



Devotional

April 12 - June 27

PSALM 91

Join us in reading this Psalm every day for 91 days (March 15-June 14) as a prayer in response to the COVID-19 epidemic.

- 1 Living in the Most High's shelter,
camping in the Almighty's shade,
2 I say to the Lord, "You are my refuge, my stronghold!
You are my God—the one I trust!"
- 3 God will save you from the hunter's trap
and from deadly sickness.
4 God will protect you with his pinions;
you'll find refuge under his wings.
His faithfulness is a protective shield.
5 Don't be afraid of terrors at night,
arrows that fly in daylight,
6 or sickness that prowls in the dark,
destruction that ravages at noontime.
7 Even if one thousand people fall dead next to you,
ten thousand right beside you—
it won't happen to you.
8 Just look with your eyes,
and you will see the wicked punished.
9 Because you've made the Lord my refuge,
the Most High, your place of residence—
10 no evil will happen to you;
no disease will come close to your tent.
11 Because he will order his messengers to help you,
to protect you wherever you go.
12 They will carry you with their own hands

- so you don't bruise your foot on a stone.
13 You'll march on top of lions and vipers;
you'll trample young lions and serpents underfoot.
- 14 God says, "Because you are devoted to me,
I'll rescue you.
I'll protect you because you know my name.
15 Whenever you cry out to me, I'll answer.
I'll be with you in troubling times.
I'll save you and glorify you.
16 I'll fill you full with old age.
I'll show you my salvation."

WEEK ONE (APRIL 12–18)

Day 103: April 12, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Chronicles 25:1–28:27

Abbreviated Plan: 2 Chronicles 36:1–23

This long list of kings reinforces this continual point about the human condition. No one is perfect. Even the “good” ones have their flaws and make grievous errors. Holiness requires constant attentiveness and God’s grace.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 104: April 13, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Chronicles 29:1–32:33

Abbreviated Plan: Ezra 1:1–8; 2:68–70

Hezekiah was one of the rare good kings in Judah. To be like him, we must 1) preserve our worship of God, 2) faithfully obey God, 3) and seek God with all our heart. (2 Chron. 31:21).

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 105: April 14, 2020

Full Plan: 2 Chronicles 33:1–36:23

Abbreviated Plan: Ezra 3:1–13; Ezra 4:1–5

Pretty simple contrast today. Manasseh or Josiah? Which one will I be more like today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 106: April 15, 2020

Full Plan: Ezra 1:1–3:13

Abbreviated Plan: Ezra 7:1–15; Ezra 9:1–15

The book of Ezra opens with the joyous return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple. Paul said that our bodies are the “Temple of the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 6:19) In what ways is God wanting to do a rebuilding project on your life?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 107: April 16, 2020

Full Plan: Ezra 4:1–6:22

Abbreviated Plan: Nehemiah 2:1–10, 17–20; 4:1–23

Any work of building the kingdom of God will attract opposition. When those barriers arise, we need to be steadfast in our resolve, to boldly say, “We are the servants of God.” (Ezra 5:11). How might God be strengthening you to face those in opposition to the work you are doing for God?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 108: April 17, 2020

Full Plan: Ezra 7:1–10:44

Abbreviated Plan: Nehemiah 8:1–6

Ezra’s prayer not only offered confession for disobedience. It also motivated the people to remember who God is. Living by faith is not just getting our behaviors right. It is about being more attentive to what God is doing.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 109: April 18, 2020

Full Plan: Nehemiah 1:1–4:23

Abbreviated Plan: Nehemiah 9:1–38

Nehemiah prayed, then God called him to be the answer to his own prayer. He saw the devastation, and God called him to be the agent of restoration. That’s sometimes what happens when we pray: God summons us to be the answer to our own prayers. How might you be the answer to your prayers for the world?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

April 12–18, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Bernie Lieving

The first three Bible readings for this 1st week of Easter are not what we might expect. They go into great detail to tell the saga of twelve kings of Judah who reigned a total of 252 years, from Jehoahaz’s three months to Manasseh’s fifty-five years.

Three of the kings “did what was right in the sight of the Lord; were good, and right, and faithful.” A couple “did what was right and yet became proud or ordered his ways before the Lord’s.”

The majority, despite God’s merciful dealings with them and God’s people, despite the prophetic warnings and the influence

and example of faithful kings and holy prophets, “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” Their “lack of faithfulness to God, their sacrifices to other gods, and stiffening their necks and hardening their hearts” ultimately led to the burning of the temple, the carrying off of temple treasures, the demolishing of Jerusalem’s walls, and the exile of the Judean people into Babylon.

The last four readings from Ezra and Nehemiah (a single book in Hebrew scriptures) tell the stories of the return of the 42,360 exiles, the restoration of the temple, the rebuilding of the physical Jerusalem and the Jewish community; all made possible by Cyrus the Great, Persia’s king who defeated Nabonidus, King of Babylon and who decreed that the Lord, the God of heaven, commanded him to build God a house in Jerusalem and return God’s people to their home.

My favorite king in the saga is Josiah, who began his reign at age eight and who ruled for thirty-one years. He did what was right in the Lord’s eyes, rebuilt and purified all of Jerusalem and Judea of the sacred poles, idols and images which had led the people astray. The finding in the temple of a scroll (Book of Deuteronomy or entire Pentateuch) and its reading led him to tear his clothes, repent for the people, and order a Passover celebration, the likes of which had not happened since the days of the prophet Samuel.

In these first seven days of the Easter celebration may we use our devotional time to help us, as Josiah did, do what is right in the Lord’s eyes, and for us, to walk the disciple’s path.

Prayer focus: Those working to get rid of their sacred poles, idols and images which lead them astray.

WEEK TWO (APRIL 19–25)

Day 110: April 19, 2020

Full Plan: Nehemiah 5:1–7:73

Abbreviated Plan: Nehemiah 13:1–31

Nehemiah was not only rebuilding a wall, he had to rebuild economic justice between the rich and the poor, all while maintaining his own integrity and humility and overcoming threats from his enemies. He is one of the Old Testament’s greatest leaders. What can you learn from his example?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 111: April 20, 2020

Full Plan: Nehemiah 8:1–10:39

Abbreviated Plan: Esther 2:1–23

Returning from exile did not just involve rebuilding a wall. It meant building a consecrated people. Ezra’s reforms rooted the people in the law and anchored them in 1) confession, 2) remembrance, 3) commitment, and 4) covenant renewal. How can you incorporate those four elements in your spiritual journey?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 112: April 21, 2020

Full Plan: Nehemiah 11:1–13:31

Abbreviated Plan: Esther 3:1–15; 4:1–17

Nehemiah finishes with some “spring cleaning.” Removal of impurities from the temple and ungodliness from the people, and a return to Sabbath keeping. The wall may have defined their city, but only faithfulness would define their hearts. How might you do some “spring cleaning” in your soul today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 113: April 22, 2020

Full Plan: Esther 1:1–4:17

Abbreviated Plan: Esther 5:1–14; 6:1–14

God is not named in Esther, but God is active. God’s work toward justice will not be deterred, whether we choose to participate in it or not. (4:14) We have been called to “such a time as this.” How can you participate in God’s work today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 114: April 23, 2020

Full Plan: Esther 5:1–10:3

Abbreviated Plan: Esther 8:1–17

Haman is killed by his very device to kill Mordecai. It’s a plot twist that is a commentary on sin. We are undone by how we would undo others. It’s the corollary of the Golden Rule: you will have done to you what you would do unto others.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 115: April 24, 2020

Full Plan: Job 1:1–5:27

Abbreviated Plan: Job 1:1–22; Job 2:1–10

The story of Job upends much of what the Bible has said so far about rewarding only the faithful and punishing only the wicked. It allows us to ask, “Why God?” The permission to ask that question is itself liberating. In what ways might you be asking that question of God today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 116: April 25, 2020

Full Plan: Job 6:1–14:22

Abbreviated Plan: Job 29:1–25

Job's prayer is raw, honest, and real. It gives us permission to do the same when we are struggling with the faith and with God. Can you believe that God can handle your lament, impatience, doubt, and fear?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

April 19–25, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Glenn Simpson

What a glorious assortment of scripture passages this week. Our scripture readings begin with the last half of Nehemiah in which Nehemiah led the reconstruction of the wall around Jerusalem. Our readings end with the first half of Job. In both Nehemiah and Job, the biblical lessons are centered squarely on obedience to God's will. Between those books, we read the book of Esther – a literary marvel offering a biblical lesson of God fulfilling His promises to the people of Israel. Although Esther is the only book in the bible that does not mention God, it is replete with God's overwhelming sovereignty.

The intriguing story involves a disparate collection of characters in this O. Henry-like plot. **King Xerxes** is a drunkard who banishes his wife, Queen Vashti, for refusing to attend a banquet in his honor. Following a search, **Esther**, a Jew, became the new Queen. The villain of the story, **Haman**, is the king's second in command who

plots to have all the Jews executed. Finally, **Mordecai**, is Esther's cousin and a fellow Jew.

The plot begins with Mordecai stopping a plot to assassinate the king and telling the king about it. Thereafter, Haman becomes incensed at Mordecai for refusing to bow to him. Haman deceives the King into issuing an edict condemning all Jews to death. Mordecai tells Esther about Haman's actions, so she approaches the King and convinces him to reverse the edict. In a plot reversal, the king orders the execution of Haman on the gallows that Haman had constructed to execute the Jews. As an additional plot twist, Mordecai is appointed to serve as the king's second in command replacing Haman.

An overview of the plot reveals that two Jews, Esther and Mordecai, are able to outwit Haman and prevent his evil aim to execute the Jews. In so doing, God's sovereignty prevails over evil and, once again, saves the Jewish people. To this day, Jews celebrate *Purim* in recognition of the story in Esther.

How does this story speak to us today?

- Even though people may not perceive God as the motivation behind their actions, God is always at work,
- God works in ways that are not readily apparent, and
- Powerful forces are no match for God's sovereignty.

Prayer: Father God, may you help me cast aside my doubts when I confront forces that are opposed to Your Will even though they may be so powerful that I see no way I can overcome their power; may you help me see that I am powerful when you are with me; may I clearly see your will as the guiding light in my life. Amen

WEEK THREE (APRIL 26–MAY 2)

Day 117: April 26, 2020

Full Plan: Job 15:1–21:34

Abbreviated Plan: Job 30:1–31

Even Job's friends are against him, speaking more than listening, telling him it's his fault, and urging him to shake off the pain. They are unhelpful, and Job feels alone. Job 17 is as honest a look at the human condition as there is in the whole Bible. How might you befriend someone in need in a more helpful way than Job's friends?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 118: April 27, 2020

Full Plan: Job 22:1–31:40

Abbreviated Plan: Job 31:1–40

Job asserts his integrity. Everything was going wrong in his life, but he could still know that he was obeying God's laws the best he could. Our integrity might be all we have left, but that is enough. It's often the one thing we can control.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 119: April 28, 2020

Full Plan: Job 32:1–37:24

Abbreviated Plan: Job 38:1–41

Elihu offers what Job's three friends do not: a reminder of who God is. Job and his friends focused on Job's actions and qualities, looking for causes to his suffering. Elihu pointed to God, to remind them of God's goodness, mercy, and might. What difference does Elihu's words make in your times of suffering?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 120: April 29, 2020

Full Plan: Job 38:1–42:17

Abbreviated Plan: Job 39:1–30

God shows up to remind Job that he is not God. Amid suffering or change, we remember that we are not God; nor do we have to be. The implicit response to everything in this last reading is, "Only God can." And that is good news for us.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 121: April 30, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 1:1–4:8

Abbreviated Plan: Job 40:1–24

Our enemies don't have to always be other people. They can be sadness, fear, loneliness, grief, and anxiety. The Psalms say that God is there to preserve us at all times from those enemies. That promise is ours to claim. What "enemies" are you facing today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 122: May 1, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 5:1–8:9

Abbreviated Plan: Job 41:1–34

Psalm 6 is for anyone struggling beyond words, weeping beyond tears, and longing for God to show up. It's a Psalm for the nighttime of the soul. It offers no false hope. It only offers this: God is listening, and that is all you need. Is that enough for you?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 123: May 2, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 9:1–12:8

Abbreviated Plan: Job 42:1–17

The Psalms make it clear that God is always on the side of the oppressed. This begs the question, "How am I the oppressor? Or to what degree am I only thinking that I am oppressed, in order to curry favor from God?"

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

April 26–May 2, 2020: Weekly Devotion by John Dormois

The book of Job is an example of classic wisdom literature. The central issues focus on the question of divine justice and human suffering. Job has experienced extreme suffering as reflected by the loss of all his possessions and his children. As a man of great faith, he refutes the idea that his suffering has been inflicted by God and concludes that God is unjust. His friends, on the other hand, contend that God does run the world according to justice and therefore Job has sinned.

Job angrily asserts his innocence. He demands that God provide an explanation for his suffering: **I sign my defense, let the Almighty answer me** (Job 31.35).

God responds to Job by acknowledging the complexities of the world and pointing out to Job that he's not in any sort of position to challenge God. God does not offer any explanation for why

suffering exists in the world (which is called the question of theodicy). God chastises the three friends of Job for saying things wrong about God. God honors Job for his suffering, his honesty, and his prayer.

The Psalms are a form of poetic discourse between Israel and God. They vary from prayers and praise to the deepest pain and distress. The first 12 Psalms vary in themes from songs of praise of God's power and justice to gratitude for deliverance illness, persecutors, and enemies.

Prayer thought for this week: The mystery of how to reconcile a loving, omnipotent, and all knowing God with suffering in the world remains. Have you experienced a spiritual struggle similar to that of Job? Do the Psalms offer solace in times of pain and suffering or words of praise in times of joy?

WEEK FOUR (MAY 3–9)

Day 124: May 3, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 13:1–16:11

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 1:1–6

Psalms 13 - There cannot be rebirth without lament. Lament honors life, and takes love and truth seriously. It acknowledges loss, so that we can then trust in God's faithful love into the future. In what ways are you lamenting today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 125: May 4, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 17:1–20:9

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 2:1–12

A connecting thread among all the Psalms in today's reading is the grateful recognition that everything one has in life is a gift from God. Every achievement, possession, and experience comes from a generous, loving God. How is that true in your life? How will you express your gratitude to God today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 126: May 5, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 21:1–24:10

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 3:1–8

Before the classic 23rd Psalm, there is Psalm 22, a psalm of longing and suffering. Sometimes you have to go through the longing before you can get to assurance. And it's followed by Psalm 24, in which one enters the glorious presence of God.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 127: May 6, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 25:1–28:9

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 15:1–5

The Psalmist consistently remembers that we are not self-sufficient. We need God for everything. To conquer our inner turmoil, to make peace with our enemies, and to overcome sin. This requires humility, repentance, and a desire to follow God.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 128: May 7, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 29:1–32:11

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 23:1–6

Each Psalm holds two ideas in tension: I am lost and hurting; God is faithful and is with me. It is possible to experience both the dark and the light, for each outlines the other. “God, where are you?” is met with “God is always here.”

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 129: May 8, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 33:1–36:12

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 24:1–10

Psalm 34 shows David’s heart as he faked being crazy to hide his true identity from others. Despite the outward roles you play for others to see, what is in your heart? Does your heart trust and praise God, or is it turned inward upon yourself?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 130: May 9, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 37:1–41:13

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 41:1–13

Humility ties these texts together. We are called to trust (Ps 37), repent (Ps 38), embrace life’s brevity (Ps 39), wait patiently (Ps 40), and care for the poor (Ps 41). How well is humility expressed in your life in these areas?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

May 3–9, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Amy Kerr

What a great comfort many of the verses in Book 1 of Psalms offers us. We are reminded repeatedly of God's love for us, and that by trusting in him we can find comfort, guidance, and relief from our troubles and our enemies.

In the midst of a bad day, receiving news that a loved one is sick, failing where we believe we should be succeeding or in the darkest of our days, it can be easy to feel alone, defeated, and beaten down. Despite our despair and sin, we can retreat into meditation and prayer and know that God is with us in those dark times and is there for us to lean on. He sees us when we are whole or broken, he knows when we are weak and need to be nourished. He refreshes us, leads us, provides for us. He shows us when we need rest.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.” (Ps 23:1-3, NIV).

The imagery of God being our shepherd and providing all that we could ever need is so vivid to me in this passage. I can picture God leading me when I am weak and trying to push through a difficult time, working too hard, or focusing my energy in the wrong ways. The idea of him helping me find a quiet place to rest brings comfort to my soul. I invite you to try to picture this scene, close your eyes, and spend a few minutes in prayer and meditation. Perhaps you will find it refreshes your soul as well!

Prayer: God, whether I am going through the best of times or the

worst of times remind me that you are always by my side and that you are my shepherd. Open my heart to follow the path that you have laid out for me and refresh my soul so that I may feel whole with the power of your love. Amen

WEEK FIVE (MAY 10–16)

Day 131: May 10, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 42:1–45:17

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 42:1–11

Psalm 42 reveals the heart at its most honest and vulnerable. It gives us permission to acknowledge our downcast soul, our doubts, and the pressures of those who don't believe in God. But it never gives up hope. What meaning does Psalm 42 bring you today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 132: May 11, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 26:1–49:20

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 43:1–5

Today’s Psalms make quite a sound: mountains shake, waters roar, people praising, God shouting, labor pains, spoken wisdom. But amid the noise is this command: Be still, and know I am God. How well are you hearing God amid the noise of your life?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 133: May 12, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 50:1–53:6

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 72:1–20

Right actions are not enough. We must do them out of a “clean heart,” from penitence, humility, and a seeking after God. The alternative is the way of the fool, who says there is no God. How will you orient your heart Godward today, rather than inward?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 134: May 13, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 54:1–56:13

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 73:1–28

“Cast your burden on the Lord” (Ps 55:22) means that God can not only carry your burden (cast your burden ON the Lord); God can also carry you (and he will sustain you). God is strong enough to do both, so we need to “release” ourselves to God and “receive” the love and power of God.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 135: May 14, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 57:1–59:17

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 89:1–29

The Psalmist does not pray for the death of his enemies, only that they will suffer the consequences of their own sin. (59:11-13) The worst punishment we experience is the consequences of our own sins, and the wrong choices we make.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 136: May 15, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 60:1–63:11

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 89:30–52

The image of the rock is a recurring one in these readings. It is an image of strength and stability, which only God can provide. Amid change, instability, and uncertainty, how might you depend on God to be led to a rock “higher than I”?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 137: May 16, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 64:1–68:35

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 90:1–17

There are many images of nature in today’s Psalms, reminding us that God is evident all around us (seas, rain, mountains, clouds, etc.) Whenever you feel alone, you can just open my eyes, breathe in the Spirit, and enjoy God’s presence around you.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

May 10–16, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Susan Northcutt

I like to learn. At the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at USF I participate in classes (such as “The Silent Generation” and “Beginning Dulcimer”), volunteer on the Faculty Support Team and lecture. Yup, I like to learn.

I approached this week’s readings (Psalms 42-68) in this frame of mind. These seventeen psalms are drawn from Book II of the Psalter (which is often referred to as an anthology of sacred poetry). They are wide-ranging, dwelling on the storms of life as well as praising the God that delivers us from suffering. Some psalms are deeply personal (and I find many verses profound. See, for instance, Psalms 51:50 and 62:1-2.) Others are national prayers, focusing on the nation of Israel and the Davidic kingdom.

As I read and re-read these psalms, I wanted to know more about them--in a high-altitude and big-picture way.

What “connects” these psalms? I don’t think an overarching spiritual or literary theme is revealed. In fact, many spiritual themes appear: hope, faithfulness, righteousness, trust, salvation, deliverance.

Is the connection located in structure or in rhetoric? Probably not, because each psalm is an example of lyric poetry--vivid, real, using both repetition and rich imagery. Further, in the tradition of Hebrew poetry, each psalm makes effective use of parallelism (where two lines of poetry are balanced, with the

second line echoing or contrasting with the first line).

So, what connects these psalms? In my opinion it's the type of Psalms; most of them are laments. There are eleven personal or individual laments (42, 42, 51, 54-57, 59, 61, 63 and 64). And three communal or national laments (44, 58 and 60).

Laments are rather common in the Psalter with forty psalms so classified. They follow a specific three-part pattern. First, a lament begins with a cry to God for help. "Vindicate me, O God" (Ps. 43:1a); "Have mercy on me, O God" (Ps. 51:1a), "Save me, O God" (Ps. 54:1a).

Following the call or cry for help, a lament describes the trouble, problem or sorrow. It may be sickness, death, a false accusation (rumors, gossip, lies), persecution of some sort (such as, in today's culture, bullying or harassment), or sin (referring to anything that brings us distress and makes us anxious). Lavish images often appear in this second part (read psalms 56 and 64).

The final part of a lament contains an appeal to God's steadfast love to deliver us--to restore, renew and reassure us in our time of urgent need. Awe inspiring!

Prayer: read aloud or sing a lament psalm from this week to experience God's presence and glory.

WEEK SIX (MAY 17–23)

Day 138: May 17, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 69:1–72:20

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 94:1–23

The final Psalm of David is a prayer for his son Solomon and his rule over the kingdom. It's a good reminder that our prayers should not all be about ourselves, but for future generations, and for God's grace to be revealed through them.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 139: May 18, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 73:1–75:10

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 106:1–23

When the days seem long and the nights seem dark, the Psalmist affirms that the presence of God alone is all that matters. "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:26) What difference do these words make in your life today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 140: May 19, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 76:1–78:72

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 106:24–48

Psalm 77 is helpful to read when your soul is troubled, your nights are sleepless, and you are reaching for God in the dark. The first half (1-10) names the stirring. The second half (11-20) invokes God's power & presence. Both are necessary.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 141: May 20, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 79:1–84:12

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 107:1–22

Psalm 84 is a song of a content soul which has found refuge in the presence of God. It meant the Temple, but could mean for us any condition in which we feel assured that God is with us. To feel that joy and strength is the chief aim of life. How will you find refuge and contentment in God today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 142: May 21, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 85:1–89:52

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 107:23–43

Psalms 88 and 89 couldn't be more different, but both coincide in the Christian life. Prayers of despondency (Ps 88) and praise (Ps 89) aren't contradictory or mutually exclusive. Each allows for the existence of the other; both are necessary. How do you experience both today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 143: May 22, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 90:1–95:11

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 118:1–29

We are not alive forever. That thought is scary, but it is also liberating. Savor each moment, but don't grip it too tightly. Let the river of life carry you, rather than trying to control it. Feel God's presence, power, & protection, and give thanks often.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 144: May 23, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 96:1–101:8

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 119:1–40

Praise (Ps 96-100) and integrity (Ps 101) go hand in hand. If we orient our spirit in praise to God, we discover the standard with which we are to live. And if we live a life of integrity, we learn to give thanks for God's power and strength. How will you live with praise and integrity today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

May 17–23, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Jess Johnson

Psalms 44

For not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm give them victory; but your right hand, and your arm, and the light of your countenance, for you delighted in them. You are my King and my God; you command victories for Jacob. Through you we push down our foes; through your name we tread down our assailants. For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me. But you have saved us from our foes, and have put to confusion those who hate us. In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever. | Psalm 44: 3-8

Reading all of Psalm 44, one can clearly hear its

desperation. A broken Israel cries out for deliverance. I'm sure a Biblical scholar could describe exactly what was going on in Israel politically or militarily at this psalm's writing, and whatever Israel was going through, it wasn't pretty. They cry out to God, "You have rejected us and abased us," "You have made us like sheep for slaughter," "You have made us the taunt of our neighbors."

But, the mistreatment of Israel has had a special effect - Israel has found its faith once again and documented it in this song.

While most of our households haven't been upended by a foreign occupying force, perhaps we can relate with these Israelites a bit. I know for me, when things aren't going so well, it's easy to first look for ways I can work harder or be more creative or more ingenious to fix the situation. I've got a lot of faith in my own abilities, and the confidence, self-reliance and entrepreneurship that come with it aren't bad things. They're just not the best things.

In Psalm 44, the Israelites reawaken to what are the best things: God's promises, his steadfast love, and a life-long, continually renewed reliance on him.

As the psalmist writes "not in my own bow do I trust," he affirms that God himself is the greatest source of hope. Sure, he has given us talents, tools and resources. For us Christians, he has enlisted us as his partners in his great works of salvation. He has equipped us to be productive and successful. But, each of us awakes to real faith when we recognize that God doesn't need us or our tools to accomplish his ends. He was the source of all those gifts anyway. It would be an honor if he were to use them, but he certainly doesn't need them.

The victory is the Lord's.

Prayer focus: Write down several ways that God has acted for you or delivered you from a difficulty. What victories in your life belong to God? What difficulties are you going through now that you want to shout to God, "Why do you sleep, O Lord?"

WEEK SEVEN (MAY 24–30)

Day 145: May 24, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 102:1–104:35

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 119:41–88

These Psalms draw a contrast between our finite mortality and the everlasting grandeur of God. Remember that whatever sags your soul is temporary. Once you are drawn into an awareness of God's mighty love & power, all your troubles will seem small and temporary.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 146: May 25, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 105:1–107:43

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 119:89–136

There are four stories of people who need God in Psalm 107: those experiencing desert, darkness, sinfulness, and storms. In each instance, we can give thanks, for God shows steadfast love and wonderful works. Which of those stories do you resonate with today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 147: May 26, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 108:1–112:10

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 119:137–176

Psalm 112 returns to the themes in Psalm 1. The blessed life follows God's commandments, does justice, cares for the poor, is generous, lives without fear, and has a steady heart. The wicked life is the opposite. Choose the blessed life.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 148: May 27, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 113:1–118:29

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 132:1–18

These Psalms today remind us that in times of distress, we can find in God refuge and strength (Ps 118) as well as rest (Ps 116). Even when others (or even when we) question the existence of God, “The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.” We are not alive forever. That is scary but also liberating. Savor each moment, but don’t grip it too tightly. Let the river of life carry you, rather than trying to control it. Feel God’s presence, power, & protection, and give thanks often.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 149: May 28, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 119:1–88

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 145:1–21

The words heart, soul, lips, eyes, and mouth are recurring throughout Psalm 119. It’s a reminder that following God should involve our whole being. Not just our minds, but our whole selves.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 150: May 29, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 119:89–176

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 146:1–10

Psalm 119 reminds us that reading the scriptures, particularly its commands, need not be dreary or threatening. It can also be a gateway to joy, life, and contentment. As long as we bring to it a spirit of expectation. How will you live with that kind of expectation today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 151: May 30, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 120:1–126:6

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 147:1–20

These Psalms were sung as worshippers ascended the Temple mountain. They prepared themselves for worship with prayers for deliverance and assurance, and shouts of praise. How might God’s people prepare for worship in that way today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

May 24–30, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Joanie Mellen

This week's readings begin with the close of Book 4 of Psalms, 102 through 106, and ends with the 5th Book of Psalms, 107-126. It is a combination of praise and lament, faith and hope, and closes with poems of Ascent.

A common theme is one of assurance of God's love for us, even as we express our pain and sorrow.

Psalms 106:1

Praise the Lord!

*Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.*

Psalms 119 is the longest with 176 verses. It is an alphabet song, with each section beginning with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet. It gives praise of the Torah's teachings as God's Word, a gift to his people. A favorite verse is **119:66**, "*Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*", made popular in a song by Amy Grant.

One of my favorites is **Psalms 121**. I was in South Africa accompanying a chaplain to a remote Zulu village to check on a recently ill woman. We entered her single room dwelling and greeted her as she sat on her bed. She was feeling much better and patted the bed next to her for us to sit down. She told us she had prayed Psalm 121 over and over while she was recovering. She wanted to read it to us now in thanksgiving. I looked out the front door opening, the only view from her tiny home. The beautiful

African hills above the village were the only thing any of us could see as she read.

Psalms 121:1-2 *I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth...*

Tears filled my eyes as she continued reading with such gratitude for her return of health. She read the last verse twice. **Psalms 121:8** "*The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.*" I was overwhelmed by her faith and belief in God's steadfast love.

Prayer: I give thanks for the blessings I receive when in the presence of those who's faith in God's love and hope is expressed. They give witness to our risen Christ.

WEEK EIGHT (MAY 31–JUNE 6)

Day 152: May 31, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 127:1–130:8

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 148:1–14

The Psalms remind us to trust, wait, hope, and long for God, when we don't know how things will turn out. (Ps 130) But it also reminds us of what we can do: build our efforts and our hearts on God's desires. (Ps 127-128) What will you do those things today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 153: June 1, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 131:1–136:26

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 149:1–9

Too often our praise of God is more about us than it is about God, about what God has done for us and to us. These Psalms (especially 135-146) remind us how to praise God simply for who God is: God's power, love, greatness, and work throughout history. How will you praise God in a less egocentric way today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 154: June 2, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 137:1–140:13

Abbreviated Plan: Psalms 150:1–6

Psalms 137 and 138 are from the lowest point in Israelite history (exile) followed by the highest in Psalm 138 (David, Zion). Life has highs and lows, sometimes back to back but what doesn't change is God's faithful presence and awareness (Psalm 139). Whether you are in a "high" or "low" right now, how will you experience God's faithfulness today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 155: June 3, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 141:1–144:15

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 1:1–19

We all have enemies. Some external, most internal. The Psalmists often pray for their enemies to be destroyed, but these readings are prayers for us to be preserved and protected against them. Our enemies won't always be defeated, but God helps us endure them. How might you pray for that kind of endurance today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 156: June 4, 2020

Full Plan: Psalms 145:1–150:6

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 1:20–33

A life of praise anchored in God's grace is the only song that matters, the "cantus firmus" according to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Everything else in your life is just harmony. How will you sing a song of praise to God in your life today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 157: June 5, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 1:1–2:22

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 3:1–12

There is such a thin line between being God-fearing and walking the way of evil. The opening of Proverbs reminds us that it is only in seeking wisdom outside us (from God) rather than trusting in yourself alone that we can be faithful.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 158: June 6, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 1:1–2:22

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 3:13–20

It's not about you. It's not about the wisdom you gain, or the capacity you have to decide what's best. It is about trusting in God's wisdom both in the moment and in the long haul, so that your path will become straight.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

May 31–June 6, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Jayne Cabigas

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.
-Psalms 139:23-24

We long for intimacy, for someone to know us so well they can anticipate our every move and finish our sentences. And when they see our dark sides and still love us, it's even better. But in human relationships, we curate what others see. There is always something left hidden.

With the Divine Creator, everything about us is already known because we were knit together in God's image. There is no escaping God's delight in us. But as much as we want God to care for us and watch over us, do we really want God in all our thoughts and actions?

When we are at our best, we reflect the Divine into the world. We accept our role in creating the peaceable kingdom. We like ourselves and believe we are worthy of love. But too often, we like hiding in the shadows, doing what we want to do. We like being anonymous in the crowd, thinking our actions don't really matter. And would we always be proud if God knew what we were going to say before we said it? Probably not.

We all struggle with the darkness in us and around us. When darkness surrounds us, it's easy to feel alone and disconnected from God. It's hard to know which way to go, so instead of moving

forward, we sit and lament. Luckily, God has excellent night vision, and even when it's too dark for us to see, the Light is there, waiting to offer comfort and guidance - a search light for our soul - getting us back on the way everlasting.

Prayer: O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know all my dark places, and yet you still love me. Help me to live in your love and follow your ways, because I am made in your image, fearfully and wonderfully made. Amen.

WEEK NINE (JUNE 7-13)

Day 159: June 7, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 4:1-5:23

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 3:21-35

There is no quicker way to “utter ruin” than our unwillingness to hear hard truths about ourselves, and a refusal to be corrected. Openness to critique is a discipline that draws the line between wisdom and wickedness. (Prov. 5:11-14) How might you be more open to helpful critique?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 160: June 8, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 6:1-7:27

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 8:1-11

Proverbs 6:16-19 names seven abominable sins. Considering and living out their opposites constitute the best way to live: humility, truthfulness, self-sacrifice, love, discipline, integrity, and peace making. What will you do to incorporate these virtues into your life?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 161: June 9, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 8:1-9:18

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 8:12-36

In these Proverbs, God's wisdom is personified as a person you should get to know. So just like starting any other relationship, getting to know God's wisdom requires being attentive, humble, eager to be in its presence and willing to be vulnerable and real. How can you get to know God better today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 162: June 10, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 10:1–11:31

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 9:1–18

Proverbs 10 starts the book's "Goofus and Gallant" section: each verse is a Do vs. Don't. It reminds us that the righteous life is a constant choice to honor God and not to honor self. A good example is from verse 12: "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses." Which of the "don't" qualities do you need to work on?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 163: June 11, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 12:1–13:25

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 10:1–13

Proverbs 12:16-26 is a master class on the power of speech. Words can do great harm, but they can also bring healing (v.18), joy (v.20), delight (v.22), cheer for the anxious (25), and good advice (26). How can your words be less like a sword and more like a salve (v.18)?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 164: June 12, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 14:1–35

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 10:14–32

Proverbs 12:13-15 gives three ways to honor God: Control your anger, Care for the poor, Conduct yourself with integrity. In other words: guard the emotions no one else can see, care for those no one else cares for and do good even if no one else is watching. Which of these areas do you need to work on the most?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 165: June 13, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 15:1–33

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 15:1–14

Proverbs 15 has seven practical insights for daily life: Don't be lazy, watch your words, be open to correction, don't be boastful, be slow to anger, be of good cheer. But most important: love is all that matters. How might you go "seven-for-seven" today.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

June 7–13, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Carleen Boyer

How is my life supposed to be lived? Am I wise? Am I foolish?

How can I develop skills for living well?

As usual, there are no simple answers in 2020, just as there were none when Proverbs was written.

Proverbs was written to help us understand human life, its problems, and its contradictions. In chapter 8, wisdom is personified as a woman named Wisdom. Giving wisdom human qualities helps us find a link between God and humans. The rich prose of Proverbs help us find the differences between wisdom and foolishness. The language contains carefully chosen words to convey ideas for us to live our lives.

Proverbs can be seen as a handbook of sound advice, a tradition from the Near East where writings can be found full of wise sayings. This book about goodness and justice gives us God's invitation to learn about a life aimed at making good choices, a life of virtue, integrity, and generosity. As Methodists, virtue, integrity and generosity are solid attributes of a life well-lived.

By the middle of the Book of Proverbs, it is clear that life is too complex for simple formulas. None of us will be perfect, but it helps to have a guide. At this point it is useful to remember and rely on the wisdom of John Wesley, as well.

Let us choose Wesley's rule as our prayer:

*Do all the good you can, by all the means you can
in all the ways you can, in all the places you can
to all the people you can, as long as you ever can. Amen*

WEEK TEN (JUNE 14–20)

Day 166: June 14, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 16:1–33

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 15:15–32

Pride, arrogance, haughtiness, and a boastful spirit are denounced throughout Proverbs. It's the opposite of a wise life, an abomination to God (16:15) and a precursor to destruction (16:18). Do a self-check today. How are you thinking too highly of yourself?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 167: June 15, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 17:1–18:24

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 17:1–11

Proverbs 17-18 has so many choice nuggets of wisdom: Forgiveness (17:9), Cheerfulness (17:22), Friendship (18:24). None to pay particular attention to is about empathy: “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.” (18:2) How can you better cultivate empathy in your relationships with others, particularly with those with whom you disagree?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 168: June 16, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 19:1–20:30

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 22:1–16

Proverbs 19-20 remind us of two key aspects of the good life: integrity and loyalty. Integrity is what you do when no one else is watching. (19:1, 20:7). Loyalty is what you do when everyone else depends on you (19:22, 20:6). How will you strengthen both qualities today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 169: June 17, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 21:1–22:29

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 22:17–29

Proverbs 22:1-4 offers the antidote to greed. “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches ... the reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.” Being honorable and humble, that is greater than riches and rewards.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 170: June 18, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 23:1–35

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 30:1–14

Proverbs 23 is a warning against two prominent temptations: 1) the allure of riches, (1-5) and 2) the allure of gluttony and drunkenness (29-35). Staying content, clean and sober is a key to the wise life. How strong are those temptations in your life, and what will you do about it?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 171: June 19, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 24:1–34

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 30:15–33

Proverbs 24 reminds us of the power of speech. We should be unafraid to speak hard truths to people who need to hear it (23-26) and refrain from speaking falsehoods about people, even if we feel they deserve it (28-29). How will you harness your speech for good, rather than for ill?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 172: June 20, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 25:1–26:28

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 31:1–9

Proverbs 26 denounces laziness (vs. 13-16) and stirring up strife (vs. 17-28), suggesting the two are related. It's a reminder that empathy, peacemaking, speaking truth lovingly and handling conflict in a healthy way are hard work. Anything less is laziness.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

June 14–20, 2020: Weekly Devotional by Mamie Wise

Proverbs 17:28 “Even fools who keep silent are considered wise; when they close their lips, they are deemed intelligent.”

When I was very young, one of my favorite activities was cooking with my grandmother in her kitchen. Just to the right of her kitchen sink was a small wrought-iron plaque with a quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln: “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt.”

As it turns out, this wisdom comes from Proverbs 17:28. My grandmother passed away when I was 12, but I think back about how she spoke so powerfully against injustice and in defiance of barriers. She spoke against men who didn't want to treat her as an equal and encouraged those in the community who were often overlooked.

As an adult, her kitchen quote has stuck with me. For such an outspoken lady, what must she have been thinking about but did not say? If she had not been guided by this Proverbial wisdom, how might I have looked back at what she said differently – would I have remembered words said in frustration, or anger, or sheer lack of understanding rather than the words I do remember?

God understands our words, how what we speak has an influence on others in the moment and for generations to come. They can build or challenge our relationships, with others and with God.

Prayer: God, guide me in times when it is wisest to speak and when it is wisest to keep silent.

WEEK ELEVEN (JUNE 21–27)

Day 173: June 21, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 27:1–29:27

Abbreviated Plan: Proverbs 31:10–31

“Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.” (Prov. 27:17) We all need people who make us better and stronger in the faith simply by our being around them. Who are those people for you?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 174: June 22, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 30:1–33

Abbreviated Plan: Ecclesiastes 1:1–18

Proverbs 30:7-9 names the two most important things that we should pray for every day: 1) that we may live and speak truth, and 2) that we may have all we need, nothing more or less. Truth and contentment are pillars of wise living. How is that true for you?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 175: June 23, 2020

Full Plan: Proverbs 31:1–31

Abbreviated Plan: Ecclesiastes 9:1–18

Proverbs concludes with chapter 31 and the image of a household as a metaphor for the wise life. It is one that does good (12) is industrious (13) influential (16) strong (17) cares for the needy (20) and empowers others (23). What will you do to nurture these qualities for your own wise life?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 176: June 24, 2020

Full Plan: Ecclesiastes 1:1–2:26

Abbreviated Plan: Ecclesiastes 11:1–10

Ecclesiastes is a favorite biblical book for many people, as it serves as a counterweight to the altruism of Psalms and Proverbs, and names reality for what it is. That’s the best starting point for turning away from self and toward God. It’s not about us. How is that true for you?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 177: June 25, 2020

Full Plan: Ecclesiastes 3:1–5:20

Abbreviated Plan: Ecclesiastes 12:1–14

Ecclesiastes 3-5 reminds us that we cannot control time, cannot ignore the evils of the world, and cannot make it on our own. But we can make the most of our time, choose joy, and control our speech and actions.

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 178: June 26, 2020

Full Plan: Ecclesiastes 6:1–8:17

Abbreviated Plan: Song of Solomon 1:1–17

Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 reads like the beatitudes, in that it both names and normalizes the shadow side of life. Life isn't always easy, but we should not give up. The best we can do is face each day for what it is, and remember that it is good to be alive. What hope does that encouragement bring you?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

Day 179: June 27, 2020

Full Plan: Ecclesiastes 9:1–12:14

Abbreviated Plan: Song of Solomon 8:1–14

We consume so much time concerned about what may or may not happen. Suffering also can happen whether we deserve it or not. Ecclesiastes 9-12 reminds us that the best and only thing we can do is live fully in the moment. How will you live more fully in the moment today?

What God is revealing to me today, and how I will apply it to my life:

June 21–27, 2020: Weekly Devotion by Gary Uremovich

Solomon wrote three incredible books including the Book of Proverbs, the Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes. He is communicating wisdom, romantic love, and life-truths. What an amazing (and complicated) ruler! What happened between the two very beautiful and insightful books and the book of Ecclesiastes. In this book, we see a broken man - all of his fame and possessions 'under the sun' provided no sense of fulfillment.

Solomon knew how to use words! In Proverbs 29:20 he says "Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him."

I have taught this book in a group a couple of times. I had never heard of this book being 'comforting'! But it is! Solomon had everything and pursued getting more. This did not bring joy. We need to avoid chasing the wind since everything under the sun is a mere vapor. Things, fame, and even achievements just don't bring a sense of fulfillment. At the end of his life he sees that clearly. He has failed the Lord in committing idolatry and will lose his kingdom.

In the first 11 verses we see Solomon using 'I, me, myself...'. 40 times. In verse 11 he concludes that 'all was vanity and striving after the wind.' A self-centered life is an empty life - despite possessions, wealth and fame. Solomon had it all! Yet, in the end it was empty. A rewarding and joyful life is always focused on the eternal - God AND people are eternal.

If all you have is what can be bought or earned 'under the sun' then life is a dreary struggle. The rich man never has enough, the attractive person fears the inevitable fading of beauty, the owner of vast amounts knows that someone will take it over once they are gone (and perhaps squander it). It's not life under the sun that brings fulfillment - but real life in the Son.

Prayer: God, help me to focus on the things that really matter.

