (v. 7). God will not have a rival. For Israel this meant avoiding the worship of Baal and Asherah, the gods of the culture around them. While most people in Western culture today are not tempted to bow down to a literal

idol, we often live as if power, money, fame, or material possessions are the most important things in life. No one should be able to worship God with full-throated praise and cling to idols at the same time.

The kind of praise modeled for us in Psalm 97 is humbling. It puts us in our place and reminds us that we are not God. Rather, we owe our allegiance to God alone. When we embrace that truth, we can rejoice in His faithful rule in the present even as we wait for His ultimate rule to be established in the new heavens and new earth (98:9). Recognizing the fact that God reigns should lead us to rejoice (97:8). We can rejoice because we know that God is gracious and just.

► What idols are competing for your attention? In what things do you place your hope? Spend time today rereading this psalm and acknowledging God as the ruler of everything in your life. Rejoice that our God reigns!

Pray with Us

Lord, Your name is above any other name, and You are worthy to be praised. How can we give our loyalties to any other person or thing? You alone are worthy; make Yourself foremost in our affections.

God Is King: Part 2

Read Psalm 99; Psalm 100

*Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain,
for the LORD our God is holy.—Psalm 99:9*

In 1741, George Frideric Handel was deeply in debt after a string of musical failures. On the verge of his going to debtor's prison, his friend Charles Jennens wrote the text of an opera based on the life of Jesus Christ and gave it to Handel to write the music. In just 24 days, Handel wrote the musical masterpiece, *Messiah*. The famous *Hallelujah* chorus celebrates the fact that God is the King of kings who will reign forever and ever.

Psalms 93–99 celebrate the Lord's kingship. You'll notice a common refrain in these poems: "The Lord reigns" (93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1). You may also recognize this section of Scripture as the *Hallelujah* chorus of the Psalter. Because God reigns over all, Psalm 99 encourages all people to "praise your great and awesome name" (v. 3). The fact that God reigns is the best possible news. He is a ruler who is just and does what is right (v. 4). He is also a King who listens to His

people. The Psalmist reminds us of Moses, Aaron, and Samuel who often interceded for the people of Israel (v. 6). God heard their prayers and answered them.

God also showed Himself to be forgiving. Israel sinned by worshiping a golden calf on Mount Sinai (Ex. 32). Despite their deep breach of faithfulness, God forgave the people and continued to reside with them (Ex. 34). God, however, also punishes sin (v. 8). These two truths are not contradictory. God is both just and merciful. The animal sacrifice in the Old Testament foreshadowed the greater sacrifice of our Lord Jesus in the New Testament. Sin can be both punished and forgiven because God made a way for us.

► Today, if you confess your sins and trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus, you can be forgiven and have peace with God. In response to this marvelous truth, take a few minutes to pray Psalm 100 in praise to God.

Pray with Us

We pray with the Psalmist today: "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever" (Ps. 100:4–5).

Holy Worship

Read Psalm 101

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. —Micah 6:8

“Power corrupts,” as the saying goes, “and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” It is true that there is something about the human condition that makes power dangerous. In his commentary on the Psalms, the reformer John Calvin observed: “Although kings are not born fools, yet they are so blinded by their dignity that they think themselves in no respect indebted to their subjects.” These corrosive effects of power can even be seen not only in government but also in the church.

In today’s reading, David affirms a commitment to justice and holiness. He resolves to worship God by how he lives, by leading “a blameless life” (v. 2). He commits himself to extend this commitment to his position as king. He will run his “house” (or kingdom) with integrity as well (v. 2). A part of running his kingdom with integrity included rooting out corrupt administrators and officials. David declares that “the perverse of

heart shall be far from me, I will have nothing to do with what is evil” (v. 4).

David’s examination of his house and kingdom should prompt an examination of our own. Can we say, “I will be careful to lead a blameless life” (v. 2) or that we “will not look with approval on anything that is vile”? David desires to surround himself with people who are honest in their communication, who have integrity in their motives, and who will serve people faithfully (vv. 6–7). For David living with integrity was not just about being a good king, it was an act of worship (v. 1). And this choice would not be made once, but “every morning” (v. 8).

► This psalm can extend beyond advice for leaders. Turn the verses in today’s reading into questions for personal reflection: Am I conducting the affairs of my heart with a blameless heart (v. 2)? Am I looking with approval on vile things (v. 3)? How will this affect our speech, our purchases, our entertainment choices?

Pray with Us

Holy God, we ask You to cleanse our minds. Grant us fresh discernment to recognize what is vile in and around us. Make our ways blameless, so that we too can say, “I will have nothing to do with what is evil.”

Clinging to God

Read Psalm 102

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday
and today and forever.—Hebrews 13:8*

A few years ago, the church building that I grew up attending was torn down. I was saddened to think that the place where I had spent so much of my childhood, where I had encountered God, would be demolished. While I realized that it was just a building, this event evoked a longing for permanence. What, in life, does not change?

Psalm 102 has a unique title. It tells us that it is a prayer for afflicted people who need to pour out a lament to God. It is comforting to know that God provided us with models for how to relate to Him in our suffering. The Psalmist here is clearly in distress. He describes the transience of his life, comparing it to smoke and withered grass (vv. 3–4). His body aches from suffering to the point where he forgets to eat (vv. 3–5). Additionally, he is cut off from any sense of community. He compares himself to a desert owl, or a bird

alone on a roof (vv. 6–7). This image illustrates his sense of social isolation. He recognizes that his suffering is not his alone, but part of the suffering of God's people (vv. 12–16). This psalm was likely written during the Babylonian exile, when many in Israel felt abandoned by God.

The Psalmist finds solace by reflecting on God's attributes. He reminds himself that the Lord is on the throne (v. 12). Despite how desperate his personal situation might be, God does not change, "but you remain the same and your years will never end" (v. 27). This is good news because God promises not to give up on His people. He would forgive and restore Jerusalem (vv. 21–22).

► Do you feel isolated or alone? We can take comfort in the truth that God does not change. God cared enough for you to send His Son to die for your sins. This same God will never change and is faithful to keep His promises.

Pray with Us

Father, You loved us enough to send Your Son to suffer in our stead. Help us to be long suffering for Your sake. Give us love for You that carries us through the grief and loneliness we must inevitably face.

Amazing Grace

Read Psalm 103

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him.—Psalm 103:11*

In 1835, a music publisher named Charles Bradlee created a tune to help children learn the alphabet. Utilizing a theme by Mozart, Bradlee copyrighted the tune that children all over the United States sing to learn their ABCs. Just like Charles Bradlee, the Israelites knew that one of the best ways to teach truth about God was through poem and song. Since most of ancient Israel was not able to read, songs were especially important.

In verses 3–5 of today’s reading, David outlines many of God’s gifts that Israel had experienced through the ages: forgiveness, healing, redemption, and renewal. These gifts flow from God’s nature. God is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love” (v. 8). The word for “love” here is difficult to capture in English. It means being devoted to someone in a covenant commitment. It is a kind of love that is for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.

Sometimes we may picture God as only loving and forgiving to the exclusion of other attributes He has. David does not do so here. He reminds us that God is also “slow to anger” and just (vv. 6, 8). “Slow to anger” reminds us that anger is at times God’s appropriate response rooted in His covenant love. His anger is in the context of a deep understanding of our frailty as humans. God “remembers that we are dust” (v. 14). This does not mean that we are unimportant, but rather that God is mindful of our limitations. The proper response is to join with the angels and heavenly hosts in joyful praise (vv. 20–21).

► Forgetfulness is dangerous in our relationship with God. Singing is a wonderful way to remind ourselves of God’s faithfulness. Spend some time in song or listening to praises today. Reflect on the many ways God has shown His love for you and how He is forever faithful.

Pray with Us

We praise You for the times You have provided, even when we lost hope. We worship You for the ways You have sustained us, even when our strength failed. We honor You for the mercies You have granted, even when we didn’t want them.

This Is My Father's World

Read Psalm 104

How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. —Psalm 104:24

My family enjoys watching nature shows together. It is stunning to see the diversity of animals and habitats that exist in the world. While most science shows do not give God the credit for creation, watching them often leads my family to have conversations about how creative and powerful our God is.

The author of Psalm 104 would have made a good scientist. He carefully observes many aspects of the created world in order to praise God. He observes the water cycle. He recognizes that rain sustains the life of animals and makes crops grow (vv. 10–14). The water cycle is not an impersonal process, but rather evidence of God's faithfulness and kindness.

The author notices that some animals come out and hunt in the night and sleep during the day, while people work during the day and sleep at night (vv. 19–23). Everything has its proper time and place. The ocean is still unexplored in many

places. And, on occasion, the news will report of a new species that's been discovered. It is a reminder to us that God cares about the animal world. He did not simply create them for humans. Rather, this psalm reminds us that God created them for His own delight (vv. 24–26). Indeed, the Psalmist proclaims, "May the LORD rejoice in his works" (v. 31).

The sheer diversity and wonder of the created world should inspire us to join with the Psalmist in praise to God. Surely, "[h]ow many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (v. 24). Today's reading is a good reminder to open our eyes and allow the wonder of creation to inspire us to praise God.

► Take time today to observe and celebrate God's magnificent creation. While today human sin has corrupted God's creation (v. 35), we can look forward to its redemption and restoration when Christ returns (Rom. 8:22–25).

Pray with Us

God the Creator, may we rejoice in science for what it teaches us about You. May each new discovery humble us, reminding us that we are merely discovering the work of Your hands.

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Read Psalm 105

He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations. —Psalm 105:8

One of the things my family loves to do at gatherings is tell stories. We recall the quirky personalities of loved ones who have departed. We talk about how couples met and got married. We tell our children some of the funny things older members of our family did when they were young. These stories, told again and again, play an important part of forming family identity and binding us to one another. We have a shared history.

Psalm 105 recounts and celebrates God's history with Israel. It is closely connected to the psalm before it and the one after it. These three psalms follow the sequence of Israel's history from Creation and the Fall (Psalm 104) to God's call of Abraham to the conquest of the land (Psalm 105), ending in Israel's apostasy and exile (Psalm 106). Today's reading shares family stories of God's faithfulness.

The Psalmist calls people to "remember the wonders he has done" (v. 5). He highlights the promise

God made to Abraham to give his descendants the land of Canaan (vv. 8–11). This promise is seen as a primary factor in Israel's history. When there was a famine, God had sent Joseph ahead of his family to Egypt to provide for them (vv. 16–22). When Israel was enslaved, God freed them (v. 27). God led and guided them in the wilderness and brought them into the Promised Land (vv. 42–45). One theme runs through this psalm: God keeps His promises! When Joseph was sold as a slave, God had not abandoned him, but used him to deliver His people. When Israel was enslaved to a major superpower, Egypt, God demonstrated His glory by delivering them.

► Despite how desperate things may look, God's people should never give up hope in His promises. He will be faithful just as He has been in the past. Believers today can be confident that Christ will return and we can trust in God's promises.

Pray with Us

Today we meditate on the promises You have brought to completion. Your Word is a testament to Your honor and faithfulness. Looking back enables us to look forward with confidence, knowing that You still keep Your promises.

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

Read Psalm 106

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.—Psalm 106:1*

Why is it so easy for us to forget the victories and miracles of our past when faced with the troubles of today? In yesterday's reading, the Psalmist narrated Israel's history with an emphasis on God's faithfulness. Today's reading continues with a different emphasis.

This psalm was likely written during the exile to Babylon which had created a crisis of faith for many in Israel. God had judged them as a nation. They asked, "How should we respond to His judgment?" The psalm begins by offering praise to the Lord (v. 1). The Psalmist declares that he is going to recite God's "mighty acts" (v. 2). We are prepared for the recital of the miracles God performed for Israel. In a sense, that is exactly what the Psalmist does, describing the exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the conquest of the Promised Land. However, this time the emphasis is not so much on the miracles, but on how Israel responded. Israel consistently fell into unbelief.

After the miracle of the Red Sea, the psalmist laments, "[B]ut they soon forgot what he had done" (v. 13). Israel failed to enter the Promised Land right away because "they did not believe his promise" (v. 24). After the conquest of the Land, Israel worshiped idols, sacrificed their children to false gods, and "shed innocent blood" (vv. 34–39).

Despite all this, God was patient. He judged them in order to bring about their repentance. Again and again, God offered grace. But Israel's sin culminated in the Exile (v. 47). The Psalmist calls Israel to repent and to praise God for His faithfulness, even while longing for deliverance (vv. 47–48).

► This month's study covers joyful moments and times of utter despair. Yet, through every circumstance, God always shows His faithfulness. This is our third study of the Book of Psalms, and in 2022 we will conclude with the final chapters. Thank you for spending time in God's Word with us.

Pray with Us

Lord God, we hesitate to judge Israel for their unfaithfulness, because we so often fall into unbelief ourselves. We praise You that our salvation depends on Your faithfulness to us. May we grow evermore faithful to You. Amen.



Need ministry training?

Transform your world for Christ with a degree in Ministry Studies from Moody Theological Seminary! Receive world-class Bible training from topnotch professors and choose from six ministry specialties.

Know the Bible better and strengthen your ministry skills at Moody!

Learn more at moody.edu/mams



MOODY
Theological
Seminary™

DAY BY DAY

THE NEW *TODAY IN THE WORD* PRAYER JOURNAL

"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

Romans 12:12



Created just for our readers, this new prayer journal has space to record your prayers and celebrate God's answers.

Plus, it features inspirational essays, quotes, and Bible verses on prayer.

It is our thank-you this month, for your gift to *Today in the Word*.

TODAY IN THE **WORD**™

todayintheword.org

A Life Income Gift

*Blessed to Give **and** Receive*



Life income gifts allow you to **give** to Christ-centered ministries for Kingdom impact and **receive** income for life!

Establish a life income gift by gifting cash or securities in support of Moody Bible Institute. When you make a life income gift, you'll receive an immediate tax deduction and then ongoing payments for life for you and your loved ones.

LEARN MORE

Contact Moody's Stewardship team today!
moodylegacy.org | (800) 801-2171



MOODY
BIBLE INSTITUTE™

Visit us online to request resources and view past issues.

todayintheword.org



Today in the Word



@TodayintheWord



TodayintheWord



TodayInTheWordDevotional



MOODY
BIBLE INSTITUTE™

Moody helps equip you with the truth of God's Word as you impact your community and the world for Christ. We believe that understanding and sharing God's Word is a lifelong journey. Let us help you take the next step in your relationship with Christ.

Learn more at **MOODYBIBLE.ORG** or call **(800) DL MOODY** today.

MOODY
Bible Institute™

moody.edu

MOODY
Theological
Seminary™

MOODY
Publishers®

moodypublishers.com

MOODY
Radio®

moodyradio.org