

MAY 2023

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May 1, 2023
Humility

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 7, 1 Chronicles 17, Psalms 1-2, 33, 127, 132](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

Humility is the crown of all character traits. It helps us maintain proper perspective. It keeps us in our proper position before the Lord. It is the key to living a joyful, peaceful Christian life. David was a humble man. At least at this point in his life. When God rejects David's plan to build Him a Temple and instead tells David that He will build David a house, David immediately responds with humble prayer. "Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family that you have brought me this far?" (1 Samuel 7:18b NLT) Some might argue David's getting the better end of the deal here so of course he submits but that's not totally the case. Temples in the ancient world were symbols of divine power and authority. They granted divine sanction to the rule of kings. There is a loss here for David that's fairly significant in that he will not enjoy the same kind of "divine right of kingship" that many of his peers would in other cultures. At the same time, David is wise enough and humble enough to realize his "divine right" doesn't come from a building but from the Lord. He expresses complete confidence in God as the one who would "build" David's house. "And now, O Lord God, I am your servant; do as you have promised concerning me and my family. Confirm it as a promise that will last forever." (1 Samuel 7:25 NLT) Not only that but David looks beyond himself to the true purposes behind God's plans. It's not to make David great but to make the name of the Lord great among the nations. This is why God is going to bless the household of David. "And may your name be honored for ever so that everyone will say, "The Lord of Heaven's Armies is God over Israel!" (1 Samuel 7:26 NLT)

What is godly humility? It is first and foremost a recognition of our position before God. We are mere mortals. Our lives are like the grass that withers and fades away. We are forgotten within a generation or two. All that we accomplish in this life turns to dust pretty quickly. God, on the other hand, is the sovereign Lord of the universe. He holds all of life in His hands. He stands outside of time and space. He reigns in glory forever. There is truly none like God. Not in heaven. Not on earth. Not under the earth. Not in the past. Not in the present. Not in the future. God alone is worthy of all worship and adoration and reverence and awe for He is holy and awesome in power. Second, humility is expressed in our complete confidence that God will do what He has promised. David believed God when He said He would make David's name great and build him a dynasty that would last for all generations. Like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, Moses, Joshua, and all those who had come before him, David trusted God and it was credited to him as righteousness. He had full confidence that God was able to do what He had promised. Finally, humility never seeks to elevate self. It never engages in self-promotion. It never seeks attention. It always looks beyond itself to the true object of our devotion which is God Himself. The truly humble person places themselves in God's hands to use as He sees fit for His glorious purposes in the world. They are willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of God's mission in the world so that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

This begs the question...how does one become humble? How does one cultivate a spirit of humility? Psalm 1:2 gives us the answer. "They delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night." If you want to become a humble person before the Lord, the way to do it is to spend time in His Word every day. "Thrilling to God's Word", as Eugene Peterson says so beautifully in the Message, "Chewing on Scripture day and night."

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 8-9, 1 Chronicles 18

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May 2, 2023
Promise Keeper

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 8-9, 1 Chronicles 18](#) [\(audio reading\)](#)

David was a promise keeper. He promised his friend Jonathan that he would show kindness to his descendants. He took a vow that he would bless his children should he be given the opportunity. After years of being hunted by Jonathan's father, David now rules over a united Israel. The temptation so many face in his position is the potential threats posed by the family members of the former king who might lay claim to the throne. Many in David's position would either kill or banish potential rivals. We see it happen all the time around the world even to this day. David, however, operated by a different set of values. When given the chance, he sought out anyone left in Saul's family in order to show them kindness. This included a lowly, orphaned, crippled, almost forgotten young man named Mephibosheth. Unable to go to war with his father and grandfather, he had to rely on the generosity of others in order to survive. David lifts him up and treats him like a prince. He gives him all the property of King Saul and invites him into the royal court. Even welcomes him at the king's table! This act of kindness fulfilled his vow to his dear friend and I'm sure brought joy to David's heart.

David had so many reasons NOT to keep his promise. Circumstances had changed. His responsibilities had grown exponentially. The decisions he made impacted not just himself but an entire kingdom. Political expediency suggested he secure his kingdom by eliminating any potential threats both internally and externally. I am sure David received counsel to kill every one of Saul's remaining family members. But David trusted God. He knew God was the source of his power and authority. He knew God had raised him up to the throne. He knew God would protect him and keep him. And because he had full confidence that God would keep His promises, he was set free to keep his promises as well no matter the potential cost.

This is the key to keeping our promises. If we trust God is in control, we don't need to be anxious. We don't need to be afraid. We don't need to worry or fret over "what if." If we believe God is faithful, we are set free to make promises and keep promises. We are set free to honor our word even if it costs us something. We are set free to walk with integrity no matter how difficult it may be. With God at our right hand, we will not fall. He will not let our foot be moved nor will He let us slip. He is our strength. He is our wisdom. He is our guide. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5)

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 10, 1 Chronicles 19, Psalms 20, 53, 60, 75

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May 3, 2023
Suspicion

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 10, 1 Chronicles 19, Psalms 20, 53, 60, 75 (audio reading)

Human beings can tend to be naturally suspicious. Especially those who have been hurt before. It is hard to earn trust and when it is lost, it is almost impossible to regain. There is an old Nigerian proverb that says, “Any animal that escapes from a trap will be suspicious of every bent stick.” This rings to true to me especially in our culture today. The rise of social media has led to an exponential increase in bullying and abusive behavior. The hurt and pain so many suffer online bleeds over into their everyday relationships. It creates a posture where we assume the worst rather than the best of each other. We question each other’s motives and/or character rather than offer trust. We are quick to pounce on mistakes rather than extend grace. The result is a toxic emotional system which perpetuates pain and suffering on a local, national, even global scale.

There is nothing new under the sun. In our reading for today, King David reaches out to King Hanun of the Ammonites to offer his condolences after his father dies. Sadly, Hanun is deeply insecure and perceives a threat where there is none. In an effort of self-protection, he shames David’s messengers and sends them back home. This represents a significant act of aggression in the Ancient Near East so David goes to war. He defeats the Ammonites in a major battle that costs the lives of thousands of soldiers. All because one man reacted with suspicion to a compassionate gesture.

In one of my favorite all time passages, the Apostle Paul writes, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” (1 Corinthians 13:7-8a ESV) Those who are in Christ are set free from a life of suspicion. We are set free from a life of caution and distrust. We are set free from the burden of being guarded and self-protective. We are set free to love. Love unconditionally. Love generously. Love sacrificially just as Jesus did. And as the Apostle John so famously said, “Perfect love casts out all fear.” So let me challenge you to set aside any and all of your suspicions. Step into the freedom Christ won for you on the cross. Step into the freedom Christ offers you through His Spirit. Embrace the way of love and watch how it changes your relationships with those you love and the world around you.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 65-67, 69-70

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May 4, 2023
God's Provision

Readings for today: Psalms 65-67, 69-70 (audio reading)

I have seen plenty and I have seen want in my life. I've had seasons where my bank account was full and times where it was empty. I've had years where I made plenty of money and was able to provide abundantly for my family and years where I've needed public assistance to feed them. I've seen both ends of the economic spectrum. I've moved up and down the levels of our economic system. Here's what I've discovered to be true...God provides. He provides what we need in the time we need it. Maybe not more than we need but never less than what we need. Maybe not what we want or desire but enough for us to make it through another day.

Ancient Israel was an agrarian society. As such, they depended on the harvests each year to provide them with food. They worked hard. They were faithful to till the ground. Plant the fields. Do what they could to tear up the weeds or chase away the animals who might steal their crop. But as any farmer knows, there's only so much one can do. Ultimately, there are so many things outside our control. The sun. The rain. The health of the soil. These things can only come from God. This is why David sings Psalm 65. It's a song celebrating the bountiful harvest. It's a song of praise to God the provider. It's a song declaring the goodness of God the creator.

All your salvation wonders are on display in your trophy room. Earth-Tamer, Ocean-Pourer, Mountain-Maker, Hill-Dresser, Muzzler of the sea storm and wave crash - of mobs in noisy riot - far and wide they'll come to a stop, they'll stare in awe, in wonder. Dawn and dusk take turns calling, "Come and worship." (Psalm 65:5b-8 MSG)

"You take care of the earth and water it, making it rich and fertile. The river of God has plenty of water; it provides a bountiful harvest of grain, for you have ordered it so. You drench the ploughed ground with rain, melting the clods and leveling the ridges. You soften the earth with showers and bless its abundant crops. You crown the year with a bountiful harvest; even the hard pathways overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the wilderness become a lush pasture, and the hillsides blossom with joy. The meadows are clothed with flocks of sheep, and the valleys carpeted with grain. They all shout and sing for joy!" (Psalm 65:9-13 NLT)

"The river of God has plenty of water." I love that line. I've experienced it in my own life. No matter how much I've struggled or how far I've fallen or how little I may have, God always provides. His river is always flowing, providing what I need. Sometimes it feels like a trickle but it gets me through. Sometimes it feels like a torrent and I am overwhelmed by its abundance. Most of the time, I find it to be a slow, meandering stream constantly refreshing my soul.

In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman. She lives on the edges of society. Marginalized due to life's circumstances and her own sin. She is desperately thirsty so she comes to the well for water and there she meets Jesus. What does he offer her? Living water. Water from an endless supply. Water that never runs dry. "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst - not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life." (John 4:13-14 MSG) Friends, come to the waters Jesus offers and let Him provide for your thirsty soul.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 11-12, 1 Chronicles 20, Psalm 51

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May 5, 2023
Sexual Abuse

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 11-12, 1 Chronicles 20, Psalm 51 (audio reading)

It is estimated by the World Health Organization that 1/3 of women worldwide are victims of sexual abuse. A 2017 poll taken by ABC News and the Washington post reports that 54% of American women have reported receiving unwanted and inappropriate sexual advances, most of which are never addressed. Sexual abuse and harassment seemingly impact every sector of society from Hollywood to major media outlets to corporations to our government to the church. Every case is tragic. Every case is heartbreaking. Frankly, a reckoning is long overdue especially for the church. For far too long, the church has protected clergy who abuse or who tolerate abuse. High profile cases in the Roman Catholic Church are matched by similar high profile cases in the Protestant world such as Hillsong, Sovereign Grace, Bill Hybels, etc. In my own denomination, I have led commissions to remove five different pastors for various forms of sexual abuse over the years. Though necessary, I hated every moment of the work. I hated what it did to the victims. I hated what it did to the congregations. I hated what it did to the pastor's spouse and children. The fallout from these situations is incredible and far-reaching.

The story of David and Bathsheba is perhaps one of the most famous stories of sexual abuse in the Scriptures. David, flush with his success on the battlefield and drunk on his own power and privilege, decides to stay home rather than head off to war like most kings in his position. As he stands on the roof, proudly overlooking all he has accomplished, he catches a glimpse of the beautiful Bathsheba bathing beneath him. His heart fills with lust. He covets this beautiful woman and who's around to stop him? The army is off at war. Her husband is one of David's mighty men which suggests David knew Bathsheba already. Perhaps this was a secret desire he'd been entertaining for years? He calls for her. Commands her to come. With her life on the line, she obeys and conceives a child from their one night stand. Now comes the coverup. David sends for Uriah but Uriah refuses to cooperate. So David orchestrates his murder. Then, to top it off, he takes Bathsheba into his harem.

It's a horrible story. One we cannot and should not reduce to a morality tale. Bathsheba is raped. Uriah murdered. A child dies. All because of David's insatiable lust and appetite for power. Left to his own devices, David might have gotten away with it. But God was watching. God is always watching. "For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun." (2 Samuel 12:12) God sends Nathan the prophet, David's own brother you'll remember, to confront him. Nathan risks his life to stand up to David. Call him out. Expose his sin.

A few years ago, legendary Bible teacher Beth Moore penned a poignant essay on her blog about her experiences with men over the years. It's a heartbreaking read. She shared how it felt to be dismissed, ignored, put down, disrespected, and objectified. Her words are honest. Direct. Fortright. She offers them in a spirit of Christ-like confrontation and love. They must be heard and she's not alone. There are women who occupy the pews every Sunday who've had similar experiences and they too must be heard. Their stories must be shared. And men who occupy places of privilege and power must humble themselves to listen and to repent if necessary.

What would such repentance look like? Psalm 51. These are David's own words as he falls on his face before the Lord and confesses his sin. It acknowledges our brokenness. Acknowledges our sin. Begs God for a clean heart and a right spirit. These are sacrifices God will never despise.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 32, 86, 102-103, 122

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May 6, 2023
Distorted Self-Image

Readings for today: Psalms 32, 86, 102-103, 122 (audio reading)

The more I spend time with people, the more I am convinced that so much of our pain and heartache and struggle is because we do not truly understand who we are. We have a distorted self-image. We look in the mirror and we are blind to the true nature of the person looking back at us. This is why reading and re-reading the Bible is so important. Within the pages of this precious book, God teaches us the deepest truths about ourselves. And just in case you need a refresher, the narrative runs something like this...

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) You and I were designed to live in a world of perfection. A paradise called Eden. We were made in the image of God so that we might show forth the glory of God. We were given dominion and authority and power to rule over all God has made as a kind of vice-regent or undershepherd.

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” (Psalms 51:5) We abandoned our vocation. We rebelled against God. We aspired to be gods ourselves. In so doing, the image of God was marred. Corrupted. Poisoned. Every single human being since Adam and Eve’s fall has been born in brokenness. Born in sin. Conceived in iniquity. From the moment the sperm fertilizes the egg, we are lost.

“Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3) We are lost but we are not hopeless! Out of love, the Father sent His only Son into the world that whosoever would believe in Him would not perish in their sin. All who believe in Christ are born again. Born a second time. This time of the Spirit.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) Being born of the Spirit literally changes our DNA. Changes the fundamental reality of our existence. Gives us a new nature. A new heart. A heart of flesh sensitive to the leading of God to replace the heart of stone that was so rebellious and resistant. The image of God is now restored. Our vocation renewed. The commission re-issued. Go. Make disciples of all nations. Baptize. Teach. Fill the earth. Subdue. Have dominion. Share my glory with all of creation.

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.” (1 Corinthians 15:52) The final promise. Jesus will come again. On the last day, a trumpet shall sound. The heavens will open. The dead will rise. And we shall be changed from one degree of glory to another. The imperfect shall be made perfect. The perishable shall be made imperishable. Sin and death will be destroyed. Eternity sets in. We are home.

This is the fundamental worldview of the Psalmist. It’s the fundamental narrative they are singing about though the revelation of Jesus as Messiah still lies far off in the future. They trust in the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Father to bring about His will on the earth. They also understand this side of heaven that we are broken, sinful, corrupt creatures in desperate need of God’s grace. And grace only comes as we confess. As we repent. It’s more than feeling bad. More than feeling guilty. More than feeling ashamed. It’s about turning from our sin. Turning towards God. Making the necessary changes in our lives in response to all God has done for us. “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,

whose sin is covered...I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." (Psalms 32:1, 5)

What do you need to confess today? Where have you fallen short? Where do you feel enslaved? Afflicted? Ashamed? Guilty? In what areas of your life has the Spirit brought conviction? Is it your thoughts? Attitudes? Actions? Feelings? The life of a believer in Jesus is one of constant confession as we come before the Lord acknowledging our sin, receiving His grace, and learn to follow in His ways. Does this mean we should live our lives in constant guilt? Live our lives in constant shame? Absolutely not! God's love is everlasting! His promises are sure! "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Psalms 103:11-12) Cling to the love of God, sinner! Let His love be the cornerstone of your life! Let His grace set you free! Trust in His faithfulness to save you from depths of your sin!

Readings for tomorrow: None

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May 8, 2023
Cycles of Revenge

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 13-15 (audio reading)

“An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.” - Gandhi

“Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.” - Leviticus 24:20

The principle of proportional justice cited by Gandhi comes straight out of the Old Testament from passages like the one in Leviticus. It's specifically designed by God to bring an end to the perpetual cycles of violence and revenge that plagued the ancient world. Insults were met with assault. Assaults met with murders. Murder met with the elimination of entire families. The elimination of families led to open warfare between tribes. These are generational cycles in honor/shame cultures. The next generation shouldering the responsibility to restore the honor of their family by taking revenge on those who wounded their fathers and mothers.

We see a similar dynamic play out in the stories we read today. David led a highly dysfunctional family. He played favorites. Indulged the children he liked and ignored the children he despised. Mostly he appears to be an absentee father who seems consumed with running the Kingdom of Israel rather than securing his succession and teaching his children to fear the Lord. The results are tragic. Amnon rapes his sister. Absalom assassinates Amnon. David effectively exiles Absalom. Absalom leads a rebellion to overthrow his father, dragging the entire country into war. At every point, there are opportunities to choose a different path. Amnon could have asked David for Tamar's hand in marriage. David could have brought Amnon to justice for the rape of his sister. David could have chosen reconciliation after Absalom's exile had ended. Absalom could have chosen the path of peace rather than war against his father. Sadly, the desire for revenge got the best of them which led to all kinds of horrific consequences for them, their families, their communities, and the nation.

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matthew 5:38-39) The path Jesus offers is the path of non-violent resistance. He challenges his followers to break the cycles of revenge that so often enslave us and instead claim the moral high ground. He challenges them to overcome evil with good. Violence with peace. Hatred with love. There may not be a more radical teaching in all of Scripture! It would almost be too much except for the fact that Jesus Himself models this ethic in his suffering and death. Refusing to lift a hand against his oppressors. Refusing to call down legions of angels to fight on his behalf. Asking for forgiveness for us rather than revenge from the cross all because He trusted in His Father's higher, greater plan. Do we trust God in this same way in our own lives?

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 3-4, 13, 28, 55

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May 9, 2023
God Listens

Readings for today: Psalms 3-4, 13, 28, 55 (audio reading)

Today's Psalms contain precious promises for the believer. They are a reminder that we can always turn to God in our time of need. He is a very present help in times of trouble. He is with us always even to the end of the age. He draws near to the broken-hearted and crushed in spirit. He doesn't stand apart from us when we grieve or mourn or cry out in pain. Listen again to just a few of the verses. Let these words sink deep into your soul today.

"But you, God, shield me on all sides; You ground my feet, you lift my head high; With all my might I shout up to God, His answers thunder from the holy mountain. I stretch myself out. I sleep. Then I'm up again—rested, tall and steady, Fearless before the enemy mobs Coming at me from all sides."
(Psalms 3:3-6 MSG)

"Why is everyone hungry for more? "More, more," they say. "More, more." I have God's more-than-enough, More joy in one ordinary day." (Psalms 4:6-7a MSG)

"Blessed be God—he heard me praying. He proved he's on my side; I've thrown my lot in with him. Now I'm jumping for joy, and shouting and singing my thanks to him. God is all strength for his people, ample refuge for his chosen leader; Save your people and bless your heritage. Care for them; carry them like a good shepherd." (Psalms 28:6-9 MSG)

Recently, I was talking to some friends about how when the pace of life ramps up on the outside, we need to slow down on the inside. When the exterior life is running and gunning, we need our interior life to slow down so we can experience the strength and peace of God. My life right now is pretty crazy. I lead a large church. I have national responsibilities with my denomination. I teach seminary. I just got back from training church planters in Africa and serve on the board of the ministry. Even more importantly, I am a husband and a father. Though my children are older, they still need my help at various times. My parents are aging and my father has been in and out of the hospital recently. So life is pretty full right now. At times, I feel overwhelmed. When I feel overwhelmed, it's a great reminder to slow my interior life down and spend even more time with the Lord in silence and solitude and quiet reflection. When I do, He fills me with His strength. He fills me with His wisdom. He energizes me for every task. He helps me be fully present in every moment.

God listens to our prayers. Such a simple and yet deeply profound statement. God hears our cries. God is engaged in our lives. God knows our needs. God is good and faithful and true. He is dependable and gives His children good gifts if they will but seek Him. Whatever is going in your life today, cry out to the Lord! Wait patiently on Him to answer your prayers and give you what you need to make it through every moment of every day.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 16-18

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May 10, 2023
The Cost of Unforgiveness

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 16-18 (audio reading)

Refusing to forgive someone always comes at a cost. The cost of intimacy when one holds a grudge against another. The cost of a relationship if the wound is too deep. The cost of a future you might have had with that person. The cost of peace as an entire family or community is disrupted.

We see the bitter cost of unforgiveness on display in our story today. The most obvious, of course, is the cost to Israel over David's unwillingness to forgive Absalom and Absalom's unwillingness to forgive in return. Their bitterness turns to open warfare, resulting in a civil war that will cost thousands of lives. However, buried deep within in this passage is another story of unforgiveness that factors into the equation. It's the story of Ahithophel. I've always wondered why this man saddles his donkey, rides home, and commits suicide after his advice is not taken. It seems like such an extreme reaction. But when one digs deep, one finds an answer potentially revealing itself. In the list of David's mighty men from 2 Samuel 23, we meet Ahithophel's son. His name is Eliam. Eliam is listed in the same list as Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba's first husband. The plot thickens when we read in 2 Samuel 11:3 that Bathsheba is the daughter of Eliam. If it is indeed the same Eliam, this means he gave his daughter Bathsheba to his friend and comrade in arms, Uriah, in marriage thus signaling the closeness of their relationship. Now imagine you are Ahithophel and you are watching the events of the last few chapters unfold, helpless to intervene. You watch as your king - the king you have loved and served your entire life - rapes your granddaughter and murders her husband. You've most likely had to console your son in his rage and grief. Is it any wonder he joined the rebellion against David? And then when his counsel is not followed and he becomes convinced he will not be able to avenge the honor of his family, he goes home and takes his own life.

It's a tragedy on Shakespearean levels. All because the parties involved refused to break the cycle of violence and shame and unforgiveness. Now I think about the many examples I see in my own life. Thankfully, they don't reach the kind of level that David and Absalom's or David and Ahithophel's conflict reached. They don't result in the death of thousands or a civil war but they do result in the death of marriages. The death of friendships. The death of small groups. The death of churches. I've watched as hurt, pain, disappointment, and unmet expectations turn into deep wounds that refuse to heal as both parties continue to withhold the forgiveness God demands. I've watched the bitterness and anger build until one party has to separate or leave or file or walk away. It's never clean and never easy. The brokenness is often perpetuated in future relationships because when we refuse to forgive, we become enslaved to our pain. The pain of David would mark the rest of his reign, resulting in him giving his son Solomon a hit list as he lie on his death bed of people to kill. All because he refused to forgive.

What about you today? Who do you need to forgive? Who have you been withholding forgiveness from? Where do you need to let go of bitterness and anger and release the grudge you are carrying? In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to ask God to "forgive us our sins AS we forgive the sins of others." Our experience of God's forgiveness is intimately tied to the forgiveness we offer others. Trust the Lord. Follow His way. Extend forgiveness to those who've hurt you and be set free.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 26, 40-41, 58, 61-62, 64

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May 11, 2023
Life with God

Readings for today: Psalms 26, 40-41, 58, 61-62, 64 (audio reading)

“Let all that I am wait quietly before God...” (Psalm 62:5a NLT) This is the secret to the abundant, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life. Let all that I am. Everything I am. Body. Mind. Heart. Soul. All that I have and all I possess. All my hopes and dreams for the future. All my experiences from the past. All my relationships. All my achievements. All my failures. All my struggles. I take all that I am - the good, bad, and ugly - lay it before the Lord and wait quietly for Him. And what then can I expect from Him in return?

He will be my hope...I will place my hope not in the things of this world. Not in achieving some degree of success. Not in achieving the American Dream or the good life however I define it. Not in marrying the Mr. or Mrs. Right. Not in having perfect kids who earn scholarships to college and make straight A's. Not in early retirement. No, my hope will rest in God. The One who created me and formed me and fashioned me and holds my life and my future in His hands.

He will be my rock...I will depend on Him. The only truly dependable thing in this life or the next. People may let me down or disappoint me. Expectations may go unmet. Dreams unfulfilled. Achievement may remain elusive. The stock market crash. Life not turn out how I expected. But God will always be there. He remains immovable and unshakeable and I can always trust in Him.

He will be my salvation...I am not at the mercy of my circumstances. I am not at the mercy of my addictions, compulsions, or predilections. I am not at the mercy of my genetics. I am not at the mercy of the principalities and powers of this dark world. I am not a victim. God has saved me. God has rescued me. He has set me delivered me from the power of sin and death and the devil. He has set me free from the cares and worries of this world. He has transferred me from the oppression and injustice of the kingdoms of darkness into His marvelous light. This world has nothing for me and so cannot touch me.

He will be my fortress...when I struggle. When I suffer. When I hurt. When I am wounded. When I despair. God becomes my refuge. God becomes my sanctuary. God becomes my stronghold. A place where no enemy can reach me. His door is always open to me. His tender kindness is always there for me. His mercies are new every morning. His faithfulness lasts for a lifetime. He holds my life in His hands. I shall never be moved. No enemy can assail me in God's presence. No enemy can accuse me in God's presence. In His presence even the hardest and most difficult parts of my life become part of the unique glory He is revealing in me as I share in the sufferings of Christ.

“O my people, trust in Him at all times. Pour out your heart to Him for God is our refuge.” (Psalm 62:8 NLT) If we believe the promises of these Psalms, it becomes easy to trust in God. Quite natural to pour out our hearts to Him. No matter what you may be going through today or in this season of your life, place yourself intentionally in God's presence. Wait quietly for Him. Let Him be your refuge and strength and hope and joy.

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 19-21, Psalms 5, 38, 42

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May 12, 2023
Tribal Rivalries

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 19-21, Psalms 5, 38, 42 (audio reading)

Human beings are a tribal people. We tend to take our stand with those closest to us - our family or clan - against those who are distant from us. The Somali's have a proverb that says, "Me against my brother. My brother and I against my family. My family and I against my clan. My clan and I against my tribe. My tribe and I against my nation. My nation and I against the world." This rings true to me and not just in places like Africa or the Middle East where ethnic tribal loyalties have been a part of life for thousands of years. We see it in America as well where we tend to gather with our political "tribe" or social "tribe." We will do anything to protect our tribe, including the use of ungodly means to achieve our tribe's ends. Every day I watch as people intentionally use deception or anger or verbal abuse or violence against those who are not of their tribe. They shade the truth. Leave out facts. Ratchet up the hate. Assume the worst. Attack their enemy. And tragically, it sometimes instigates or results in violent acts.

Nothing is new under the sun. David and his son Absalom fight a civil war. Though brief, it shatters the peace of a nation. The seeds of disunity are sown. The twelve tribes of Israel - once united under a Davidic kingship - now find themselves at odds with each other. Jealousy over who has the better claim on David creates fractures. Harsh words are exchanged, resulting in a second rebellion under a man named Sheba. Once again, lives are lost. People are murdered as political loyalties shift amidst the chaos. Topping it all off is the somewhat strange story of the Gibeonites. You may remember, Israel had taken an oath not to hurt them during the conquest. Saul in his misplaced zeal had tried to wipe them out. This created generational bloodguilt that needed atonement. In ancient near east culture, sin carried communal consequences. Justice could potentially be delayed for generations. It wasn't just the individual who was held accountable but the whole family or clan or tribe or community. In this particular case, David seeks out the descendants of Saul and hands them over to the Gibeonites. They are executed before the Lord in order to atone for the bloodguilt of the household of Saul. Eye for an eye. Tooth for a tooth.

We may not understand why the ancient Israelites prosecuted justice in this way. We are thousands of years removed from their world but we too have our own issues with justice. We too struggle with the communal consequences of sin. How else can we explain the generational tension that exists between different ethnicities in our country? The genocide of the indigenous tribes. The chattel slavery of African-Americans. The gang warfare between different European groups. The indentured servitude of the Chinese. The internment of the Japanese during WWII. The list is long. And though we have made progress when it comes to equal rights, we have yet to fully atone for our sin. We have yet to extend forgiveness. We have yet to engage in a process of truth and reconciliation. This is why the tensions persist, stoked by those who are invested in keeping the conflict alive.

So where do we go for healing? Where can our nation go for healing? We must return to the Lord. Like David says in his Psalms, "I will put my hope in God! I will praise Him again- my Savior and my God!" (Psalm 42:11 NLT)

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 22-23, Psalm 57

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May 13, 2023
No One is an Island

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 22-23, Psalm 57 (audio reading)

President Harry Truman once said, “It’s amazing what you can accomplish when you don’t care who gets the credit.” Truer words were never spoken. Over the course of my life, I’ve had seasons where I tried to do it all myself. Tried to achieve it all myself. Tried to shoulder the burden all myself. Tried to hoard all the credit for myself. Those are some of the worst seasons of my life. Seasons where I experienced burnout and depression and frustration and anger. Seasons where I was exhausted and on the verge of giving up. Those seasons fed the unhealthy “hero complex” that lurks inside me, a vestige of growing up as the oldest child in an alcoholic home, and it threatens to poison everything I do. Thankfully, God confronted me years ago through a wise and discerning counselor. He told me clearly that He “opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” and He challenged me to embrace obscurity, anonymity, and insignificance. To let go of my need to be the best. To let go of my need for recognition. To let go of my need to perform or appear perfect. He charged me with celebrating those around me. Lifting others up. Decreasing so that others might increase. Taking the lowest place so that I might rejoice as those around me might be loved more than I, esteemed more than I, and preferred over me in all things. The result? A profound sense of personal freedom. The building up of the church into the community she was designed and created by God to be. Greater Kingdom impact through those I’ve been able to equip, encourage, help, and celebrate over the years.

I imagine David must have felt the same way. It’s why he made sure to give credit where it was due. First and foremost to God. 2 Samuel 22 is a beautiful song of praise declaring the wonders and glories of God. David takes no credit for himself for his life. He gives it all to God. He understands it was God who lifted him up out of the shepherds fields. It was God who gave him victory after victory in his life. It was God who anointed him king and made him ruler over Israel. It was God who made his name great and secured a future for his household. Secondly, David understood none of what had taken place would have been possible without the strong leaders God put around him. The Three. The Thirty. The mighty men who accomplished incredible feats of valor and led his armies in battle. Without them, David would have been nothing. David would have come to nothing. So he makes sure to spread the credit around. He makes sure their names are recorded in the history books so they are never forgotten. He even chronicles some of their most famous exploits, deeds that rival his own. David is clearly in a humble place here at the end of his life.

What about you? Do you give credit to God for all He has done in your life or do you believe your achievements are due to your own strength, talent, and wisdom? Do you honor God for all He has given you or do you hoard the credit for yourself? When people take a glance at your social media feeds or engage in conversation with you or observe the way you act; what do they see? Someone who’s all about self-promotion? Or someone who deflects and gives glory to God and others? Do you find yourself clinging to titles and position and authority? Or do you leverage your influence in service to others? Do you celebrate those around you? Constantly lifting them up? Or do you remain silent as those around you get the credit? Jesus once said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.” Is that how you understand your life? Is that how you understand your calling from God?

No one is an island unto themselves. No one accomplishes or achieves on their own. The cultural idea that we each have to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps is nonsense. It’s a myth. All of us have

help along the way and the humble man or woman readily shares the credit with God and with those around them.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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May 15, 2023
Praise the Lord

Readings for today: Psalms 97-99 (audio reading)

Today's Psalms are songs of praise. They declare the truth that God is king over all the earth. He is the sovereign ruler of the universe. As such, He deserves our praise. He deserves our thanksgiving. He is worthy of all honor and glory. His name is above every name. Because He is good and just and righteous, we can trust Him. We can submit to Him. We can gladly give our hearts to Him.

It's impossible to overstate the utter uniqueness of the Jewish - and later, Christian - view of God. Human beings have always worshipped gods. The earliest records of Homo Sapiens found deep in caverns across the globe depict humans engaged in worship. We worship animals. We worship the weather. We worship nature. We worship each other. We make up names for these gods. We create elaborate rituals to appease these gods. They are capricious and arbitrary. Often cruel and malicious. They are selfish and greedy for their own gain. In short, we make gods in our own image. Gods that reflect what we know of human behavior. It's all we can understand.

The great 20th century rabbi, Abraham Heschel, once described the Scriptures not as man's search for God but God's search for man. This is what sets Judaism and Christianity apart. We didn't create God, He created us. We didn't make God in our image, He made us in His own image. We didn't seek God or find God or discover God, He revealed Himself to us. He has come to us over and over again throughout history starting all the way back with a guy named Abraham and then culminating in the Person of Jesus Christ. The Word made flesh and blood. Over the course of thousands of years, as God interacted with humanity, He revealed His nature and character. He showed Himself to be good and just and righteous and trustworthy. He is the source of all wisdom and power. He reigns sovereign over all He has made. He sits on His throne as judge and king over all the earth. And this is why we praise Him. This is why we compose new songs to sing to Him. This is why rejoice in the Lord and all He has done for us. This is why we love Him.

One of the most important things we can do as we seek to cultivate a deep, intimate prayer life is learn to praise God. Praise God for who He is and all He has done. Praise God for the ways He has impacted our lives and blessed us with every spiritual blessing. As we learn to praise God, giving Him the honor and glory due His name, we find our hearts lifted up. Our souls find rest. Our minds are at peace. For we know God is still sitting on His throne. There is never a moment He is not in charge. And because He is a good and righteous and just and loving God, we can trust Him. We can trust Him with our lives. We can trust Him with our families. We can trust Him with our needs, wants, and desires. We can trust Him with our future. This is why we praise the Lord!

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 24, 1 Chronicles 21-22, Psalm 30

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May 16, 2023
The Problem with Popularity

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 24, 1 Chronicles 21-22, Psalm 30 (audio reading)

More and more studies are being conducted measuring the impact of social media on our mental health. The results are scary. It is becoming clear that prolonged social media use presents like addiction with similar accompanying symptoms. (Neglect of personal life, mental preoccupation, escapism, etc.) When people attempt to stop using social media, they go through something akin to withdrawal. The more we use social media, the less happy we seem to be and the more socially isolated we become. The comparisons social media invites between our lives and those we are connected to is not good for our well-being. Furthermore, social media is specifically designed to trigger dopamine “highs” in the brain. Dopamine release is triggered by unpredictability, small bits of information that can be digested quickly, and most importantly, reward cues. (i.e. number of “likes” on FB, number of “followers” on Instagram, number of “retweets” on Twitter, etc.)

I think about the number of people I know who draw at least part of their self-worth off of the number of friends they have on Facebook. The number of times people hit the “heart” button on an Instagram pic. The number of retweets and “likes” a pithy phrase draws on Twitter or the number of “views” on a YouTube video. Young people seem especially susceptible. But it’s not just social media. I think of the number of church leaders I know who draw their self-worth off the number of people who show up on a weekend for worship. I think of the drive there is in most churches for numerical growth. I know some pastors who seem to live or die based on whether they make OutReach Magazine’s Top 100 list every year. I think of the uncritical assumptions too many Christians make that larger churches must be doing something “right” and smaller churches must be doing something “wrong.” Or they flip the script. I think of the number of folks I know who criticize large churches simply because they’re large. I can’t tell you the number of conversations I’ve been in over the years where such criticisms were leveled largely out of jealousy, envy, or spite.

Why are we so obsessed with numbers? Full transparency, it does seem to be a particularly American phenomenon. I travel the world fairly regularly. I’ve been to China, South Korea, Mexico, Ethiopia, Uganda, etc. I’ve interacted with pastors from all over in lots of different settings. In my experience, they just don’t seem as hung up as we are on numbers. That isn’t to say they ignore them. They pay attention. They evaluate. They are wise and discerning. But there isn’t the emotional attachment American Christians, and especially American pastors, seem to have with attendance, buildings, and budgets. It’s like we get a dopamine “high” every time the sanctuary’s full.

Perhaps this is why I find the story from 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21 so convicting. David wants to number his people. He wants to know the size of his army. He wants to measure his power. His influence. He wants to feel secure, safe, and in control. The images I have in my head are of third-world despots throwing military parades to show off their strength. David is clearly feeling insecure and in that moment, Satan strikes. He comes along and tempts David according to 1 Chronicles 21 and God allows it to happen according to 2 Samuel 24. The results are tragic. “Gad delivered the message to David: “Do you want three years of famine, three months of running from your enemies while they chase you down, or three days of the sword of God—an epidemic unleashed on the country by an angel of God? Think it over and make up your mind. What shall I tell the One who sent me?” (1 Chronicles 21:11-12 MSG) God is going to teach David a lesson in humility.

70,000 die from the plague. This is horrific and impossible to understand. How could God do such a thing? At the same time, we have to remember that such events take place at the mysterious intersection of God's will and human freedom. David's decision has consequences and because David is king, the consequences impact his people. The same is true for us today. The decisions our politicians make impact real people in real life and can cause real pain and suffering. David decides to number his fighting men and around the same time, a plague begins. It is brutal. Virulent. And it kills. Somewhere in David's mind, in the prophet Gad's mind, probably in Joab's mind and the minds of so many others, these events are related. The plague is perceived as God's punishment on Israel for David's sinful choices. And perhaps it is. We cannot dismiss the possibility out of hand for God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. He has clearly told His people over and over again that there are consequences...real, life-threatening consequences...for sin. God's justice and righteousness will not be mocked.

So how do we respond to such a text? First and foremost, it should lead us to humble confession. Repentance. It should call to mind all the times we too have placed our faith in numbers or our mental health and well-being in the number of likes we get from social media. We are not immune. So we confess our sin before the Lord. Second, it should lead us to the cross. To the place where the penalty for our sin was paid. To the place where God's judgment was fully and completely and utterly satisfied by the death of our Lord. We are not condemned. We need not feel shame. God has done for us what we could not. Third and finally, it should inspire us to live for Him. To live from that place of grace knowing God has torn down the dividing wall of hostility that exists between us and made peace with us by the blood of His cross. We are forgiven so we can forgive others. Grace was extended to us so we can extend it to others. Love was shown to us so we can show love to others. We are secure in God's hands.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalm 108-109

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May 17, 2023
Honest Prayers

Readings for today: Psalms 108-109 (audio reading)

Psalms 108-109 is nothing if not honest. David is expressing his anger and frustration towards his enemies. He is being attacked. His reputation is under assault. His character is being assassinated. He tries to repay evil with good. He tries to respond to the hate with love. He prays for them but nothing seems to change. If anything, their hatred for him burns even hotter. So David lets loose. He unleashes all his outrage to God. He calls for their destruction. He curses them every which way but sideways. He basically asks God to consign them to hell. It's a brutally honest prayer and one I will admit I have prayed myself at certain times over the years.

Many years ago, I somehow got crossways with a person who served on a board overseeing my work. To this day, I do not know what I did to them. Despite the fact that I went to them over and over again to ask for forgiveness and make things right, they never did tell me what happened or why they hated me so much. They made their singular aim to destroy my career. They talked behind my back at board meetings. They sabotaged the work I was doing in the church. They contacted people in our small group to impugn my character. It was brutal. It was costly. I lost relationships as a result. And I almost left the ministry. After resigning my position, I spent months in prayer as I looked for work. It was one of the scariest seasons of my life. I didn't know how I was going to feed my kids. Provide for my family. I had never been in this position before. Like David, I felt like I was "at the end of my rope, my life in ruins. I was fading away to nothing, passing away, my youth gone, old before my time. I was weak from hunger and could hardly stand up, my body a rack of skin and bones. I was a joke in poor taste to those who saw me; they took one look and shook their heads." (Psalms 109:23-25 MSG) In the midst of my despair and anguish, I asked God to curse the person who attacked me. I asked God bring judgment down on them. I asked God to return to them what they had done to me. I was angry. I was bitter. I was beyond frustrated at the injustice of it all.

Here's what I learned from that season. God's a big boy. He can handle our most honest, gut-wrenching prayers. In fact, He invites us to share our deepest fears and anxieties with Him. He encourages us to hold nothing back. He wants us to feel safe and free to express all our emotions. Turn everything over to Him. And here's what happens when we do...as we empty ourselves before Him. Expressing all our anger, bitterness, frustration, and pain; God begins to fill us with His grace. He turns our sorrows to joy. He turns our fears to faith. He turns our bitterness sweet. He heals our pain. He wipes away our tears. He holds us close. And even our deepest frustrations turn to praise. Listen to David as he ends Psalm 109, "My mouth's full of great praise for God, I'm singing his hallelujahs surrounded by crowds, For he's always at hand to take the side of the needy, to rescue a life from the unjust judge." (Psalms 109:30-31 MSG)

Here's the thing I discovered in the depths of my own despair...God is faithful. God can be trusted. God is at work. God never leaves us or forsakes us. God holds us in the palm of His hand. God draws near the broken-hearted and crushed in spirit. God is safe. We can literally share anything and everything with Him and trust Him for the result.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 23-26

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May 18, 2023

Legacy

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 23-26 (audio reading)

“When David got to be an old man, he made his son Solomon king over Israel.” (1 Chronicles 23:1 MSG)

Legacy. It’s something all of us will leave to our children, our grandchildren, those we work with, and, for pastors especially, those we serve. Over the past several years, I’ve been part of a couple of teams in my denomination both regionally and nationally that oversee the work of pastors and churches. As such, it has been my privilege to walk alongside several pastors as they made the transition into retirement. It wasn’t always easy. Some of those transitions were smooth. Some were rocky. Some were planned. Some were unplanned. Some felt affirmed on their way out. Others felt pushed out by the people they loved. My biggest takeaway? We either plan for the day when we will no longer be around or someone else will plan it for us.

David made plans. He understood from wisdom and experience that he could set his successor, Solomon, up for success. So he organizes the Levites. Helps them transition from service to the Tabernacle to service in the Temple. Gives them new roles and responsibilities that fit the new situation they will find themselves in. He organizes the priests. Casts lots so they can be established in their terms of service. He sets up the musicians in their service. And then the gatekeepers, treasurers, and other officials. It is a massive undertaking. A complete reorganization from top to bottom of the entire leadership structure of a nation. Imagine would might have happened had David left this to Solomon to figure out? Imagine the infighting. The jockeying for position. The currying for favor. Imagine the chaos that might have resulted as the sons of Eleazar fought with the sons of Ithamar for the power of the priesthood. Imagine the sons of Levi, set free from their obligations to carry and care for the Tabernacle, refusing to care for the sacred elements of the Lord. Imagine the gatekeepers and musicians each deciding to do their own thing. Solomon would have had a mess on his hands for sure!

But David was faithful. He knew a significant part of his role was to finish well. To pass on a strong legacy to his son. Not just for Solomon’s sake but for the sake of Israel as a nation. Because of my experience walking alongside so many pastors, my wife and I talk a lot about our legacy. I just hit 50 this year and it feels like the years are passing by so fast. How am I preparing to pass on what has been entrusted to me? Should the Lord tarry and give me a rich and full life on this earth, I might have twenty good years of pastoring left. What will those years look like? How will I spend them? When will I know it is time to raise up my successor? How can I set them up for success? My youngest children are preparing to leave home and head off to what’s next. What kind of spiritual legacy have I given them? How have I prepared them to take on the roles and responsibilities of an adult? My parents are getting older and have begun to face the challenges that come along with aging. Am I prepared to care for them? Assist them? Make sure they continue to live a rich and full and vital life alongside their grandkids? These are important questions to ask and ponder and pray over no matter what season of life you find yourself in.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalms 131, 138-139, 143-145

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May 19, 2023
God is Limitless

Readings for today: Psalms 131, 138-139, 143-145 (audio reading)

Reading through the Psalms this morning was refreshing. Especially the final reading from Psalm 145. One cannot meditate on these words enough. One cannot hear these words enough. "God is magnificent; He can never be praised enough. There are no boundaries to His greatness." (Psalm 145:3 MSG) God is truly great. Greater than we can imagine. Greater than we think we know. Limitless in his power and knowledge. Limitless in his love and grace. Limitless in his righteousness and justice. His greatness is simply so great it is unsearchable. It is mysterious. Unfathomable. His will is inscrutable. We will never truly understand the mind of God because we are finite. We see through a glass darkly. We only can see part of the picture. We have such a limited view. But God's greatness knows no end! God's greatness knows no boundaries!

"God is all mercy and grace - not quick to anger, is rich in love. God is good to one and all; everything He does is soaked through with grace." (Psalm 145:8-9 MSG) Echoes of Exodus where God showed Himself to Moses. The true nature and character of God revealed in all its fullness and glory. God is gracious. His love is unconditional. His mercy is everlasting. There is nothing that can separate us from God's love. Nothing that can condemn those who are in Christ Jesus. No conditions. No circumstances. No sinful behavior. No addiction. No crisis. No tragedy. No doubt. No fear. No failure. Nothing in all of creation can separate those who are in Christ Jesus from the gracious, merciful, steadfast love of God. This is why "creation and creatures applaud You, O God!" (Psalm 145:10 MSG)

"Everything God does is right - the trademark on all His works is love." (Psalm 145:17 MSG) His Law is beautiful. Precious. It is like water to the soul. His commands are designed for human flourishing. His statutes are for our protection. All his ways are good and kind.

"God's there, listening for all who pray, for all who pray and mean it. He does what's best for those who fear Him - hears them call out, and saves them. God sticks by all who love him..." (Psalm 145:18-20a MSG) O the wonderful promises of God! They are true! They are secure! They are more real to me than my thoughts. My feelings. My experience. They are the foundation of my life in Christ. Truly God fulfills His promises. Always in His way and in His time and according to His good plan.

I love the Psalms so much sometimes I just sit and let the words wash over me like waves at the seashore. Wave after wave of God's goodness. Wave after wave of God's promises. Wave after wave of God's glory. As I am drenched in the love and grace of God, I find myself quite naturally falling to my knees in praise. Falling to my knees in humble submission. Falling to my knees is thanksgiving for all He has done for me.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 27-29, Psalm 68

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May 20, 2023
Sacrificial Leadership

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 27-29, Psalm 68 (audio reading)

I firmly believe true, godly leadership involves great sacrifice. When a person accepts the call to lead God's people, they are accepting a call to give themselves up for the sake of others. Lay down their lives for the sake of God's family. They are called to model their leadership after that of Jesus who "did not come to serve but to be served and give His life as a ransom for many."

David models sacrificial leadership in the reading for today. He has already declared he "will not give to the Lord that which costs him nothing." (1 Chronicles 21:24) And here at the end of his life, he makes good on that promise. He gives all his personal wealth to help in the construction of the Temple. He spends his final years mobilizing God's people and stockpiling materials to set his son Solomon up well. He donates "3,000 talents (about 113 tons) of gold—all from Ophir, the best—and 7,000 talents (214 tons) of silver for covering the walls of the buildings, and for the gold and silver work by craftsmen and artisans." (1 Chronicles 29:4-5a MSG) He holds nothing back. Keeps nothing for himself. And then he challenges God's people to follow his example. "Now then, who will follow my example and give offerings to the Lord today?" (1 Chronicles 29:5b NLT)

As the pastor of a local church, I try to follow David's example as he seeks to follow Christ. I do my best to make the first sacrifice. When I first came to the church I serve, they were going through financial hardship. Before I got any kind of raise or negotiated a fair, market-rate salary for my position, I made sure the church took care of the other members of our staff. When COVID hit and so many in our community faced job insecurity, I refused to take any kind of raise while we navigated that season. When I started taking my trips to Africa, I made sure I paid for them so the burden wouldn't fall on the church. (Full disclosure: we've since added a second trip that the church does pay for since the Petros Network is a mission partner.) The point here is not to promote myself but to give examples of sacrifices I believe leaders have to make if they are to set the example for God's people. The same was true when we launched our building campaign a few years back to retire debt and develop our counseling center. My wife and I were among the very first to pledge above and beyond what we already gave to the church. Every year, we push ourselves to grow in generosity as we seek to follow Christ faithfully in all we have. What is true in our finances is also true when it comes to our time and unique talents. We have gladly and joyfully given our lives to our church family because we believe sacrifice is essential to godly leadership.

What about you? What does such sacrifice look like in your life? Where are you laying down your life for your spouse or children? For your family and friends? For those you work with or for or among? For your brothers and sisters in Christ?

1 Chronicles 29:1-5 MSG

Readings for tomorrow: None

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May 22, 2023
Personal God

Readings for today: Psalms 111-118 (audio reading)

Christians believe in a personal God. Not a private god. Not a cosmic butler. Not a divine ATM machine. But a God who is personal, present, and who fulfills His promises. Today's reading is a good one. In so many of the Psalms, God reveals His heart to us. He is a God who is with us. He is a God who is for us. He is a God who is at work in us. He will never leave our side. He will never let us go. He will never give up on us.

"This God of Grace, this God of Love. He gave food to those who fear him, He remembered to keep his ancient promise...He paid the ransom for his people, He ordered his Covenant kept forever. He's so personal and holy, worthy of our respect." (Psalms 111:4-5, 9 MSG) God's covenant with us in no way depends on us! What a glorious truth! It is completely and utterly dependent on the steadfast, faithful, fiercely loyal love of God!

"God is higher than anything and anyone, outshining everything you can see in the skies. Who can compare with God, our God, so majestically enthroned, Surveying his magnificent heavens and earth? He picks up the poor from out of the dirt, rescues the forgotten who've been thrown out with the trash, Seats them among the honored guests, a place of honor among the brightest and best. He gives childless couples a family, gives them joy as the parents of children. Hallelujah!" (Psalms 113:4-9 MSG) The Lord is especially tender towards those in great need. The poor. The needy. The barren. The hurting. The struggling. The depressed. The anxious. The lonely. God sees you! God looks down on your broken condition and He is at work to raise you up! There is nothing hidden from God. No secret pain or heartache. No injustice. No unrighteousness. The Lord sees it all and He will set all things right!

"I love God because he listened to me, listened as I begged for mercy. He listened so intently as I laid out my case before him." (Psalms 116:1-2 MSG) God hears every cry. God sees every tear. God knows every anxious thought. God feels all our pain. And He inclines His ear towards us. He doesn't force us to come to His level. Doesn't require us to ascend the heavens to gain an audience with Him. He inclines. He descends. He listens closely. Intently. He gathers His beloved into His arms and leans in to make sure He hears every word. Every thought. Every prayer.

By the time you get to Psalm 118, it's like the Psalmist can't help himself. The words tumble over each other. Promise after promise. Declaration after declaration. So much to praise God for! So much to thank God for! One of the best ways to read the Psalms is back to back to back and let the words wash over you. Let them fill you. Let them give you confidence today. Let them give you strength.

The Lord is on my side.
The Lord is my helper.
The Lord is my strength.
The Lord is my song.
The Lord is my salvation.

Claim these promises as your own today. Let them guide you through each and every challenge. Each and every crisis. Each and every circumstance of your life.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 1-2, Psalms 37, 71, 94

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May 23, 2023
Resisting Evil

Readings for today: 1 Kings 1-2, Psalms 37, 71, 94 (audio reading)

It is easy to “fret yourself because of evildoers.” It’s easy to watch the news or scroll through social media and focus on all that is negative. All that is wrong with the world. It is easy to focus on the unrighteous and their manipulation, oppression, and greed. It is easy to give in to anger and hate. To lash out at those who perpetrate abuse and violence. There’s something deep inside all of us that longs for revenge. Longs to see those who do evil get what’s coming to them. We get frustrated when they seem to prosper. We lose heart when they get ahead. We question the justice of God when the wicked seemingly get away with all their plots and schemes.

Once again, the Psalmist gives voice to how we feel. He speaks directly to our hearts and points us to God. He helps us reframe our understanding and teaches us God’s eternal perspective. Do not be envious of those who do wrong. They will fade like the grass. Do not fret over the one who carries out evil. They will be cut off. In the grand scheme of things, the evil only prosper for a moment but it is the righteous and the meek and the godly who will inherit the earth. Our job is not to seek revenge but to trust in the Lord and do good. Delight ourselves in God and commit ourselves to walk in His ways. If we will remain faithful, God promises to make our light shine. He promises us an eternal inheritance and the blessing of peace. He promises to uphold the righteous and never let us be put to shame. He promises to establish our steps and provide for our needs and give us a future.

This isn’t easy. Our world is growing more chaotic by the day. Evil is rising up all around us. Evil people are taking advantage of the instability to hoard power and wealth and influence. They plot against the righteous. They draw the sword. They bend the bow. Their goal is the destruction of the godly. The oppression of the poor and needy. They are a curse. They sow fear. They spread anxiety. They will stop at nothing until they achieve their sinful, selfish, unrighteous ends. But God sees them and laughs. He knows their day is coming. He will execute judgment on them and cut them off forever. So place your trust in the Lord. Make Him your stronghold in times of trouble. Seek His help. Deliverance and salvation come from His hand. Take refuge in Him.

Readings for tomorrow: Psalm 119:1-88

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May 24, 2023
Doing vs. Being

Readings for today: Psalm 119:1-88 (audio reading)

I remember the first time I read Psalm 119. I had just become a Christian and I was making the attempt to read through the Bible in a year. My first impressions of this Psalm were not positive. It was long. It felt repetitive. The challenge it presented was overwhelming. The way of life it described seemed very foreign to me at the time and definitely unattainable. Not that I didn't try. I did! With all my might! I worked as hard as I could to live up to the standard this Psalm sets. I turned the different verses into prescriptions for living.

For example, being in college and struggling with pornography, I memorized verse nine - "How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word." I not only memorized that text, I meditated on it day and night as I fought against sexual sin in my life. I exhausted myself trying to stay pure. I worked so hard and all too often failed. I thought purity was the goal. I was wrong. Here's a second example. I grew up in an alcoholic home and learned to cope with the shame of my father's addiction through high achievement. I projected a great deal of self-confidence and pride but it was all a cover for my deep insecurities and pain. So I memorized verse twenty-nine - "Keep me from lying to myself; give me the privilege of knowing your instructions." I not only memorized that text, I meditated on it day and night as I wrestled with my self-esteem. I worked so hard to prove to myself that I was accepted and okay and loved. That I had nothing to be ashamed over. I thought self-confidence was the goal. I was wrong.

As the years passed and I continued to come across this Psalm in my annual Bible reading, something shifted in my heart. I can't pinpoint a day or a time. I don't remember when it happened. All I know is that there came a moment when I realized this Psalm is not a PRESCRIPTION for what to do but a DESCRIPTION of who to be. The beauty and brilliance of this Psalm is that it points beyond itself to the love of God from which our love of His commands flows. One cannot love God's law without first knowing they are loved by God, the great Law-Giver. One cannot embrace God's commands unless they first believe they are embraced by God Himself. One cannot walk in God's ways unless one trusts God knows the way to the most joy-filled, peace-filled life. As soon as this realization hit me, I ceased my striving. I stopped trying to white-knuckle my purity. I stopped trying so hard to prove myself to myself and to God. Instead, I simply began resting in His Presence. I began trusting His Spirit to do His sanctifying work in my heart. I read not to "get something out of it" or "to learn how to be a better Christian" but read just to get to know God, the great lover of my soul, more deeply.

This is the heart of Psalm 119. It describes the life of a believer who is fully confident in the unconditional love of God. A believer who's heart and mind and life has been utterly changed by the grace of God. For such a believer, God's commands become a delight and a joy for it flows from a heart fully devoted to God. How does this happen? It happens as we open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit's work. It happens as we continue to spend time with Him day after day. It happens as we read His Word and let it shape who we are and how we live. Simply present yourself to God, friends. Let Him do for you what He has promised - more than you can ever ask or imagine!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 3-4, 2 Chronicles 1, Psalm 72

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May 25, 2023
A God-Listening Heart

Readings for today: 1 Kings 3-4, 2 Chronicles 1, Psalm 72 (audio reading)

Wisdom is a gift according to the Bible. It's not something we can manufacture. It's not something we can earn. It's not something we can buy. It comes from one source. It is drawn from one well. The ancients put it like this - "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." I really like how Eugene Peterson describes it in the Message version as he translates this conversation between God and Solomon. "Here's what I want: Give me a God-listening heart so I can lead your people well, discerning the difference between good and evil. For who on their own is capable of leading your glorious people?" (1 Kings 3:9 MSG)

A God-listening heart is the essence of wisdom. Seeking God. Hearing from God. Listening to God. Ultimately obeying God. This is what it means not only to learn wisdom but to walk in wisdom as well. After all, God's ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. He promises to do for us more than we can ever ask or imagine. His plans for us are more glorious than we could ever come up with on our own. So it makes perfect sense if we want to live with wisdom, we need to seek it from God. This is what makes Solomon's request so amazing and worthy of emulation. Of all the things he could have asked for as he got started - military might, untold riches, etc. - Solomon was humble enough to recognize his weakness and his deep need for God's guidance. He also understood the responsibility of his new role. He was being called to a life of service. Being king was not about him. It was about the people he served and his desire was to do that well. Of all the sons of David, this character trait seems unique to Solomon and it's what makes him such a great king.

Again, I love how Peterson describes it, "God gave Solomon wisdom—the deepest of understanding and the largest of hearts. There was nothing beyond him, nothing he couldn't handle. Solomon's wisdom outclassed the vaunted wisdom of wise men of the East, outshone the famous wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone—wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, wiser than Heman, wiser than Calcol and Darda the sons of Mahol. He became famous among all the surrounding nations. He created 3,000 proverbs; his songs added up to 1,005. He knew all about plants, from the huge cedar that grows in Lebanon to the tiny hyssop that grows in the cracks of a wall. He understood everything about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. Sent by kings from all over the earth who had heard of his reputation, people came from far and near to listen to the wisdom of Solomon." (1 Kings 4:29-34 MSG)

Do you have a "God-listening heart?" If God were to come to you and present the same offer He gave Solomon, how would you answer? Would you ask for wisdom or something else? The Book of James says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him/her ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given." (James 1:5 ESV) How does one pray for wisdom? Let me encourage you to use the words of the Psalmist. Make them your own. For if we ask for wisdom and then act in wisdom, those we love and live among will truly be blessed. "Give the gift of wise rule to the king, O God, the gift of just rule to the crown prince. May he judge your people rightly, be honorable to your meek and lowly. Let the mountains give exuberant witness; shape the hills with the contours of right living. Please stand up for the poor, help the children of the needy, come down hard on the cruel tyrants. Outlast the sun, outlive the moon— age after age after age. Be rainfall on cut grass, earth-refreshing rain showers. Let righteousness burst into blossom and peace abound until the moon fades to nothing. Rule from sea to sea, from the River to the Rim." (Psalms 72:1-8 MSG)

Readings for tomorrow: Psalm 119:89-176

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May 26, 2023
Wisdom vs. Foolishness

Readings for today: Psalm 119:89-176 (audio reading)

A few years ago I read a book that helped me parse the difference between wisdom and foolishness. Wisdom, according to the author, is when we see the truth and adjust our lives accordingly. Foolishness, on the other hand, is when we demand the truth adjust to our reality. To put it another way, wise people will meet the demands of life while foolish people will demand that life meet their demands. Wise people receive feedback when given, own their own performance, mistakes, and issues and take responsibility without externalizing blame or giving excuses. Foolish people become defensive very quickly when confronted, refuse to own their own shortcomings, and often externalize by blaming those around them. Wise people listen. Fools dismiss or ignore.

Are you a wise or a foolish person? How would you know? Well, how do you feel as you read the words from Psalm 119? What happens internally when you consider the demands of God's Law? Are you the kind of person who embraces God's commandments, however imperfectly? Are they your delight? Do you find yourself seeking to bend your life in submission to what God has revealed in His Word? Or are you the kind of person who resists God's laws? Dismisses them? Ignores them? Rationalizes away your sin? Are you a wise person or a fool?

The Psalmist is clearly wise...

"I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life..."

"Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day..."

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

"Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way."

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

"Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart."

"The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever."

(Psalms 119:93, 97, 103-105, 111, 160)

The Psalmist loves God with all His heart which, by extension, means he loves God's Law. Loves God's commands. He seeks to do all he can to adjust his life to God's will. His greatest desire is to live his life under God's sovereign rule and authority. He makes no excuses for his sin. He doesn't hide his shortcomings. He faces his failures honestly and transparently.

Sadly, so many in our culture today are fools. Rather than submit their lives to reality, they seek to bend reality to fit their lives. Sadly, this seems just as true for Christians as it is for those who do not yet know Christ. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 10:2, they have a "zeal for God but not according to knowledge." They say they love God but not in the way He deserves or demands. Instead, they "do what is right in their own eyes." They bend God's truth to their reality. They seek to make God's Word

null and void either through outright rejection, rationalization, or simple ignorance. They refuse to submit certain areas of their lives to His will and as a result, they live lives of quiet desperation. They are not evil people. They do not have bad intentions. They simply are misguided. As Paul says in Romans 1, “Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools...” (Romans 1:21-22)

Let me be the first to say that this, at times, describes me. I am not immune. On some level and in certain seasons and in particular sets of circumstances throughout the course of my life, I have tried to bend God’s will to my own. I have tried to rationalize away my sin. I have tried to make twist and turn God’s Law to make it fit my life. All to no avail. I have thrown myself against the will of God so many times and every time I broke. I surrendered. And with each surrender came greater wisdom. Not perfection. Wisdom. Self-knowledge. Self-understanding. Seeing myself for who I truly am, warts and all, and learning to trust God’s ways above my ways. God’s thoughts are more than my thoughts. God’s will is more than my feelings. This is what it means to be wise, friends. The fear of the Lord truly is the beginning of wisdom!

Readings for tomorrow: Song of Solomon 1:1-5:1

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May 27, 2023
Intimacy with God

Readings for today: Song of Solomon 1:1-5:1 (audio reading)

The Song of Solomon is one of the most difficult and least understood books in all of Scripture. It's one we tend to avoid in our sex-saturated culture. The language is far too intimate. The imagery too graphic. We won't allow ourselves to even picture it much less reflect on how the Spirit might speak to us through it. We flip through the pages as fast as we can to get to the end so we can avoid any embarrassment. We're not alone, of course. Our Orthodox Jewish friends have a tradition that men should not read this book until they are at least 30 years old. The early church fathers advised a similar practice. Both traditions speak to a healthy respect for the power of sexual desire and want to make sure it is not stirred up before the appropriate time.

So what is this book all about? The love for a man and a woman? The love of God for His church? Perhaps both? Are we comfortable thinking about our relationship with God in sexually intimate terms? Is that a bridge too far? For my part, I believe this book invites us to approach God in the most intimate of ways. The language of the Song is designed to arouse. It's meant to touch the deepest places of our hearts. It's breathed out by God in order to draw us into His intimate embrace.

Our inability to embrace this book reveals how corrupt our understanding of human sexuality has become. Generally speaking, we see sex as dirty yet pleasurable. Something to be enjoyed and yet something to be feared. Our culture boasts of sexual freedom and yet is shocked when such freedom leads to abuse and violence. If there's anything the #MeToo movement taught us is that our sexual appetites are almost impossible to satisfy. Sexuality without restraint is incredibly destructive and traumatic to all parties involved. There simply is no way to reduce it to a biological act or a simple exchange of fluids. Sex just doesn't work that way.

Sex is God's creation. Sexual desire is something He instilled within each of us. Now I am fully aware there are those who do not experience sexual desire just as I am aware there are those who experience an addiction to sexual desire. Both of these conditions - along with many others - are products of the Fall when the sexual desires of human beings became disordered and God's original design for sex became corrupt. Originally, God designed sex to be the ultimate experience of "knowing." A way for us to express our deepest affections. Our deepest emotions. Our deepest vulnerabilities. When the Bible talks about "knowing" another person, it often uses the most sexually intimate of terms. The same is true for "knowing" God. And such knowledge is designed to be experienced within the safety of a covenant relationship. A covenant relationship with Jesus or a covenant relationship of marriage between a man and a woman.

Viewed from this angle, is it possible to read this song as a prayer? A way to express the deepest desires of our hearts to God? A way for us to ask for deeper intimacy with Him? Or, does the brokenness of the human experience of sexuality warp our thinking? Does it corrupt how we understand this most powerful and primal of drives? Does it poison this well and thus prevent us from fully grasping the depth of relationship God desires to have with us? There's a reason Christ calls the church His "bride." There's a reason God so often refers to Himself in the Old Testament as a "husband" and Israel as his "wife." Marriage is the place where a man and a woman become "one flesh" before the Lord and it is designed to point beyond itself to something even greater...the "oneness" God desires to have with His people for all eternity.

Readings for tomorrow: None

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May 29, 2023
Union with Christ

Readings for today: Song of Songs 5:2-8:14, Psalm 45 (audio reading)

“I am my lover’s and my lover is mine.” It’s perhaps the most beautiful expression of the oneness Christ desires for us in all the Scriptures. It speaks to the depth of the intimate relationship God desires to have with us. It speaks the union God wants with His people. Nothing held back. Nothing coming between them. All barriers coming down. All walls torn down.

Union with Christ is the “central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation” according to John Murray. You see it reflected in the number of times the Apostle Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” in his letters. 216 occurrences in the Pauline Epistles and 26 times in the Johannine literature. It conveys a wide range of meaning from the righteousness of Christ imputed to believers to the spiritual nourishment we receive from Christ day by day to the life of Christ that manifests itself in our lives as we grow in faith over the years. John Calvin taught that union with Christ was the basis for our justification and sanctification as nothing can happen apart from our relationship with Him.

The Song of Songs speaks to the experience of our union with Christ not just the theological principle. It speaks to the heart rather than the head. It communicates emotion and desire and seeks to awaken in us a deep longing for Christ, the lover of our souls. It’s one of the reasons the Song of Songs was read historically by the church as they prepared to come to the Lord’s Table. Similarly, it is considered one of the festal scrolls by the Jews for Passover. While it may have meaning for the relationship between a man and a woman, the deeper allegorical meaning relates to Christ’s relationship to His people.

God wants us to both know Him and experience Him. He wants to dwell in both our heads and our hearts. He longs for us to walk with Him in the cool of the day as He once did with Adam and Eve. He longs to reveal Himself to us in the day to day. As we reflect and pray over the words from the Song today, ask the Holy Spirit to give you a greater awareness of God’s abiding presence in your life. Ask the Spirit to give you a greater experience of the deep, deep love of the Father and the sacrificial love of the Son. Ask the Spirit to give you the eyes to see and the heart to understand the beauty and wonder and awe of the Triune God.

Readings for tomorrow: Proverbs 1-4

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May 30, 2023
In Case of Emergency

Readings for today: Proverbs 1-4 (audio reading)

So many people treat God like the fire hose in the wall at the office. “Just break glass in case of emergency.” We’re not really interested in a relationship with God. We’re not really interested in walking with God. We’re not really interested in having God as a part of our lives. But when things go wrong or significant mistakes are made or terribly tragic things happen, we not only expect Him to show up, we demand it. The problem is God doesn’t work that way. You can’t keep Him under glass. You can’t ignore Him until you need Him. You can’t even find Him if you’ve never truly sought Him. And none of this is God’s fault. It’s our senses that have dulled. It’s our sense of direction that is skewed. It’s our lack of intentionality in nurturing a relationship with God that comes back to bite us.

This is the message from Solomon today as he opens up the Book of Proverbs. “Because you hated Knowledge and had nothing to do with the Fear-of-God, Because you wouldn’t take my advice and brushed aside all my offers to train you, Well, you’ve made your bed—now lie in it; you wanted your own way—now, how do you like it? Don’t you see what happens, you simpletons, you idiots? Carelessness kills; complacency is murder. First pay attention to me, and then relax. Now you can take it easy—you’re in good hands.” (Proverbs 1:29-33 MSG) We talk a lot in my family with our kids about logical consequences. How the decisions we make or don’t make often come back to haunt us. I think of my daughter who decided to work only 20 hours a week one summer while in college. She had just enough to pay the bills but then an emergency came along and she was behind the eight ball. We had a hard conversation about why she rejected my advice to work forty hours so she could build a cushion. I think of my son who decided to ignore the oil light in his car. Instead of taking it in to get checked out, he kept driving it. Of course the engine seized up on him and left him stranded. Not only that but he still had payments to make on his loan. He was shocked when he found out those payments were still due! We’ve all experienced these things in our lives and the same is true when it comes to our relationship with God. If we listen to Him and learn from Him, we can relax. We can rest. We can have confidence we’re in good hands. If we choose to ignore Him or dismiss Him or reject Him, we will find ourselves feeling all alone when trouble comes.

This is why Solomon encourages us to cling to wisdom. He encourages us to make knowledge of God our close companion. He knows what it’s like to walk with God and sadly, he will find out what it’s like to not walk with God. Here are his words again from Proverbs 2:9-13, “So now you can pick out what’s true and fair, find all the good trails! Lady Wisdom will be your close friend, and Brother Knowledge your pleasant companion. Good Sense will scout ahead for danger, Insight will keep an eye out for you. They’ll keep you from making wrong turns, or following the bad directions.” Today, make it your aim to walk with God. Today, make it your goal to cultivate a greater awareness of His presence. Today, when given the choice, follow His ways and watch what happens in your life.

Readings for tomorrow: Proverbs 5-8

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May 31, 2023
Made for Work

Readings for today: Proverbs 5-8 (audio reading)

Human beings are made in God's image and, as such, are made to work. When God created the heavens and the earth, He worked for six days and rested on the seventh, enshrining a sacred rhythm to life that we ignore to our own peril. When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in a garden to work and to keep it. When God gave human beings their first command, it was to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and exercise dominion over all He has made.

After the Fall, our relationship with work became corrupt. First of all, work became incredibly difficult. The ground began to fight us. Creation went to war with us and resisted our efforts to tame her. This makes sense, of course, because our concept of "dominion" now became exploitative and tyrannical rather than symbiotic and harmonious. Second, work became an idol. So did rest. So some in our world never seem to stop working and others in our world never want to work at all. Some in our world love their work too much and others in our world see it as a necessary evil. Some in our world would choose to work while others would choose to never lift a hand.

This is why I love what Solomon has to say about work in today's reading. "You lazy fool, look at an ant. Watch it closely; let it teach you a thing or two. Nobody has to tell it what to do. All summer it stores up food; at harvest it stockpiles provisions. So how long are you going to laze around doing nothing? How long before you get out of bed? A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there, sit back, take it easy—do you know what comes next? Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life, poverty your permanent houseguest!" (Proverbs 6:6-11 MSG) The ant doesn't need direction. It doesn't need anyone to tell it what to do. It is discerning enough to gather food in the right season and store it for the days when food will be scarce. It knows when to rise and when to sleep. It knows when to work and to rest. It doesn't grow slothful or lazy. It recognizes that the welfare of the entire community is dependent to some extent on its work.

Over the years, I have counseled men and women on both sides of the equation when it came to work. For some, I have counseled them to slow down. To take a Sabbath. To make sure they have one day out of every seven to rest and worship and spend time with those they love doing the things they love. For others, I have counseled them to ramp up. To work harder. To stop trying to get by on the least amount of work possible but instead dedicate themselves to the work God has put in front of them so they can not only live a rich and full life themselves but they can bless others.

Culturally, we have a problem with work. Either we work too much or we work too little. Either we never turn it off or we are doing our best to get as many days off as possible. Either we never stop working or we try to retire as quickly as possible. Both of these betray God's original design and lead only to heartbreak and pain. God's command is clear. Six days shall you work and the seventh day you shall rest. Work as though you are working for the Lord rather than for yourself. Labor while you have strength in the right season and store up resources for yourself and those you love for when the seasons change and your strength fades. Commit yourself to God's original mandate to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and be a good steward over all He has entrusted into your hands.

Readings for tomorrow: Proverbs 9-12

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